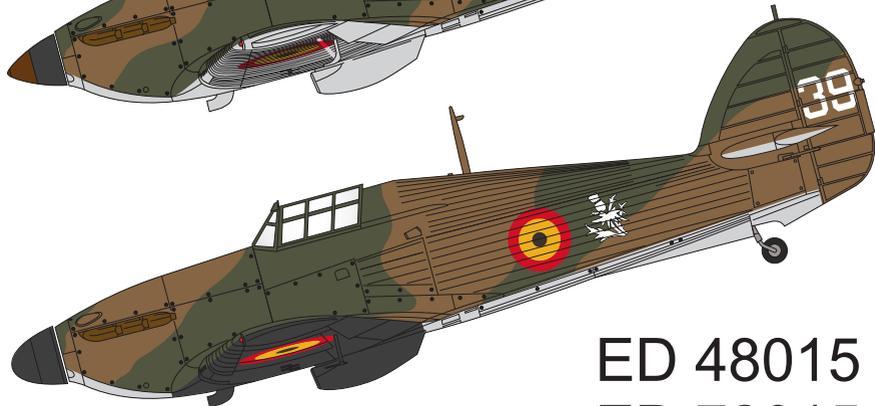
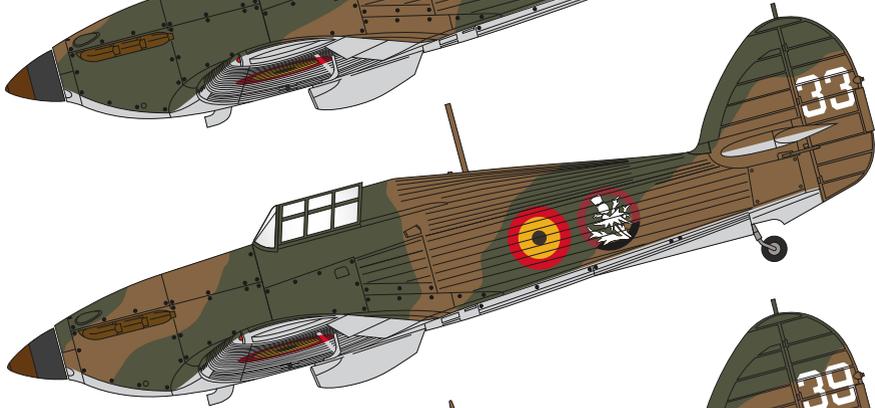
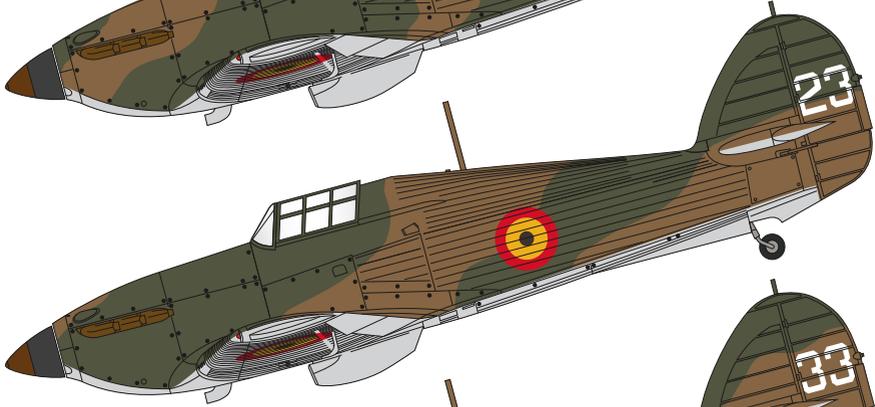




Belgian Hurricanes

Hawker Hurricane Mk.I
in Belgian service



ED 48015

ED 72015

Hawker Hurricane in Belgian service

In the late 1930s, as it became apparent that war was likely, the Belgian air force started to consider a modern replacement for its Fairey Firefly IIM and Gloster Gladiators biplanes. Belgian government placed an initial order for twenty Hurricanes Mk Is from Hawkers, and made arrangements for Avions Fairey to build a further eighty with armament to their own specifications.

Due to the ever-pressing need for such fighters, it was agreed to accept the transfer of twenty machines originally destined for the RAF, with the first three (H-20, H-21, H-22) arriving at Evere on 19th May 1939. Twelve other Hurricanes were consigned between June and September 1939, while the remaining five aircraft could not be delivered due to the German invasion of spring 1940. Meanwhile, licence production had begun at the Gosselies plant of Avions Fairey. These aircraft differed in being armed with four .50in Browning FN machine guns in the wings in place of the standard .303in guns installed in the British machines. Only two examples (H-42, H-43 or H-45) had been completed while a third remained incomplete without an engine.

All British-built planes had Rolls-Royce Merlin II engines with two blade Watts propellers, fabric covered wings and non armored windscreen and had been painted in a two-tone RAF-type camouflage (Dark Green / Dark Earth) on upper surfaces. The under surfaces had been painted aluminium dope. National insignia (red-yellow-black roundels) being applied in six position - the upper and lower wings as well as fuselage sides. Each aircraft was identified by a white number painted on the rudder, a black number under the right wing with black letter "H" under the left wing.

The Belgian Hurricanes equipped the *2eme Escadrille* ("*Les Chardons*"), *1ere Group*, *2eme Regiment de Chasse* (2nd Squadron "Thistles" of the 1st Group, 2nd Regiment of the Royal Belgian Air Force).

On 3rd September 1939 Belgium declares neutrality in the war. In spite of that the Belgian airspace was systematically violated by combat aircraft of both fighting sides. For that reason the *Escadrille "Les Chardons"* was allocated on 6th September 1939 for defence of the eastern border of Belgium. The Belgians, who strictly observed their neutrality, would not carry ammunition in their aircraft until March 1940 when German reconnaissance Dornier Do 17P destroyed by fire three Belgian Hurricanes.

During "Phoney War" Belgians were "reinforced" with several British Hurricane Is. The first of these has forced landed in Belgium on 10th November, the next two on 14th November 1939. Their pilots were interned (and escaped to France on 27th November). The next, fourth British Hurricane force-landed in Belgium on 9th December 1939. This example was fitted with Merlin III engine and three bladed Rotol propeller. The British government, regarding the forcibly interned Hurricanes, semi-officially declared that it had no interest in operating these aircraft and they could be put to good use by the Belgians. In connection with the above, they became part of the Belgian Air Force. Aircraft received serials H-35, H-36, H-38 and H-39 (this one with three blade propeller).

When the Germans attacked on 10th May 1940, the entire Belgian air force had 180 serviceable combat aircraft. The Belgians received a total of 19 Hurricanes, including the four interned British ones. But only 11 serviceable Hurricanes were in service. The Belgian Hurricanes were surprised during preparations for take-off by German fighters and bombers. Their pilots were wounded and burnt by exploding bombs. Only two Hurricanes managed to take off. The former managed to catch a twin-engined bomber near Louvain (claimed as a Heinkel He 111 shot down). The Belgian Hurricanes landed at Le Culot airfield. They were later joined by a third one (H-29), repaired at Schaffen-Dienst. The next day German fighters, during a ground attack, seriously damaged the remaining three Belgian Hurricanes.

info based on Miroslaw Wawrzyński book "Hurricane in Foreign Service"
and Richard J. Caruana article "Export Hawker Hurricanes"
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