

Developed in Czechoslovakia by the state-owned Aero company in the late 1960s as a successor to its L-29 Delfin, the L-39 'Albatros' was the standard jet trainer of the Warsaw Pact and affiliated socialist countries from the mid-1970s until the dissolution of the alliance in 1991. By far and away the largest customer for the L-39 was the USSR. Having been impressed by the L-39's vice-free handling, ease of maintenance and aerobatic pedigree in state acceptance trials, the Soviet Government ordered a total of almost 2,100 aircraft. L-39 deliveries to Soviet military pilot schools commenced in 1974, the last Albatros being delivered to the USSR seventeen years later in 1991.

Being one of the most populous aircraft in the VVS inventory on the eve of the break-up of the USSR in 1991, it was inevitable that L-39 would be drafted into military service by those republics and autonomous regions of the Soviet Union, who aspired to varying degrees of independence, made possible by the power vacuum in Moscow.

The Caucasus and Central Asian Republics in particular found history on the verge of repeating itself, as numerous age-old ethnic conflicts reemerged, sometimes encouraged by international powers many miles removed from these new warzones. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the struggle for empire in this part of the world between Tsarist Russia and British India was known as the 'Great Game' (a phrase coined by one of its players, Captain Arthur Conolly, and later adopted by Rudyard Kipling in his classic Great Game era yarn, 'Kim'). Even Soviet historians adopted this sobriquet ('Bolshaya Igra'), referring to the struggles between an eastwardly expanding Russian empire and the British presence in India, who had convinced themselves of the existence of Tsarist plans eventually to invade the subcontinent. The key to maintaining the peace during this Victorian era Cold War was the creation of buffer states to keep the protagonists apart. After the Russians and British eventually made their peace in 1907, the Great Game flared up again in the wake of the Russian Revolution; the Bolsheviks fighting their way through the Caucasus and on into Central Asia. By the 1930s only the ten-mile wide Wakhan Corridor in northeastern Afghanistan separated Stalin's Tadjik SSR from British India.

In the New Great Game, unleashed by the break-up of the Soviet Union, the protagonists are different and much more numerous. Russia is attempting to restore its historical influence in the region, while the USA sees the region as an extension of the instability in the Middle East and a threat to its own domestic security and energy needs, as militant Islam spreads into Central Asia. Other players pursuing their own goals in the region include Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

The key fixed-wing element of the new air forces of the region has been the L-39, inherited from old local Soviet bases, and now pressed into service as fighters and bombers. From Transdniestria in the west, to Chechnya, through Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, all the way to the Ferghana Valley at the crossroads of Central Asia, the reliable L-39 Albatros still plies its trade.

All L-39s delivered to the USSR were of the C variant, and all decal options in this set, with the exception of the Bulgarian VVS ZA version, are L-39Cs. Clearly not all subjects in this set hail from the lands of the Great Game. Bulgarian, Vietnamese and Ethiopian options have been added as bonus for the truly internationally minded modeller!

L-39s of the new Great Game

The L-39 Albatros over Russia, the Caucasus, Central Asia and beyond

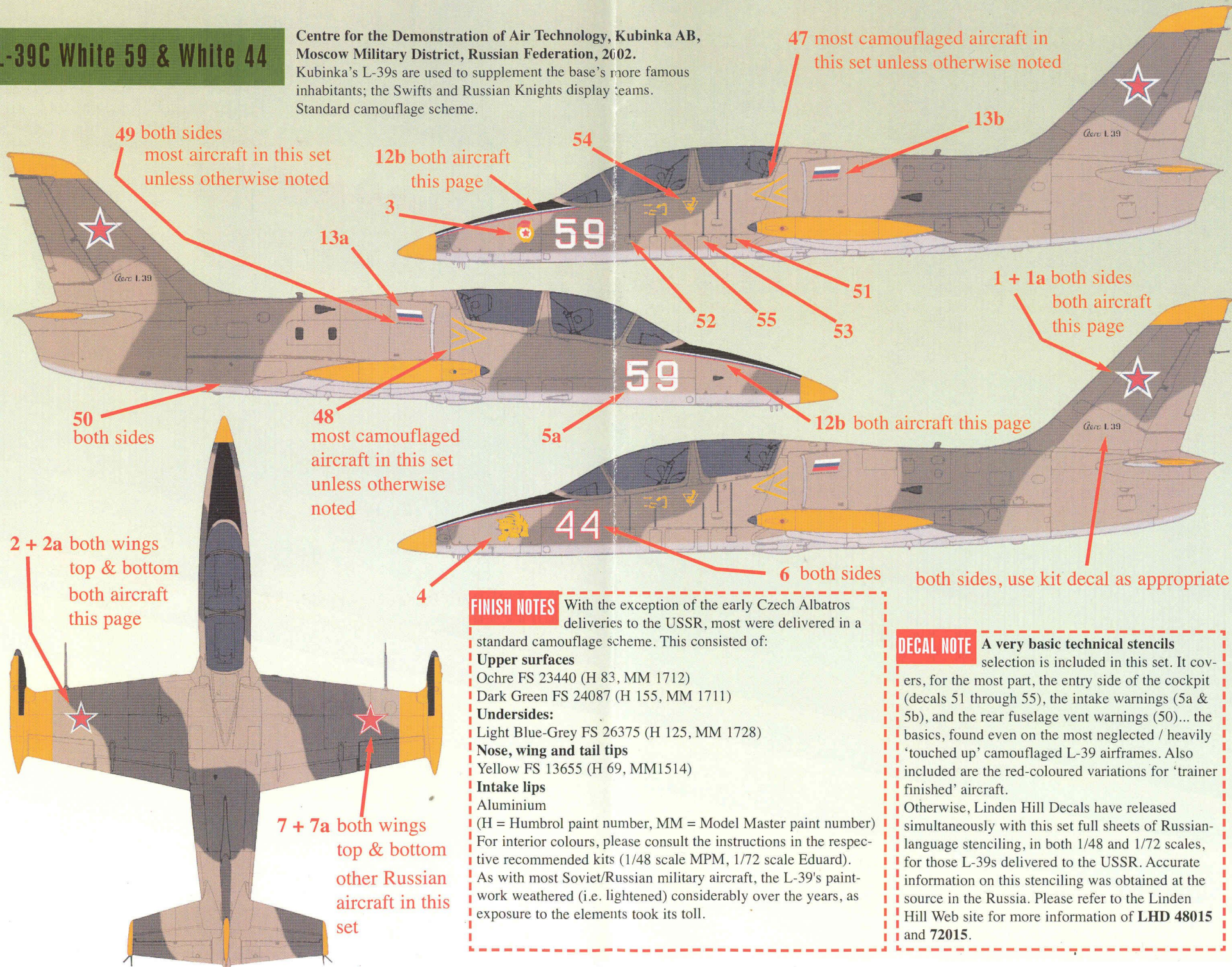


L-39C White 59 & White 44

Centre for the Demonstration of Air Technology, Kubinka AB, Moscow Military District, Russian Federation, 2602.

Kubinka's L-39s are used to supplement the base's more famous inhabitants; the Swifts and Russian Knights display teams.

Standard camouflage scheme.



49 both sides
most aircraft in this set
unless otherwise noted

12b both aircraft
this page

47 most camouflaged aircraft in
this set unless otherwise noted

13b

13a

54

3

59

51

1 + 1a both sides
both aircraft
this page

52

55

53

50
both sides

48
most camouflaged
aircraft in this set
unless otherwise
noted

5a

59

12b both aircraft this page

1.39

2 + 2a both wings
top & bottom
both aircraft
this page

4

44

6 both sides

both sides, use kit decal as appropriate

FINISH NOTES

With the exception of the early Czech Albatros deliveries to the USSR, most were delivered in a standard camouflage scheme. This consisted of:

Upper surfaces

- Ochre FS 23440 (H 83, MM 1712)
- Dark Green FS 24087 (H 155, MM 1711)

Undersides:

- Light Blue-Grey FS 26375 (H 125, MM 1728)

Nose, wing and tail tips

- Yellow FS 13655 (H 69, MM1514)

Intake lips

- Aluminium

(H = Humbrol paint number, MM = Model Master paint number)

For interior colours, please consult the instructions in the respective recommended kits (1/48 scale MPM, 1/72 scale Eduard).

As with most Soviet/Russian military aircraft, the L-39's paint-work weathered (i.e. lightened) considerably over the years, as exposure to the elements took its toll.

DECAL NOTE

A very basic technical stencils

selection is included in this set. It covers, for the most part, the entry side of the cockpit (decals 51 through 55), the intake warnings (5a & 5b), and the rear fuselage vent warnings (50)... the basics, found even on the most neglected / heavily 'touched up' camouflaged L-39 airframes. Also included are the red-coloured variations for 'trainer finished' aircraft.

Otherwise, Linden Hill Decals have released simultaneously with this set full sheets of Russian-language stenciling, in both 1/48 and 1/72 scales, for those L-39s delivered to the USSR. Accurate information on this stenciling was obtained at the source in the Russia. Please refer to the Linden Hill Web site for more information of **LHD 48015** and **72015**.

7 + 7a both wings
top & bottom
other Russian
aircraft in this
set

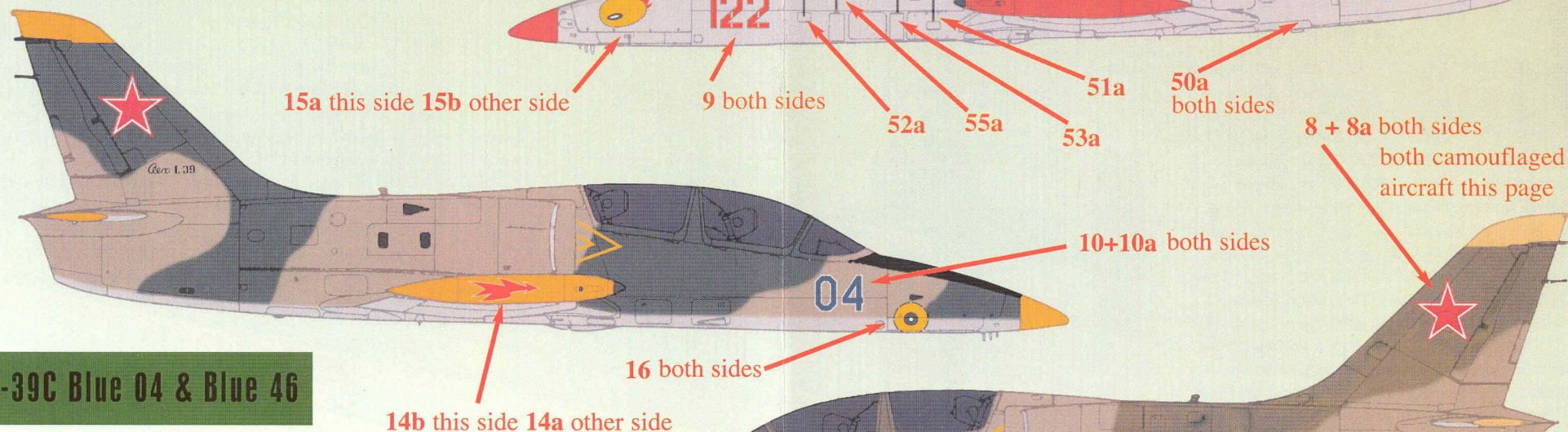
L-39C Red 122

783rd Training Centre, Armavir Fighter Pilot Academy, Armavir AB, SKVO - North-Caucasian Military District, Russian Federation, early 1990s.

The Armavir Training Centre in the northern Caucasus was the hub of pilot training in the region, with a number of airfields to the south also hosting training regiments subordinated to the Centre. As the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, these southern bases in republics such as Chechnya and Azerbaijan were to be taken over by new masters.

Red 122 carried the original 'trainer' paint scheme of the earliest L-39s delivered to Soviet pilot schools. This comprised of red high visibility areas over bare metal. Some sources indicate that these airframes were later refinished in aluminum dope. Our reference photos of this aircraft suggest this latter finish, with some 'ghosting' of the former black anti-glare panel showing on the aluminum paint ahead of the cockpit.

High visibility panels and 'evil eyes' show large chipped and flaked patches in our reference photos, but at one time would have been in pristine condition. The 'evil eyes' are supposed to assist in scaring away birds.



L-39C Blue 04 & Blue 46

These Armavir Academy L-39s are interesting in that they sport camouflage finishes, which when juxtaposed, illustrate the variation in schemes worn by the Albatros in latter day Russian Federation Air Force service.

15a this side
15b other side
note that anti-glare black is applied over top of the upper part of this marking

FINISH NOTES

Both of these aircraft feature the standard 3-colour camouflage scheme. Blue 04 is the cleaner of the two, featuring fresh markings and high visibility panels and only a little weathering - the 'green' actually looks green! Blue 46 is very heavily weathered. The 'green' has faded to a near 'dark khaki' colour while the 'ochre' and yellow high visibility areas appear uniformly sun-bleached. Some of the 'green' areas also appear to have been loosely retouched with a local olive green paint. Wing and tail leading edges have worn down to the grey-green primer and a large bit of the upper part of the 'evil eye' has chipped away (on the port side anyway).

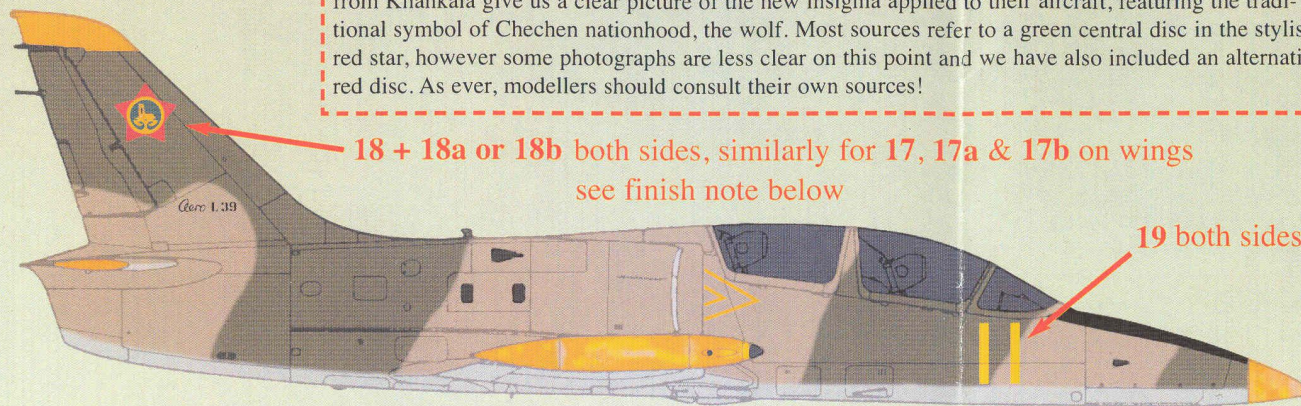
FINISH NOTES

Chechen L-39s carried the standard camouflage pattern, however the Soviet red stars were overpainted with a new Chechen motif. Photographs (b/w) and eyewitness accounts from Khankala give us a clear picture of the new insignia applied to their aircraft, featuring the traditional symbol of Chechen nationhood, the wolf. Most sources refer to a green central disc in the stylised red star, however some photographs are less clear on this point and we have also included an alternative red disc. As ever, modellers should consult their own sources!

Air Force of the 'Chechen Republic of Ichkeria', Khankala North AB, Chechnya, December 1994.

L-39C Yellow 11

As the USSR collapsed and Soviet military forces withdrew from most of the southern Caucasus, much hardware was left behind, falling into the hands of numerous armed groups seeking autonomy in various forms. By the end of 1992 the breakaway self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria could already boast its own functioning armed forces, and 250 aircraft (but only 41 trained pilots). As the staff of the Armavir Training Centre departed its two bases in Chechnya at Khankala and Kalinovsk, they inexplicably left behind all their aircraft. At Khankala alone, the Chechens seized possession of 72 L-39s and 69 L-29s, each of which were armed with two OB-16 rocket pods. A training regiment was set up at Kalinovsk. The L-39s at Khankala were armed ready for combat, however by November 1994 the security situation in the Republic had deteriorated to such an extent that banditry and anarchy threatened to spill over into neighbouring regions. Russian Federal Forces now decided to intervene, and air raids commenced on Chechen airfields. By December 7, 1994 the Chechen Air Force had ceased to exist. Yellow 11 was among many L-29s and L-39s destroyed on the ground at Khankala. Thus began the first Chechen War. Some of the L-39s, left relatively intact, may have been subsequently 'repatriated' to Russia.



18 + 18a or 18b both sides, similarly for 17, 17a & 17b on wings see finish note below

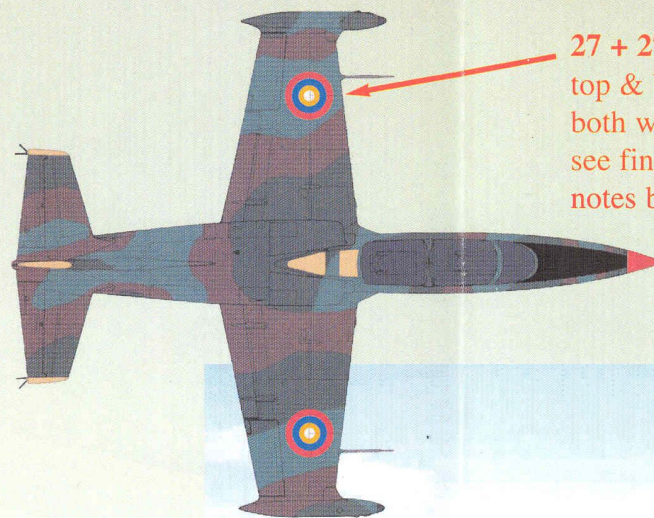
19 both sides

L-39C Red 01

121 ShAE, Armenian AF, Gyumri AB, 2005.

This Albatros is one of four L-39s in service with

the Armenian Air Force. Two were recently acquired from Ukraine. Red 01 has been in Armenian service since independence and is allegedly a veteran of the fifteen-year old conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan over the disputed regions of Nagorny Kharabakh and Nachichevan. Our correspondent Stenio Bacciocchi visited Armenia in 2005 and was able to photograph Red 01 at Gyumri. His photos show a revised colour scheme, applied locally. According to Stenio, this consists of green and dark green (close to USAF SEA colours) and dark red brown upper surfaces with light blue undersides. The lighter green may also be similar to the traditional Soviet aircraft wheel hub green. Note also the red nose cone.



27 + 27a top & bottom both wings see finish notes below



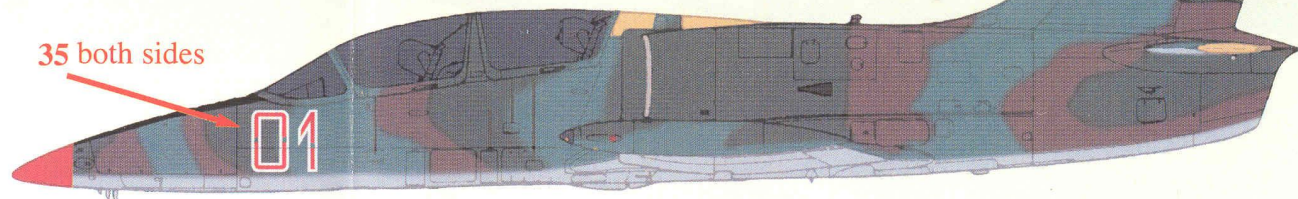
27 + 27a both sides

FINISH NOTES

The red-brown, green and dark green colours applied to this aircraft may have come from stocks left on a local airbase for refinishing frontal fighters and attack aircraft (Mi-23s, MiG-27s, Su-17s, Su-25s etc). The lower colour appears to be the standard L-39 colour left untouched.

The light coloured areas along the spine fairing, as well as the fin cap, are either faded high visibility panels or natural dielectric material showing through the paint. The horizontal tail and nose caps are high visibility paint. Roundel positions on the wings are speculative based on photos of Armenian Su-25s.

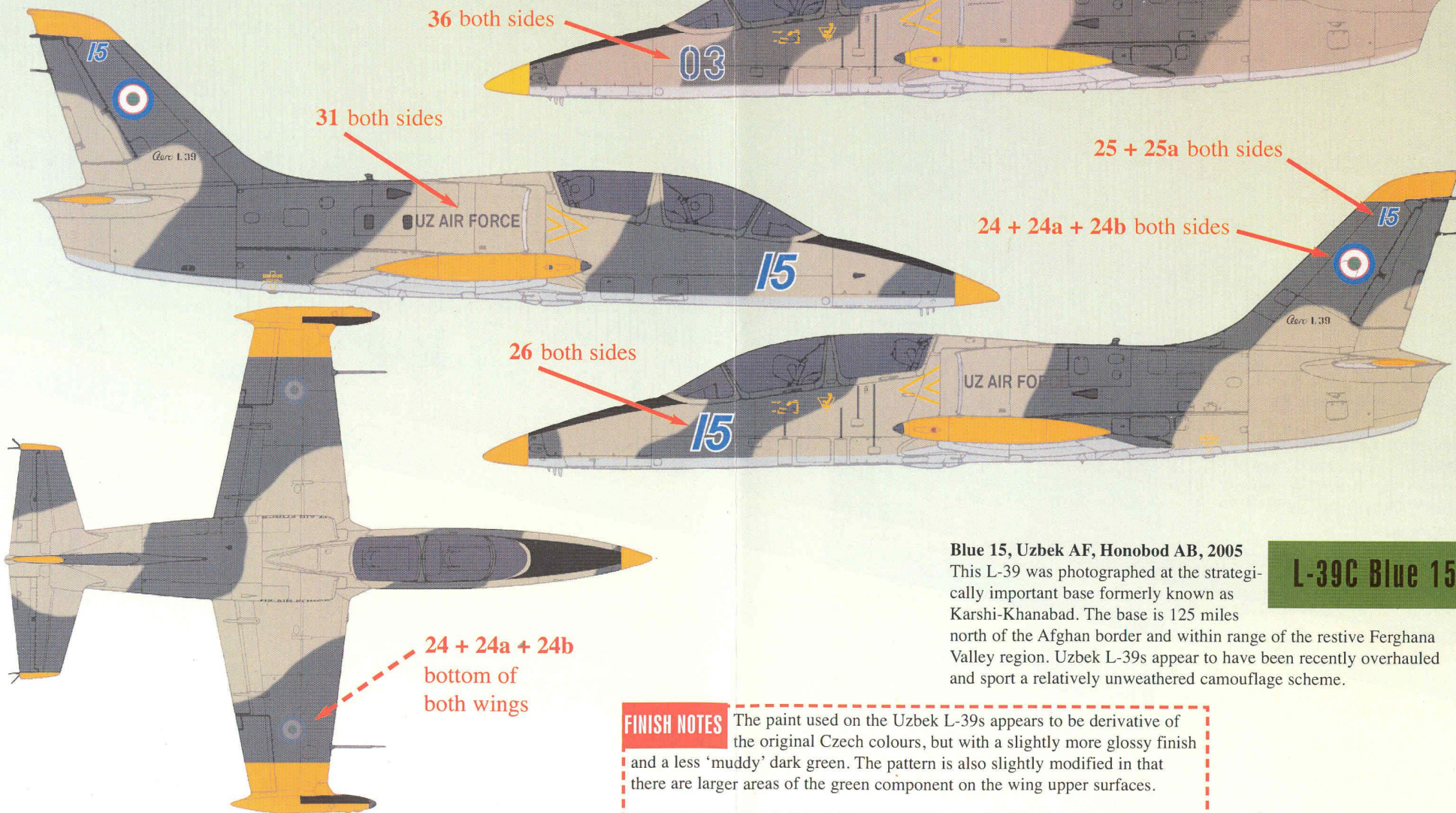
35 both sides



L-39C Blue 03

Azerbaijani AF, Kurdamir AB, 2004

Azerbaijan inherited approximately a dozen L-39s upon the dissolution of the USSR. As with the Chechens, the Azerbaijanis allegedly sourced these aircraft from the inventory of the Armavir Training Centre's airfields in the southern Caucasus. Azerbaijan's L-39s have been pressed into service in a combat role against Armenian forces during the bitter Nagorny Kharabakh and Nachichevan conflicts. These L-39s sport the standard camouflage scheme. Note that the 'handed' nature of the Azerbaijani insignia; crescent facing backwards, blue section inwards on the wings and uppermost on the tail. Kurdamir itself is a classic Great Game location; it sits astride the future Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline and is within striking distance of Iran. The base has been the source of much speculation in the regional press regarding its possible lease to the US Government. Whether the resident L-39s would remain at the base under such circumstances remains open to conjecture.



FINISH NOTES

National insignia (decals 38a & 38b) are also applied to the wings centered over the previous red star positions with the crescent arch forward, green outboard, blue inboard. Paintwork on this aircraft was in very good shape at the time our reference photo was taken.

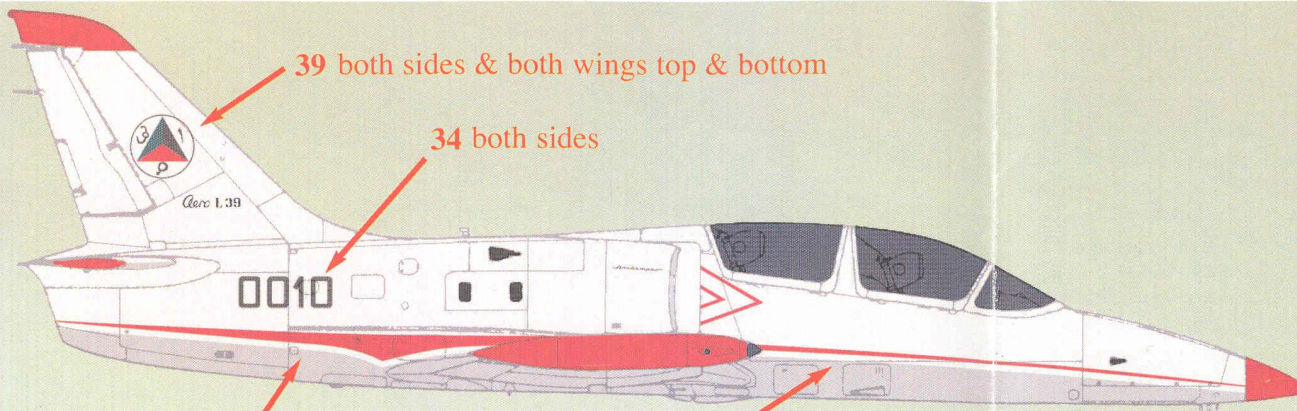
Blue 15, Uzbek AF, Honobod AB, 2005

This L-39 was photographed at the strategically important base formerly known as Karshi-Khanabad. The base is 125 miles north of the Afghan border and within range of the restive Ferghana Valley region. Uzbek L-39s appear to have been recently overhauled and sport a relatively unweathered camouflage scheme.

FINISH NOTES

The paint used on the Uzbek L-39s appears to be derivative of the original Czech colours, but with a slightly more glossy finish and a less 'muddy' dark green. The pattern is also slightly modified in that there are larger areas of the green component on the wing upper surfaces.

L-39C Blue 15



39 both sides & both wings top & bottom

34 both sides

43 this side

46 other side

both 'trainer finish'
aircraft this page

44 this side

45 other side

both 'trainer finish'
aircraft this page

**Republic of Afghanistan AF,
Mazari-Sharif AB, 1977**

L-39C #0010

The first eight of sixteen L-39s were delivered to then non-aligned Afghanistan via the USSR in 1977. They were delivered in the early white over bare metal metal colour scheme and used in the first instance exclusively for training purposes. The Afghan insignia of this era was introduced in 1973, following the forced abdication of the King, brought about by Premier Mohammed Daud Khan's proclamation of a Republic, with himself as President.

**393th Training Air Regiment (UAL), VVS and PVO Democratic
Republic of Afghanistan, Mazari Sharif AB, 1979**

L-39C #003

The increasingly oppressive rule of Khan was overthrown in April 1978 by a coup instigated by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), whose leader Hafizullah Amin immediately undertook his own brutal campaign of bloodletting against all perceived enemies. His attempts to 'modernise' Afghanistan by force had predictably disastrous consequences for such a feudal society, and were the catalyst for the creation of an Afghan Islamic resistance movement, founded by exiles in Pakistan. To make matters worse, Amin then made an abrupt volte-face and threatened to remove Soviet influence in the country, which led to the Soviet invasion and coup d'etat of December 1979 (in which Amin was killed by Soviet special forces). The insignia applied to Afghan AF during this time (and featured on 003) was the symbol of the Khalq ('masses') faction of the PDPA. These markings were promptly removed after the invasion by the new Soviet client regime. During this period the 393rd UAL was run by Soviet pilot instructors under the command of Major General V. A. Pekhotin.

L-39C #005

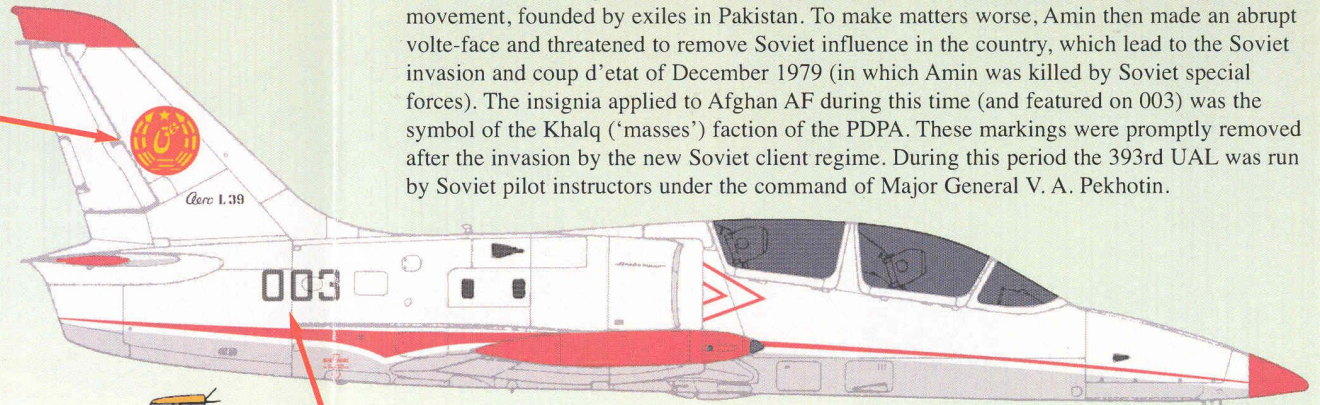
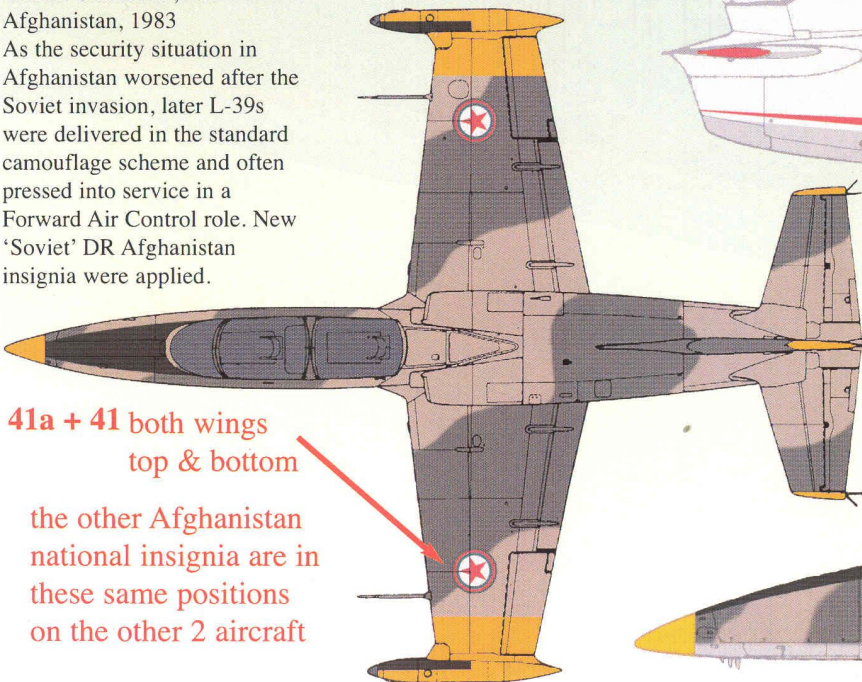
393 UAL, VVS & PVO DRA,
Mazari-Sharif AB, DR
Afghanistan, 1983

As the security situation in Afghanistan worsened after the Soviet invasion, later L-39s were delivered in the standard camouflage scheme and often pressed into service in a Forward Air Control role. New 'Soviet' DR Afghanistan insignia were applied.

40 both sides &
both wings
top & bottom

41a + 41 both wings
top & bottom

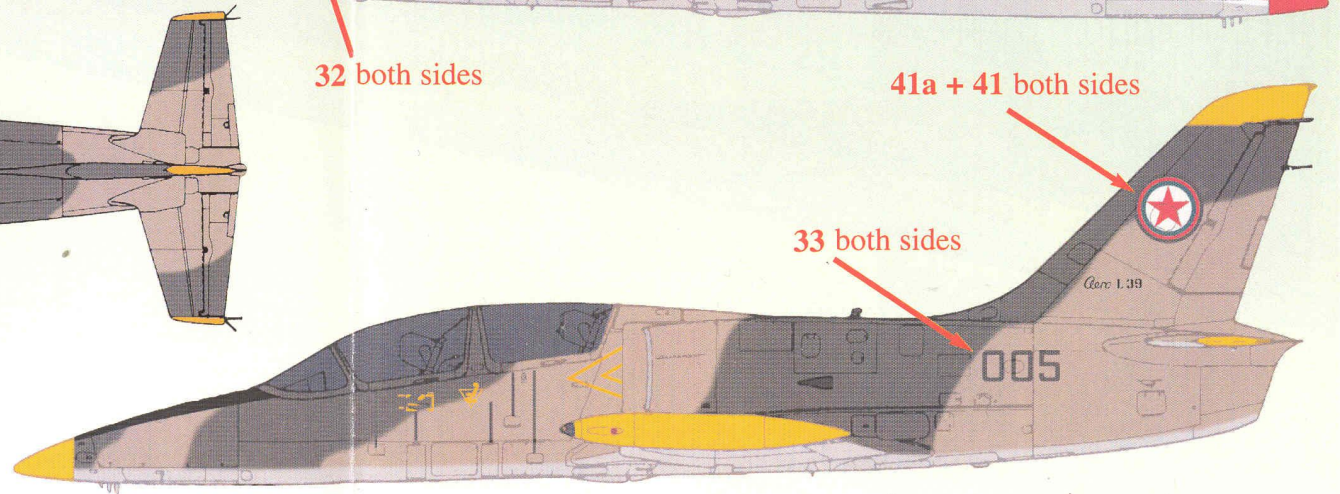
the other Afghanistan
national insignia are in
these same positions
on the other 2 aircraft



32 both sides

41a + 41 both sides

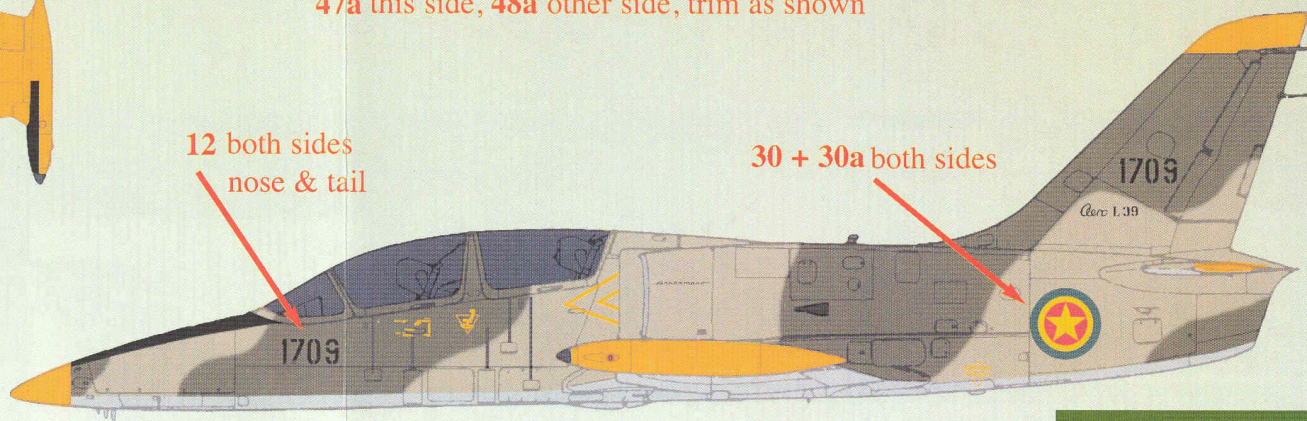
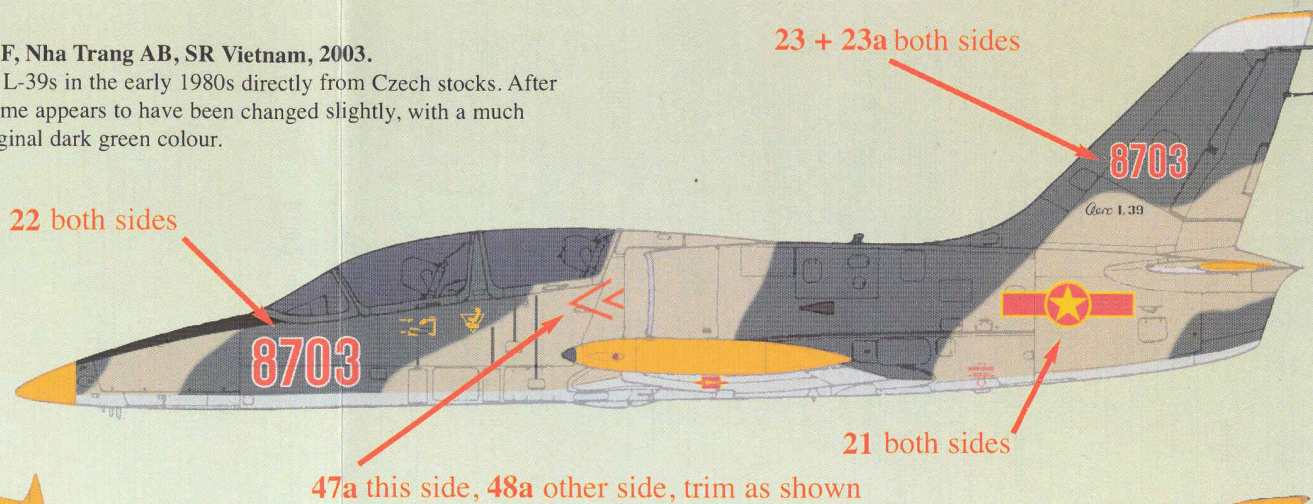
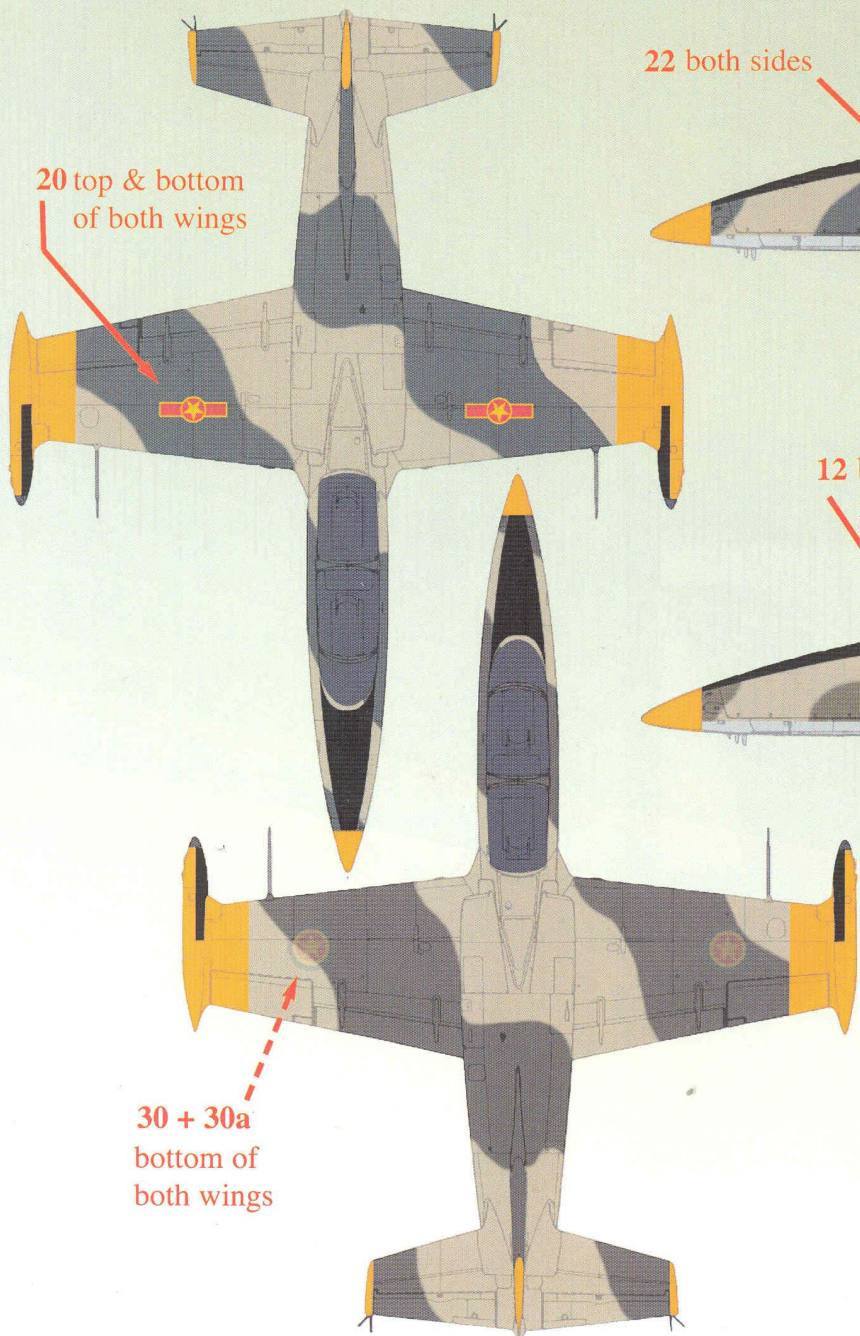
33 both sides



L-39C #8703

910th "Julius Fucik" Regiment, VPAF, Nha Trang AB, SR Vietnam, 2003.

Vietnam took delivery of its two dozen L-39s in the early 1980s directly from Czech stocks. After overhaul, the standard camouflage scheme appears to have been changed slightly, with a much darker shade being applied over the original dark green colour.



L-39C #1709

Gambela AB, Ethiopian AF, 1980s

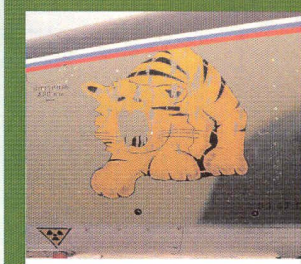
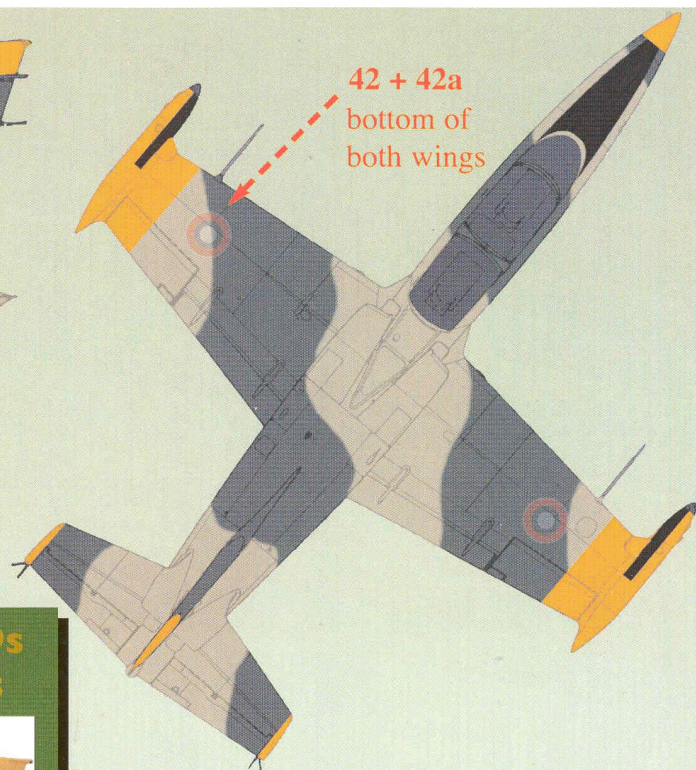
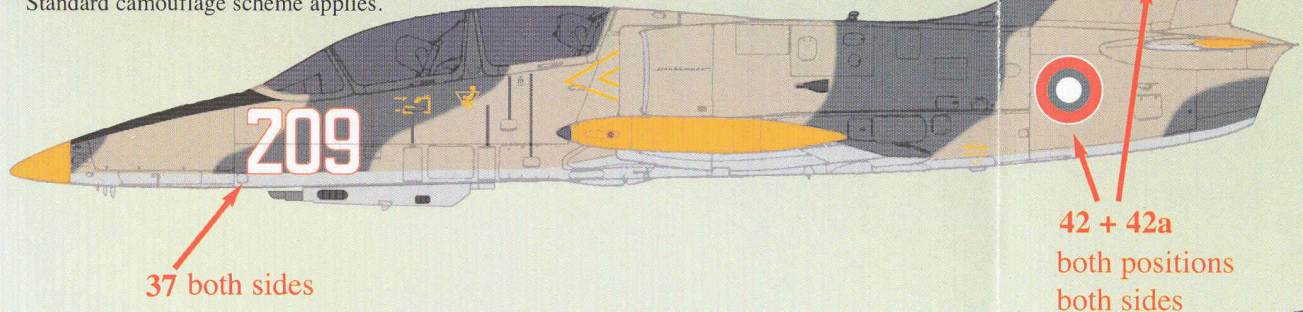
The Derg regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam acquired large quantities of Soviet weaponry, having declared a Marxist-Leninist revolution in Ethiopia. A total of 25 L-39s were delivered from the USSR, beginning in the early 1980s. Attrition during the long civil war caused these numbers to dwindle. However, according to Tom Cooper in his book 'African MiGs', following the removal of the Derg and subsequent independence of Eritrea, at least 4 L-39s were made flyable again in the 1990s. They were used to train student pilots (with mixed results) prior to conversion onto Ethiopian fast jets. Standard, if weathered, camouflage scheme.

FINISH NOTES When delivered, the paint finish on Ethiopia's L-39s was to a very high standard, featuring a semi-gloss appearance. In later years of service, this has weathered to a uniform dull matte sheen while the colours have changed – the green has become a sort of Khaki green/brown colour while the ochre has become more like a desert sand.

L-39ZA #209

Bulgarian VVS, 12th Training Air Base, Kamenetz AB, 2004

36 L-39s were delivered to Bulgaria between 1986 and 1990 for use as advanced weapons trainers. Two thirds of this force is no longer operational with the BVVS, many having been sold off. However 12 L-39s are being upgraded, in order to extend their service life for another decade. The L-39ZA is the ultimate armed version of the base L-39 model. It features a strengthened undercarriage (note the extra bump on the upper wing root), four pylons on the wings and an undernose fairing for the GSh-23 cannon. Standard camouflage scheme applies.



Kubinka's L-39s BONUS photos



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