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Savoia Marchetti SM.79

The Yugoslav Story

Operational Record 1939 – 1947


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had grown into a respectable formation, but its development was arrested with the world economic crisis and subsequent depression. Huge cuts in military budget not only prevented any acquisitions of new equipment, but seriously hampered training of aircrews and maintenance of existing resources. At the same time, a huge leap forward in the aircraft design and engineering rendered the VVKJ's Breguets XIX, Potez XXV's and Dewoitine fighters obsolete. To make matters worse, air force doctrine and its leadership were still rooted in the Great War, unwilling or incapable to understand the future of aerial warfare.

In a rapidly changing world, Yugoslavia was losing pace. On **9 October 1934**, King Aleksandar Karađorđević was assassinated in Marseille, in a plot sponsored by Italy. Despite of his authoritarianism, which at one point turned into open dictatorship, it was his strong hand that kept the country together. With him removed, the Yugoslav Kingdom entered a period of deepened instability. Internally, corrupted political elites remained divided in power struggles, their particular interests coming ahead of broader goals. On the international scene, the 'Petit Entente' received a mortal blow and the moment could not have been worse, with rising German militarism.

Aware of the challenges lying ahead, Yugoslav High Command started seriously to consider how to strengthen its air arm. In **1935**, the head of VVKJ, arm đen Milutin Nedić, submitted a modernization program requiring the acquisition of 114 bombers, 206 fighters and 169 reconnaissance aircraft, albeit over the next eight years! The plan was accepted and funds approved, but the implementation went very slowly. In **1936** the board for selection of the twin-engine bomber opted for purchase of Dornier Do 17Ka, of which 70 would be eventually delivered.

A new burst for modernization came in **October 1936** when div đen Dušan Simović took charge of the VVKJ. He proposed an updated and expanded plan for an additional 42 bombers and 40 fighters. Progress remained slow as these aircraft had to be identified and produced. The Yugoslav aviation industry could not be counted on, as it lacked capacity and manpower to deliver modern aircraft quickly and in large series. Apart from license-built types and various trainers, it would manufacture just a dozen indigenous Rogožarski IK-3 fighters and several exceptional prototypes before the outbreak of war.

In the second half of the thirties, Yugoslavia's major ally and arms supplier, France, overwhelmed by its own economic and social problems, was changing its foreign policy priorities in the Balkans region. It was unable to adequately equip its own air force, so could barely provide anything for export. Delivery of a single Potez Po 630C-3 and a Po 631C-3 was just symbolic and even these came after long delays. Close ties and very friendly relations with Czechoslovakia were of little use as its producers were still struggling to develop modern aircraft by the time of country's collapse. Contacts with the United States came too late, and there were no links with Soviet Union whatsoever as the Yugoslav Kingdom was one of the last countries to recognize its communist government in **1940**.

This left Britain and Germany as the key players on the market. Unfortunately, they had their own priorities, that

their governments were well aware of and ready to use arms shipments as a tool of political and military influence. British hardware was very expensive, payment terms were unfavorable and modern types were not for sale. It was the serious concern that Germans would push them out of the game completely that enabled VVKJ to acquire 62 Bristol Blenheims and 48 Hawker Hurricanes. On other side, Third Reich's appetite for Yugoslav raw materials resulted in its readiness to use the dominant position for all sorts of extortions and concessions. Eventually, apart from already mentioned Do 17Ka, the German aviation industry delivered 22 Fieseler Fi 156C-1s, 13 Messerschmitt Bf 108B-1s and 73 Messerschmitt Bf 109E-3as, making the Yugoslav Kingdom it's largest foreign customer at the time. Still, these came at a high price, after long negotiations and many broken contractual provisions and deals. And then, quite unexpectedly, a new competitor joined the fray.

Sparviero comes to Yugoslavia

Although main opponents in political and military sense, Yugoslav and the Italian Kingdom did have fertile economic ties. Rise of German might, the fact that other powers supported territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, thirst for raw materials, and ambition to spread influence in the Balkans, caused Benito Mussolini to shift his policy in mid-thirties. For the time being, he decided to leave the aggressive approach and freeze the support for subversive and radical elements within Yugoslav society.

The Yugoslavs did not have much experience with Italian aviation hardware though among the 28 Breguet XIV A2s and B2s acquired from French stocks in the autumn of **1919**, Fiat A-12bis engines powered six. Not much is known about their service, but it is certain that all airworthy examples were eventually re-equipped with Renault 12Fcx. In the first post-Great War years no less than six Italian biplanes crashed or force-landed in the South Slavic Kingdom. One of these, an Ansaldo SVA 5 fighter, was seized in **October 1920** and pressed into service only to be lost in accident shortly thereafter. Three FBA Typo H and a pair of SIAI S.13 flying boats were purchased for Pomorsko vazduhoplovstvo (PV - Naval Aviation) in the spring of **1922**. It is very likely that the small number had been strengthened with a Italian civilian FBA, which was confiscated later that year. The service life of these seaplanes was marked with numerous accidents and lasted for just a couple of years.

The first Italian offer of combat aircraft was passed to VVKJ in **January 1937** and included the Caproni Ca.135, Breda Ba.65, Piaggio P.33, SIAI S.79B Sparviero¹ and Fiat BR.20 Cigogna (Stork). Possibly because of the old mistrust and prejudice, it had not been seriously considered. The warming in relations of the two neighbors was made official with the signing of a Non-Aggression and Friendship Agreement on **25 March 1937**, to much German discomfort. That same year several Italian aircraft types were demonstrated

¹ In 1937 the concern Societá Idrovolanti Alta Italia (SIAI) changed its name into Societá Italiana Aeroplani Idrovolanti 'Savoia Marchetti'. In June 1938 the designation S.79 was changed to SM.79 i.e. S.M.79.

Curious locals and a Yugoslav Army guard stand next to a twin-engine SIAI S.79B, which force-landed at Košijsko Polje near Kruševac in the spring of 1938.

(Aleksandar Smiljanić)



to VVKJ authorities: Breda Ba.25, Caproni Ca.310 Libeccio, Macchi MC.94 and Nardi FN.305. The first contract, for 12 Ca.310, was signed on **22 December** and these were delivered on schedule in little over six months.

At the time, Italian aviation industry was eager to take its share of the international market and this effort was channelled through government-controlled Consorzio Italiano Esportazioni Aeronautiche (CIEA - Italian Consortium for Aeronautical Exports). The first European foreign customer of the Sparviero was Romania which ordered 24 aircraft in its twin-engine S.79B configuration. The journey of the first aircraft from Vergiate to Bucharest on **18 April 1938**, ended in tragedy, as it crashed near Poklek hamlet in vicinity of

Samobor, taking the lives of SIAI test pilot Adriano Bacula, flight engineer Luigi Merizzi and Romanian căpitan (capitano) Dimitrescu. Nonetheless, transfer flights commenced and VVKJ airmen and technicians got the chance to see the Sparviero from close quarters. During the spring, one plane veered off course in bad weather and force-landed at Košijsko Polje landing ground near Kruševac, as witnessed by a local lad Momčilo Joksimović:

I watched a Savoia with Italian airmen land at Kruševac airfield. The plane sank up to the wheel hubs into the mud, so that six oxen had to pull it out. After they landed at Košijsko Polje and saw the Gypsies from the nearby Ciganmala settlement, Italians asked whether they have come down in Abyssinia!'

A group of cadets from the nearby Vojno-tehnički zavod (VTZ - Military Technical Institute) Obilićevo used the opportunity for a souvenir photo with the Romanian Sparviero at Košijsko Polje.

(Aleksandar Smiljanić)





A line-up of freshly delivered Sparvieros with Italian markings at Jasenica aerodrome. The SM.79 was third modern bomber in the VVKJ inventory and carried the greatest bomb load.

(Robert Čopce)

210^a Squa. The next group of six Savoias was led to Jasenica by cap. Bressanelli on **21 November**, followed by seven more on **2 December**. Delivery dates for MM22077 and MM22078 remain unknown, while the last nine aircraft landed at Jasenica at midday on **22 December** - a mere 10 days behind schedule. In all, 22 Italian and two Yugoslav crews with four pilots (kap Ik Leo Bradaška, kap Ik Dušan Milojević, por Radoje Nedeljković and por Miloš Jelić) were engaged in transfer flights.

Despite all the disputes and difficulties encountered, the pace of deliveries and co-operation of the other side literally astonished the Yugoslavs. At the time, the Italians were prepared to deliver additional aircraft, but both the German and British lobbies were too strong to enable complete change of procurement policies in the VVKJ. Indeed, purchase of additional 15 Savoias was considered (arm den Janković even mentioned 50 to t.col. Piroddi). And then, when all seemed to be flowing smoothly, the bomb racks issue broke out. In **February 1940**, ŠVV reported that the first phase of testing with sample horizontal bomb rack made by SIAI ended with unsatisfactory results, thus the admission board was instructed to rejected to accept the remaining 44 examples. This led to a lengthy and unpleasant exchange of notes, in which the Italian arguments prevailed: despite of being offered the regular (vertical) bomb racks the Yugoslavs insisted on a horizontal rack of its own design; SIAI adhered to the request and produced the sets according to instructions provided; the sets met the required characteristics and the other side failed to indicate exactly the alleged defects; SIAI was ready to make some modifications and requested 10 Yugoslav bombs for launch tests but these were not provided.

In the meantime, discussions about the export of other types continued. In **January**, an A.V.I.A. FL.3 made demonstration flights in Zemun, followed by FN.315 and Ambrosini S.7 in **March**, when a team of VVKJ pilots went to Italy to evaluate the Reggiane Re.2000 fighter, FN.315, SM.85 and a fighter version of Ba.88. A request for delivery of 50 SM.79Ms with P.XI engines made in late **April** was eventually rejected as RA was itself seriously short of aircraft.

The official military designation of the exported bomber was Savoia Marchetti SM.79I³ (I for Iogoslavo - Yugoslav) and the factory export designation was SM.79KI. The plane, however, did not differ from standard Italian SM.79M (SM.79K). Powered by three 780 HP A.R.126 RC34 engines, it had the ceiling of 7.500 m and range of 3.300 km when empty i.e. 1.900 km with 1.200 kg of bombs. Interestingly, during the trials in Yugoslavia, in some aspects Sparviero performed better than declared by the manufacturer: it required 280 m of runway for take off (opposed to 295 m), climbed to 5.000 m in 15 min 39 sec (17 min 43 sec) and had a top speed of 430 km/h (420 km/h) at 4.000 m. The plane was armed with three Breda-SAFAT MC.12,7 mm machineguns (the fixed-one firing forward with 350 bullets and two in flexible dorsal and ventral positions had 500 bullets each) and a 7,7 mm Lewis Mk.IV with six drums, each containing 47 bullets. Its maximum take-off weight was 10.738 kg and bomb load 1.536 kg, which was 1/3 heavier than that of Do 17Ka and no less than 2/3 than that of Blenheim Mk.I. The bomb load could be arranged in four different com-

3 Widespread designations of the type in VVKJ were both SM-79I and SM-79.



Unknown kap Ik of 7.BP standing in front of a Sparviero at Jasenica. Its original Italian national markings have been removed, but the Yugoslav ones still hadn't been applied.

(Family of Aladar Antauer via Mitja Kenda)



Airmen of 66.VG with their commanders kap Ik Milan Popović and kap Ik Vlastimir Vojinović (standing, eighth and ninth from the left) in front of SM.79I 'White 9' at Jasenica aerodrome on 22 November 1939. The plane still carries Italian 'fasce' marking on the nose.

(Vladeta Vojinović)



SM.79I 'Black 10' of 262.E in flight over Serbia in the summer of 1940. The plane carried VVKJ military serial number 3706 both on the fuselage and on the rudder.

(Šime Oštrić Collection)

original MM, thus it was not possible to establish whether they have been modified or not. For his part, gen. Pricollo noted that there was no ground for any kind of compensation, with a remark that all that had happened is not unusual for a period of 'familiarisation' on new military hardware.

As the life returned to normal, regiment focused a lot on training, both of its regular and reserve cadre, as recalled by maj Milan Popović, at the time commander of 66.VG:

As it was thought that during the war the aircraft would be dispatched on several day and night sorties and that airmen would not be able to endure this, there was an endeavor to have two crews for each aircraft i.e. to send a different crew on each next mission, day or night. This was done only partially during the activation, with four to five aircraft with double crews, due to the shortage of flying cadre. For that reason, I trained some ten reserve pilots of 66.VG, which hadn't flown on multi-engine



During the activation in 1940, the 81.VG from time to time operated from Pančevo. SM.79I 'Black 1' of 261.E is seen on one such occasion.

(Robert Čopce)



Ground crews and airmen of 66.VG with their commander, maj Milan Popović (seated, sixt from the left), at Jasenica.

The size of the Sparviero is evident.

(Šime Oštrić Collection)

aircraft previously, but with their long practice on single-engine planes and experience, they quickly learned to handle the tri-motors and complexity of the work with modern machines...

Reserve officers which were to be deployed in war with the unit as per assigned schedule, were well trained in their functional duties. Pilots were fully prepared for combat missions and as such, after the end of the activation in the autumn, they were sent home. The same was done with reserve NCOs and

soldiers, which completely mastered new hardware and learned it in detail.

Organization of work of the flying and logistic units was excellent, so that everyday flying, radio communications and other auxiliary services functioned perfectly. Each day the bombardment with 100 kg cement bombs was done at the Podvelež range. Both aviation groups (66. and 67.) alternately participated in these bombings, one day the first and another the second. In



Another view of 'Black 1' at Pančevo airfield with an unknown airmen taking the opportunity to take a nap in the grass, in front of the Sparviero.

(Robert Čopce)

staff located in the village of Ljubić, three km west of Preljina. The four VB of the Operativno vazduhoplovstvo (OV - Operational Air Force) - which was under direct command of ŠVV, represented the most potent part of Yugoslav aviation forces.

The 7.BP was ill prepared for war in many ways, rez por Zvonimir Kucel described the situation he found after reporting for duty in 213.E:

Due to the reasons of organizational and technical nature the transfer of the aircraft could not be accomplished, and so we stayed at Jasenica almost a full month in strict readiness. All that time we were accommodated in the escadrille premises and slept on the straw, covered with leather coats and other pieces of flying gear in absence of cloth covers. As our cases with personal belongings have been sent with vehicles to Butmir, we were left behind without essential necessities and clothes. Feeding was also bad, as we had just a little time and opportunities to eat normally. It all increased psychosis, which did not encourage the ‘warrior enthusiasm’.

In the first few days the flying was suspended, but later on we did perform the necessary training and exercises in flying without external visibility.

Professional qualifications of the aircrews, although noticeably advanced when compared to conditions from 1940, were still deficient. Not all the airmen were yet familiar with installations on Savoias, especially when considering the need of some of the crew members to step in in place of the others during combat missions.

We could not get the aviation maps in 1:500.000 scale, although these were deposited in the library of the 7. vazduhoplovna baza (VBa - Aviation Base), we were told there that they would be issued in time, but I neither saw them nor were they delivered to the escadrille.

In the days after the introduction of the strict readiness, the bombs were mounted in and out of the racks. The first time it was done almost amateurish, without necessary technicians, and a lot of time was consumed as some parts were not fitting in appropriate places. The planes had the installation for dozen 100 kg bombs. The Breda 12.7 mm machineguns were also handled with insufficient technical knowledge and training.

Generally speaking, most of the pilots were very skilled, there were only two observers in escadrille and they were also very good. Radio operators-gunners were fine, but both they and mechanics-gunners, especially the younger ones, lacked the technical knowledge. There were mechanics-gunners which were not sufficiently trained in manipulating the fuel installations, which on Savoia required special attention due to their complexity.

Theoretical lessons were very deficient and superficial. Training classes in individual subjects were held irregularly and with insufficient attention by the attendants. It was more a improvisation than systematic work. As a consequence, majority of the pilots were pretty weak in radio telegraphy and navigation and their knowledge about armament was poor. We worked with Jozza bombsight, which the crews really knew pretty well, there were exercises above moving canvas and in 1940 bombing practice was conducted at Podveležje firing range. Nonetheless, more training and repetition was needed to work with Jozza and in my opinion, instead of it we should have been equipped with the German G.V.216, as this mechanical device was both precise enough and much simpler than the Italian Jozza.

Half of the pilots finished the ‘blind flying’ course, but even they declared that they felt a need for additional training.

Also felt was the lack of sufficient training of the radio operators in navigation and keeping the communication with ground stations and other aircraft in flight. In 1940 though, the training flights for direction finding and positioning were conducted, but these relied on a couple of radio operators which were really excellent. I'd also like to mention that technical advantages of modern aircraft have not been fully used, for example the interphone for the in-flight communication of the crew was not used, or the de-icing device although there were cases when it was necessary.⁹

Some of the shortcomings in 7.BP were easily avoidable and should have ended with a court martial of those responsible. Nonetheless, the six-month activation during 1940 had served its purpose and reservists were familiar with the new aircraft and their duties within the regiment. However, for unknown reasons, possibly an administrative blunder (or even sabotage), during the regular update of the lists of the reservists and their schedules in **December 1940** and **January 1941**, a mix-up of specialties was made. Many reserve NCOs and conscripts that had been mobilized in 1940 were erased from the files and new ones added. Men were were posted to positions for which they were untrained, such as to anti-aircraft defense, while others which had no knowledge of engine maintenance were drafted as mechanics, and armourers became chauffeurs, etc. This led to serious disruption of ground support services within the regiment and caused numerous problems.

The regiment HQ, lead by ppuk Dragić departed for Preljina by a train on **21 March**. Two days later, 67.VG received new movement orders: instead to Butmir, it had to go to Gorobilje auxiliary airfield (sometimes referred as Dobrić), four km southeast of Užička Požega. ppuk Hinko Dragić, was deeply dissatisfied with the auxiliary bases allocated to his regiment:

Characteristically for the headlessness which ruled in the Air Force Headquarters regarding the selection of the war airfields was the following:

Every regiment commander had the duty to select the auxiliary airfields for his regiment in the assigned area, to propose their selection, and organize them. Following landing grounds were arranged for the 7.BP: Pokrovnik near Šibenik, Glamočko Polje, Nikšičko [Kapino - a.c.] Polje, Grab near Trebinje and Podgoričko [Čemovsko - a.c.] Polje. These airfields were very well suited for the needs of the regiment, both in their dimensions and in the quality of the terrain. On opposite, those at Preljina and Užička Požega were swampy and in rainy weather completely unusable for SM.79s which weighted, with full load of bombs and fuel, 10.500 kg. In May 1940, upon activation of the 81.VG, which I was leading back then, I was ordered to fly to Preljina airfield. On the 14th I landed there with my group. Two days later the weather deteriorated, the terrain became so sodden that I couldn't take-off until 16 June. I sent around ten reports about the unsuitability of Preljina airfield for SM.79s and still in March 1941 I was ordered to work from there. The month of March was very dry and the terrain was good when I arrived there, but my prediction that it will be useless as soon as heavy rain falls came true...¹⁰

Having been told by ŠVV not to expect any fighter protection for his units, puk Petar Vukčević ordered maj Popović, who was with the air echelon at Jasenica, to immediately increase night flying training. The problem was that even those of his pilots which were qualified in blind flying lacked experience on Savoias, having been usually trained on ancient Breguet XIX

and Potez 25 biplanes. Unpreparedness for instrumental flying lead to abandonment of some engagement scenarios, as recalled by kap Ilk Aleksandar Dobanovački, CO of 212.E:

Before the war, as the escadrille commander I received a document from Air Force Headquarters with instructions that, if the war breaks out and no mission orders are forthcoming, we shall bomb at night an aerodrome in Romania, somewhere across Danube, in direction of Bucarest. I prepared a negative report arguing that escadrille was not capable of such a mission, as no one else except me had the experience in night flying with SM.79.¹¹

Threatened with invasion in the event of non-compliance, Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković and Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandar Cincar-Marković signed the protocol on the Yugoslav accession to the Axis Treaty in Vienna on **25 March**. The very next day, the alert to all VVKJ units was raised to level no.2, requiring a higher state of preparedness of aircraft, with duty crews and all personnel on the airfield at all times. In a twist of fate caused by memories from the Great War and animosity towards the Germans by the largest element of the Yugoslav nation, the Serbs, a power-thirsty military clique, and good work by British SOE, the Yugoslav government was overthrown on **27 March** by a group of senior VVKJ officers, led by arm đen Dušan Simović and his aide brig đen Borivoje Mirković. Simović became the new Prime Minister, and Mirković took his place at the head of VVKJ. Evidence suggests that the prime target of the coup was not the Axis or a strong pro-Allied stand but rather Prince Regent Pavle. The putschists kept the Axis treaty in force and sent a clear message to the German ambassador, Viktor von Heeren, that they were willing to continue on the same course as the previous government. Nevertheless, the fashion in which the

coup was executed, and the outburst of anti-German sentiment which followed it, especially in Belgrade, outraged Hitler to such an extent that he considered it a declaration of war. Plans for the Balkan campaign were quickly altered so that now they would include both Greece and Yugoslavia.

On the day of the putsch, a crew of a Do 17Ka brought the news from Belgrade to Jasenica, together with leaflets with the announcement of the coup, which had to be dropped over Raška, Herzegovina, Montenegro and Dalmatia. Three Savoias fulfilled the task during the afternoon. When the VVKJ command raised the alert on **1 April** to highest level, ordering round-the clock readiness with armed aircraft and crews with assigned targets ready for immediate action, staff of the 7.BP was in Preljina and its aircraft at Jasenica, unable to transfer to auxiliary positions due to bad weather.

On **4 April**, CO of 262.E kap Ilk Branko Drakulić died in flying accident in a Bücker Bü 131 and his deputy, por Radoje Nedeljković, was named as the acting commander. Some of his subordinates thought that this affected efficiency of the escadrille, as por Nedeljković was greatly distressed by the loss and unprepared for the task that befell him. The 261.E also had a leadership issue as it's recently appointed commander, kap Ilk Sergije Frantov, was not fully qualified to fly Sparviero.

Finally, in the morning of **5 April** the weather cleared enough for the transfer of 26 SM.79Is to Northern Serbia; single Savoia was left at Jasenica non-operational as there were no spare engine mounts for it. The formation led by maj Popović landed at Preljina, where an aircraft of 212.E, piloted by nar Mate Vrančić, slid off the runway and its tail wheel collapsed. Such damage would easily have been repaired at Jasenica,



SM.79I 'Black 11' of the 262.E in flight. On 10 March 1941, the group was subordinated directly to PAO and so it is sometimes referred as samostalna vazduhoplovna grupa (Independent Aviation Group).

(Family of Aladar Antauer via Mitja Kenda)

the airfield went away in direction of Mostar; he landed at Ortiješ 45 minutes later. Prodanović and his crew stayed next to their plane, clearing some snow from its wings. They waited until maj Popović walked away for some 300 meters and then quickly jumped into the cockpit and turned the engines on. When Popović turned hurriedly in their direction, maj Sofilj entered the plane, willing to go with them, but seeing it was overcrowded, told them that he's going to give it a try also and that they should go to Gorobilje or Mostar. Instead, when they finally took-off, the plane went in direction of Soviet Union, as recalled by nar Vojislav Živković:

Meteo conditions for such a flight were very bad. We had no data, nor did we have time for basic preparations. We were aware that we went into great uncertainty, but we had no other choice. The take-off itself was very hard and risky, but somehow we succeeded. For the duration of flight we flew through thick black clouds and several times we tried to break over them but without success. We went up to 4.000 meters but we didn't dare to go higher as we had no oxygen. After four hours of flying and wandering we came upon diluted clouds and we managed to see huge water surface - the Black Sea. At a distance of 100 kilometers land loomed in the mist. We reached the mainland and flew at the height of some 50 meters, looking for an airfield or a suitable meadow to land. During this ramble we saw an airfield at a distance of some 30 kilometers. Thinking that it was Russian, we went towards it to land. However, as we closed to it we saw aircraft with German and Rumanian markings. At that instance

Prodanović turned sharply in direction of the Soviet Union, the plane tore the ground with a wingtip, made a 180° turn, flipped over and burst into flame.

This was the airfield in Mamaia, near Constanta. Pilot poručnik Milan Prodanović and bombardier narednik Stevan Knežević were killed in the crash and some ten days later Jože Grlj, reserve potporučnik pilot, died of burns. They were all buried in Constanta with military honors. Mechanic narednik Miloš Dželetović, bombardier narednik Vladimir Radecki, bombardier narednik Vojislav Živković, and kaplar Milan Dokić survived.

Radecki and Dokić believed that we were really going to Mostar. Radecki had a wife and two children in Mostar, and Dokić was from Split, so they wanted to reach Mostar as soon as possible. We could not tell Radecki that we were flying for Soviet Union, as he was a son of a Russian emigrant, and Dokić boarded the plane secretly and hid during the preparations for flight. We found him after two hours in the air.²⁸

All but Dokić, who was released in late spring of 1942 as he received Italian citizenship, remained interned in Romania until **23 August 1944**.

In the end, maj Popović gave up, letting those who were prepared to do so, to depart. Four more Savoias followed, but only kap IIk Dominko reached Ortiješ. 'White 11' of kap IIk Dobanovački broke through the clouds at the height of 5.500 meters and after a flight of three hours, unable to find Mostar, landed at Mali Radinci auxiliary airfield near Ruma, occupied

by 105.E of 6. lovački puk (LP - Fighter Regiment). After a two-hour flight, maj Sofilj landed at Gorobilje. The last Savoia off from Preljina that morning was piloted by nv IIIk Milivoje Kapetanić of 211.E. It seems that he applied too much power to his engines when gaining altitude, as the right engine of his plane burst into flame, similar to the occurrences in 1940. The crew tried to land at auxiliary airfield at Pranjani, less than 20 km west of Preljina, but during the landing circuit, the burning engine fell off the plane, which stalled and crashed, killing the pilot, radio-operator nar Alojz Tantegal, mechanic nar Vučić Jovanović, and possibly one or two more unidentified aviators. One more plane flew away in direction of Mostar, a hack Bü 131. However, its unlucky pilot nar Alojz Stražišar and mechanic pnar Zdravko Berisavljević crashed near Milatovići village on Jelica mountain and perished, some sources attributing this to so-called 'friendly fire'. In all, seven Savoias were set ablaze by chief mechanic nar Arsenije Kočević and his men before the remaining 66.VG airmen departed for Nikšić, via Sarajevo and Mostar.

The sequence of events was different in 67.VG. During the night ppuk Dragić called maj Ranko Rašković, who was situated in a peasant's house near the airfield, to announce he was arriving at 5.00 with a very important message. However, at around 6.00 he phoned him and ordered evacuation of his group to Nikšić since the German panzers - as he said - had entered Trstenik and would likely arrive at Čačak by noon. If the weather did not permit take off by 10.00, he was to destroy the planes and leave in lorries. The 67.VG CO was astonished and in disbelief told his staff what he has just heard. Escadrille commanders went to the airfield and shared the grim news with their men, ordering them to unload the bombs and prepare the aircraft for the worst. After the initial shock, the aircrews agreed among themselves to disobey the orders and fly out to Mostar at any cost. Fortunately at around 9.00 the weather cleared to the extent that the other end of the runway was visible and 'White 21' piloted by por Uroš Đerić took off. It was followed by 'White 22' piloted by nar Ivan Perme, with rez por Zvonimir Kucel in observer's seat:

The take-off was performed individually and at intervals of several minutes to avoid collision, as the lower cloud base has been at 150 m. We flew in clouds up to 4.800 m, where we broke through the upper base, a sort of pilot's blind flying competence exam. Then we had to bring the plane to Mostar aerodrome or wherever the circumstances allowed it, as the cloud belt spread far above the sea. Having passed the clouds in the area of Mljet island, we went low down over the sea and brought the plane to auxiliary landing ground at Blagaj, as Mostar aerodrome has been incapacitated in air raids.²⁹

Remaining 11 crews decided to follow and in haste, one after another departed from Gorobilje. This caught maj Ranko Rašković completely off guard, as stated by his adjutant, kap Ik Mile Kosanović:

After some time I heard a Savoia take-off. Fog was at altitude of 50-100 m. I thought that it went to reconnoiter the weather, to establish whether it was possible to reach Neretva estuary. But then, a second Savoia went up.

'Run, stop them' - I told Ranko. He hesitated and only after the third or fourth plane left, he exited the building and sat into a 'Praga' car. He raced to the airfield and I soon followed

in a sidecar of a motorcycle. There were six or seven planes still there, and one by one they all flew away...³⁰

It is not clear why maj Rašković failed to act and at least board one of the departing planes, nor why his escadrille commanders left him behind. Eventually, all he could do was to organize the retreat of the ground echelon to Mostar via Rogatica and Sarajevo.

Twelve SM.79Is and the hack Bü 131 with kap Ik Vladimir Graovac from the regiment HQ at the controls reached Mostar and landed at Ortiješ. The only one that didn't make it through was 'White 8' 3729 of 214.E, piloted by por Dimitrije Kovijanić:

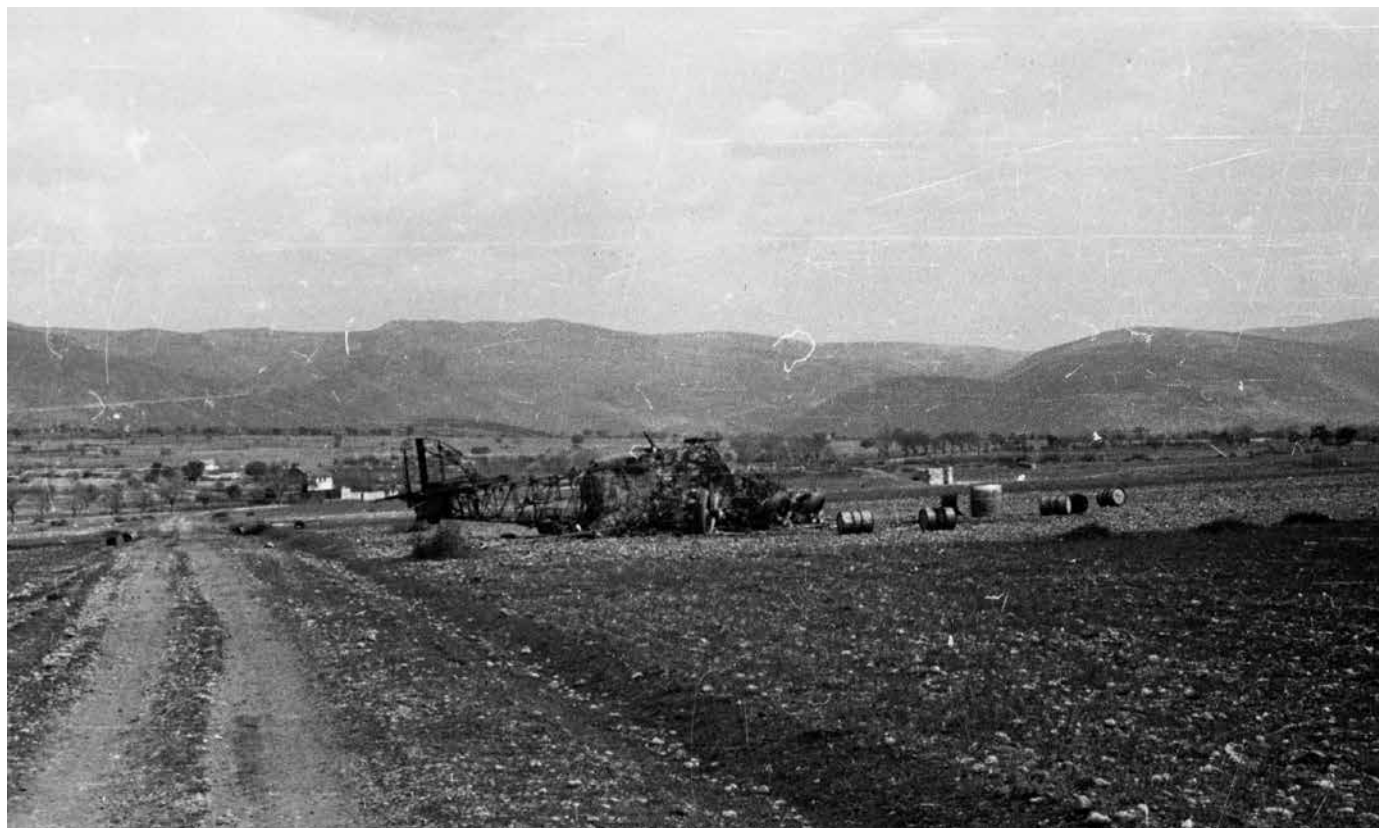
It was around 9.00 when we took-off. My co-pilot was Dušan Miljuš. As we climbed in thick mist, our wings iced and the speed was dropping, but still we continued to Mostar. Unable to break through, I turned in direction of Belgrade, but the heavy clouds prevented any attempt of landing there, so I decided to go to Greece. I made a bad calculation and when I thought that I have passed Prokletije mountains I started the descend. I landed at Tetovo airfield. There were several burned wrecks, the runway was short and soft, and the Germans were on three sides and firing at us! As we stopped, an Albanian shepherd approached us and with a pointed pistol I asked him where were we. As soon as he told us, I switched on the engines, but we managed to start only the left and the middle one. We took off and when we reached 3.000 meters, I managed to ignite the right engine as well. I left the commands to Miljuš and told him to fly the plane. He was



SM.79I 'White 1' of 211.E at Mamaia airfield in Romania after an ill-fated attempt of escape to the Soviet Union on 10 April 1941. Pilot por Milan Prodanović and bombardier nar Stevan Knežević died instantly, rez ppor Josip Grlj succumbed to his wounds ten days later.
(Aviation Museum - Belgrade)



A German officer and a Romanian guard at the crash site of 'White 1' at Mamaia.
(Dénes Bernádd)



The distinctive wreckage of a Sparviero and abandoned fuel barrels on the left bank of the Neretva. RA pilots claimed the destruction of no fewer than 32 Yugoslav aircraft at Jasenica aerodrome and auxiliary airfields in the Mostar valley on 13 April 1941.

(Giancarlo Garelo)



Two burned-out Savoias on the edge of the road leading from Gnojnice to Ortiješ. Up to 40 aircraft were destroyed in what proved to be most successful RA attack against VVKJ during the April War.

(Giancarlo Garelo)



Another Savoia caught in the open and destroyed by RA raiders on 13 April 1941 in Mostar valley.

(Giancarlo Garelo)

magg. Giuseppe Donadio the CO of 101° Gruppo (Gr - Group) - who led the attack; he was captured together with his gunner 1° av. Franco Zuchelli. Following closely were the escorting Macchi C.200s of 150° Gr and Fiat CR.42s of 160° Gr which came in on the deck, their pilots reporting the destruction of no fewer than 22 i.e. 11 VVKJ aircraft respectively, across the Mostar basin. Last on the scene were 21 C.200s of 22° Gr,



In all, 12 VVKJ SM.79Is were destroyed at Ortiješ auxiliary airfield on 13 April 1941.

(Giancarlo Garelo)

which claimed 28 destroyed on the ground and nine damaged. Despite of the overclaiming, the accomplishment of the Italian pilots was extraordinary and their score did not include at least nine aircraft set on fire inside the hangars, among them the non-operational SM.79I left behind by 7.BP.

Back at Kapino Polje, at 16.00, at the request of Zetska divizija (ZD - Zeta Division), which was holding the front near



Italian airman inspects the remnants of a 7.BP SM.79I, left behind at Jasenica due to the lack of spare engine mounts. This was the 13th SM.79I destroyed in a series of raids by Italian aircraft on 13 April 1941.

(Archivio Centrale dello Stato)



With its camouflage colours faded from the African sun, SM.79I 'Black 14' / 'Q' AX705 transport of 117 Sqn RAF, with no armament, seen during the summer of 1941.
(Stefaan Bouwer)



SM.79I 'Black 5' / 'N' AX702 during its service with 117 Sqn seen somewhere in Africa in 1941. Parts of its engine cowlings, wing's leading edge and rudder have been overpainted.
(Antun Burdelez)

amount of instructional flying for men who were not posted but rather only attached to 117 Sqn and was deemed impractical. Furthermore, both W/Cdr Rankin and S/Ldr Lovemore were busy flying on W.A.A.R.R. Fortunately, there was a reasonable reserve of spare parts from stocks captured from the Italians at Addis Ababa aerodrome.

There was some drama on the 7th, when the last operational Italian aircraft in East Africa - a pair of Fiat CR.42 fighters and a Ca.148 transport - were withdrawing from Jimma to Gondar. Near Lake Tana they stumbled upon W/Cdr Waters Rankin and his crew in one of the SM.79Is:

On the 7th June, Wing Commander Rankin, whilst flying from Addis Ababa to Khartoum in a Savoia Marchetti S.79K, was attacked by enemy aircraft 25 minutes out from Addis Ababa. No enemy aircraft was seen, but presumably it was a CR.42 from the Gondar area, where the Italians are still fighting. In view of the fact that no armament of any kind was carried on any of the Squadron aircraft, the most effective defense was deemed to be the converse of the adage that 'attack is the best form of defense'. Three attacks were made, bullets entering the wing tanks, interior gravity tank, cockpit and fuselage. There were no injuries to personnel, but as they were escaping from fighter, petrol fumes gradually overcame the pilot and crew. Just before becoming completely overwhelmed by the fumes, the Commanding Officer made a successful forced landing at Karkoj, on the Blue Nile, approximately 200 miles south-east from Khartoum (Map Reference Sudan 1:2.000.000 2055N 3402E). Spares were flown to Karkoj and the '79' was flown to Khartoum on the following day.⁴³

Italian fighter pilots, s.ten. Guglielmo Folcherio and s.m. Gaetano Volpe of 410^a Squa reported a single firing pass on SM.79 with RAF markings before breaking-off due to fuel shortage.

By the end of the month, the leading officers of the squadron logged 270 flying hours on Savoias. This reduced to just 90 in **July**, solely flown on AX702 and AX705, spare parts making up the cargo on all three return journeys from Addis Ababa to Khartoum. On **21 July**, F/Lt Alexander Duiguid started to fly as co-pilot to S/Ldr Lovemore, as did F/Lt Robert Chisholm in **August**, when the 117 Sqn recorded 268 flying hours on the type. During the month, several captured Alfa Romeo A.R.126 RC34 engines were delivered from Abyssinia and Eritrea aboard Bombay transports.

The number of flying hours dropped to 54 in **September**, as the unit's Operational Record Book explained:

The supply of stores to staging posts within the Sudan was maintained by the S.79Ks.

It was very difficult to keep to schedule with these aircraft, as although the S.79 is normally a very pleasant aircraft to fly, many minor troubles occurred, mainly due to the braking system which would continuously seize up or fail altogether. Trouble was also experienced with the two position airscrews and the fuel system. All these things were instrumental in the loss of flying hours.⁴⁴

By early autumn one of the Sparvieros disappeared from the records, thought to have been 'P' AX704 that was possibly cannibalized to keep the rest of the fleet operational. On **20 October**, W/Cdr Rankin received orders from RAF



SM.79I 'Black 14' / 'Q' AX705 seen at El Fasher airfield in north Darfur, Sudan. The plane remained with 117 Sqn until November 1941. Note the cleaned exhaust pipes on all three engines.
(Andrew Thomas)



SM.79I 'CQ+HQ' seen shortly after arriving to Borongaj aerodrome, late July 1941.

(Boris Ciglić)

Just as in previous successful campaigns, the Germans plundered considerable amounts of military hardware abandoned by the Yugoslav armed forces, including some usable 350 VVKJ aircraft. Having kept the best for themselves, the rest was offered for sale to its allies across Europe, including the Finns and Romanians. The Croats were left with the residue, but in the Italian occupied zone, they were allowed to collect hardware for which RA had no interest. Surprisingly, this included six brand-new A.R.126 RC34 engines which were brought from Jasenica to Sarajevo! The air arm of the

new state, ZNDH, was still building up when the first fighting broke out.

Expecting the Germans to treat them as allies, Croat officials requested for more than 200 new aircraft to Reichsluftfahrtministerium (RLM - Reich's Ministry of Aviation) in **May**. The response that only ex-VVKJ machines were available at short notice was disappointing, even if this was considered to be of a temporary nature. Deliveries began that same month and in just over two years, 211 captured aircraft were provided to the ZNDH. Except for 21 modern bombers - 11 Do 17Kas, eight Blenheims and one each Amiot 354 and SM.79I - the rest were trash. As if being equipped with ancient crates was not enough, the ZNDH suffered another blow soon after the German invasion on Soviet Union. In order to prove his servility and loyalty, the head of the NDH, Ante Pavelić, ordered creation of Croat 'volunteer' units to fight in the east under German command. Its aviation component, HZL, was established on **12 July** with the 362 airmen on its roster being the best flying cadre that the ZNDH possessed. Although expecting to have them returned, re-equipped with new aircraft, the Croat air arm permanently lost some of these men and many others for a very long time.

The first modern aircraft was delivered to ZNDH in late **July**. It was SM.79I, ex-'White 23' MM22044, found by the Germans at Zemun. On the **22nd**, orders were issued by Komanda zrakoplovstva (KZ - Command) for sat Ivan Pezelj, por Petar Bedalov, st nar Franjo Lebar, and civilian radio-operator Josip Paden to go to Vienna, inspect the aircraft, repair it if necessary and bring it to Borongaj aerodrome. With



With old camouflage and yellow Luftwaffe tactical markings, the one and only SM.79I on the roster of ZNDH, '0701' at Borongaj aerodrome in August 1941.

(Hrvatski povijesni muzej)

their task completed, the plane was assigned to 1. zrakoplovno jato (ZJ - Aviation Escadrille) of 1. zrakoplovna skupina (ZS - Aviation Group), with serial number 0701. It was dispatched on its first combat mission against the insurgents on **4 August**, however in the months that followed it rarely flew.

When new escadrilles and groups within ZNDH were formed, '0701' was allocated to 9.ZJ, a part of 3.ZS, at Rajlovac aerodrome near Sarajevo on **16 December**. At the new base, the Sparviero suffered from low serviceability and was rarely flown. In early **1942**, it was offered to CIEA together with six A.R.126 RC34 engines in exchange for six CR.42s. The proposal was forwarded to RA General Staff which showed no interest.

After months of inactivity, '0701' made a 30-minute test flight in the morning of **17 June 1942**, with two ex-VVKJ Savoia pilots at its controls, por Šimun Kvarantan and por Salih Islamović, and mechanic st nar Martinović. After two short test flights, on the **25th** and **26th**, two attempts to reach Zemun on the **27th** and **30th**, with pilots sent to pick up some aircraft, failed due to bad weather. It was only in the third attempt, on **1 July** that the round trip to Zemun succeeded. The Savoia remained grounded until **17 July**, when por Kvarantan, npor Vjekoslav Majer, por Ivan Šandola and st nar Martinović flew it on a strike on Partisan positions near Bugojno. The aircraft logged one short training flight on **5 August**, before taking-off from Rajlovac at 14.00 on the **22nd** to bomb Partisans in the area of Kupres. After it failed to return, an aircraft was sent to look for it in the afternoon and the searches continued on the following day. Finally, five days later, head of the ZNDH gen Vladimir Kren submitted the following report to Glavni stožer hrvatskog domobranstva (Headquarters of the Croatian Home Guard):

At 14.00 on 24 August 1942 a crew was sent with a Fizir FN to establish the exact position of the lost Savoia Marchetti.

On this occasion, during a low-level flight the crew found the burned aircraft at Vukovo Polje, three km southwest of Raduša mountain. By the position of the plane, the crew got the impression that it made a normal landing (with landing gear down).

At 17.00 on 25 August 1942 the same crew with the same aircraft landed at Bugojno in order to collect data about the missing airmen and was informed by pukovnik Šimić that the Partisans reported through their messenger that the crew of the Savoia Marchetti was alive and healthy in their hands. They also stated, that they have shot the aircraft down with machinegun fire, captured the crew and set the plane on fire.

The plane was probably brought down by fire from Breda type heavy machinegun. According to the statement of pukovnik Šimić, Partisans in that area have such machineguns.

On the same occasion, pukovnik Šimić stated that he will try to initiate the prisoners exchange negotiations.⁴⁹

What brought the Savoia down is still unclear. The crew was under impression that a bullet severed the fuel pipe, stopping all three engines so forcing them to make a deadstick landing. It seems more probable that the plane was disabled by st nar Matko Gregorka, a mechanic of 9.ZJ who is known for having sabotaged no less than 11 ZNDH aircraft! Apparently, during the previous summer the Narodnooslobodilački

pokret (NOP - People's Liberation Movement) had established a wide network of sympathizers that became engaged in effective underground work. This included espionage, smuggling of arms and medical supplies, propaganda, recruitment, raising of funds for the so-called 'red aid', organizing defections, and other subversive acts.

Pilot boj Romeo Adum, observer por Božidar Wagner, mechanic-gunner st nar Džemal Kažinić and mechanic st nar Franjo Čengić were taken to Janj, and later to Glamoč. Negotiations for prisoner swap began immediately and eventually, the four airmen were released on **19 March 1943**. Interestingly, boj Adum was invited to remain with the Partisans and become the commander of their air force once it is established, but he refused. Nonetheless, he was recruited and became a member of the NOP himself. On **25 September 1944** he defected to Partisans with a Fieseler Fi 167A, together with one of the top NOP operatives within ZNDH, boj Matija Petrović.

Return of the Sparviero

Throughout the war, the ZNDH repeatedly sought modern aircraft from its Allies but what little came out of it was too late. As a part of an agreement for delivery of 140 aircraft, in **1942** NDH paid five 'Savoia Marchetti bombers' (in all probability SM.79s) to Italy, but none arrived until the fall of Italy in **September 1943**. Nonetheless, in early **1944** the RLM acknowledged the debt and promised to provide replacement aircraft.

Allied air supremacy, battered bases, flourishing NOP activity, defections on all sides, low morale and degrading treatment by the Germans were just some of the factors of the grim reality which the ZNDH and its airmen faced in the closing year of the war. In such circumstances, in early **December** an agreement was reached to dispatch ZNDH technicians to collect five SM.79 transports from the stock held at an aerodrome near Prague. The team arrived in mid-**December** only to find a dozen or so Sparviero that had been left in the open for some time and were in a poor condition. Only three could be made airworthy. On **19 January 1945** KZ issued orders to pilots puk Hinko Hubl, dpuk Boris Kello, boj Gabrijel Hauptman and nar Dragutin Žauhar (who as a reserve eventually stayed home), an observer and three mechanics to fly the aircraft to Borongaj, which they did in early **February**.

The Sparviero were incorporated into 19.ZJ and one of them was destroyed when on **13 February** 36 B-24 Liberator of 98th and 376th Bomb Group USAAF bombed Borongaj aerodrome and nearby marshalling yards. In mid-**March**, transport capacities of 19.ZJ were further strengthened with the arrival from northern Italy of two more Savoia Marchetti tri-motors, the SM.82s.

On **1 April**, the Germans informed the NDH authorities that they would pull out from Sarajevo and its surroundings within a week. This caught the Croats completely by surprise as they were not able to hold the city on their own. In a hastily organized evacuation, KZ engaged its modest transport resources, as witnessed by zast Bruno Južnić, pilot of 4.ZJ:

First transport machines arrived at Rajlovac already on 2 April and this continued in days that followed, until the 5th.



Settantanove of 255ª Squa is pulled by a tractor across the apron of Bari aerodrome towards the start. Aircraft of this squadron conducted only one raid on target in the Yugoslav Kingdom, bombing Cetinje on 14 April 1941.

(Archivio Centrale dello Stato)

Podgorica. The same day a SM.79 of RVC also flew a recce over the Yugoslav border, taking off at 12.05 and landing at 15.40.

RA emerged from the war against the Yugoslav Kingdom with an additional Sparviero: 'White 8' 3729 that was found at Gruda airfield on **17 April** stuck in the mud, stripped of many parts and with its fuselage canvas riddled by bullets fired by passing Yugoslav troops in the final days of the campaign. The plane was later repaired and flown to Ciampino aerodrome near Rome where it was temporarily taken on charge by Servizio Riparazioni Aerei e Motori (SRAeM - Aircraft and Engines Repair Service); its subsequent service is unknown.



Stripped of its old markings, SM.79I 'J-105' of MHKL at Ferihegy aerodrome near Budapest prior to being exchanged with Italians.

(Dénes Bernád)

A second SM.79I also entered RA service. After learning that a Yugoslav Sparviero was captured in Hungarian Transylvania, the Italian military attaché col. Umberto Nannini arranged for the ex-'White 30' MM22073, registered by the Magyar Királyi Honvéd Légierő (MKHL - Royal Hungarian Home Defense Air Force) as J-105, to be exchanged for two CR.42s. In **July 1942** he personally flew it back to Italy.

When the Axis broke up the Yugoslav Kingdom, Italy annexed part of Slovenia, Gorski Kotar, most of Dalmatia and the Adriatic islands and Montenegro. Parts of Southern Serbia and Macedonia were annexed to Albania which was under Italian rule. The peace didn't last long and within months, Yugoslavia became one of the most dreadful battle grounds for Italian soldiers. Until the Italian capitulation, many RA units would be engaged in the annexed territories, as well as Italian occupation zone in the NDH. Nonetheless, none were equipped with 'il Gobo' and any Settantanove occasionally seen were on liaison and transfer flights. The same applied for Istria and parts of eastern Adriatic coast and islands, which were a part of Italy that were later ceded to Yugoslavia. An SM.79 is known to have crashed into the sea near Preluk in the Bay of Fiume, pieces of which were recovered by divers during the 1980s.

Torpedo Bombers

The Armistice with the Allies signed by Italy on **8 September** did not remove it from the war. Apart from disarming Italian troops in the Balkans and France, German



A pair of Sparviero at Valtura airfield in the vicinity of Pola in the summer of 1943. In general, the RA employed obsolete types against the Partisans in Yugoslavia. SM.79s were in high demand in other theatres and so appeared mainly during flights to and from Greece.

(Boris Ciglić)

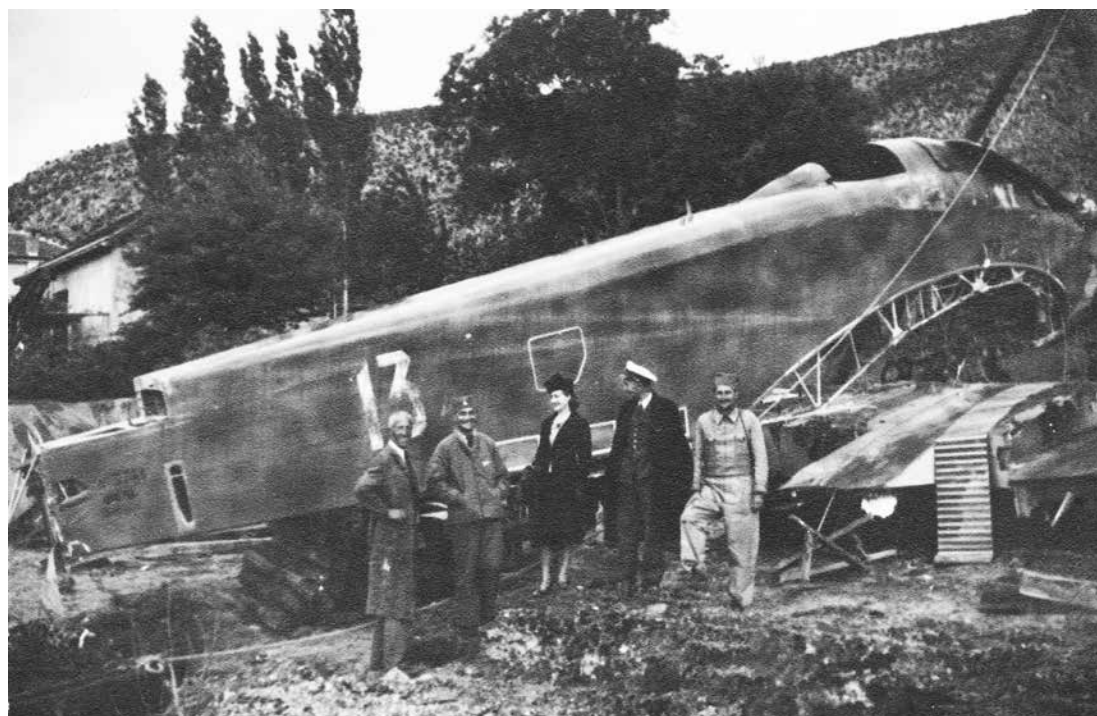
troops also quickly assumed control of Northern and Central Italy. Thus the Italians found themselves in two camps, with the Allies under the government of Pietro Badoglio, and the German puppet Italian Social Republic under Benito Mussolini that was proclaimed on **23 September**. The RA was also split into the Aeronautica Cobelligerante Italiana (ACI - Italian Co-belligerent Air Force) that operated in the south alongside the Allies and the Aeronautica Repubblicana (AR - Republican Air Force) in the north.

For a variety of reasons (avoiding possible confrontations with ACI, questionable legal status of its personnel and whether they fell under protection of Geneva Convention and German doubts regarding the loyalty of its ally, to name but a few) the AR was organized mainly as a defensive force. Only one of its units fell out of this mold and it was equipped with SM.79 torpedo bombers. Officially established on **1 January 1944**, 1° Gruppo Aerosiluranti (Gr A - Torpedo Bomber Group) 'Buscaglia' was named after magg. Carlo Emanuele Buscaglia, a famous RA bomber pilot lost in action in **November 1942**. It consisted of 1ª, 2ª and 3ª Squa, plus Squa Complementare (Complementary Squadron) for training and made its combat debut over the Anzio beachhead late on **10 March**. During action over the following month, 1° Gr A sustained heavy losses, including the loss of its CO, cap. Carlo Faggioni. Eventually, it had to be withdrawn from operations to rest and refit. With the Squa Complementare disbanded, under its new commander - cap. Marino Marini - the unit went back to action with a daring raid on Gibraltar harbor in early hours of **5 June**.

On **29 June**, the Italian air force in the north changed its name to Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana (ANR - National Republican Air Force). At the time, 1° Gr A 'Buscaglia' was considered ready for a deployment against Allied shipping in the Aegean and at 6.45 on **7 July**, ten SM.79bis tri-motors left Lonate Pozzolo airfield, bound for Greece. Two aborted but the remaining eight reached Zemun, where they stayed overnight. At 8.00 next morning they departed for Salonika, arriving at 9.50. Finally, at 19.00, seven planes reached their destination, Eleusis aerodrome near Athens. After two unsuccessful missions on **10 and 12 July**, with two aircraft lost on the latter date, four Savoias returned home via Zemun at 10.50 on the **13th** and the remaining two at 18.00 a day later.

On **30 July**, six Sparviero of 2ª Squa took off from Lonate Pozzolo for another round of ship hunting in the Aegean but dreadful weather forced them to stop at Villafranca, where one of them crashed. Two Savoias continued the journey to Zemun in the morning of the **31st**, but only one arrived. The other fell victim to 213 Sqn Red Section flying Mustang Mk.III, that had left Biferno at 7.00 heading for Celje led by F/Lt Clifford Scott Vos:

Having failed to penetrate the cold front, I ordered Red Section to turn about and set course 280° intending to sweep the gulf of Fiume. Red 4 (W/O Pickford) called up reporting on aircraft at 10 o'clock. I then ordered Red Section to climb and headed towards it. As we approached the aircraft, which was identified as a Savoia SM 79, it started to turn to port and dived towards the clouds. I followed it down delivering a quarter attack



The remnants of SM.79I 'White 13' after it had been pulled out of the Neretva and dismantled. The Yugoslav serial 3741 and, below it MM 22056 are clearly visible on the aft part of the fuselage. Standing second from left is kap Ik Vojinović, who left 7.BP on 19 August 1940.

(Vladeta Vojinović)

ber, except that the first 15 were allocated to aircraft in 81.VG and the remaining to 7.BP. About a month later, ŠVV issued orders for asymmetrical positioning of the 'Kosovo Crosses' i.e. their removal from the underside of the left and top side of the right wing. For some reason, this was not done on Savoias, all of which retained their lower insignia. Scarce photographic evidence of the upper surfaces suggests that some aircraft kept the 'Kosovo Cross' on the right wing instead.

Italian stencils were replaced with Yugoslav ones written in black Serbo-Croat Latin letters, but the Italian MM number below the horizontal stabilizer was retained. On the central part of the rudder, inscribed in two rows were aircraft's operational weights: empty (7.040 kg) and useful load (3.700 kg).

Machines of the 81.VG were marked with individual black numbers, sprayed over templates, in range from 1 to 15 on both sides of the central engine cowlings. Those in 66.VG and 67.VG carried large white numbers (1 to 30) on the rear part of the fuselage, hand painted, in various sizes, shapes and angles. So far, no evidence of any personal or commander's markings on VVKJ Sparvieros has been found.

Shortly before the outbreak of war, several aircraft were experimentally overpainted on the upper surfaces in a two tone camouflage of dark green (approximately FS 24079) and chocolate brown (FS 20118). The colors applied were domestically made and also used on license-built Blenheims and Do 17Kas. Existing photographic evidence proves that 'White 23' of 213.E



A neat row of 81.VG aircraft, with black escadrille numbers on central engine cowlings, at Zemun aerodrome during the inspection by Crown Prince Petar II on 27 April 1940.

(Šime Oštrić Collection)

SM.79I 'White 12', with original Italian honey-comb camouflage, at Paramythia on 14 April 1941.

(Ronald Dudman via Don Clark)



acquired such a scheme, while 'Black 14' of 262.E was thus coloured over the fuselage only and not on top of its wings.

Voyenno-vozdushnye sily

On **20 June 1941**, People's Commissariat of Defense of the USSR issued the first official painting manual to VVS units, introducing the camouflage made of black (AMT-6 on wood and linen surfaces i.e. AM-26 on metal skin) and light green color (AMT-4 i.e. AM-24). The new camouflage scheme was applied on most aircraft by **10 July**, sometimes in-between combat sorties. National insignia in the form of red stars was reduced to only four positions, on the tail and wing underside,

those on top of the wings being removed. Painting in field conditions led to many variations and improvisations. One example is the ex-Yugoslav SM.79I on strength of 299 ShAP, photographed after being partially and roughly hand-brushed with AMT-6 nitro paint. Eventually, the upper surfaces of all ex-VVKJ Savoias were overpainted in accordance with the new rules. As there was no mention of the underside in the manual, it probably remained in the old Italian light gray livery.

Royal Air Force

Upon being incorporated into the RAF and prior to being sent to Khartoum, the four SM.79Is received new markings



SM.79I 3738 of 724 NBAP after crash-landing on 21 December 1941. The plane carries the prescribed combination of black and light green colors on its upper surfaces.

(Mikhail Timin)



SM.79I 'Black 1', 261.E / 81.VG
por Miljko Vračarić
Ortiješ, April 1941



SM.79I 'Black 12', 3709, 262.E / 81.VG
por Radoje Nedeljković
Ortiješ, April 1941



SM.79I 'White 1', 211.E / 66.VG
por Milan Prodanović
Preljina, April 1941



SM.79I 'White 23', 213.E / 67.VG
kap Ik Evgenije Georgijev
Ortiješ, April 1941



SM.79I 'White 24', 214.E / 67.VG
por Miloš Jelić
Gorobilje, April 1941



SM.79I 'Black 5', 3712, 261.E / 81.VG
kap Ik Leo Bradaška
Kapino Polje, April 1941



SM.79I 'Black 14', 3702, 262.E / 81.VG
nar Anđelko Benković
Ortiješ, April 1941



SM.79I 'White 30', 3745, 214.E / 67.VG
ppor Asim Nožić
Gorobilje, April 1941