

Pesenta na Roland*

Andrea Brenco builds MDesign's excellent new 1/72 kit and describes Bulgaria's use of the LFG D.II fighter – *a sad Song of Roland** indeed.



LFG Roland D.II

1/72 Resin Scale Model



Limited edition
No.0172



LFG Roland D.II

Kit No: 0172

Scale: 1/72

Type: Resin

Manufacturer: MDesign

www.mdesignscalemodels.com



The kit comprises about forty parts and a multitude of supports.



A side cutter in this case sped up the operation, but often just a light finger pressure was enough.

The Tsardom of Bulgaria entered World War I as a member of the Central Powers on 4 October 1915. The Aeroplane Section of the Bulgarian Army was reformed with assistance from Germany and Austria. After flying eleven sorties from Sofia, aircraft were deployed to Kumanovo Airfield in support of advancing Bulgarian forces, but bad weather initially prevented any flying. As the frontline advanced, the unit re-deployed to airfields near Belitsa and Xanthi (now in modern Greece). Newly acquired German LVG aircraft were hastily pressed into action. Two more airfields were constructed near Udovo and Levunovo. The Allies began flying reconnaissance and bomber sorties against Bulgarian units on the Southern Balkan Front, and throughout the Bulgarian military aviation experienced a steady increase in both numbers

and quality of aircraft, however, they remained inferior to those flown by the Allies, especially the British and French. Six Roland D.II fighters were delivered in July 1917 with six Roland D.III fighters arriving in March 1918.

Several Bulgarian pilots flew with German air units at the Western Front and at Xanthi. They operated several types, including the Albatros D.III and Halberstadt.

On 27 November 1919 the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine was signed. As part of this the Tsardom of Bulgaria was banned from operating military aircraft of any form for the next twenty years, so during 1920 no less than seventy airplanes, plus engines, balloons, armament and even photographic cameras and other aviation

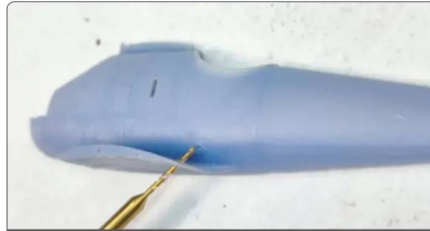
equipment were destroyed at the military airfield of Bozhurishte. Due to the devotion of the Air Troops personnel and with the help of the nearby villagers, several aircraft were hidden, thus evading Allied inspection following destruction. In addition, at least ten engines were also saved.

LFG ROLAND (PFALZ) D.II

The LFG Roland D.II single-seat fighter was manufactured by LFG (Luftfahrzeug Gesellschaft), and by Pfalz Flugzeugwerke under license. It used a plywood monocoque fuselage, with two layers of plywood strips spirally wrapped in opposing directions over a mould to form one half of a fuselage shell. The fuselage halves were then



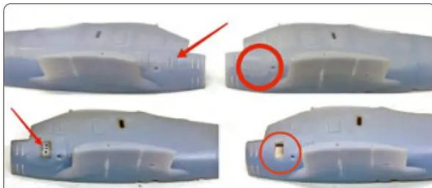
Having decided to insert steel rods to stabilize the structure anyway, I enlarged the existing holes.



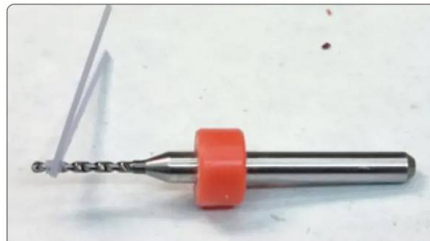
Since this was a test kit, some details will be modified in production. Here, for example, I had to enlarge the through hole for the landing gear structure, an operation that will no longer be necessary on production kits.



I also slightly enlarged the diameter of the reference holes, indicated by the arrows. In the fuselage, I've highlighted another detail that could be improved, providing the cockpit base as a single piece, rather than two halves. This has already been implemented in the D.III kit.



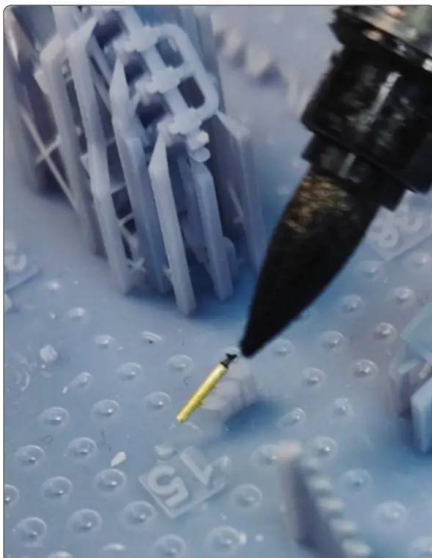
The sequences for opening the two inspection panels. First I removed the raised panel, Then drilled a series of holes of sufficient diameter. This opening was then widened using a cutter and square files.



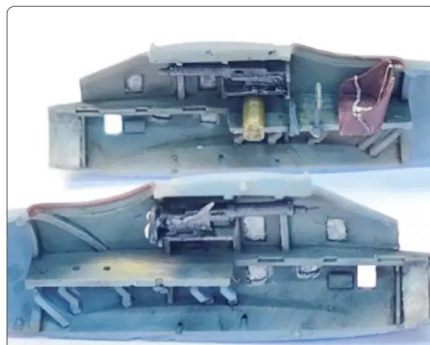
The hole for the landing gear axle was also enlarged, but it will no longer be necessary on the final kit.



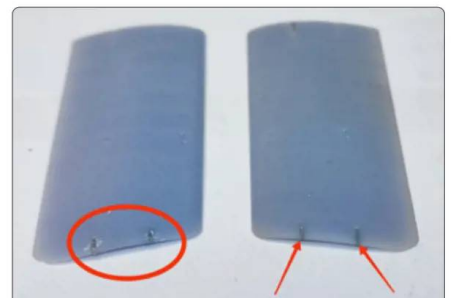
The ailerons are too precise; it's better to file off some of their length.



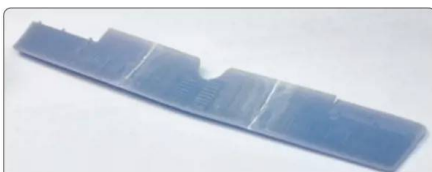
I preferred to paint the smallest details before separating them, such as the fuel tank pressurization pump.



The cockpit was painted in Tamiya XF66 Light Gray 66 then washed with oils. Almost all the details were glued before closing the fuselage. If you want to insert the engine afterwards, it's best to remove the gun barrels – they're invisible in the end and leave very little room for the engine.



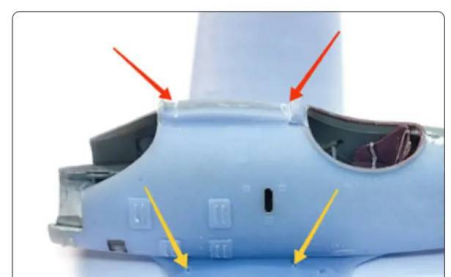
I closed the hole in the wing reinforcements with stretched sprue and cyanoacrylate, then a bit of Tamiya Liquid Surfacer covered everything.



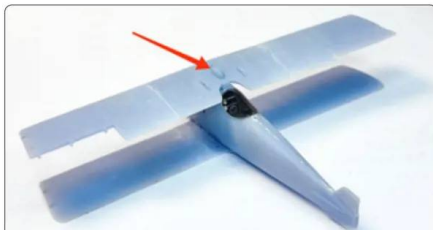
Using cyanoacrylate gel, I inserted steel pins into the previously prepared holes and then joined the three parts by carefully aligning them on a sheet of glass; The tiny gap was filled with cyanoacrylate and then sanded. The lower part required more attention to make the joint as invisible as possible, using a half-round file and sandpaper.



Joining the fuselages also required a little Tamiya Liquid Surfacer and sandpaper. I also inserted some steel pins and glued the two lower wing halves.



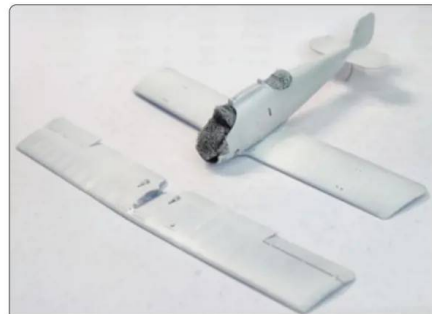
The yellow arrows show where I made holes for the turnbuckles. In red are the incisions where the elastic thread could pass through the wing support for the external struts.



This dry fit shows the main difference between the Bulgarian and German D.IIs. What looks like a tank is actually a condenser built by Bulgarian technical staff to prevent the radiator from venting all vapour into the atmosphere, which created numerous overheating and range problems, noted during the first test flights in Sofia. Bulgarian modifications to make the aircraft operationally better are extensively described in the book *The Bulgarian Hunters*.



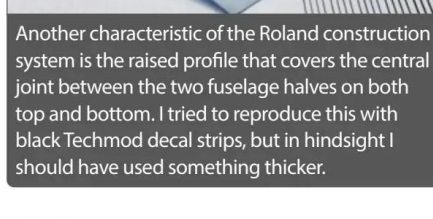
I preferred to add reinforcements to the tailplanes too.



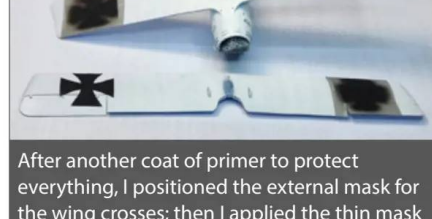
Finally, the final stages could begin. Mr. Hobby Aqueous White Surfacer 1000 formed the basis for all subsequent work.



I tried using the 1/72 Eduard surface panels (ref ER72004) for the first time to enhance the etched panels in the kit. Unfortunately, I didn't realize until too late that they were printed on a continuous sheet of transparent decals. I should have trimmed them first.



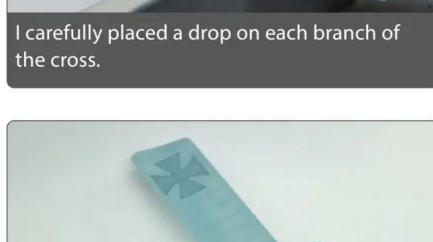
Another characteristic of the Roland construction system is the raised profile that covers the central joint between the two fuselage halves on both top and bottom. I tried to reproduce this with black Techmod decal strips, but in hindsight I should have used something thicker.



After another coat of primer to protect everything, I positioned the external mask for the wing crosses; then I applied the thin mask for the white outline with some trepidation, but it didn't actually deform as I feared, and it was simple to position it correctly.



Another thing I thought would be more difficult. Instead of using vinyl masks for the black, I tried using masking fluid.



I carefully placed a drop on each branch of the cross.



Finally, using a toothpick, I spread the fluid until I reached the thin mask that protects the white edge.



A light pre-shading with the light blue obtained by mixing ten parts Tamiya White (XF 2) and one part Medium Blue (XF 18). Note the vinyl mask for the 'M' on the fuselage.



The lower surfaces once finished.



Camouflage completed, masks removed, and test fit of the upper wing. I'd say we're done!



Dry brushing and detail painting with my trusty uniPOSCA oil pastels, followed by a coat of gloss clear for protection.

glued together, covered with a layer of fabric, and doped. This design, which was known as the *Wickelrumpf* (wrapped body) allowed the creation of a smooth, strong and light structure. The upper wing was attached to the fuselage by means of a large central pylon, greatly impairing the pilot's forward vision. Armament consisted of twin LMG 08/15 machine guns buried in the fuselage decking. The D.II was initially powered by a 160 hp Mercedes D.III engine, giving a top speed of around 180 km/h at sea level. Later aircraft, designated D.IIa, were powered by a 180 hp Argus As.III. The As.III offered poor performance above 3,000 m and the D.IIa was mostly relegated to operations on the Eastern Front. Nicknamed *Haifisch* (shark) for its sleek appearance, the D.II and D.IIa proved generally unpopular in service due to poor fields of view, heavy controls, and mediocre manoeuvrability and handling.

THE KIT

I received a sample kit from a new Bulgarian company, MDesign, active since 2025. They produce in-house, 3D-printed models relevant to the history of the Bulgarian Air Force during World War I. In addition to the Roland D.II, a Roland D.III and an Armstrong Whitworth F.K.3 will hopefully be available in 1/72 scale, while the offering in other scales is already more comprehensive.



Decals were applied to the tail and fuselage, flat clear varnish sprayed, and then a pitiful attempt was made to simulate the mysterious Cyrillic script (perhaps).



The last ties were a bit more nerve-wracking to secure, but the hardest part was done.



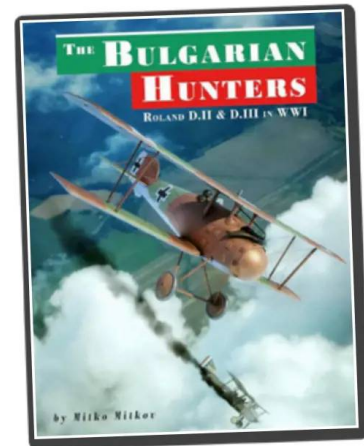
One last check before completing the assembly of the final details and starting with pin washing with very diluted oil paints.

The instruction manual is in downloadable PDF format. The first two pages provide a detailed summary of the history of LFG Roland, the unique construction technique, and the development of the D.II and D.III. This is followed by fairly easy-to-follow assembly images. The kit also includes a small decal sheet and three sheets of vinyl insignia-masks for three versions. Gunze Aqueous/Mr.Color codes are provided for camouflage and details. For rigging, you can rely on the photo, which also indicates the cooling tube, which must be self-built.

REFERENCES

In addition to *Windsock Datafile 47* by P. M. Grosz, published in 1994, I found a 2025 book by MDesign owner Mitko Mitkov, *The Bulgarian Hunters – Roland D.II & D.III in WWI*, by Aeronauts Books, which was truly interesting and indispensable. It has ninety pages, ninety-nine photos, and eleven colour profiles. It carefully traces the history and use of the D.II and D.III by the Bulgarian Air Force, from the failed

negotiations to obtain Albatros fighters from Germany to the forced destruction of all aircraft following the 1919 peace treaty.



MDesign's Mitko Mitkov's book is an excellent history of this relatively unknown fighter in Bulgarian Great War service.



I decided to use Part photoetched turnbuckles to make it easier to attach the elastic thread, which would have been more complex to attach directly to the pre-drilled holes. So, I inserted thread into the turnbuckles, then fixed these in place.



Engine installed, the last delicate step was inserting the landing gear structure into the pre-drilled holes, and then the final rigging was added.



At this point, using acrylic gel glue, I secured the four interplane struts, assisting their positioning by resting the upper wing in place for a few moments. Once secured, I also placed the cross-ties between them.



A bit of relaxation by painting some details on the engine.



The 'Monument to the Aviator'.

MY MODEL

I wanted to represent a D.II with Military Serial Number 2898/16, initially assigned to the Second Detachment but later transferred to the First Detachment, where it was flown by Captain Ivan Milanov. For the camouflage, national insignia, and some details, I referred to two photos in the book, showing a 'Monument to the Aviator' (perhaps made upon landing by the Captain himself?) and a third photo showing the same aircraft after quick repairs. This aircraft was later repainted with late-war insignia, changing the *Eiserne Kreuz* to *Balkenkreuz* but retaining the personal letter M. At a third stage, another insignia was added, a letter K on a white rectangular background. This is one of three options in the kit decals, of which I used only the wing-cross masks and the individual letter M. For the fuselage and tail crosses, I used decals left over from a KP kit, and for the white Cyrillic lettering, I used a uniPOSCA oil pastel.

Assembly begins in the classic manner, with the cockpit, which is reasonably detailed despite the limited documentation available. I have some doubts about the indicated position for the fuel tank, but it's virtually invisible once the fuselage is closed. Pay attention to the control column and fuel pump, which have their part numbers transposed in the instructions. The engine colours are also reversed – the cylinders are black, and the engine block is aluminium, not vice versa. Obviously, CA is needed to glue all the parts together. I often used gel CA for a longer setting time.

The most tedious part is separating all the parts from their myriad of print supports. They often come off easily, even with light finger pressure or a twist with tweezers: simply separate the thicker

part from the support surface first, then you can finish with files or sandpaper. The use of filler is limited to a few areas, especially at the joints that make up the lower and upper wings and at the horizontal tailplanes with the fuselage.

A peculiarity of the kit is the presence of various holes for inserting reinforcements for the wing/fuselage, wing/central radiator, and tailplane/fuselage connections. The instructions state these are for the larger scale kits – the 1/72 kit is downsized from the 1/48, so these reinforcements are unnecessary given the parts' lack of weight (although the holes are partially present but blocked). Obviously, knowing my limited ability to handle delicate parts, I decided to insert small reinforcement pins anyway!

The scaling down also entailed the need to increase the diameter of some locating holes for the undercarriage structure. I'm told that in future prints the problem should have been resolved.

The engine is a little gem in itself. It's a shame to hide it under the integral cowling, so I decided to leave it exposed as much as possible, so I left it until the building was almost complete to assemble. This, however, required some modifications to the part that would have remained hidden, to allow for its correct insertion. Following this decision, and to give the model a little more life, I decided to open two inspection hatches on the nose sides, using a section of a spare fuselage test print to create the corresponding panels. Once this was done, I airbrushed a neutral grey over all interior parts. Roland's construction method used by Roland involved covering the laminated wooden parts with fabric inside and outside, protecting everything with varnish. This was used in the production of the Roland C.II. In some photos,

you can see faint reliefs still visible on the exterior, indicating the diagonally-arranged wooden-strip construction. I attempted to achieve this effect by modulating the colour coverage during the painting. I also attempted to achieve the worn and discoloured effect on the wings, corresponding to the various ribs. The thickness of the wings and their struts is truly realistic and this contributes significantly to the final result of the model.

Other weathering steps were carried out with various uniPOSCA oil pastels, protected by layers of flat clear coat and then adding pin washes using highly diluted oil paint.

The unique structure of this aircraft, with the central fuselage supporting the upper wing, allowed simple alignment of the wing leading edges and the four struts. This allowed me to position most of the rigging cables, made with elastic thread, before gluing. Obviously, the upper wing must be assembled completely at an earlier stage, not as shown in the instructions, where the central section is attached to the fuselage first. This would make the inevitable filling of subsequent joints very complicated. The landing gear structure appears fragile, also being very 'scale', but it is actually very flexible and can be spread slightly to insert it into the through holes in the wings until it fits into the recesses in the fuselage.

After inserting the engine, the last details to position were the fin struts, aileron control rods, tail skid, wheels, propeller with spinner and rear plate, the exhausts, and a couple of small pipes on the wing radiator running between the condenser and the water tank cap. With that the model was finished. My thanks to MDesign for this kit, it bodes well for future 1/72 releases.

