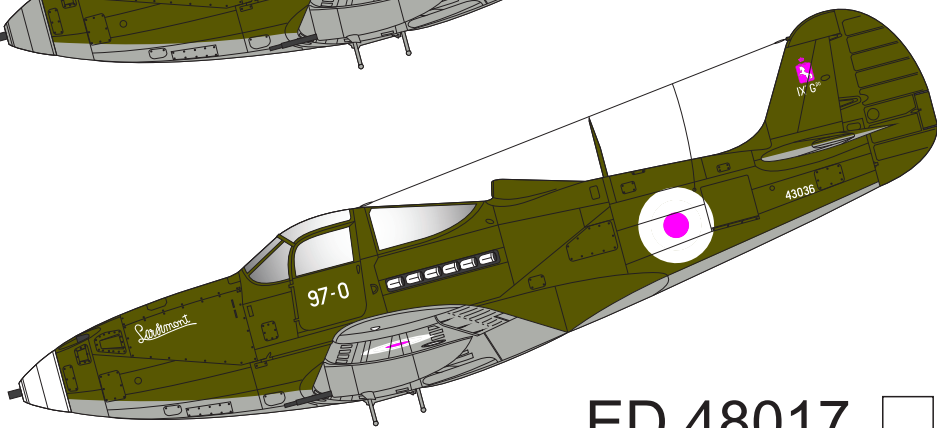
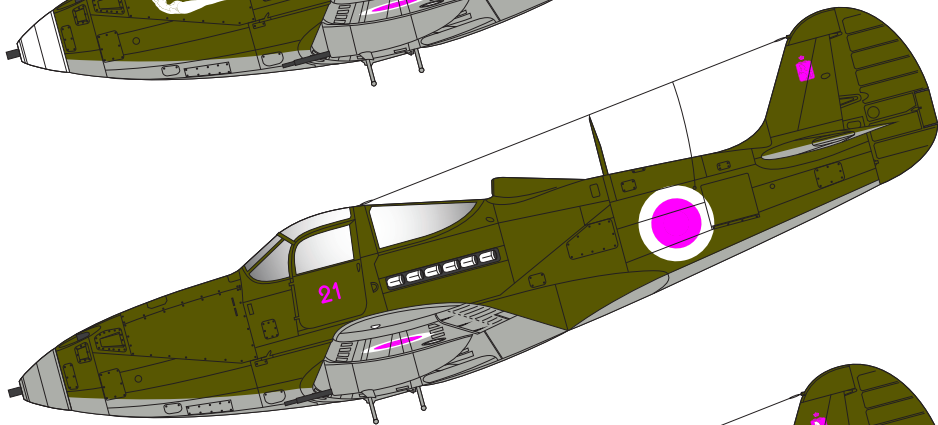
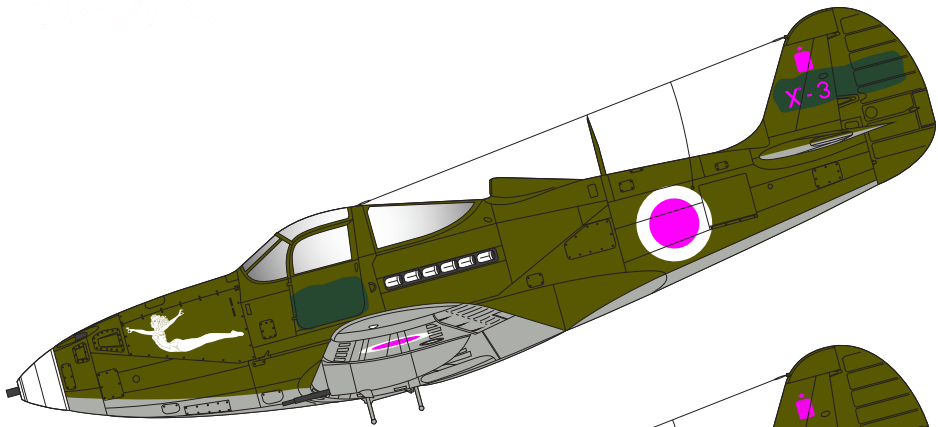




Italian Cobras #2

Bell P-39 in Regia Aeronautica - part 2



ED 48017

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Bell P-39 in Regia Aeronautica

After the armistice (at September 1943) the Regia Aeronautica continued operating uninterruptedly, at least formally. All Regia Aeronautica planes were ordered to fly to the airfields in the South, in Apulian and Calabrian Areas, but only 203 planes of various types managed to do this. About 250 planes were taken over by the Allies at the occupied Sicilian and Tunisian airfields - but only half of them were suitable for active service.

The air units of Regia Aeronautica started fighting again beside the Allies or, more exactly, acting in defense of the Italian soldiers in (major) troubles within all areas under German control, particularly in Greece and the Balkans.

On 21 September the Allied Control Committee requested the Italian aircraft to adopt new national markings in order to avoid misidentifying them with (similar) enemy types. In that occasion the Italian Air Staff proposed adopting the same tricolour roundel as used already in World War One and in the twenties.

After a long re-organising stage, „co-belligerent” Regia Aeronautica was finally ready to start concretely operating beside the Allies as from 1st January 1944. This fact was officially confirmed also by two formal acts - a new (and different) organisation of air units, and their placing under control of the Desert Air Force. As far as the new organisation is concerned, it was decided to upgrade the units into something better resembling the British Squadrons, considering they would have been operationally integrated with RAF units.

Operations under allied control were carried under two distinct operational tours:

- the first held in Palata (near Foggia) as from 20th January 1944 and continued at Nuova (Campobasso) from 1st May to early July.
- the second one, to the orders of the new Balkan Air Force (established on 1st June 1944), from September at Leverano and Galatina (Lecce) and then at Canne (Campobasso), from 12th February to 8th May 1945.

As Italian-made equipment began to crumble, the Allies transferred their planes to new allies, including Supermarine Spitfire and Bell P-39 Airacobra fighters.

The main combat effort of the Regia Aeronautica was directed to the Balkans to avoid a situation of fratricidal fighting between Italian pilots fighting alongside the Allies and in the RSI air forces.

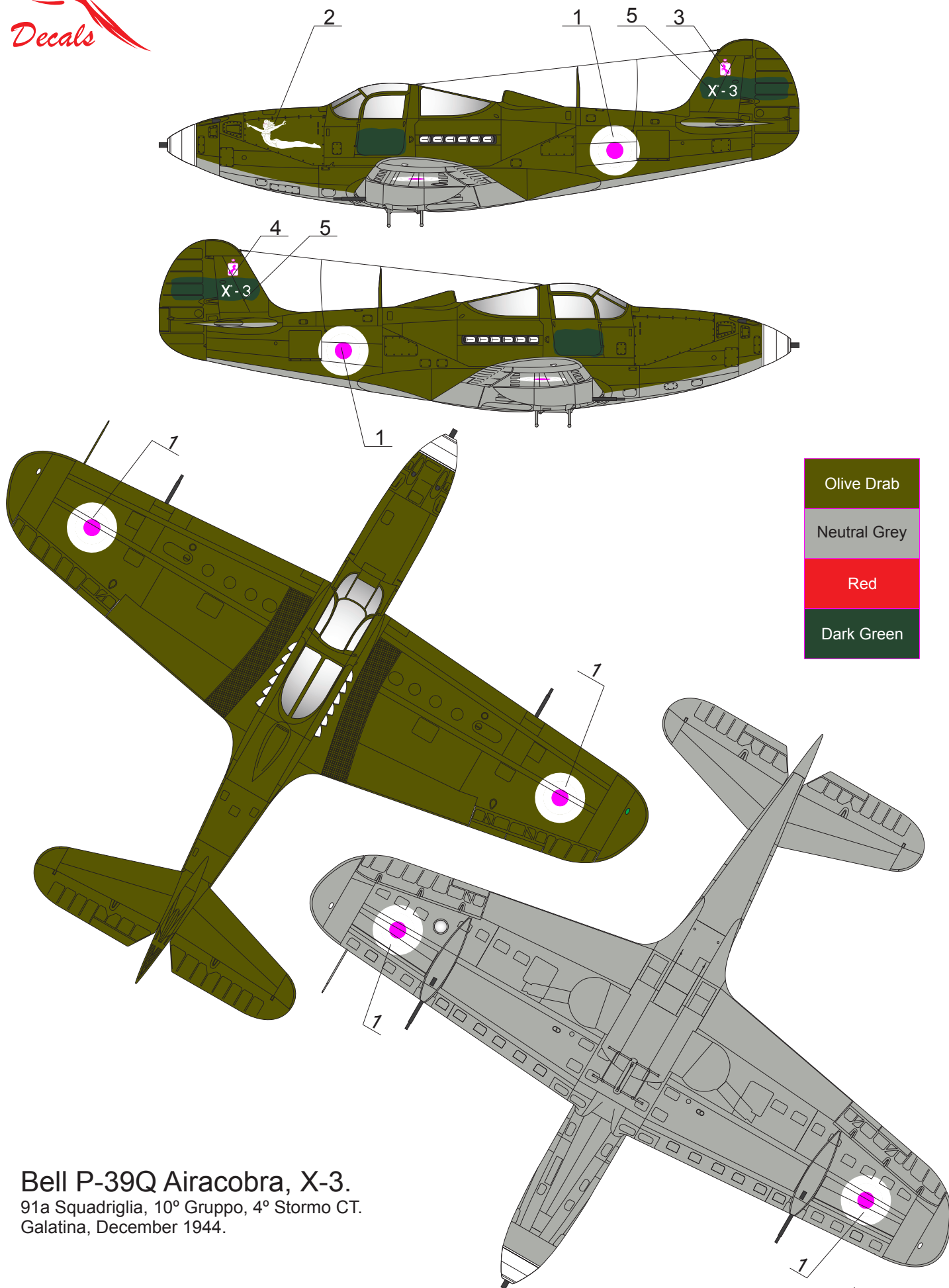
Italian units supported Tito's partisans, provided them with supplies, and attacked German forces in Yugoslavia and Albania. The last combat flight of Regia Aeronautica aircraft during World War Two took place on May 5, 1945 over Zagreb. In total, Italian pilots fighting on the side of the Allies performed over 11,000 flights in 18 months,

info based on Paolo Waldis & Marino De Bortoli „Camouflage and Markings of the Italian Air Force 1943-1945” books.

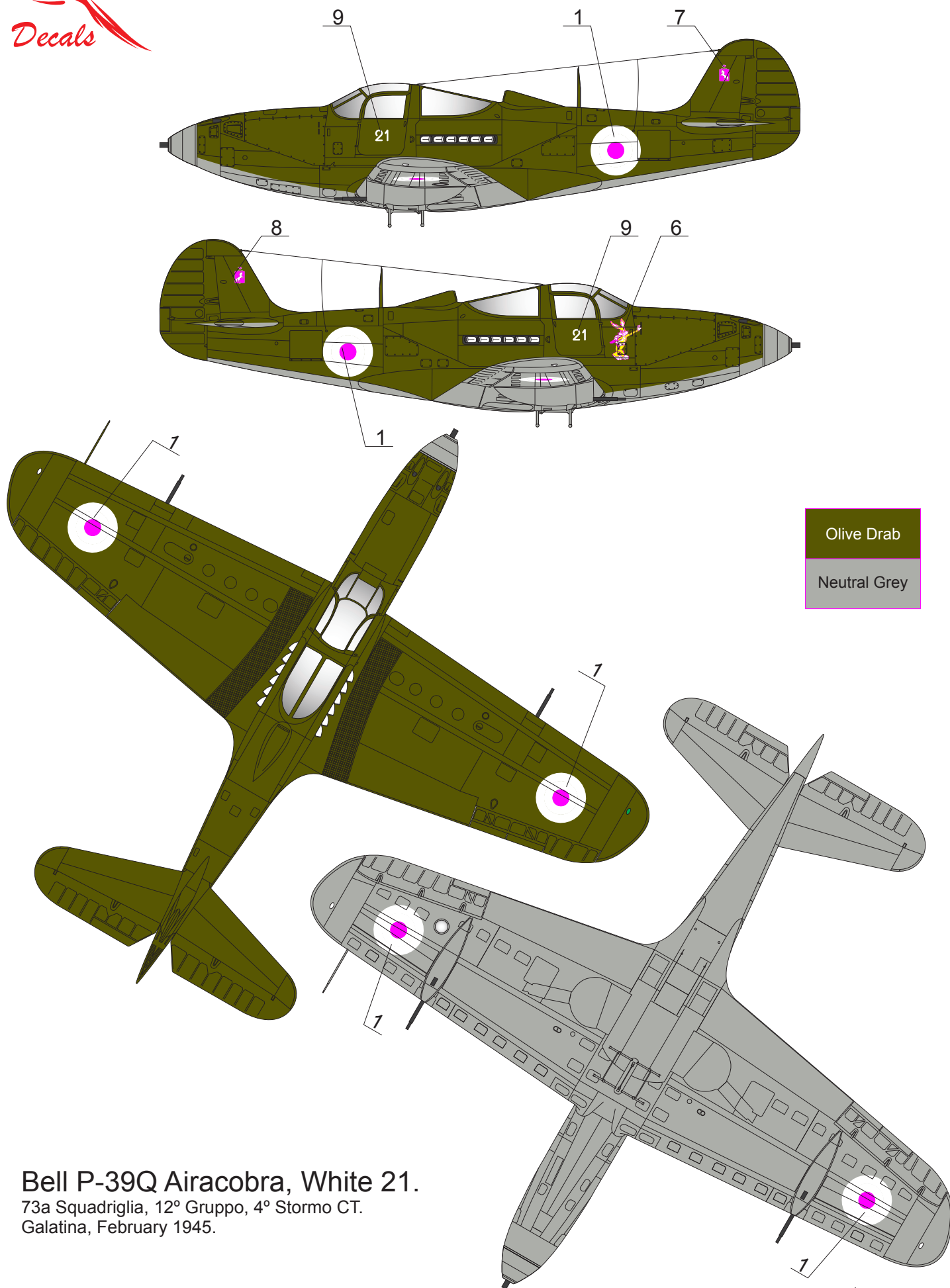


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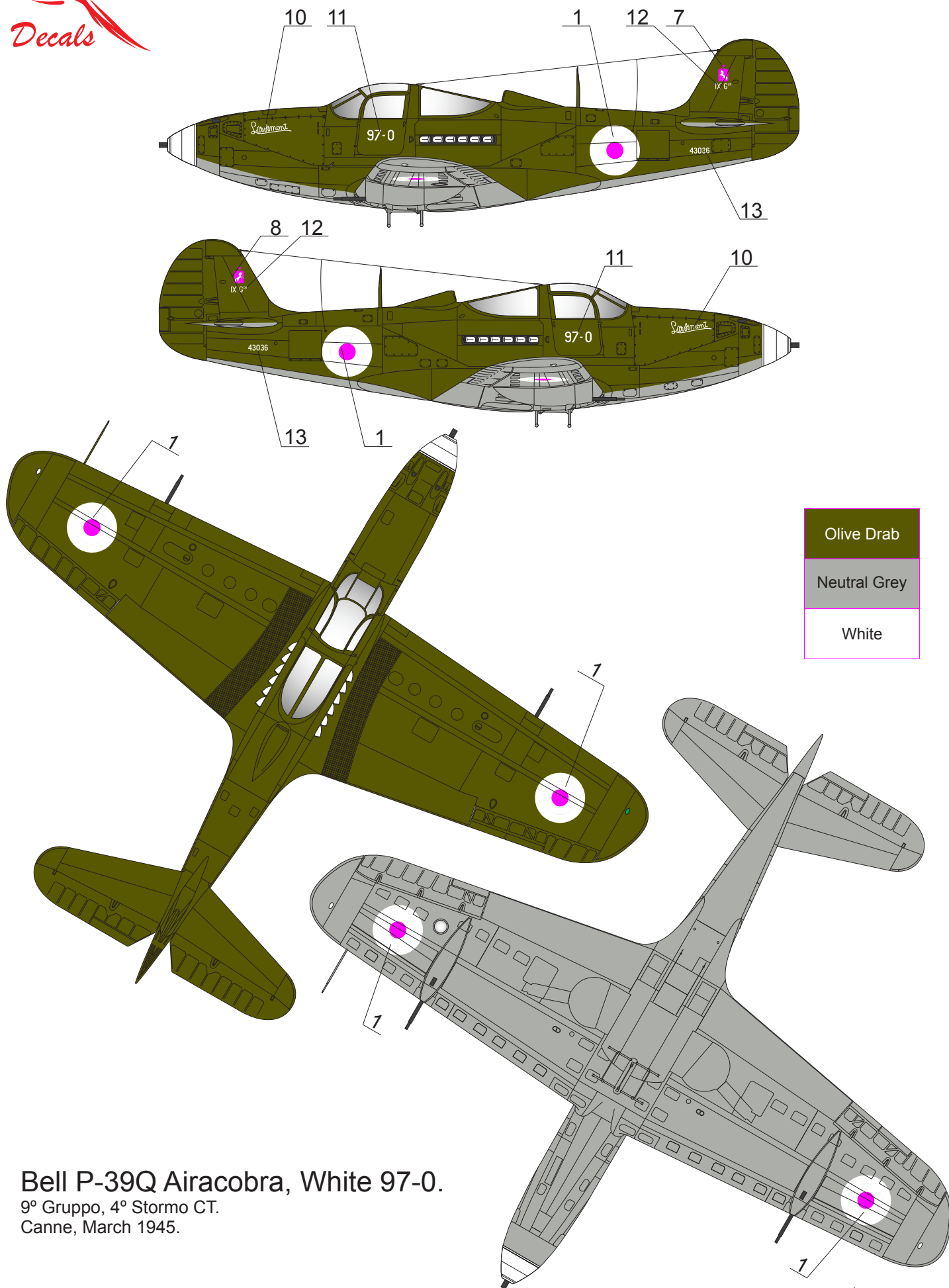


Bell P-39Q Airacobra, X-3.
 91a Squadriglia, 10° Gruppo, 4° Stormo CT.
 Galatina, December 1944.



Bell P-39Q Airacobra, White 21.

73a Squadriglia, 12° Gruppo, 4° Stormo CT.
Galatina, February 1945.



Bell P-39Q Airacobra, White 97-0.

9° Gruppo, 4° Stormo CT.
Canne, March 1945.

When the Italians started receiving Bell P-39s from the U.S. Army Air Force, planes were in typical American camouflage - Olive Drab upper surfaces and Neutral Grey undersides. First changes were just limiting to overpaint the tricolour roundels directly on the American stars and bars. The latter being more properly removed only at a later stage, together with the large yellow serial numbers on tail and (not always anyway) the original personal insignia of the American pilots, sometimes retained anyway even by the Italian pilots, evidently appreciating them. As a later stage, when the aircraft started being overhauled by the Italian technical units at Galatina, they were fully repainted as evidence by some aircraft in „clean“ liveries instead of the notably worn out paintwork originally carried.

Even if the source of paints used for such overhauls is not exactly known, it's very probable the Americans directly supplied also the original paints of the appropriate shade.

Info based on Paolo Waldis & Marino De Bortoli „Camouflage and Markings of the Italian Air Force 1943-1945“ books.

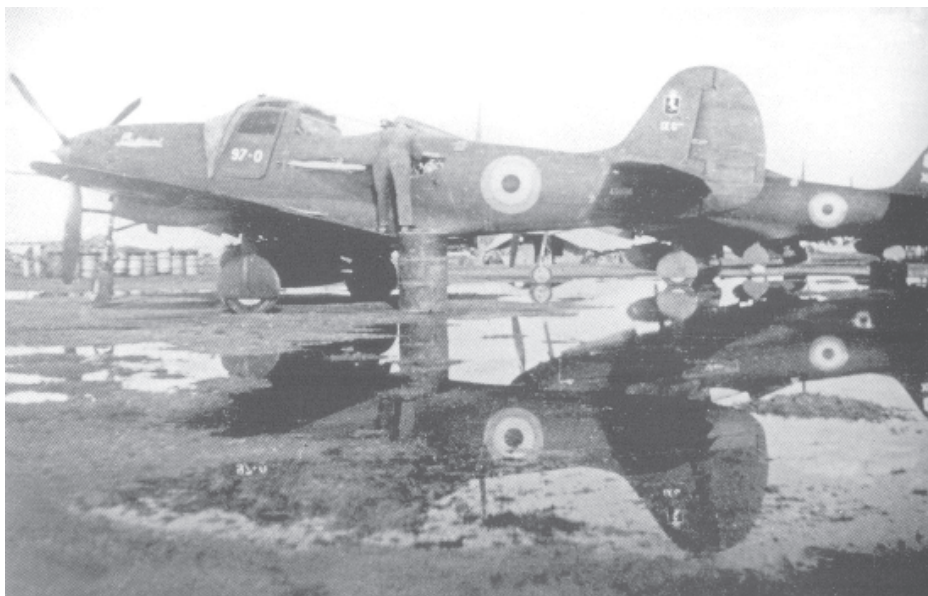


photo credits: Paolo Waldis & Marino De Bortoli „Camouflage and Markings of the Italian Air Force 1943-1945“ books.

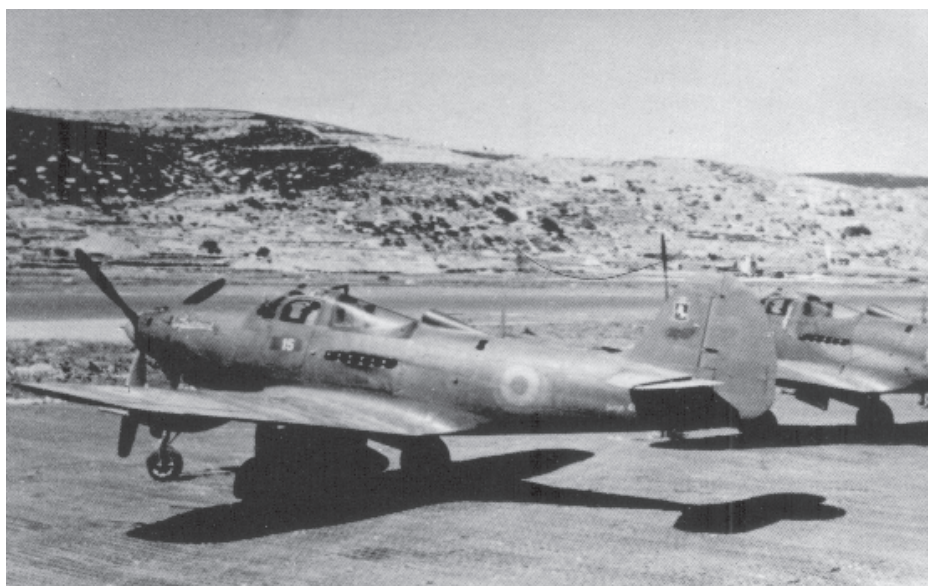


photo credit: Marco Mattioli „Bell P-39 Airacobra in Italian Service“ book.

