

The First Messerschmitt

The aircraft top right is an enigma, and is presented with the hope that someone may be able to shed more light on it. It is almost certainly the first Bf-109 flown operationally in Spain, by Hannes Trautloft (no stranger to Messerschmitt fans) and bears his famous green heart insignia. In December 1936 Trautloft was assigned to fly one of the prototypes for evaluation, a photo appears in Ries' book, and that is about all that is known. The article in April 89 SAM includes a drawing with the code 6-1 and a red cross in the fuselage disc, and not knowing otherwise we have included them in this drawing. It also shows the spinner striped red/yellow/red, and that is clearly not the case in the photo. The aircraft has been identified as Bf-109 V4, ex D-10QY, which had the original windscreen, again the photo is of an aircraft with the production style windscreen first seen on the V5. Does anyone have more info?

Bf-109 Camouflage in Spain

National markings on the wings were a black disc with a diagonal white cross and white wingtips, applied on all but the prototypes. The fuselage insignia omitted the white cross, but frequently had a secondary insignia in the center, either a personal marking, Staffel insignia in the case of 1./J/88, or the Falangist emblem on many Spanish-flown aircraft. The rudder was white, with a diagonal black cross. The spinner on many aircraft was white, particularly with 2./J/88, and the area surrounding the exhaust ejectors was painted black to minimize staining. The Messerschmitt was given the aircraft code 6, and this was always the first digit of the aircraft designator appearing on the fuselage.

Camouflage of the Bf-109s went through four phases. The Bf-109B-1s and the prototypes were finished in overall light grey, RLM 63 Lichtgrau, and the designator on these first aircraft appeared in small squarish black letters aft of the fuselage disc, with the aircraft code and number separated by a hyphen (6-16 and 6-1). The Bf-109B-2s (6-36) were delivered in the colour scheme being introduced on home-based Luftwaffe aircraft, the splinter scheme of RLM 70 Dunkelgrün and RLM 71 Schwartzgrün, with the undersurfaces finished in RLM 65 Hellblau. The aircraft finished this way which had entered service with 1./J/88 were flown in this camouflage for several weeks, however the aircraft joining 2./J/88 were repainted, and the dark uppersurface greens were replaced with a uniform coat of RLM 63 Grüngrau (not the same colour as RLM 63 Lichtgrau). There was a change in the style of numbers used for the codes of this, and subsequent, batches. The new numbers were larger, in a rounder style which was quite distinctive and unique to Nationalist aircraft.

In the winter of 1937, 1./J/88 replaced the 70/71 scheme with lighter colours: on most aircraft the upper fuselage was finished in RLM 62 Grün, and the wings were camouflaged with this colour and areas of RLM 63 Grüngrau and sometimes RLM 61 Brun (6-51). The Staffel flew with this scheme until the Fall of 1938, when it was decided to adopt a uniform camouflage scheme already in use by 2./J/88. From that point all Bf-109s in Spain, including the Bf-109Es had with RLM 63 Grüngrau uppersurfaces.

The Bf-109 and the Legion Condor

Several different versions of the Bf-109 were used in Spain. In December 1936, the Bf-109 V3 and V4 arrived, to be followed the next month by the V5 and V6, and these aircraft were assigned serials in the range 6-1 to 6-6. The V3 was damaged almost immediately and returned to Germany for repair, but the other prototypes were flown and evaluated under combat conditions, one of them by Hannes Trautloft. Problems stemming from their experimental status limited their use, but the potential of the design was evident, and the production Bf-109B incorporated many changes to resolve shortcomings which the testing in Spain had revealed.

The first German pilots had arrived in August 1936, together with 6 He-51s. The plan was for the Spaniards to fly them in combat, with the Germans to remain in an advisory role, but the Spaniards had no success and soon the Luftwaffe pilots were clamouring to take the aircraft into combat. The He-51s could hold their own against the Ni.52s which formed the bulk of the Republican air strength, although the C.R.32 flown by the Italians was a much better airplane and did much to establish air supremacy. All this changed, radically, when large numbers of Polikarpov I-15s and I-16s arrived and the Republicans took the offensive in the air. The I-15 and C.R.32 were fairly evenly matched, but the I-16s were much faster, had a better ceiling and climb rate, and were almost as maneuverable as the biplanes. Both aircraft completely outclassed the 24 He-51s which had arrived, and the Heinkels were increasingly limited to the ground attack role, at which they excelled.

By now Germany's involvement in Spain had been upgraded, and on 7 November the Legion Condor was formed. That month 25 German ships arrived with equipment and men. Generalmajor Hugo Sperrle, the new commander, was alarmed at the deterioration of the situation in the air and pressed hard for more effective aircraft to counter the Soviet types. His pleas were answered with alacrity. Another 60 He-51s had arrived, redressing the numerical imbalance and allowing for the creation of three Staffeln within Jagdgruppe 88. Over the objections of the Luftwaffe, half of the initial production batch of Bf-109s was sent, and from that point, the Luftwaffe and Legion Condor received equal priority for the new fighter.

The first batch of Bf-109B-1s arrived in March 1937 and were used to re-equip 2./J/88. These aircraft, coded 6-7 to 6-19, were powered by a Jumo 210Da, fitted with a wooden Schwartz prop and armed with two cowl-mounted 7.9mm MG17 machine guns. Their impact was immediate. They flew higher than the I-16s, had much better performance at altitude and were faster in a dive, and their mere presence forced the I-16 pilots to revise their tactics to try to lure the Messerschmitts down to lower altitude where their advantages were not as pronounced. The Staffel was switched from one trouble spot to another over the next few months, remaining in the thick of the fighting. Their numbers gradually decreased due to losses and attrition: by 30 July 1937 J/88 had been reduced to a mere handful of aircraft, with only 9 Bf-109s and 18 He-51s.

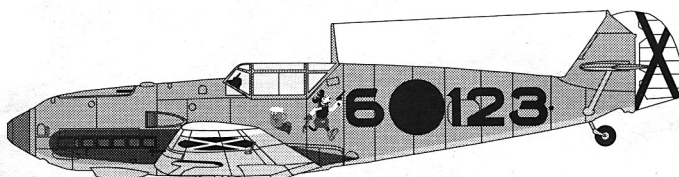
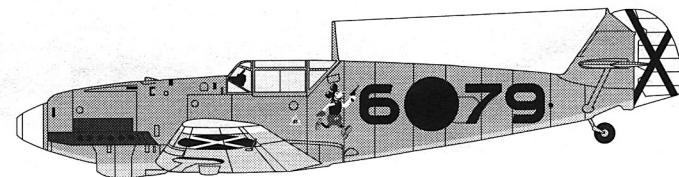
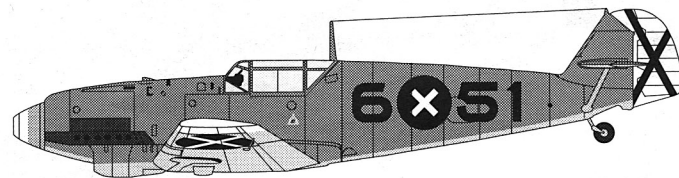
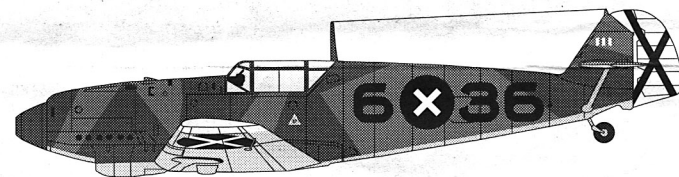
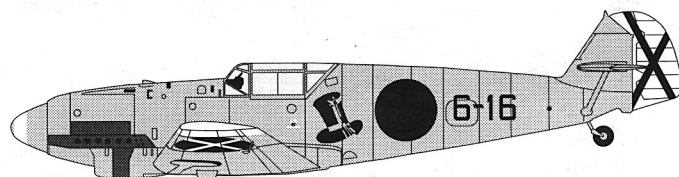
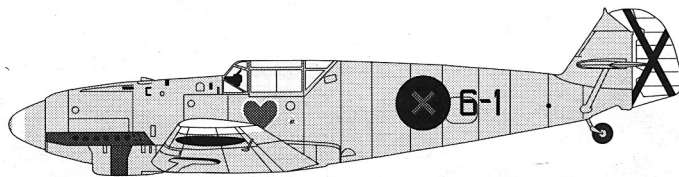
In August 1937 the second batch of 22 Bf-109B-2s arrived, coded 6-20 to 6-45. These aircraft were used to replace the He-51s of 1./J/88, which became the second Bf-109 Staffel. The Bf-109B-2 had a two-blade VDM variable-pitch metal prop, and armament was increased by the addition of a third MG17 firing through the propeller hub, although this installation gave many problems and the gun was often removed.

Only a small number of the next model were received, five Bf-109C-1, serialised from 6-46 to 6-50. The C version was powered by a Jumo 210Ga, with fuel injection rather than a carburetor, and this resulted in a slight deepening of the nose and a slightly larger oil cooler under the wing. The engine mounted MG17 was removed, to be replaced by two MG17s installed in a modified wing. These were assigned to 3./J/88, who had lost most of their He-51s flying strafing missions. This Staffel, now under the command of Mölders, who had replaced Galland, resumed operations flying both types, and as deliveries of 109s continued the unit was completely re-equipped.

March 1938 also saw the arrival of the first Bf-109Ds, which reverted to the Jumo 210Da but had the increased four-gun armament of the C. These aircraft, coded 6-51 to 6-86, were issued to 1./J/88 and 2./J/88, whose older aircraft were refurbished and sent on to 3./J/88.

The last model of the Bf-109 to arrive in Spain was the Emil. In February 1939 the Legion Condor began to receive the new Bf-109E-1s and E-3s, and 2./J/88 began to convert to this model in the last weeks of the Civil War. The war ended before the Emil saw combat, and when hostilities ceased only half of the 40 aircraft sent had been assembled. These, together with 27 earlier marks which were still in service, were handed over to the new Ejército del Aire and used to form two squadrons of Grupo 5-G-5, Escuadrilla Azul. They became the backbone of the Spanish fighter force for many years, and although the Bs and Ds were relegated to training much earlier, the Bf-109Es did not retire until the mid-1950s.

(TALLY HOI #7218 features markings for Spanish fighters during the 1940s, including the Bf-109B. Markings for a Swiss Bf-109D are included with TALLY HOI sheet #7130.)



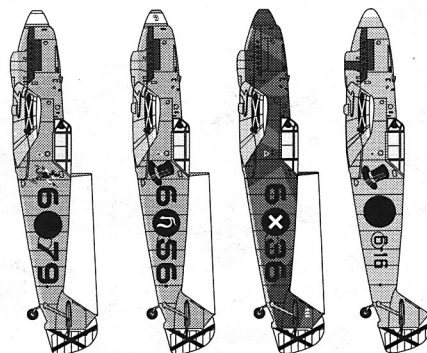
Modelling notes:

Heller's kit of the Bf-109B, released in the late 1970s, has been reissued after a long absence. It is one of the nicest 1/72 scale Bf-109 kits, generally accurate and includes both the VDM and Schwartz props.

D.B. Conversions also offered a resin nose for a Bf-109B designed to fit the (old) Hasegawa Bf-109E kit. Falcon's canopy for the Bf-109E-3 can be used as is, as can Cooper Details resin interior for the Emil, although the purist might wish to modify the resin parts to reflect the minor differences between the Emil and earlier aircraft.

Aircraft Markings for the Modelling World

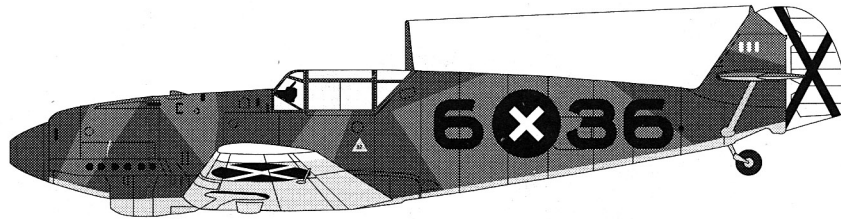
7140 - Bf-109B, Legion Condor
1./J/88 - Harder, Terry, Schellmann
2./J/88 - Handrick, Grabmann
3./J/88 - Mölders, Schmolter-Haldy



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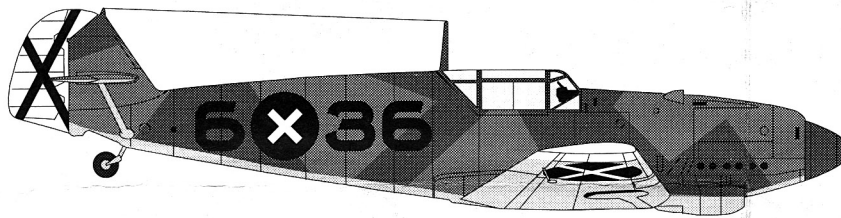


The white cross on the fuselage disc was the squadron badge of 1.J/88. Harro Harder had applied a white swastika to the side of his He-51, 2-64, and this was carried briefly by a number of 1.J/88 He-51s. However Germany was still paying lip service to non-intervention, and the swastika was deemed not to be "politically correct" for a group of apolitical "volunteers", so the swastika was toned down to a simple cross.

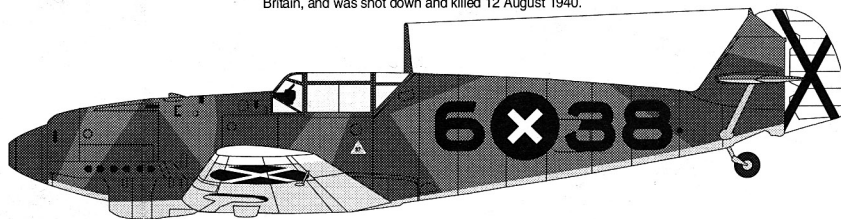


Bf-109B-2 6-36, flown by Hauptmann Harro Harder, Staffelkapitän of 1.J/88, early September 1937.

Harder was one of the old hands, having flown He-51s in Spain since late 1936. On August 27, 1937 Harder scored his second kill with this aircraft, the first victory for 1.J/88 with the new Messerschmitts. In October he became Staffelkapitän of 1.J/88, and became the youngest Hauptmann in the Luftwaffe at age 24. Pilots with the Legion Condor usually served nine months in their tour, and in December 1937 Harder returned to Germany, after scoring nine more victories. He then spent several months demonstrating the He-112 to potential customers, before returning to Spain in April 1938 with the He-112V9. He remained there until July, flying the new Heinkel, and he relieved Handrick as Gruppenkommandeur of J/88 while the latter was on leave. Harder finished his days in Spain with 11 kills, the third ranked ace behind Mölders and Schellmann. He was Gruppenkommandeur of III/JG 53 during the Battle of Britain, and was shot down and killed 12 August 1940.

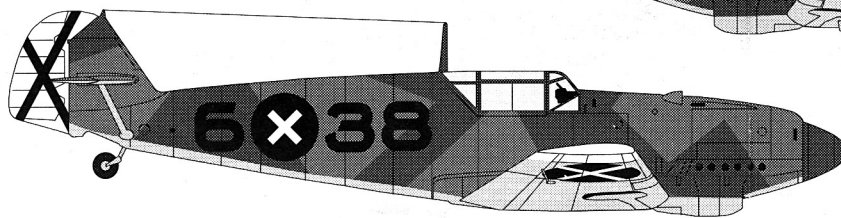


Camouflage on both these aircraft is the (later) standard Luftwaffe day fighter splinter camouflage which was being introduced onto the production lines in the summer of 1937. Colours are RLM 70 Dunkelgrün and RLM 71 Schwartzgrün on the upper surfaces and RLM 65 Hellblau undersides. Spinners and propellers are Schwartzgrün. Victory markings almost always took the form of small white rectangles on one side of the vertical stabilizer. Harder's tally was marked on the port side, whereas both Schellmann and Mölders chose to display their kills on the starboard side.



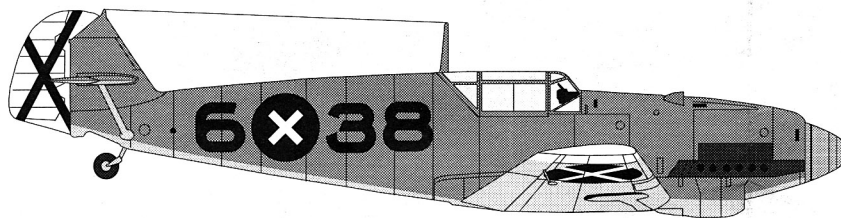
Bf-109B-2 6-38, flown by Uffz. Ernst Terry, August 1937

Terry was Harder's regular wingman, and had two victories to his credit by the end of his tour. By 1940 Terry had attained the rank of Oberleutnant and become the Adjutant of I/JG 51. Colour scheme is identical to Harder's aircraft. This aircraft is illustrated in the later scheme below, and a plan view of the later scheme appears on Page 4.

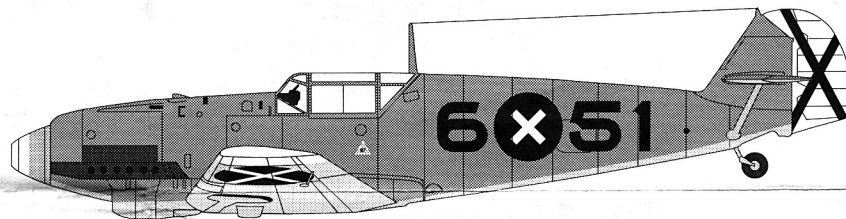


	RLM 70 Dunkelgrün 24052		RLM 71 Schwartzgrün 24084		RLM 65 Hellblau 25414
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In October 1937 the fighting at Santander ended, and J/88 was sent back to the Madrid Front. The terrain in that area was more arid, without the lush greenery of the north, and the dark Luftwaffe 70/71 scheme was not suitable camouflage for the region. At the end of October the third major variant of Messerschmitt camouflage appeared, one unique to 1.J/88, when the Staffel's aircraft were repainted. Most had the fuselage and top of the wing painted Grün 62, with splinter-type areas of Grüngrau 63 on the wing and tailplane, while the Hellblau 65 on the undersides preserved. In December further changes were made to this camouflage when areas of Brun 61 were added to the wing. This camouflage was used by 1.J/88 until September 1938, when Schellmann was recalled to Germany and the new commanding officer, Hptm. Siebelt Reents, ordered that the Staffel's aircraft be painted along the same lines as those of 2.J/88, with RLM 63 Grüngrau applied to upper surfaces and with Hellblau 65 undersides. At the same time, the white cross was removed from the fuselage disc, and a new squadron badge was adopted. This was the "Holzauge" or "Hooded Eye" badge, a white disc with a caricature of a man pulling down his lower eyelid, in black. This was taken from a Spanish phrase signifying the need for maintaining a sharp look-out. The badge appeared on the port side of the fuselage, below the cockpit.

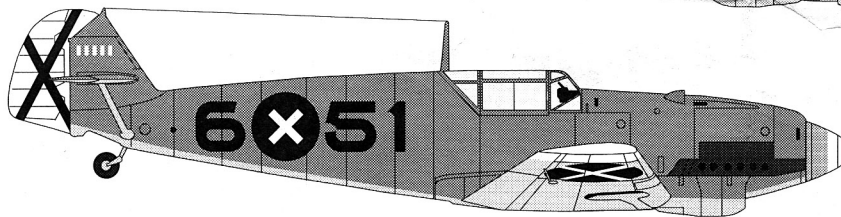


Uffz. Terry's aircraft as it appeared in December 1937, after 1.J/88's aircraft were overhauled and repainted. The fuselage is now Grün 62, with areas of Grüngrau 63 on the wing and tailplane. Spinner is Grüngrau 63, and the area behind the exhausts has been painted black in a style similar to that on the Bf-109B-1.



Bf-109D 6-51, flown by Hauptmann Wolfgang Schellmann, Staffelkapitän of 1.J/88, July 1938.

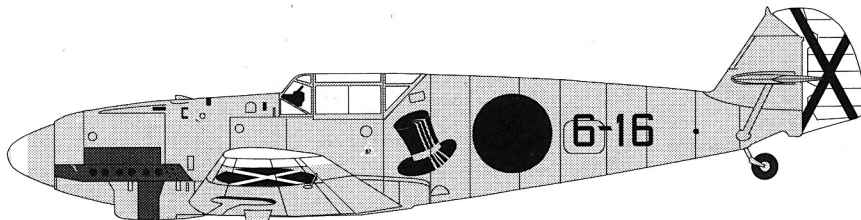
Schellmann took over command of 1.J/88 from Harro Harder in December 1937, and led the unit through the campaign at Teruel and the battles at the Ebro, some of the bitterest fighting in the Civil War and which had some of the largest aerial engagements. He scored his first victory on 18 January 1938, and within seven months had become the highest-scoring pilot in the Legion Condor, adding eleven more. In September 1938, during the height of the Munich Crisis, Schellmann was recalled to Germany along with many other experienced pilots. His tally of twelve confirmed victories in Spain made him one of the top scoring aces of the Legion Condor, second only to Mölders' score of fifteen. He continued to score after the Second World War began the following year, adding another fourteen during the fighting in the West. He led II/JG2 during the invasion of France, then became the Geschwaderkommodore before he was succeeded by Helmut Wick. At the start of Barbarossa was Geschwaderkommodore of JG 27. The day that campaign began, June 22 1941, his Bf-109F was damaged in combat with a Soviet I-16 and he was forced to bail out. Major Schellmann was captured by the Russians and summarily shot.



Schellmann's aircraft is one of those known to have had the three-colour camouflage on the upper surfaces of the wing. The fuselage was Grün 62 with black trim on the engine areas, white tip to the spinner, and with white kill markings on the starboard tail. During the July 1938 fighting over the Ebro, Schellmann scored three victories, his sixth through eighth. Five are marked here, as the aircraft appeared at the start of the month, and as photographed.

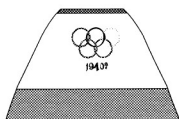
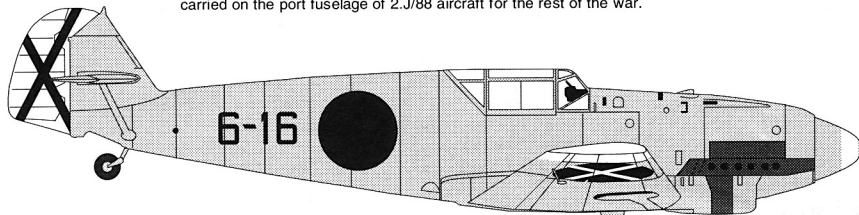


The "Zylinderhut", or "Top Hat" badge became one of the most famous insignia of the Spanish Civil War. It reflected the "civilian" nature of the German mission, the pilots having been formally discharged from the Luftwaffe prior to their arrival in Spain, i.e. having taken their "Top Hat" and gone. It appeared on the He-51s of the original Jagdstaffel when it was joined by the main force of the Legion Condor and became 4.J/88. In March 1937, 4.J/88 was disbanded, with many of the pilots going to 2.J/88 which had re-equipped with Bf-109s, and this Staffel adopted the badge as the Staffel emblem and was carried on the port fuselage of 2.J/88 aircraft for the rest of the war.

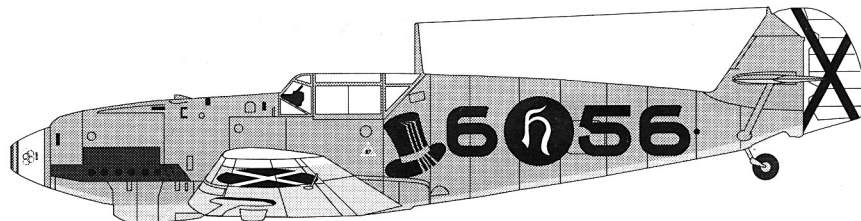


Bf-109B-1 6-16, 2.J/88, March 1937

This was one of the original Messerschmitts sent to Spain, and was painted overall RLM 63 Lichtgrau with the customary white wingtips and rudder. The spinner and propeller are also grey, with the tip of the spinner in white and a silver cap fitted to the extreme tip. The propeller blades on these aircraft were painted silver, although the propeller itself was one of the wooden Schwartz props fitted to the initial production batch. Note the absence of a radio antenna, since the VHF radio was not fitted to the first aircraft. The pilot is not known.

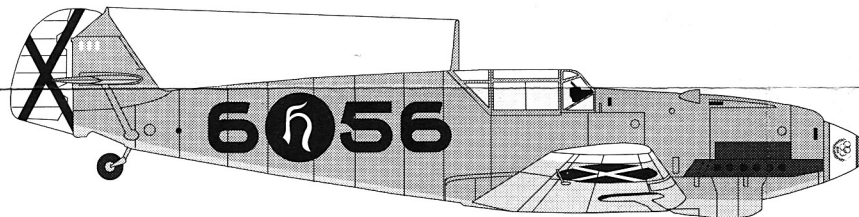


Handrick's personal markings were among the most colourful on the Bf-109s. He had won a Gold Medal in the Pentathlon during the 1936 Olympic Games held in Berlin, and to mark this achievement had the Olympic rings painted on the spinner of 6-36. On one side was a wreath and the legend "1936", while on the other was the legend "1940?" and the tip had the red/yellow/red Spanish tricolour. His monogram was applied in the center of the fuselage disc, and three of his kills are recorded on the starboard tailplane. The colour scheme for this machine, and for the other aircraft of 2.J/88, is RLM 63 Grüngrau on the uppersurfaces with undersides in RLM 65 Hellblau. Spinner, rudder, and wingtips are white, and the area behind the exhaust stacks is black.

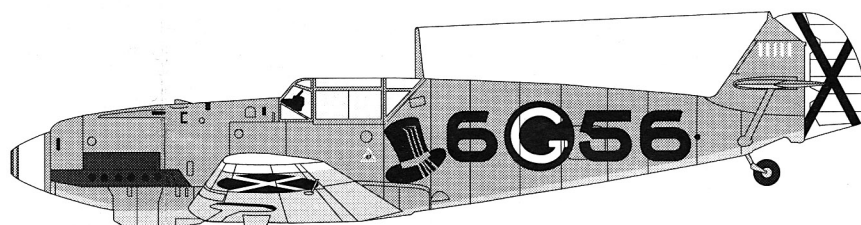


Bf-109D 6-56, flown by Major Gotthard Handrick
Gruppenkommandeur J/88, July 1938

Handrick was appointed Gruppenkommandeur of the Legion fighter forces on July 8, 1937 and led the fighter Staffeln until September 10, 1938. Handrick took command of Jagdgruppe 88 just as 2.J/88 had converted to the Bf-109, and led the unit through the headiest days of the Civil War. Although often he had only a handful of aircraft in his command, under his stewardship the Messerschmitts achieved a level of success quite out of proportion to the number of fighters available. He scored five victories before being hastily recalled to Germany, along with many of his best pilots, during the Munich Crisis in 1938. Back in the Luftwaffe, he continued his success. He was Geschwaderkommodore of JG 26 during the invasion of France and through the initial weeks of the Battle of Britain, when he was succeeded by Galland. He led the fighters of JG 77 during Operation Marita, the attack on the Balkans in April 1941, and in January 1942 became the first commander of JG 5 Eismeer. In 1945 he was in command of Jagddivision 8 (Vienna), and survived the war.

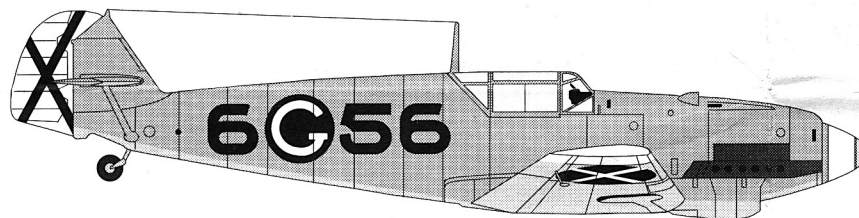


When Grabmann took the airplane over Handrick's personal markings were removed. In the center of the fuselage insignia Grabmann added his own device, a letter G painted freehand. His victory markings were shown on the port side rather than the starboard, but apart from that the other markings remained unchanged.



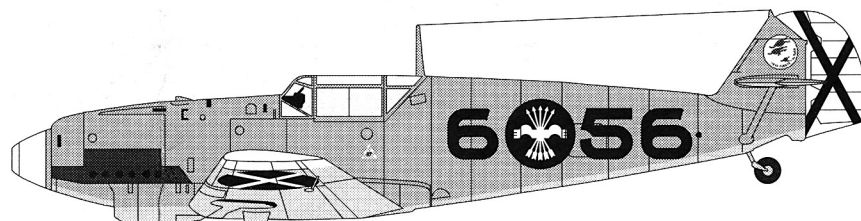
Bf-109D 6-56, flown by Hauptmann Walter Grabmann
Gruppenkommandeur J/88, November 1938

Grabmann succeeded Handrick as Gruppenkommandeur in September 1938 and commanded Jagdgruppe 88 until the end of the Civil War in March 1939. Grabmann is credited with seven victories while flying this aircraft, although by the end of the war he was flying a Bf-109E-1 6-130 (the last Messerschmitt delivered to Spain), and this aircraft had been passed on to the Spanish. (See below.) During the Battle of Britain, Grabmann was the Geschwaderkommodore of ZG 76, and by 1945 he had attained the rank of Generalmajor within the Luftwaffe high command.



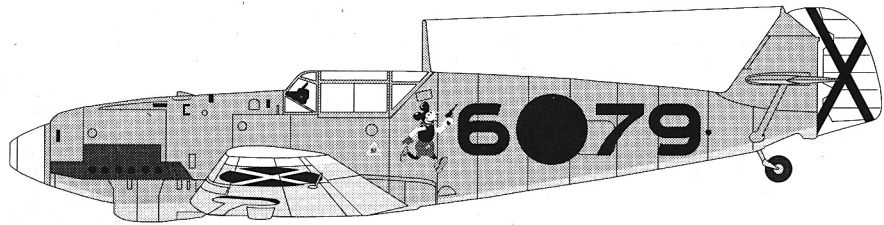
Bf-109D 6-56, 2a Escuadrilla, Grupo Mixto 5-G-5
Lagroño, April 1939

This is 6-56 again after it had been turned over to the new Ejército del Aire. This is not a Legion Condor machine, but it is interesting to compare it with the aircraft's identities above. In February 1939 the Bf-109E began to arrive and the older Bf-109 models were used to form the 2a Escuadrilla of Grupo 5-G-5 at Lagroño, near Salamanca. This group was the famous Blue Patrol, which had gained fame through the exploits of Spanish pilots like Garcia Pardo and Morato. The group flew a mixture of Bf-109s and He-112Bs during WW2, and volunteers from this group also flew later model Bf-109s in Russia alongside Luftwaffe pilots of JG 27 and JG 51. This aircraft can be modelled using the insignia and codes from this sheet, and the unit badge on the tail can be found on **TALLY HO!** #7218, which features markings for a number of Spanish fighters from the years after the Civil War.



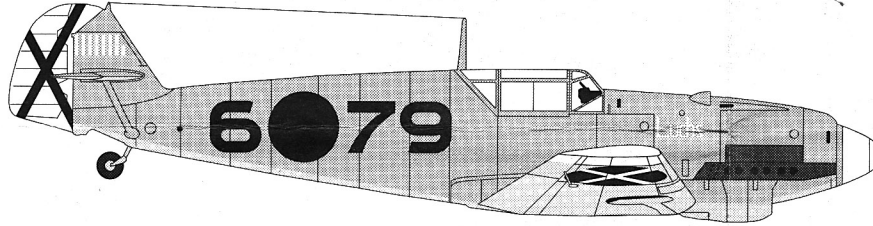


"Mickeymaus" was the Staffel badge of 3.J/88, and had first appeared on the He-51. There were many variations in style, however the version included is based on a photo of a 3.J/88 Bf-109D. As the Staffel commander, it is most probable that Mölders had the badge on his aircraft, however this is not confirmed since we have not found a photo of the port side of 6-79.



Luchs

Mölders named his aircraft "Luchs" (Lynx), which appeared on the rear upper cowling panel on the starboard side, and a photo of his aircraft at the end of his tour shows fifteen kills on the starboard tail. It is possible that the name and kills were repeated on the port side, however this is not documented.



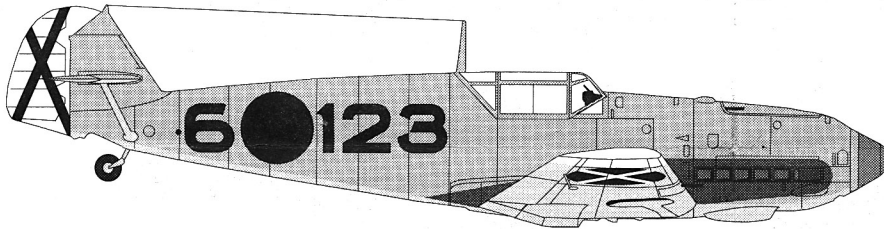
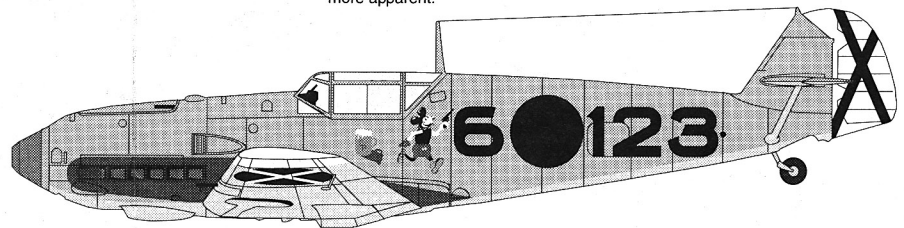
Bf-109D 6-79 flown by Hptm. Werner Mölders
Staffelkapitän of 3.J/88, November 1938

Mölders was the highest scoring Legion Condor pilot, a feat he achieved in an astonishingly short time. He was a latecomer to Spain, arriving in the Spring of 1938. He succeeded Galland as Staffelkapitän of 3.J/88 on 24.05.38, and a month later the unit's aging He-51s were exchanged for Bf-109s. Mölders shot his first enemy aircraft down on 15 July, and during the Second Battle of the Ebro he would rack up an impressive 14 confirmed victories, the most of any Legion Condor pilot. Mölders returned to Germany on 5 December, and was certainly the most famous Luftwaffe pilot during the early war years. During 1940-41 he commanded JG 51, which was named in his honour after his death. In November 1941, after becoming *Inspekteur der Jagdflieger* with the rank of Oberst, he was killed in a plane crash en route to the funeral of Ernst Udet. His impressive tally of 115 victories was made mostly in combat with French and British aircraft, before the tremendous totals accumulated over the Russian Front became commonplace, which makes his skill as a fighter pilot that much more apparent.



Bf-109E-1 6-123 flown by Oblt. Hans Schmoller-Haldy
2.J/88, March 1939

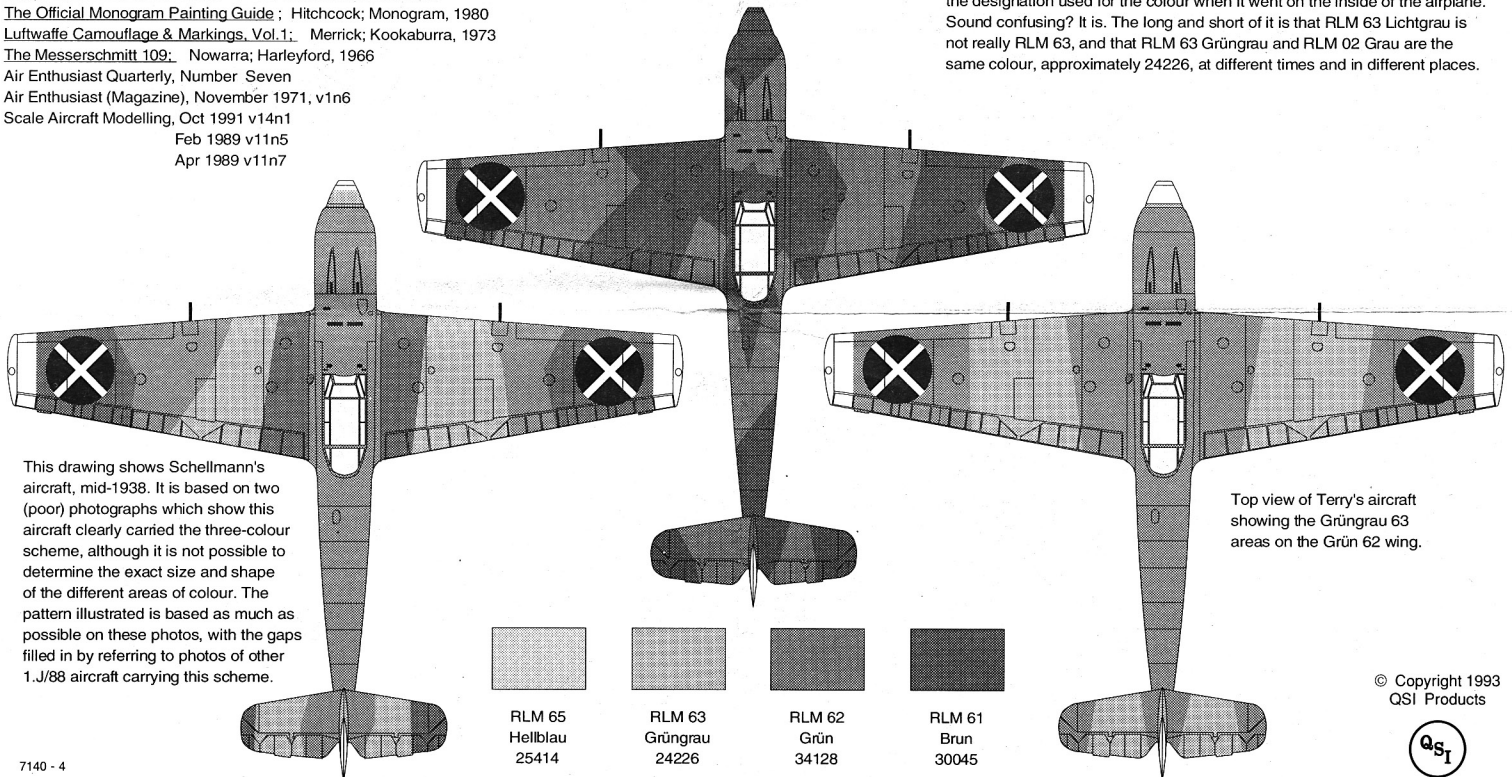
The most interesting part of this aircraft is the beer mug at left, which appeared under the port cockpit sill. It is the symbol of the "Order of Cardinal Paff", a pilots' organization devoted to dipsomania. In WW2 Schmoller-Haldy was the Staffelkapitän of 3.J/G 54, with 14 victories before he was seriously injured in a crashlanding, February 1942. He survived the war, and served in the post-war Bundeswaffe. Note the black area around the exhausts and over the wing which was standard on Emils in Spain.



A note on the colours RLM 63: The system of colour identification which Luftwaffe aficionados have come to know and love was in its infancy in 1936. At that time most German aircraft were delivered in a pale grey, Lightgrau, approximately 36493, originally a civilian finish. For many years this was confused with Grüngrau and called RLM 63. In 1935 new colours were introduced for camouflage purposes: Brun 61, Grün 62, Hellblau 65, and Grüngrau 63. These were used particularly on bombers in a three-colour splinter pattern. In the autumn of 1938 the colours 61, 62, and 63 were withdrawn, no longer used for camouflage, however in late 1939 tests showed that the colour RLM 63 Grüngrau was very useful for camouflage, and it began to be used again. In the meantime, Grüngrau had become a standard colour for interior finishes, for which application it was referred to as RLM 02 Grau. By the time it was reintroduced as an exterior colour, the number RLM 63 had been retired, and the easiest solution was to preserve the designation used for the colour when it went on the inside of the airplane. Sound confusing? It is. The long and short of it is that RLM 63 Lichtgrau is not really RLM 63, and that RLM 63 Grüngrau and RLM 02 Grau are the same colour, approximately 24226, at different times and in different places.

There are numerous books and articles on the Bf-109 and the Legion Condor. Among the works consulted during the preparation of this decal sheet are:
Legion Condor: K.Ries, H.Ring; Schiffer, 1992
Warplanes of the Third Reich: Wm.Green; Macdonald, 1972
The Official Monogram Painting Guide: Hitchcock; Monogram, 1980
Luftwaffe Camouflage & Markings, Vol.1: Merrick; Kookaburra, 1973
The Messerschmitt 109: Nowarra; Harleford, 1966
Air Enthusiast Quarterly, Number Seven
Air Enthusiast (Magazine), November 1971, v1n6
Scale Aircraft Modelling, Oct 1991 v14n1
Feb 1989 v11n5
Apr 1989 v11n7

Below is a top view showing the standard splinter camouflage in RLM 70 and RLM 71. National insignia appeared in the same place above and below the wings on all aircraft.



This drawing shows Schellmann's aircraft, mid-1938. It is based on two (poor) photographs which show this aircraft clearly carried the three-colour scheme, although it is not possible to determine the exact size and shape of the different areas of colour. The pattern illustrated is based as much as possible on these photos, with the gaps filled in by referring to photos of other 1.J/88 aircraft carrying this scheme.

Top view of Terry's aircraft showing the Grüngrau 63 areas on the Grün 62 wing.

RLM 65 Hellblau 25414	RLM 63 Grüngrau 24226	RLM 62 Grün 34128	RLM 61 Brun 30045

