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Entry into service

In July 1935 the Air Ministry placed an initial order for 23 Gladiator MkIs. Due to the planned expansion of the RAF, with six new fighter squadrons in 1936 and eight in 1937, a further contract for 180 Gladiators was signed in September 1935. These aircraft had to be in squadron service by 1937. The first three aircraft, K6129 to K6131, were hurried through production in order to provide aircraft for performance and handling trials. These tests were completed in early January 1937, and on 16 February the RAF officially took the Gladiators on charge.

It is somewhat ironic that when the Gladiators entered service they were already obsolete: the prototype Hurricane and Spitfire had already flown and large orders were being placed for these modern fighters. Until these new aircraft came into service, however, the Gladiators would remain the front line defence of the country.

Introduction into the RAF was relatively straightforward. However, although most pilots had previously flown Gauntlets, they were notably lacking in praise for the newer aircraft. The Gladiator had a higher wing loading, which led to a lack of sensitive control under certain conditions. Spin recovery required more care, and a landing without flaps often resulted in damaged wing tips due to the wing dropping at low speed. It has to be said however, that pilots who went from Gladiators to Hurricanes and Spitfires suffered fewer accidents than those who went direct from Gauntlets.

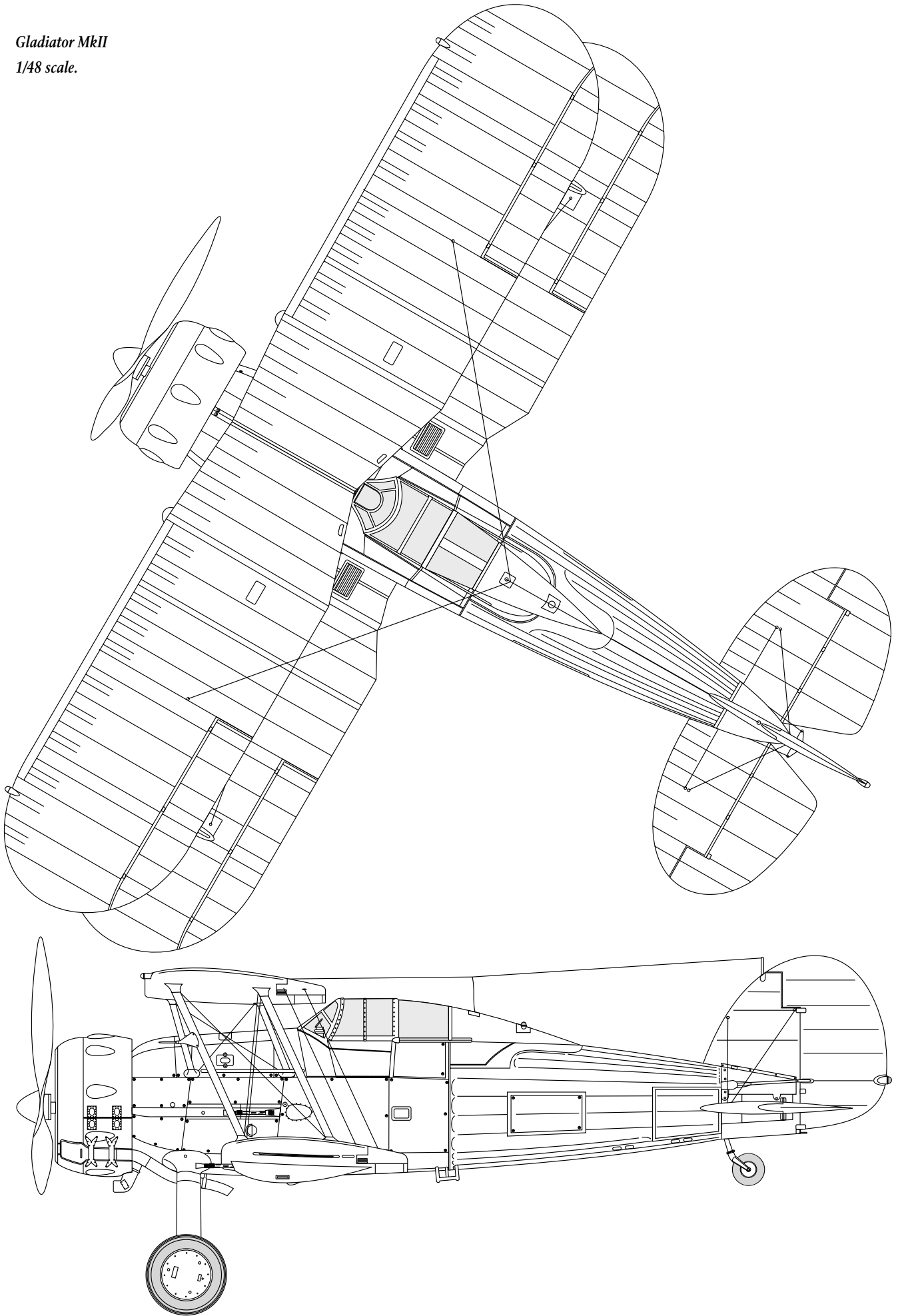
On 22nd February 1937 the first of the Gladiators (K6130-K6137) entered service with the newly-formed 72 Sqn, based at Tangmere. F/Lt Teddy Donaldson was placed in temporary command. A further six Gladiators (K6138-K6143) arrived for the squadron on 4th March. One of these latter

The second production Gladiator K6131 during a pre delivery test flight. This aircraft was delivered to 72 Sqn on 22 February 1937. It served for just over a year before being wrecked in a forced landing.

*Gloster
via George Paul*



Gladiator MkII
1/48 scale.



THE AUSTRALIANS ARRIVE IN THE DESERT

On 28th February 1940 a decision was made to send an Australian Squadron to support the 6th Australian Division 'for national and training reasons'. The Air Ministry in London was asked whether aircraft and equipment could be supplied, as only the personnel were available in Australia. This was agreed and arrangements were made for the necessary equipment not already in the Middle East to be sent out in a convoy so that the squadron could be formed in August.

On 1st July 1925, 3 Sqn RAAF was formed at Point Cook, Australia. Under the command of S/Ldr F W F Lukis the squadron became one of Australia's premier Squadron. The squadron was an Army Co-operation unit, and as such worked in close support of the ground units. It soon moved to Richmond, New South Wales, where it was to stay until posted to North Africa in 1940.

It was a cold winter's day when the men of 3 Sqn, RAAF, under the command of S/Ldr McLachlan, set out onboard the RMS *Orontes* on 15th July 1940. Stopping at Bombay the squadron transferred to the HT *Dilwarra* and proceeded to Port Tewfik, Egypt where they arrived on 23 August. Their aircraft were still en route, as they had been delayed. It had been decided to equip all army co-op squadrons with Hurricanes but these were in very short supply and so initially Lysanders were given out. The squadron moved to Ismailia and training was started on borrowed aircraft. It was not long before their own Lysanders appeared, although they were minus propellers and filters. On 16th September the squadron moved to Helwan to be reorganised as a three-flight squadron. The first two flights were equipped with Gladiators and the third flight had Lysanders. A further four Gauntlets were given to the squadron to be used as dive-bombers, these undertook training with 208 Sqn. It was becoming apparent that the squadron was moving over to ground support duties instead of army co-operation duties.

The Squadron consisted of the following pilots:

Squadron Leader Ian D McLachlan (Commanding Officer)		
'A' Flight	'B' Flight	'C' Flight
F/Lt Gordon Steege (OC)	P/O Charles Gaden (OC)	S/Ldr P R Heath (OC)
F/O Alan Gatward	P/O L E Knowles	F/Lt Blake Pelly
F/O Alan Boyd	P/O V East	P/O J M Davidson
P/O Peter Turnbull	F/O Alan Rawlinson	F/O John Perrin
P/O Wilfred Arthur	F/O B L Bracegirdle	P/O M D Ellerton

In early November the squadron moved up to Gerawla to commence operations. The Gladiators arrived on 2nd and the Gauntlets the day after. The Lysander flight remained at Helwan and later on 21st moved to Ikingi Maryut. It acted as a reinforcement pool, for not even in mid-December, when the other flights could only muster one serviceable aircraft between them, was it deemed practical to commit them to battle.

F/Lt Steege, N5777, took off on the squadron's first operational sortie on 13th of the month. It was a tactical reconnaissance of enemy positions from Sofafi-Rabia-Bir Enbar-Melegat-Nebeiwa. F/Lt Gaden, N5780, acted as escort and no enemy aircraft were encountered.

The next day at 0900hrs F/Lt Pelly, N5725, with F/O Arthur, L9044, as escort undertook a similar patrol to that of Steeges the day before. An hour and a half later S/Ldr Heath, N5764, carried out a reconnaissance of Fort Madklina. His escort was F/O Boyd, N5752. On both missions no enemy aircraft were encountered.

THE IRAQI REVOLT

By early 1941 the situation in the Middle East did not look promising for the British. The Italians had overrun most of the British Territories in Sudan and northern Kenya, as well as threatening the all-important Red Sea route to the Suez Canal. Aden had been a prime target for the bombers of the *Regia Aeronautica*, being raided regularly by lone aircraft. The early gains in North Africa were retaken by the newly arrived Afrika Korps, under the command of Erwin Rommel, and the situation in Greece was precarious as the Germans were about to give their Italian Allies a helping hand.

In Baghdad it was decided that the time was ripe for a change of Government, as a result a coup d'état brought power to a certain Rashid All el Ghailani. Rashid was a previous Prime Minister with pro-Axis sympathies. He was backed by the "Golden Square", who were four Generals also highly pro-Axis. Learning of this plot the uncle of the young King of Iraq, Emir Abdul Illah, fled to Basra where he and his followers were taken onboard the British warship HMS *Cockchafer* and taken to Transjordan.

After World War One the Turkish Empire was no more, one of its colonies, Iraq, was placed under British mandate. This lasted until 1927 when Iraq was given its own independence. At the same time a treaty was drawn up between the two nations. The treaty recognised Iraq as an independent nation and in late 1927 it was allowed into the League of Nations. In return Iraq guaranteed assistance to Britain in the event of a war and allowed the passage of troops through the country. Two bases were also set up, one at Shaibah, near the port of Basra, and the other at Habbaniya, situated on the River Euphrates and on the main Baghdad-Haifa highway.

If the Mediterranean should be closed to the British the alternative supply route to the Middle East was around the Cape of Good Hope, up the East Coast of Africa and through the Suez Canal. If, however, this route was also closed, by the Italians in East Africa for instance, an alternative had to be planned. This involved using the Persian Gulf as far as Basra, from Basra by rail to Baghdad, and from Baghdad by road to Haifa. The take-over of power by Raschid had put all this in jeopardy, and so the British Government decided to act. The Government of India, who was responsible for the defence of Iraq, was asked to make troops available for operations in Iraq. A brigade was ready to leave Karachi for Malaya but this was diverted to Iraq where it would not arrive until 18th April. Rashid was informed on 16th April that the British intended to invoke the treaty rights and land troops at Basra. From Karachi 31 Sqn, equipped with Vickers Valentia transport biplanes and four DC2s, airlifted in the first of 400 men of the King's Own Royal Regiment.

Of the two bases in Iraq, the one at Habbaniya was the more important. It was situated on low ground by the river Euphrates and was overlooked by a plateau 1,000 yards to the south, which rose to around 150ft at its highest point. Behind the plateau was Lake Habbaniya, which was used by the Empire flying boats of the BOAC on its routes to the Far East. Based at Habbaniya was 4 Service Flying Training School equipped with Airspeed Oxfords, Hawker Audaxes, Fairey Gordons and three Gladiators. Also at the station were an engineering depot, a communications flight plus all the normal ancillary services.

At the other base at Shaibah was 244 Sqn equipped with Vickers Vincent general-purpose biplanes under the command of S/Ldr H V Alloway. On 15th April three Fairey Gordons arrived at Shaibah from Habbaniya, another four arriving next day. These were to be attached to 244 Sqn in case of any trouble during the arrival of the Fifth brigade from India. On 17th the first aircraft from 31 Sqn started to arrive with elements from the 1st King's Own.

Gladiator Mk I L7616 was built between December 1937 and January 1938 at Hucclecote. It was shipped out to the Middle East and served with 33 Squadron (shown in photo), 112 Squadron and 3 RAAF Squadron. While in storage in Egypt it was used by 94 Squadron to reinforce the Habbaniya Fighter Flight during the Iraqi Revolt on May 1940. It was lost on 16 May when F/O Herrtage was shot down by He111 gunners.

James Hibberd



I also remember one or two Gladiators landing on Illustrious in the Med in 1940/41.”

By early March 806 Sqn had left for Egypt taking with it the Fulmars. The remaining Gladiators were left on Malta and still performed meteorological flights, although with increasing numbers of German Bf109s it became a dangerous occupation.

HMS EAGLE'S FIGHTER FLIGHT

In July 1940, after repeated attacks by the *Regia Aeronautica*, HMS *Eagle* collected four Sea Gladiators from stocks held in Egypt, these being N5512/6-H, N5513/6-F, N5517/6-A and N5567/6-C. These formed a fighter flight within 813 Sqn, which operated Swordfish. Cdr Charles Lindsay Keighly-Peach was put in command, and the other two pilots were Lt (A) K L Keith and Lt (A) A N Young, both Swordfish pilots who had been trained by Keighly-Peach to fly the Sea Gladiator. One of the Sea Gladiators was kept for use as spare parts. Two other pilots, Lt (A) R H H L Oliphant and Lt (A) P W V Massey would also fly the Sea Gladiators as and when required.

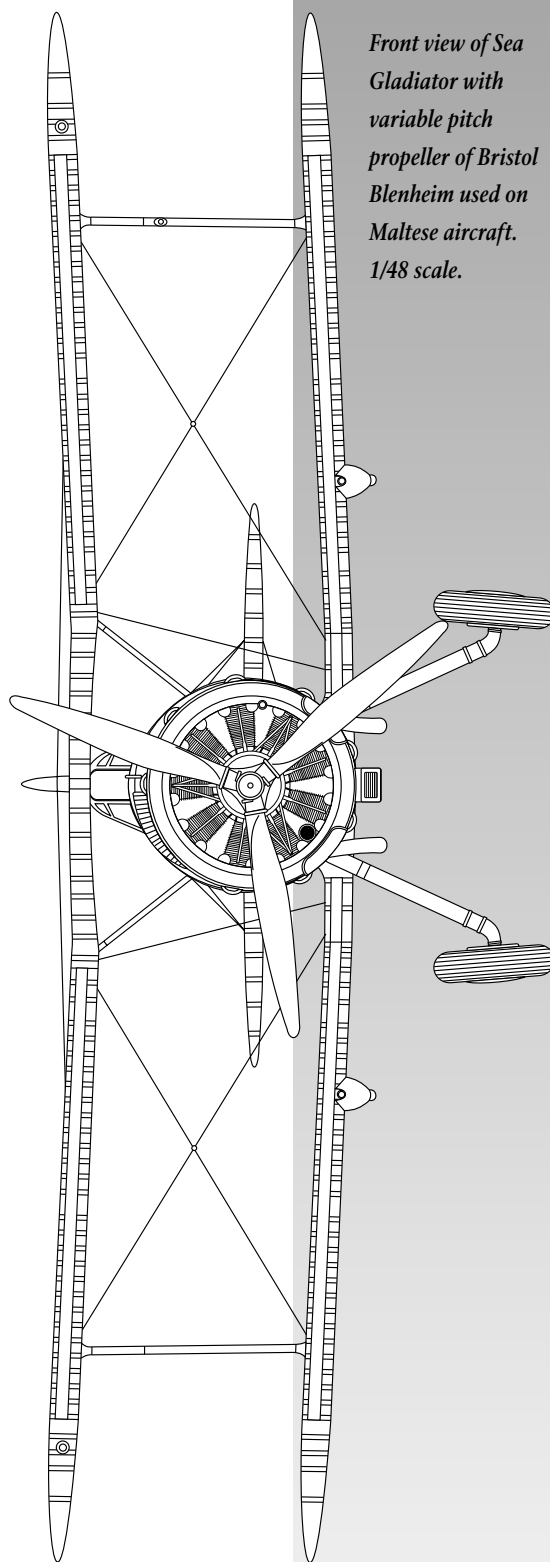
On 7th July the Fleet left Alexandria to support two convoys on their way through the Mediterranean. The next day the Fleet was discovered and a number of raids were launched by Libyan-based SM.79s. Although the Sea Gladiators were scrambled no interceptions were made.

The 9th July saw the Mediterranean Fleet engage the Italian Fleet is what is known as the Battle of Calabria, although the Italians know this as the Battle of Punta Stilo. HMS *Eagle* was not part of the main force but did provide air cover for the Fleet and also launched a number of Swordfish attacks on the Italian Fleet.

On 11th the Fleet was attacked again by over 16 SM.79s. The Sea Gladiators in the hands of Cdr Keighley-Peach, N5517/6-A, and Lt Keith, N5513/6-F, rose to intercept the intruders. Keighley-Peach dived onto one of the SM.79s and after carrying out three diving attacks the bomber dived into the sea. Lt Keith attacked another but had to break off the attack due to AA fire from the naval ships down below. Keighley-Peach was hit by return fire in the thigh but the wound was only minor. In 1976 the wound began to fester and the piece of shrapnel was finally removed.

The SM.79s were from 30° *Stormo* based in Sicily. Gunners claimed four aircraft shot down for the loss of one SM.79. SM.79s from 33° *Stormo* based in Libya also attacked the Fleet. This group lost one bomber to AA fire. This may have been the one attacked by Lt Keith.

Raids against the Fleet continued on the 13th. First contact against the raiders was made by Cdr Keighley-Peach at 0750hrs. Flying N5517/6-A, he sighted a lone SM.79 ahead of the Fleet and after making several passes it went down into the sea. This aircraft may in fact have been a Z501, which was lost during the day to unknown circumstances. Just after 1100hrs Keighley-Peach, again in N5517/6-A, and Lt Keith, N5513/6-F, came across three tri-motors 5000ft below them. These were identified as SM.79s. Both pilots attacked the same aircraft and it fell into the sea in flames, one crew-member being picked up by one of the escorting destroyers. Keith attacked two other bombers without any obvious effect.



Front view of Sea Gladiator with variable pitch propeller of Bristol Blenheim used on Maltese aircraft. 1/48 scale.

Foreign Service

BELGIUM

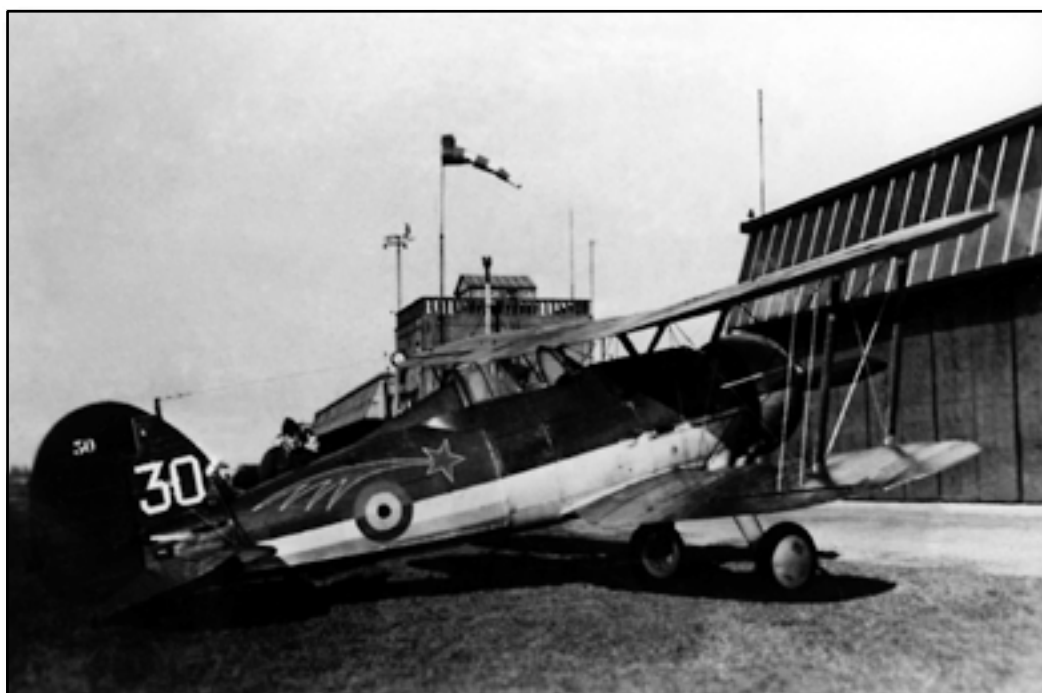
The entry of the Gladiator into Belgian service happened almost by chance. The Belgian Government was confident that it could still maintain its neutrality despite the growing tension in Europe. In order to defend this neutral stance it would have to rebuild its Air Arm with more modern aircraft. The principal aircraft in the Belgian inventory was the Fairey Fox. This outdated aircraft was used in a variety of roles but was no match for the latest fighter aircraft then entering service. Various Government officials were sent on a tour of Europe to obtain the best aircraft that could be found. The Gladiator was evaluated against the Italian Fiat CR.42 and eventually came out on top. Due to the delay in the delivery of Hawker Hurricanes and Brewster Buffalos from America, a batch of Fiat CR.42s was ordered as a stop-gap.

In 1937 the Belgian Government ordered twenty-two Gladiators from Glosters. In August of that year six pilots arrived at Hucclecote to take delivery of the first six aircraft. After a brief training period the six aircraft, carrying civil registrations, left for Belgium. By the beginning of 1938 fifteen aircraft had been delivered this way. These aircraft carried registration marks G5-1 to G5-15. The remaining seven were transported by ship and were assembled by SABCA in March 1938. Negotiations were also held for the license production of Gladiators by Fairey in Belgium, but these talks eventually broke down.

The Gladiators entered service with *1ere Escadrille de Chasse* (Le Comète) of the 1st Group of No 2 (Fighter) Regiment (1/1/2) based at Diest. They carried the serials G-17 to G-38. The serials were probably derived from the Glosters' construction numbers. Export Gladiators may have been identified by a G.5. prefix before the 5 digit construction number. The last two digits and the 'G' may have been used to make up the serial number. Training went ahead without delay, although attrition took its toll on men and machines.

The first known appearance of a Belgian Gladiator was at Kiewit airfield, near Hasselt, on 14th August 1938 when five aircraft, G-12, -24, -27, -31 and -34, took part in a local air display.

During 14th March 1939 the Comets were practising dogfighting techniques when two aircraft collided. Both pilots, Adj Defise (G-28) and 1st Sgt Pirlot (G-20) were killed in the resulting crash.



One of the Belgian Gladiators received in 1937/38.

Please note how Belgian national markings were applied.

M. Willot

Signed with their Honour

In October 1943 a film production company, Independent Producers, arrived at RAF Rednal, Shropshire. They were there to make a film dedicated to the RAF operations over Greece in 1940-41. The film was to be based on a book called 'Signed with their Honour' written by Australian war correspondent James Aldridge.

Members of the production team included Vernon Sewell (director), Paul Soskin (producer), Osmond Borradaile (lighting camera), George Stretton (lighting camera), Grant McClean (camera operator), Jim Body (camera assistant) Douglas Woolsey (special effects), Clive Donner (editor) and Gerald Hambling (editor).

From mid October a number of Gladiators arrived at Rednal. Sources differ as to the number of Gladiators used it varies between 9-12. So far 10 have been identified and they are K6149, K7898, K7927, K8004, K8042, K8044, K8045, K8046, L8302 and N5903. A Wellington was also brought in to be used as a camera plane. This force of aircraft was officially termed Q Flight and was attached to 61 Operational Training Unit (OTU) probably for administration and maintenance duties.

A number of pilots have been associated with the film work and it is not yet known how many were brought in to fly the Gladiators or how many 61 OTU pilots were used. Known pilots are:

2nd/Lt Knut Bache Royal Norwegian Air Force 434 escaped from Norway to fly with the RAF. He flew with 331 Squadron and claimed at least 5 victories while with the unit. He was posted to 61 OTU as an instructor, possibly for a rest from operations. He was then posted back to 331 Squadron. He failed to return from an operation on 7th May 1944. His Spitfire MkIX MK182 was hit by flak and crashed near Mooreseele airfield.

Sqn Ldr Richard Alvin Acworth DFC 40486 was posted to 61 OUT from 118 Squadron in August 1943. Richard saw action with 112 Squadron in Africa and Greece flying Gladiators and Hurricanes. He claimed 4 ½ enemy aircraft shot down while flying Gladiators. He was awarded the DFC in June 1941. He returned to the UK and spent some time as an instructor at 55 OTU before being posted to 118 Squadron as a flight commander in mid 1943.

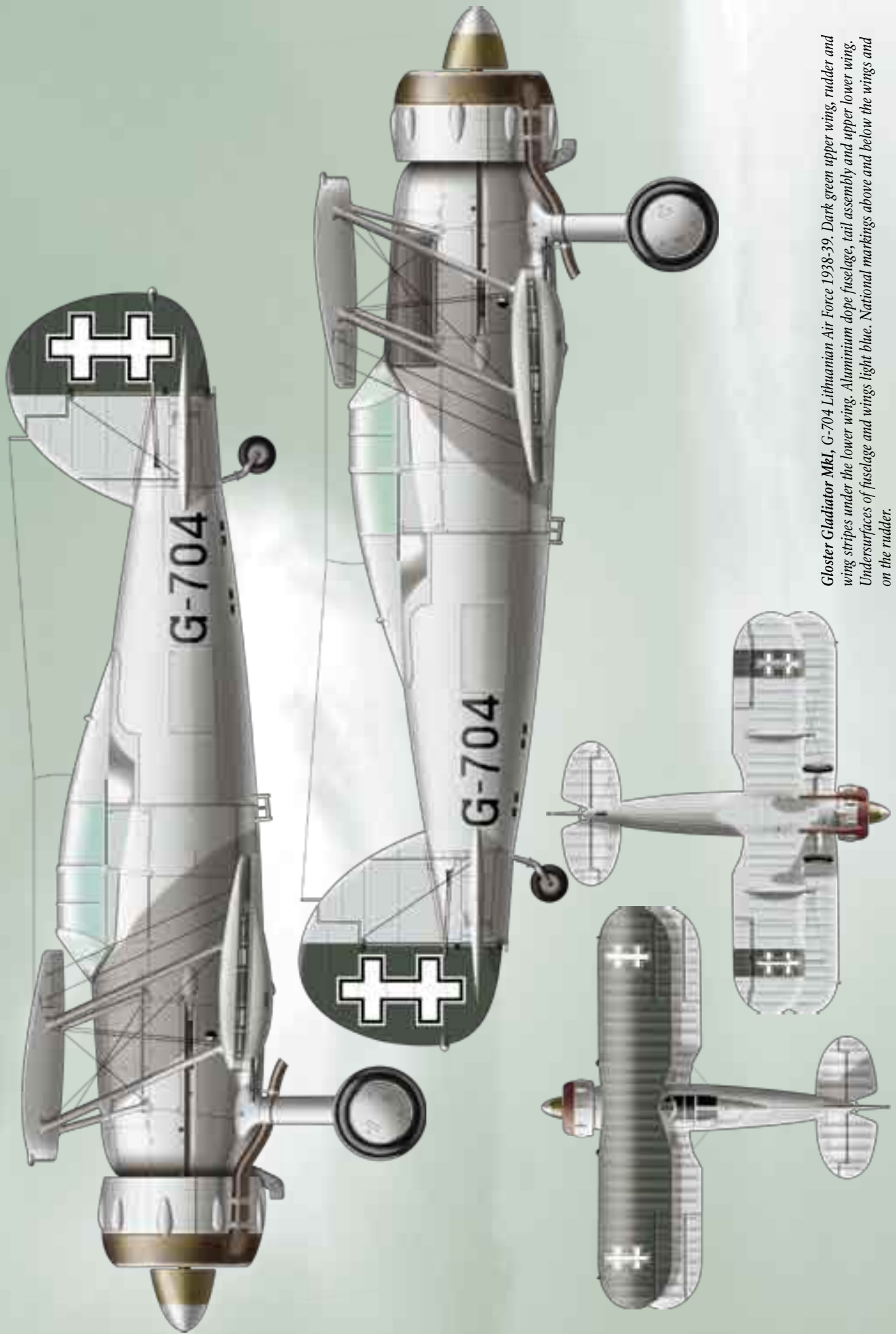
Flt Lt Hugh Dudley Wanklyn 'Twinstead' Flower 41390 was posted into 61 OTU from 1 Depot on 21st February 1943 for instructor duties. Hugh had served with 80 Squadron in Greece flying Gladiators and Hurricanes and had claimed 2 enemy aircraft shot down and shared in a third.



Above: A group photo showing some of the production crew and pilots who were involved in the filming. In the background can be seen Gladiator K8045, which was also used in the film.

Bottom: One of the pilots talks to S/Ldr Acworth and another pilot before he prepares for another sortie. Ian Simpson





Gloster Gladiator Mk I, G-704 Lithuanian Air Force 1938-39. Dark green upper wing, rudder and tail assembly and upper lower wing. Aluminium dope fuselage, tail assembly and upper lower wing. Undersurfaces of fuselage and wings light blue. National markings above and below the wings and on the rudder.