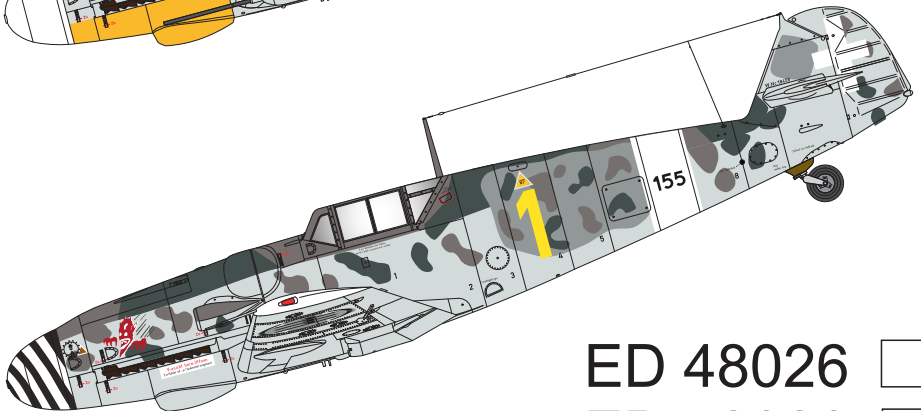
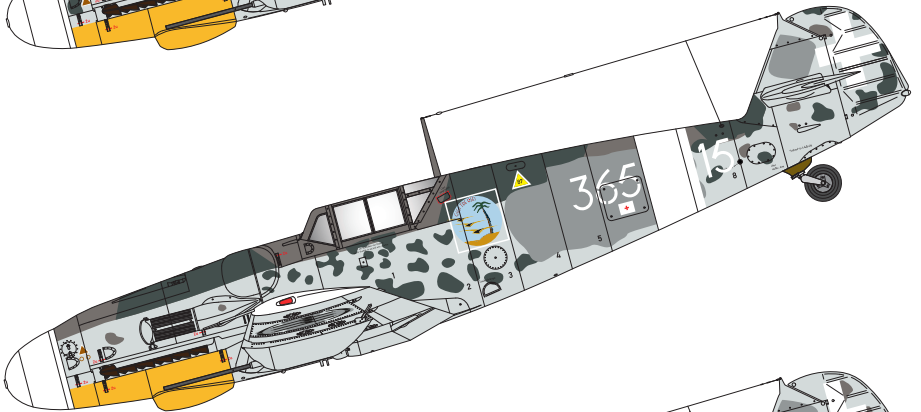
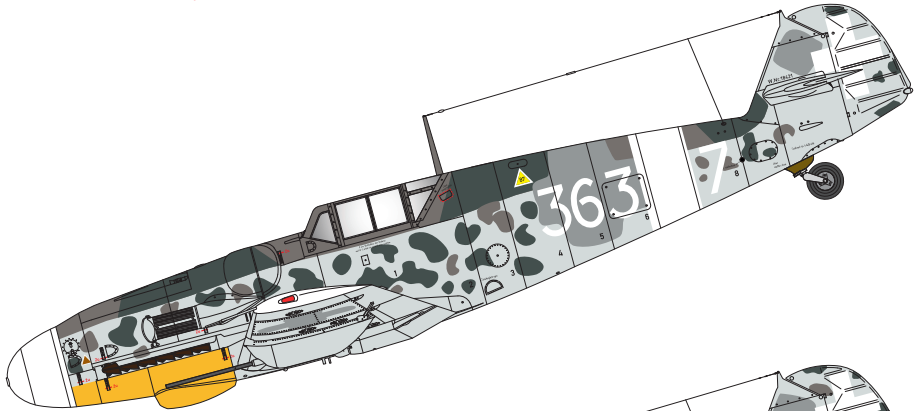




Italian Gustavs over Sicily #2

Bf 109G in Regia Aeronautica - part 2



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Bf 109G in Regia Aeronautica

The widespread use of German aircraft in Italian units was brought about, not without hypocrisy, only by the growing evidence of Italian technological and industrial difficulties. To quote but one example, the minutes of the six meetings held up to 12 June 1943 never mention approaching the Germans to obtain modern aircraft from them. This despite the fact as early as March the Italians had admitted that the desired standardisation of production on just two types - a fighter and a bomber, respectively with ground support and heavy fighter variants - would not be possible before 1944. This silence stemmed possibly from embarrassment, or perhaps from the illusion that the need might be temporary. The Germans did not show much enthusiasm either. The idea of delivering Messerschmitts to *Regia Aeronautica*, on which Hitler insisted for political reasons, met the firm opposition of Goering, who believed that this would be equivalent to withdrawing from combat a large number of modern aircraft.

In any case, as early as 27 February 1943, the *Regia Aeronautica* had applied to *Luftwaffe* for „500 aircraft, including 60% fighters and 40% bombers“. By 5 May 1943 these had grown to 300 Bf 109G, 200 Ju87 and Ju88, 50 Me 210, 12 Do 217 and 60 DFS 230 gliders. The *Luftwaffe* raised many objections - both reasonable and unreasonable - but in the end was forced to accept the agreement that Hitler and Mussolini had reached.

Bf 109 deliveries began on 19 April 1943. Before the armistice, the *Regia Aeronautica* received at least 122 aircraft including 15 Bf 109F-4, 6 109G-2, 10 G-4 and 91 G-6. The F were old machines built in 1941 and mostly drawn from German units deployed in Greece. The Gustavs were instead mostly recent, built from February-March 1943 by the Erla, MTT and WNF factories. Almost all were delivered through the *Bari Luftpark* (air depot). The first Italian unit to receive the Messerschmitts was the 150th *Gruppo* (363, 364 and 365 *Squadriglia*), followed for a brief period by two squadrons of the 4th *Stormo* (73 and 84, which soon moved onto the Macchi Mc.205), by the 70th *Squadriglia* of the 23rd *Gruppo* in mid May and by the 3rd *Gruppo* (153, 154 and 155 *Squadriglia*) at the end of month. The delivery of 23 II./JG 53 aircraft to the 3rd *Gruppo* was duly recorded by the official German photographers.

The 3rd and 150th *Gruppi Autonomi* became the main Italian user of Bf 109. Based on Sicilian airfields, their training period was made difficult by a lack of two-seater aircraft and spares, which the Germans refused to supply in order to keep Italian under control. The 150th *Gruppo* made its debut on 25 April with a patrol sortie, while its first Bf 109 combat occurred on 28 May. The 3rd *Gruppo* claimed its first and only victory on 13 June. Up to this date, the two Italian Bf 109 groups flew some 323 sorties, losing 13 aircraft but putting in claims for 23 victories. Further clashes came in the following days, resulting in additional claims, but unit effectiveness was greatly diminished by massive air strikes launched by the Allies in preparation of the invasion of Sicily. Italian losses, both on the ground and in the air, climbed at correspondingly high rates. By 9 July 1943, the 3rd and the 150th groups each fielded 21 Bf 109Gs, but only 6 machines were considered serviceable. The 3rd *Gruppo* flew its last operational sortie on 6 July, followed by the 150th on the 9 July. Between 14 and 23 July the crews were flown back to Turin awaiting a rather unlikely re-equipment.

info based on Gregory Alegi & Marco Guelli „Ali Straniere in Italia - Messerschmitt Bf 109 Italiani“ book.



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