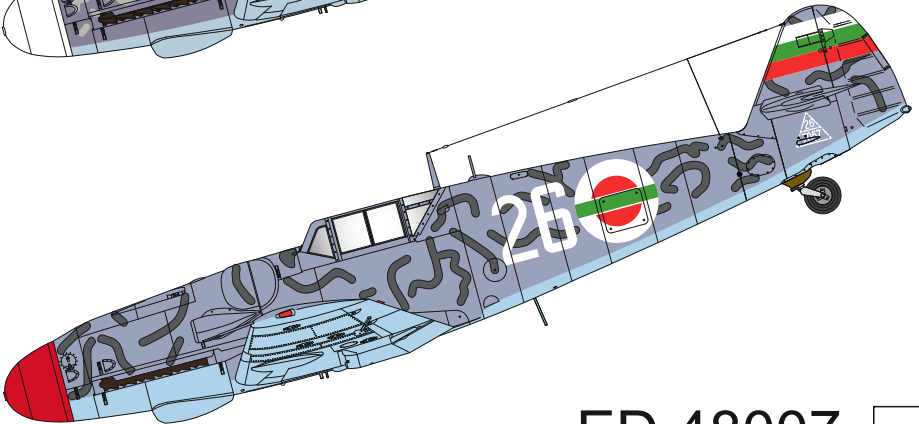
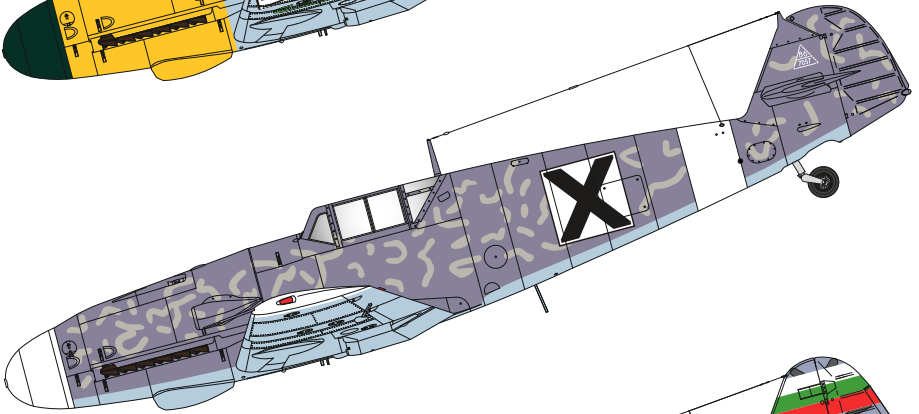
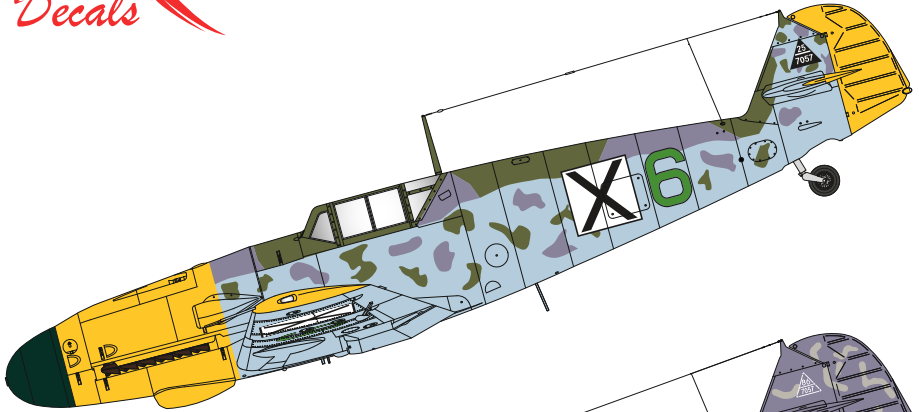




Bulgarian Arrows #4

Bf 109 G in Bulgarian service - part 1



ED 48007

ED 72007

Bf 109 G in Bulgarian service

Following the unexpected American air raid against Rumania on June 1942, it became obvious to Berlin what Sofia had demanded for some time - the air defence of Bulgaria needs to be strengthened. At that time, the most modern fighter aircraft the Bulgarians had were the handful of Messerschmitt Bf 109Es, a type which was already *passé* by then by the latest standards. The *Emils* were complemented by hopelessly outdated Avia B.534 biplanes, as well as the similarly obsolete Polish P.24s. The Bulgarians requested 54 Bf 109G fighters, but the request was initially turned down by the Germans.

The order for the 16 Bf 109G-2s, equipped with Db605 engines, was signed on 18 February 1943.

Brand new airplanes (WNF) arrived by train to Bulgaria at the beginning of March 1943.

On 1 August 1943 started American air offensive against South Europe. Although the targets were located in Rumania - in the strategically important oilfields in Ploesti area - the air armada had to pass through Bulgarian airspace, both there and back. At this day first „Liberator“ had been shot down by Bulgarian pilot (Ppor Peter Bochev, - B-24D, S/N 42-40364).

In late October 1943 had started American the air raids against the Balkan country, particularly its capital - to destroy the morale of the population, with the end goal of convincing Bulgaria's leader to exit the Axis camp and sue for peace.

By the end of 1943, a total of 46 Bf 109Gs were transferred to Bulgaria from the Messerschmitt repair workshop at Pipera-Bucharest, Rumania. Till end of August 1944 German sold to Bulgaria (according to German documents) another 20 Bf 109 G-2 and 60 Bf 109 G-6 (but probably only 50 arrived to Bulgaria).

On 30 August 1944 VNVV (Royal Bulgarian Air Force) had 33 serviceable and 75 unserviceable Bf 109Gs.

Realizing that the Red Army advancing through Romania would show up at the country's northern borders within days, Bulgarian government announced Bulgaria's neutrality on 26 August 1944 and ordered German forces to leave the country, or to be disarmed. On 2 September, a new government cut diplomatic relationship with Germany, asked USA and UK for a truce and started withdrawing the main Bulgarian forces from occupied territories (mainly Macedonia). This was not enough, though, the Communist-led *Otechestven Front* (Fatherland Front - OF), committed a coup d'état on 9 September and declares war on Germany and other Axis nations. The OF Government signed a cease-fire treaty with the Soviet Union and unilaterally allied Sofia with Moscow, pretty much like Bucharest did two weeks earlier. In meantime, on 5 September, Soviets declares a state of war with neutral (in the German-Soviet war) Bulgarian Kingdom. Three days later, the first Red Army units crossed the Bulgarian border and started the occupation of north-eastern Bulgaria.

On 9 September 1944 anti-German campaign had started. During these campaign Bulgarian *Strela*'s realised mainly ground-attack missions. During the so-called „Patriotic War“ that lasted two and half months, the 6. *Iztrebitelen Polk* (equipped with *Strela*'s) reported a total of 793 combat sorties. Nine Bf 109G and total of seven pilots were lost - all victims to enemy ground fire and accidents. Some 120 vehicles, three tanks, ten artillery tractors, two tankers, two locomotives and two light-calibre anti-aircraft batteries were reported neutralized.

In addition, the Bulgarian fighter pilots claimed 14 enemy aircraft destroyed on ground by strafing.

The 1945 found the Bulgarian Air Force on a peacetime footing. With the front line far away from Bulgaria proper, and the Bulgarian warplanes - except for the occasional long-range reconnaissance and transport flights - not requested to support Bulgarian ground troops fighting in Hungary.

On the first day of 1945, the number of existing first-line Bf 109Gs was 65, of which only 30 were serviceable.

During the spring of 1945, units of the Soviet 17th Air Army reported over 300 Me-109s and Fw 190s captured in Austria, at „an airfield in a forest“. Bulgarian delegation (headed by former Soviet Air Force technical officer) asked the Soviet commander of 17th Air Army, for 50 „trophy“ Bf 109s. After receiving Stalin's consent the Bulgarians were allowed to select an initial batch of 50 Bf 109s, repair and fly them away, as soon as it was possible. Among these so-called „trophy“ aircraft were a number of late-version Bf 109Gs as well. Despite the top-level approval, a sizeable bribe must have been paid by the Bulgarians to the local Soviet Commanders to get the best available aircraft.

Recovery activity on Zeltweg started on 6 April, and lasted until the area was handed over by the Soviets to British units on 21 July. (Zeltweg, Styria was in British post-war occupation zone).

According to the Paris peace treaty, which came into force on 15.09.1947, the Bulgarian Air Force was allowed to have maximum of 90 aircraft, of which only 70 could be „combat types“. As Communist Bulgaria and Yugoslavia - former enemies - came closer after war, a deal was struck for total of 291 surplus (including 59 Bf 109Gs) to be handed over to Yugoslavia, as an escape from a strict peace treaty limitations. Otherwise, the „surplus“ materiel should have been scrapped in Bulgaria. Despite of deal with Yugoslavia, over 50 Bf 109Gs remained in Bulgaria soldiering on, including about seven dual-control ones, used as trainers. *Strela*'s had been on duty till mid-1950 when it was decided to scrap the remains of "royalist time". The few surviving Messerschmitts were kept in storage at Karlovo for a while, then cut into pieces in the first half of the fifties.

Bulgarian Air Force used (at least) 172 Bf 109Gs different versions. One ex-Bulgarian *Strela* G (Bf 109 G-3 W.Nr. 14792, Bulgarian No. 23/7057, „Green 4“ of 682. Yato) is currently displayed in the Belgrade aviation museum (as ex-Bulgarian). At the last one, (Bf 109 G-10/U-4 W.Nr. 610937) of the originally ex-Hungarian, then ex-Bulgarian, then ex-Yugoslav Gustav is displayed in Evergreen Aviation&Space Museum, McMinnville, Oregon, USA, in *Luftwaffe* markings as Eric Hartmann plane.

info based on Denes Bernad book „Bulgarian Fighter Colours 1919-1948“ published by STRATUS s.j.



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