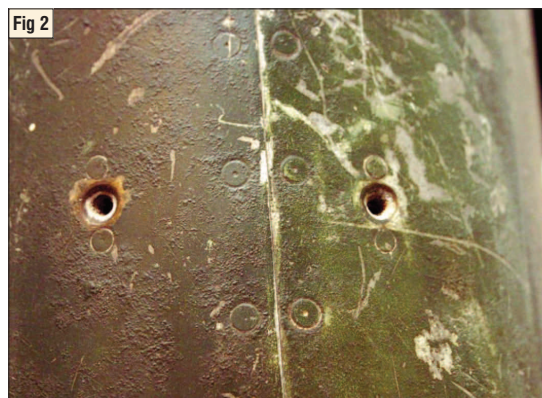


What colour were the later Spanish 109s?

There has been much discussion over the years regarding the actual colors used on the Bf 109s sent to Spain as part of the Legion Condor. The release of Ken Merrick's much anticipated *Luftwaffe Camouflage and Markings 1933-1945, Vol 1* has added further fuel to this debate, proposing that the commonly accepted light grey 63 over light blue 65 scheme may not, in fact, be correct.

The earliest operational Bf 109s to reach Spain were a batch of A models, which wore an overall silver coating. The suggestion has been made that the aircraft were in fact in natural metal, with a very thinly applied translucent surface protectant applied which carried a very faint greenish tinge. Photos of operational early aircraft, however, show a very smooth and uniform surface finish to the aft fuselage



assembly, with no variance in tone or any visible panel lines between the fuselage stations. This suggests that the panel lines were taped or puttied, then the assembly was painted, perhaps in silver. Other areas may well have been in natural metal, including the fin and forward fuselage; the photo of 6-7 certainly suggests the presence of a natural metal fin, wing root fillets, cowlings, and forward fuselage section. The wings also appear to be very uniform, and a photo of Bf 109A 6-4 taken from above exhibits considerable paint wear along the inboard wing area where the crew and pilot would typically tread. This suggests the wings also received a coat of silver paint.

The first batch of B models to reach Spain carried their factory finish of 70 and 71 over 65, which has been previously discussed. With the introduction of the C and D models to Spain, however, a new color scheme began to appear, and it is this which causes such puzzlement. The aircraft were

completed in the standard 70 and 71 scheme, but upon arrival in Spain, received an overall coat of a lighter color on their upper surfaces. For many years, it has been suggested that this color was RLM 63 *Hellgrau*, but Merrick proposes that the color used was RLM 62 *Hellgrün*. No supporting documentation has been unearthed one way or the other to date, which leaves us with the tricky task of deducing colors based on tonal values in old photos. This can be a dodgy enterprise at best, given the differences between orthochromatic and panchromatic film, operational environment, and even the amount of carrier added to the base pigment by the painter. However, scholarly works such as those by Merrick, Ullmann, Crandall, and others help us make an educated guess as to these colors based on known production practices.

It is those practices which would suggest that 63 would indeed be the more likely of the two colors used as an overall



This photo shows 6-88 warming up prior to a mission. The remains of this exact aircraft are currently in storage awaiting a buyer and restoration





This unaltered photo of Dornier Do 17E 27 o 15 from A./88 is shown to demonstrate the contrast of the aircraft's markings against the camouflage colors on the aft fuselage; the colors, from front to rear on the aft fuselage, are 62 Hellgrün, 61 Dunkelbraun, and 63 Hellgrau behind the upper part of the '15'

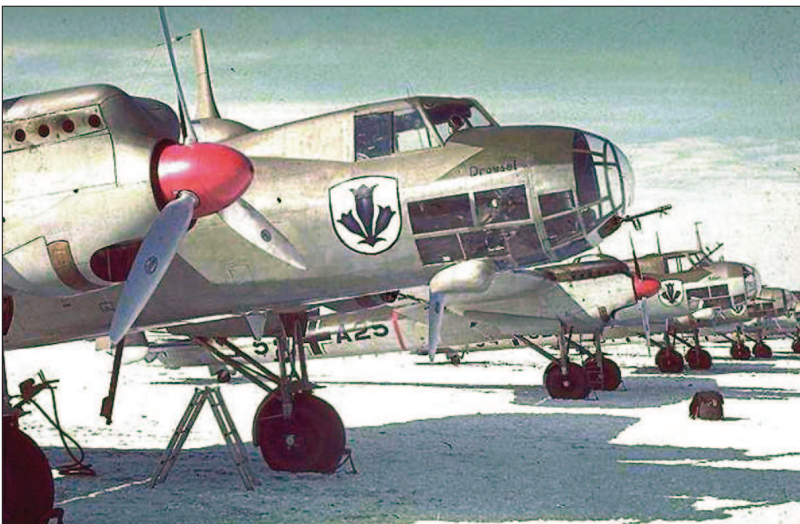
upper surface camouflage color. Quoting from Merrick's book, pg. 26:

From 1936 onwards, 63 replaced 02 as the external finish. That favoured the rationalization policy of colours and raw materials since 63 also formed the base colouring for the new three-colour upper surface camouflage introduced very early in 1936 for the new Ju 86 all metal bomber. To the base coat 63 were added segments of 61 and 62 to form a disruptive pattern, with 65 used for the lower surfaces. The painting schedule for the Do 17 bomber, which had also entered production that year, listed 63 simply as 'Nr. 63 grau'.

Given the timeframe of Spanish service and the extraordinarily rigid instructions regarding the application, care, and maintenance of the external paint finish on metal aircraft as documented so thoroughly in Merrick's work, it seems more probable that the officially specified base coat of 63 would be used on the aircraft.

An interesting opportunity to test this theory has recently presented itself. In mid-2005, a Bf 109E-3 hulk was offered for sale by William Moore of AeroLocker (www.aerolocker.com). As it turns out, this aircraft was the second Emil to be sent to Spain, where it received the code 6 o 88. The aircraft spent its entire service career in the Spanish Air Force, being unceremoniously consigned to a dump at the end of its service life. Fortunately, the remains were recovered, and will form an excellent basis for a thorough restoration (back to its original Spanish identity, it is hoped!). Mr. Moore was contacted regarding this aircraft, and he was gracious enough to supply several photographs of the tail area, which still retains a good

This photograph of Dornier Do 17Es of KG 255 demonstrates the warm nature of RLM 63, as well as the sheen of the aircraft after being freshly painted (Photo: via T. Fischer)



deal of original paint.

Figures 1 through 5 all show the top and side of fuselage stations 8 and 9, where the fin fairing bolted to the fuselage itself. The first thing which is immediately evident is that the aircraft was originally finished in 70 and 71, as shown by the close-ups in figures 1 and 2. Figure 3 is a photo taken in ambient light with no flash; there has been no color correction applied in this photo. Figure 4, however, is the same shot with the orange-yellow tinge removed via Adobe Photoshop. While still not perfect, this gives a more realistic interpretation of the colors on the airframe. Figure 5 is a view of the port side of fuselage section 9, while figure 6 shows the starboard side of section 9, at the point where the rudder meets the fuselage. The cold, light grey tones in these photos are remnants of the oxidized surface paint; note the chipped areas where the underlying coat of 70 and 71 shows through. In Figure 6, several fresh scrapes in this paint show a slightly warmer tone, more consistent with a faded 63 Hellgrau, which was quite similar to RLM 02 in tone and hue. These photos, while not 100% conclusive, do give strong credence to the theory that 63 was used on the upper surfaces of Messerschmitts in Spanish service.

Finally, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that this is not meant to be taken as 'gospel'; there are far too many variables at work to definitively declare 63 was used as opposed to 62, and research still continues on this subject. The interpretations expressed above are strictly those of the author, and are certainly open to discussion; the reader is encouraged to study other published works and photos, and to use their own best judgment when building a model of a Spanish Messerschmitt.