

COLORS OF WAR

WE DELVE INTO THE CHALLENGE ARCHIVES TO PRESENT ANOTHER SELECTION OF RARE COLOR IMAGES THAT HELP DEFINE AVIATION HISTORY

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Also photographed during 1939 in the Dutch East Indies, these two Koolhoven FK.51s were being utilized as trainers by the Royal Dutch East Indies Army. Winner of a 1935 Dutch contest for a new trainer, small numbers were ordered by the Royal Netherlands Air Force and the Dutch Naval Aviation Service. The Royal Dutch East Indies Army acquired 38 between 1936 and 1938 fitted Wright R-975E Whirlwind radials of 420-hp. The planes were rugged and reliable and some 27 were operational in December 1941 but on 5 December all training was shut down and two reconnaissance squadrons were formed in Java with the biplane. The aircraft were painted in a glossy brown camouflage.



As the Dutch government watched Japanese Far East aggression with growing concern, the decision was made to modernize the military in the Dutch East Indies. The Glenn L. Martin Company was offering an export variant of the Air Corps' B-10 bomber, which had been described as the first modern bomber. In 1936, an order was placed for 13 Martin 139-WH1s (export designation). This led to a political outcry as the Dutch Colonial Ministry protested that the Fokker T-V bomber be purchased instead but this aircraft was still on the drawing board. Also, the dated wood and fabric construction of the T-V would not hold up in the hot and humid climate of the East Indies. The Martin won out and on 2 September 1936, the Dutch East Indies Army (KNIL) took delivery of the first bomber, serial M-502, at Baltimore. The plane was disassembled and shipped along with M-502 to its new base at Andir, arriving in the middle of December 1936. This led to an order for 26 more of the improved 139-WH2 and, as tensions increased, Martin greatly improved the basic design as the Model 166 and in December 1937, the Dutch purchased 39 of these aircraft as the 166-WH3 and then 42 more with updated Wright Cyclones as the 166-WH3A. The last aircraft were delivered in May 1940, giving the Dutch a force of 120 Martins. Because of the lack of flying fields, all the bombers were initially based at Andir airfield

and Martin set up a school to train crews — the Dutch had not made plans on how to man the new bombers. Having zero bomber experience, losses were high and seven were destroyed by the end of 1939. By mid-1941, the Martins were already obsolete and on 8 December they went into action as Japanese forces stormed into the Malay Peninsula. Dutch and Australian aircraft attempted to fight back but losses were significant and the Allied forces moved back to Java. From that point, the Martins suffered constant losses as the Allies kept pulling back against enemy advances. During January 1942, 16 Martins were destroyed due to various reasons. When Allied forces surrendered on 8 March 1942, the Japanese captured at least 17 Martins, thus ending the type's brief life in the East Indies. This extremely rare color photo shows Martin 139-WH3 M543 and M536 at Bandung in 1939. As can be seen, the planes were delivered in pristine Air Corps colors of blue and yellow and even the propellers were polished. Dutch national markings of the time consisted of a roundel divided into blue, red, and white segments with an orange center. As Japanese aggression increased, the planes were camouflaged in a dark green and the national insignia changed to an orange triangle with a black border.