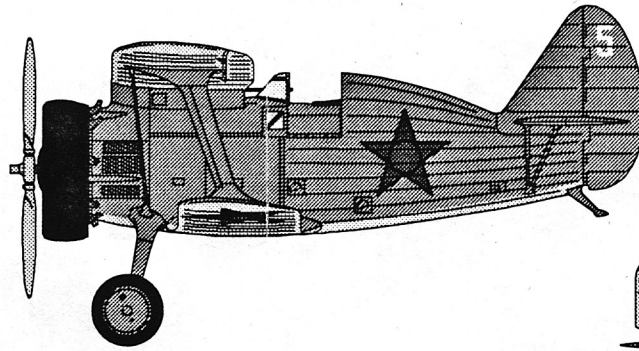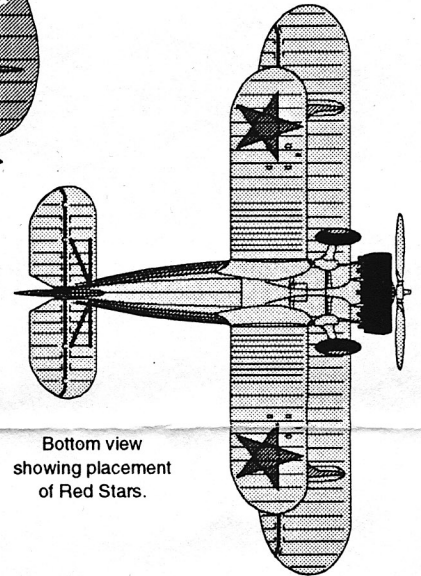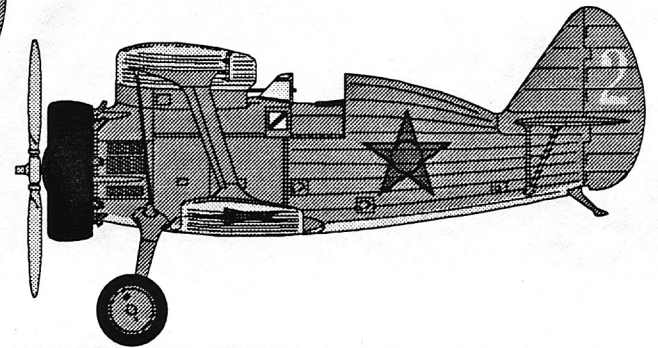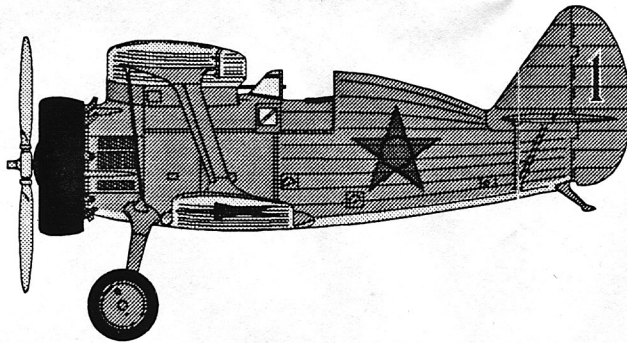Top view showing position of Soviet national insignia.

Unfortunately there is little information on Red Air Force units of this period. The numbers provided appear on the rudder, as shown, but we haven't the foggiest where or with which units these aircraft operated. More information would be welcome.
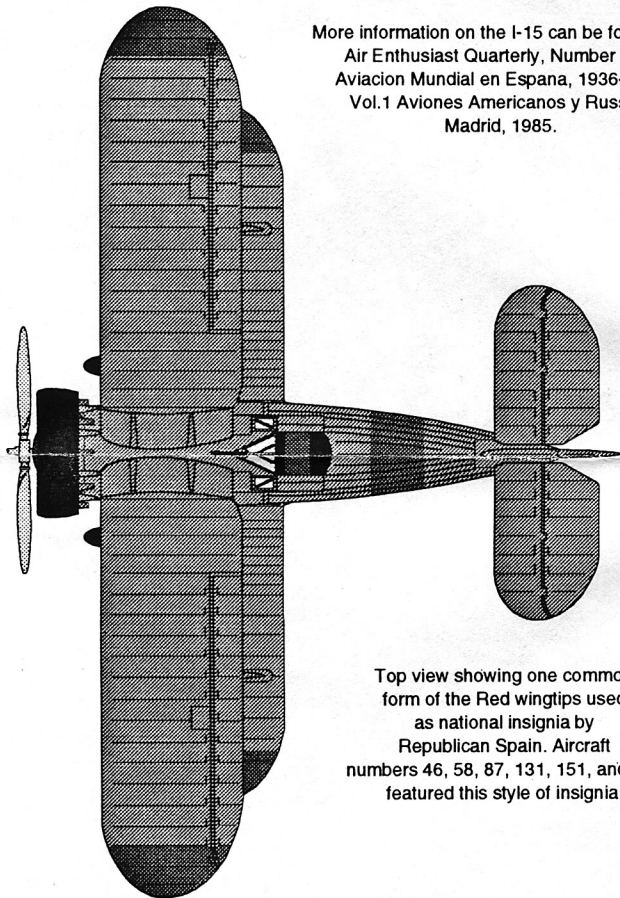
Bottom view showing placement of Red Stars.

Standard scheme for I-15s in both Spanish and Soviet service was Dark Green uppersurfaces and Light Blue undersudes, with (usually) a Black cowling. The cover for the engine cylinders was Dark Green, as were the undercarriage struts, rudder, aand interplane struts.

More information on the I-15 can be found in Air Enthusiast Quarterly, Number 11 Aviacion Mundial en Espana, 1936-39, Vol.1 Aviones Americanos y Russos, Madrid, 1985.

The Polikarpov I-15 evolved from the I-5 and first flew in 1933. It was designed around the Wright Cyclone SGR-1820-F3, to that time the most powerful aircraft engine available to the Soviets, who began negotiations for licence production. However the Cyclone did not enter production until 1936, by which time 404 aircraft had been built, powered by the lower-rated M-22, a licenced Jupiter. In any case, the I-15 was an exceptional design, fast, sturdy, and very maneuverable, and for its time was probably the best fighter in the world.

A total of 733 Chaikas were built, 404 with the M-22, 270 with the M-25 (licenced yclone), and 59 with imported American engines. Another 80 or so were built in Spain, powered by engines scrounged from various sources. In Soviet service, the I-15 was largely supplanted by the I-152 and I-153 before 1941, but in Spanish service the type was to soldier on until the 1950s. The Soviets supplied 155 to Spain, where the Chato, as it was known there, served with both sides during the Civil War.
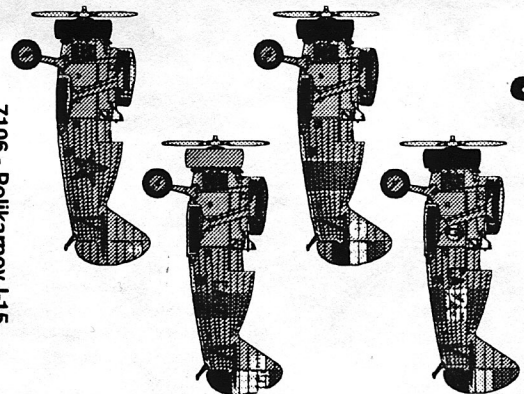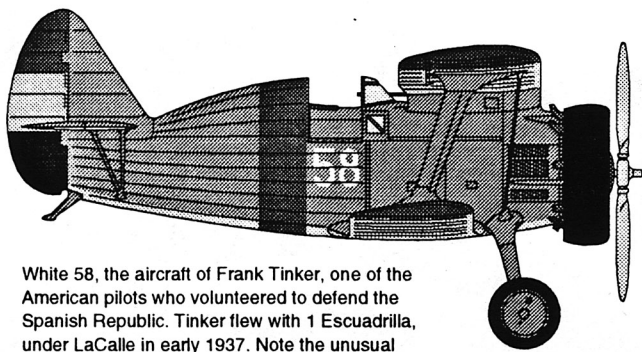
Suggested kit:
Aviation Usk AV-1007

Top view showing one common form of the Red wingtips used as national insignia by Republican Spain. Aircraft numbers 46, 58, 87, 131, 151, and 142 featured this style of insignia.

7106 - Polikarpov I-15
Republican Spain 9 aircraft
USSR 3 aircraft

White 58, the aircraft of Frank Tinker, one of the American pilots who volunteered to defend the Spanish Republic. Tinker flew with 1 Escuadrilla, under LaCalle in early 1937. Note the unusual placement of the fuselage band and number.
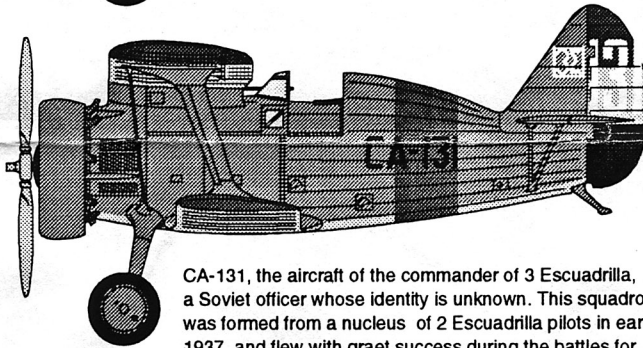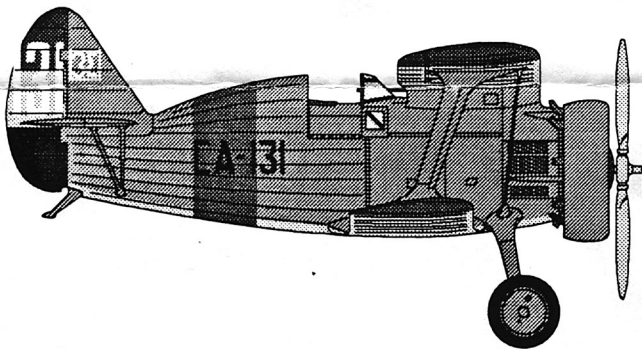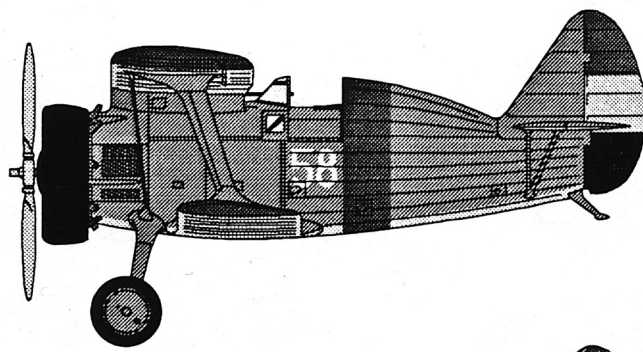
CA-131, the aircraft of the commander of 3 Escuadrilla, a Soviet officer whose identity is unknown. This squadron was formed from a nucleus of 2 Escuadrilla pilots in early 1937, and flew with graet success during the battles for Jarama and Guadalajara. The squadron identifier was a white square on the fin, and this unit also carried the aircraft number in large white numerals on the rudder.
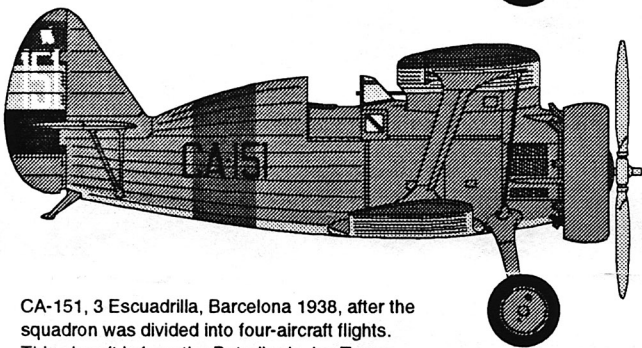
CA-151, 3 Escuadrilla, Barcelona 1938, after the squadron was divided into four-aircraft flights. This aircraft is from the Patrulla de los Toros, and carries a small bull's head on the rudder.
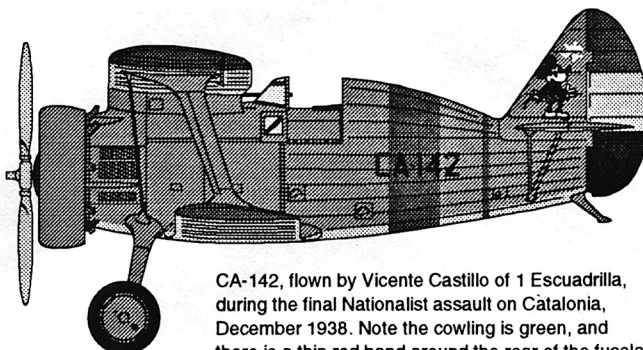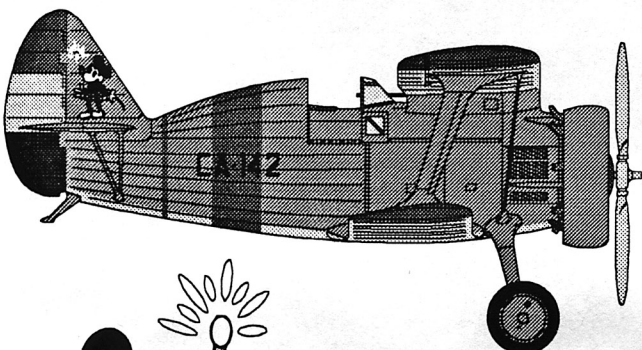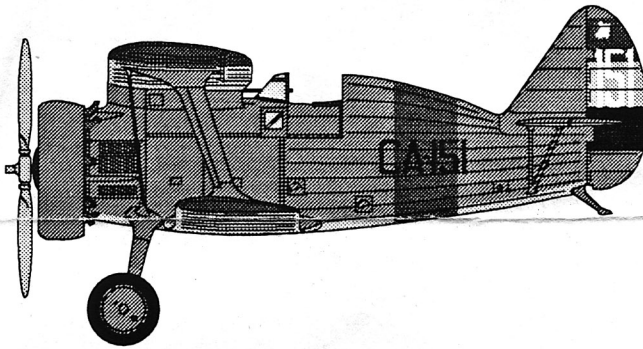
CA-142, flown by Vicente Castillo of 1 Escuadrilla, during the final Nationalist assault on Catalonia, December 1938. Note the cowling is green, and there is a thin red band around the rear of the fuselage, perhaps denoting the commander's aircraft.
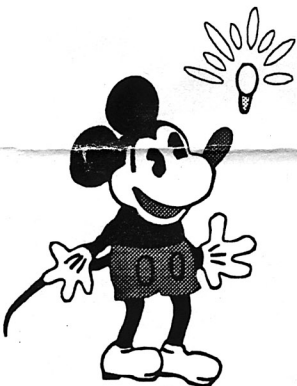
Many Republican aircraft carried American cartoon characters as personal insignia, including Popeye, Betty Boop, Donald Duck, and many others. This is a detail of the Micky Mouse emblem which appeared on the tail of CA-142.

The Spanish Civil War began on 18 July 1936, when Franciso Franco led a group of disaffected Army officers in a coup against the duly-elected government of Spain. The British, French, and Americans promptly declared an embargo of arms to Spain, and outlawed the participation of any of their nationals in the conflict. Hitler and Mussolini agreed to supply arms and "volunteers" to Franco in exchange for future mineral concessions and other inducements, and at the end of August 1936, Stalin offered assistance to the Spanish government in exchange for $400,000,000 in gold bullion. In early October the first aircraft arrived, consisting of the equivalent of a Soviet regiment (31 aircraft) each of I-15, I-16, R-5, and SB-2 types. These were initially commanded and flown by regular Soviet army officers, who used aliases which fooled no one, and the aircraft were at first mistakenly labelled as American types, "Curtiss" fighters and "Martin" bombers. In 1936 both the I-15 and I-16 were truly revolutionary designs, outclassing the He-51 and C.R.32 fighters flown by the Nationalists in every respect, and their introduction radically transformed the air war. Initially there were two 15-aircraft Escuadrillia formed in the south, and a second smaller group operated in the Basque region to the north. Known as the Chato in Spain, the I-15 entered combat on November 4, promptly racking up a score of 2 Ju-52s, 4 C.R.32s and an Ro.37 without loss. The air strength of the Republicans was decisive in halting the Nationalist drive on Madrid, and from that point the war settled into an attritional struggle until 1939. The USSR sent 155 I-15s to Spain, most powered by the M-22, and in addition the Spanish built about 85 aircraft.

In early 1937 a third Escuadrilla formed in the south, and during the battles for Jarama and Guadalajara the Chatos began flying ground-attack sorties, with great success. By then the I-15 had become less effective as an interceptor, lacking the speed to catch the newer Do-17 and He-111 which the Nationalists had received, and from that point the Chato squadrons were used increasingly for close support. A fourth Escuadrilla was formed in late 1937, and a night-fighter flight was also equipped with the type. There was also a smaller grou[operating in the Basque region to the North although there were never more than fifty or so aircraft on strength at any given time.
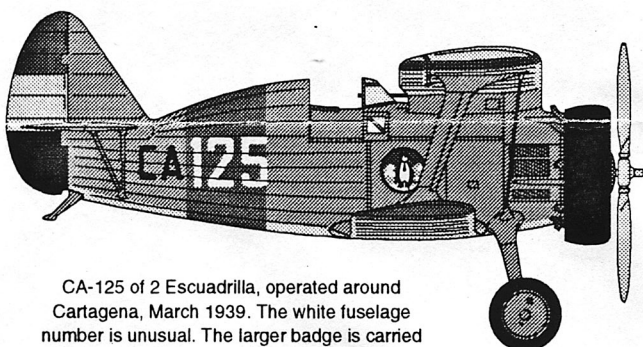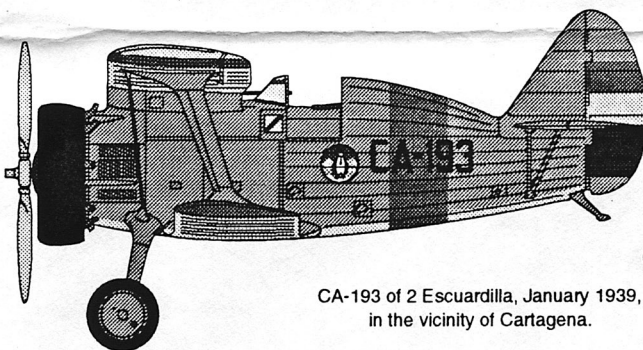
After the Republicans collapsed, in March 1939, the remaining Chatos, together with a quantity which had been captured, were marked with the red and yellow roundels and the Cross of St.Andrew, and continued in Spanish service well into the 1950s.
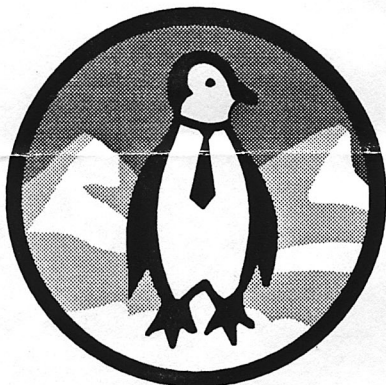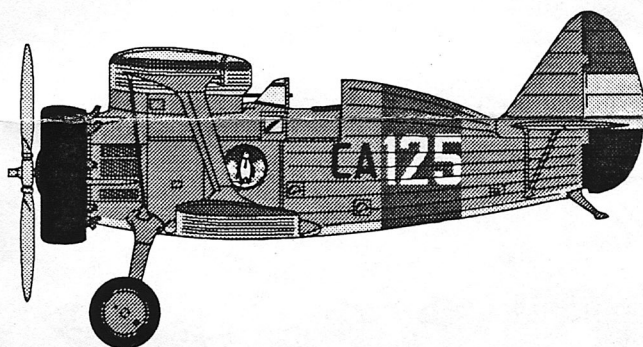
7106-2
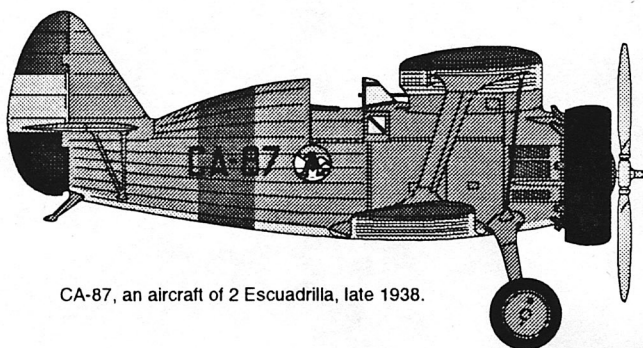
CA-87, an aircraft of 2 Escuadrilla, late 1938.
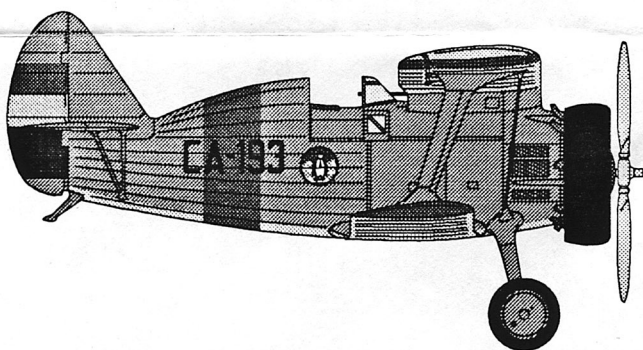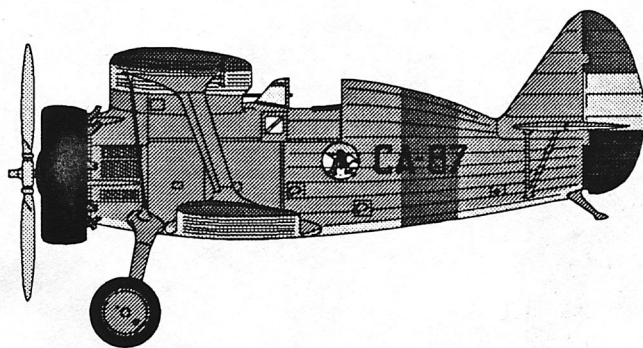
CA-193 of 2 Escuardilla, January 1939,
in the vicinity of Cartagena.

CA-125 of 2 Escuadrilla, operated around
Cartagena, March 1939. The white fuselage
number is unusual. The larger badge is carried
on the fuselage, forward of the cockpit.

Two variations of the penguin badge
used by 2 Escuadrilla. Colours are (right)
Black bird with yellow feet on a white
background, with light blue sky, and
(left) Black bird against light blue and
white mountains, with red sky.

Soviet aircraft were delivered in a scheme of Dark Green and Light Blue, with Spanish markings added as the aircraft were assembled. These
markings consisted of a red fuselage band and red wingtips initially, although later aircraft had a one-meter red band painted around the
top wing (a few aircraft had both). The rudder was painted in the colours of the Republican flag, red (top), yellow, and purple. Aircraft
serials were usually black, and appeared centrally on the fuselage. Individual aircraft numbers and squadron symbols were white,
and generally appeared on the vertical stabilizer or rudder. Some aircraft had additional bands painted on the rear fuselage,
particularly those flown by unit commanders. There was much variation in the size and position of markings.
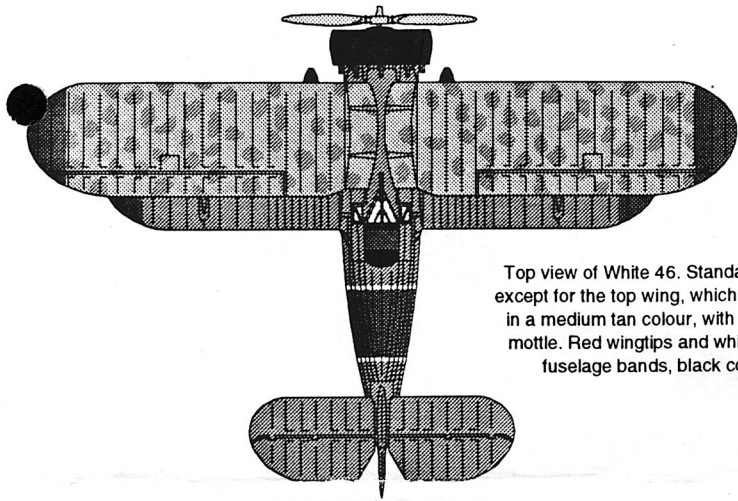
Top view of White 46. Standard scheme except for the top wing, which was painted in a medium tan colour, with dark green mottle. Red wingtips and white-outlined fuselage bands, black cowling.
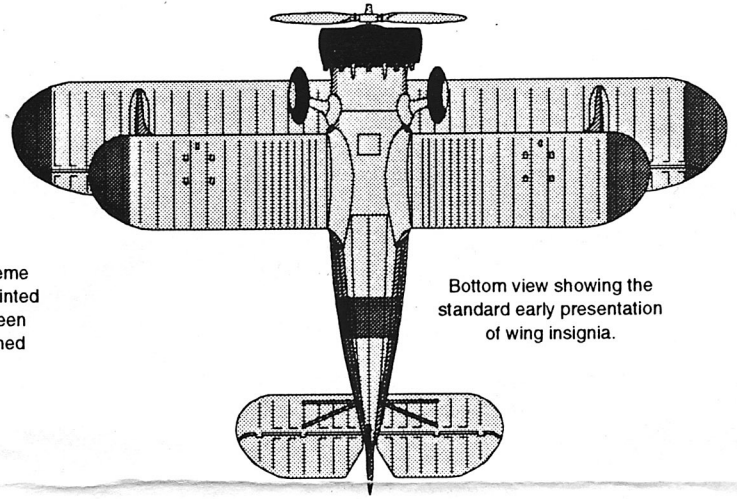
Bottom view showing the standard early presentation of wing insignia.
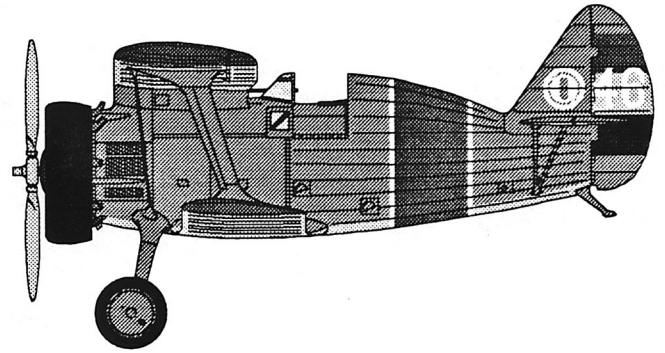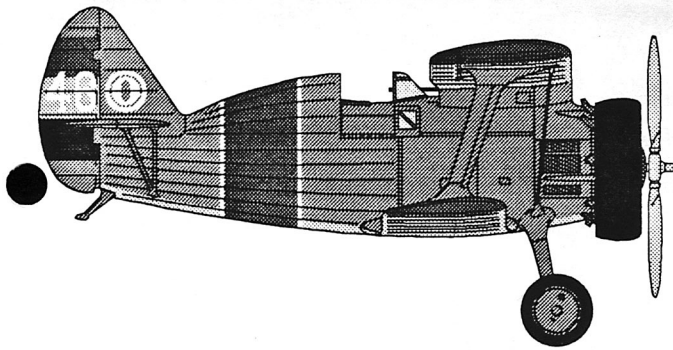
White 46, the aircraft of the commanding officer of Grupo de Caza num 26, Estado Mayor, mid-1937. Standard finish with black cowling, apart from the upper wing which was mottled, as noted above.Note the fuselage band is outlined in white, and is wider that normal.
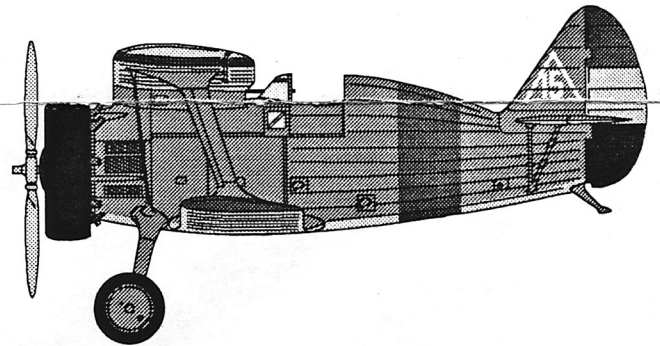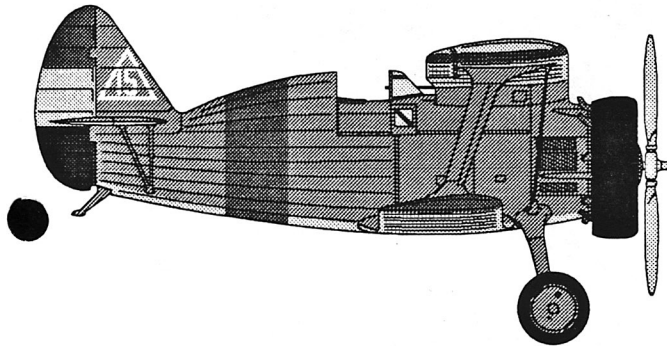
White 15, flown by Leopold Morquillas, commander of the 2 Escuadrilla during 1938. The aircraft number was carried within a white triange, which was the symbol used to designate 2 Escuadrilla. Other symbols used were a circle, for 1 Escadruilla, a square for 3 Escuadrille, and a diamond for 4 Escuadrilla. A double circle was used by command echelons.
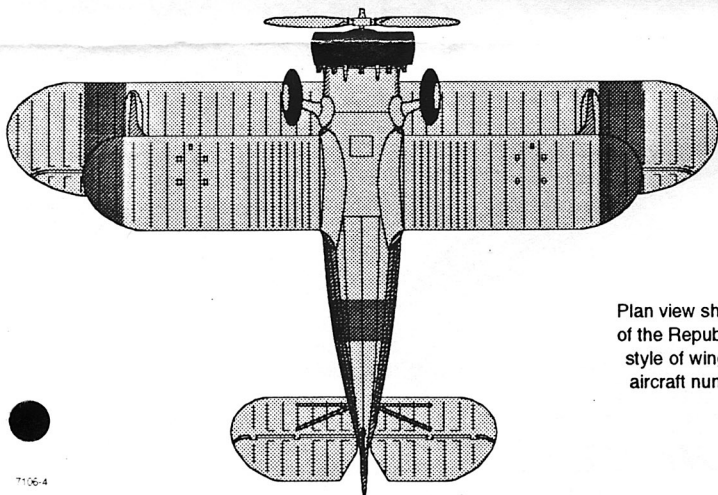
Plan view showing the later variation of the Republican wing insignia. This style of wing marking was used on aircraft number 15, 125, and 193.