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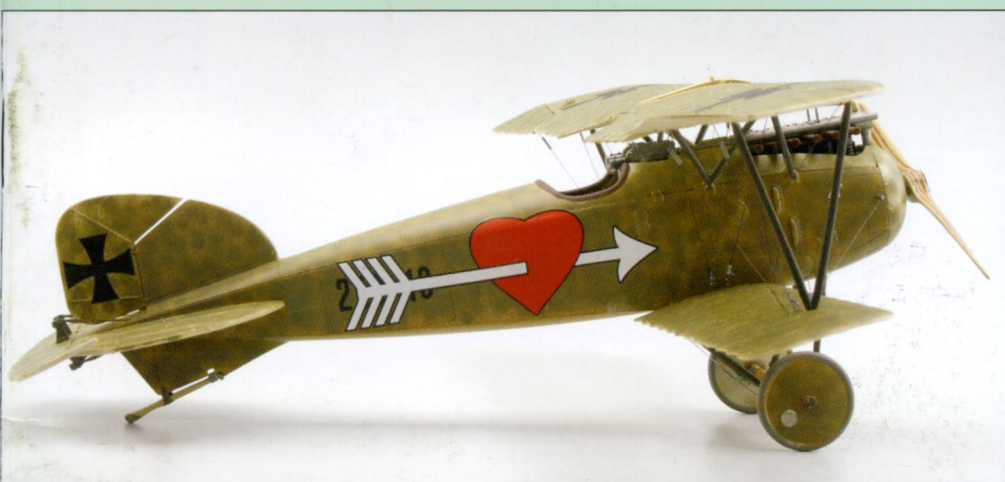
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**ROLANDS IN  
RUSSIA**

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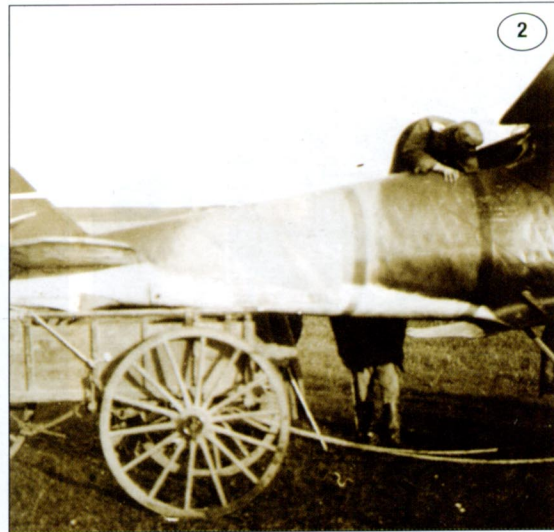
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\*

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# Rolands in Russia

By Marat Khairulin (Translation by Sergey Vlasenko)

ON 21 September 1917, military flyer *Poruchik* (Lieutenant) Sveshnikov AN from the 7th Corps Air Detachment of the 2nd Battle Air Group shot down and forced to land LFG Roland D.IIa 539/17. Sveshnikov, piloting a Nieuport 23, attacked four times (at a height of 4000, 3400, 400 and 250 metres) near the village of Tarnoruda and in the second attack damaged the Roland. The enemy pilot was injured and landed his machine near the village of Gnyla Malinuvka about 64 metres from barbed wire entanglements. For his victory Sveshnikov was awarded the Order of St. George 'Fourth degree'. The Roland was almost undamaged, except for a few bullet holes in the fuselage and a left wheel broken while landing. The documents of the 7th Corps Detachment do not contain data on the later use of this machine. In November 1917 the Roland, under repair, was based with the 11th Air Division; it was later taken to Moscow, where the entire 2nd Battle Air Group (consisting of 3rd, 7th and 8th corps detachments) was evacuated.

In Moscow, the Roland was assigned to the 1st air squadron of the Moscow Revolutionary Air Detachment. This unit was hastily formed in late 1917 and on 25 December deployed to the Front against Cossack troops of Ataman Kaledin. An air unit under command of military flyer Schuman arrived in Slavyansk via Kharkov serving under Antonov-Ovseyenko, the Commander of Red forces in Ukraine. The Roland now bore the number 690 and

retained its original Argus 180-hp engine (No.2622). On the photo showing the Roland (carrying German crosses) shot down by Sveshnikov is seen the following technical inscription on the port side of the fuselage:

*Leergewicht 690 kg.*

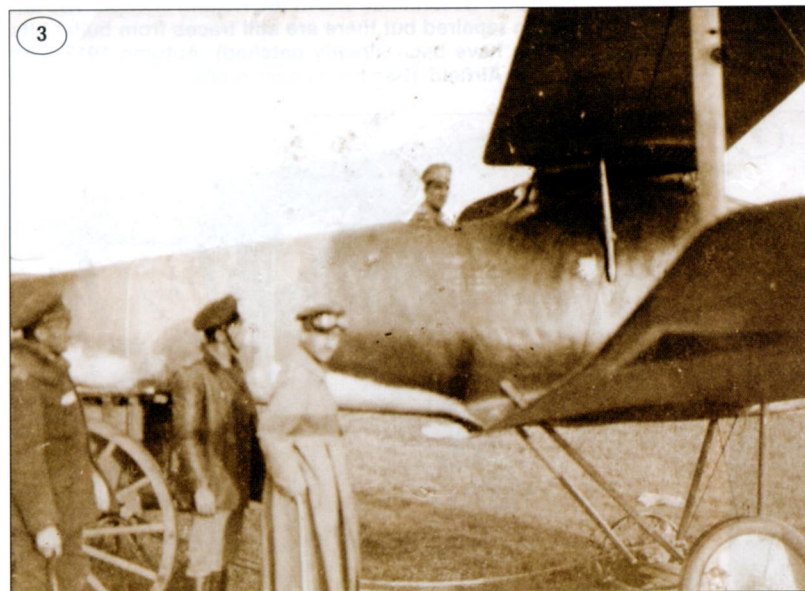
*Zul. Nutzlast bei vollem Tank 167 kg.*

Most likely the new number 690 was taken from this inscription! In surviving documents of the Red Air Force the D.II is designated numbers 690 or 539/17.

In April 1918, the Roland was taken away by Schuman 'at the disposal of Comrade Germashev' (Head of Aviation at the headquarters troops of Antonov-Ovseyenko). Most likely, in coming months it was delivered to Moscow, as evidenced by the following

**1 and 2).** The Roland shot down by *Poruchik* Sveshnikov, loaded on a cart. On the right side of the fuselage, the savaged ply skin is visible where the German cross was souvenired. The rim of the left wheel was wrenched off in the forced-landing on 9/21 September 1917, South-Western Front.

**3 and 4).** Sveshnikov in the Roland cockpit. Here one may see the split airscrew blade. Alongside are men of the 2nd Battle Air Group. 21 September 1917, South-Western Front.







records. On 24 March 1918, the famous aviator, Rossinsky BI founded at Moscow's airfield Khodynka, the so-called 'flying laboratory'. The test department of this laboratory, under the guidance of Zagoryanskiy NA made efforts to define the centre of gravity of different aircraft. To make the tests, they had to take 16 machines based in Moscow: from aviation school detachments and from the air-park-warehouse. On 10 July 1918 the Roland was weighed (without wings and rudder) and recorded as 585.83 kgs.

On 23 July the 3rd Corps Air Detachment under the command of military flyer Barkovsky, left Moscow for the Eastern Front (to the town of Alaty). The Roland was taken with them. In August, the entire group (the 3rd, 7th and 8th corps detachments) was transferred to Morshansk in the Tambov province. The reference to 'Roland 539/17' is found several times in documents of the 3rd Detachment. For example, on 1 October 1918, Roland 539/17 with Argus 180-hp engine 2622, was listed in the unit as 'defective'.

In December 1918, plans were formulated to link up with Soviet troops in Turkestan, and the Chief of Aviation, Eastern Front, military flyer Shiukov, was ordered to prepare such a flight. Consideration was given to using the Roland, on which in November, military flyer Barkovsky made a flight from Morshansk to Arzamas. But the aircraft was not suited for long flights, because 'it became clear that Roland has a flight radius of about 320 versts (341,37km), that's why it is unfit to make the flight to Turkestan, because before it reached the Arzamas, the pilot was forced to land with the propeller stopped due to lack of fuel'.

In February 1919, according to the detachment report, Roland 539/17 (Argus engine, No.2622-33 and one 'Spandau' machine gun No.1435) was in good condition. In June 1919, the 4th Fighter Detachment (formerly the 3rd Corps Detachment) was transferred to the Southern Front, but the Roland went for repair to a central Moscow air-park-warehouse.

The Moscow Central air-park repaired the Roland in 1920; it

was assigned No.301, and in January 1921 sent on to the 11th Fighter Detachment, based near Kacha, near the former Sevastopol military aviation school. The D.II was in good condition, had Argus engine No.2536, and two Vickers machine guns. The detachment was later reorganized in the 2nd non-separate detachment of the 2nd Fighter Squadron. It is known that it was based in Kiev in 1922, the Roland still in its service. During this period the D.II was adorned with a devil, attacking the workers' and peasants' star on the starboard side of the fuselage. The last known photo of the Roland is dated 1924, photographed on the premises of the 2nd permanent base at Kharkov. Obviously, the machine was put there for safekeeping.

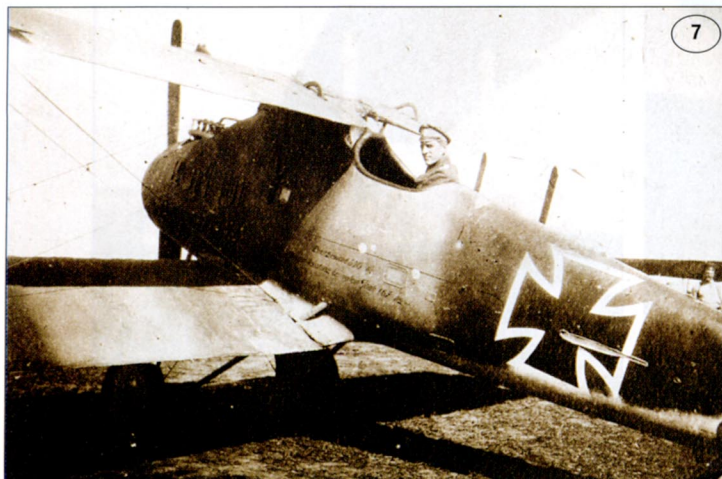
Information about the second, Pfalz-built (as evidenced by its markings) Roland D.IIa, which ended up in Russia became known through photographs of this aircraft with a white stripe on the fuselage. In August 1917 its fuselage was photographed in Kamenetz-Podolsky (other sources: Kremenchug). The number on the aircraft and the circumstances of its capture are unknown. In *WINDSOCK DATAFILE No.47* this machine was mistakenly identified as the Roland shot down by *Poruchik* Sveshnikov.

It is likely that the abovementioned Roland was in service within the 1st Gen. Alekseev's Air Detachment of the Volunteer Army.

**5). *Poruchik* Sveshnikov (with binoculars) behind the Roland shot down by him.**

**6). Pilots from the 7th Corps Air Detachment of the 2nd Battle Air Group. *Poruchik* Sveshnikov (with binoculars) and *Podporuchik* (Sub-lieutenant) Spatarel (left) pose with the Roland. 9/21 September 1917, South-Western Front.**

**7 and 8). *Poruchik* Sveshnikov sits in the Roland cockpit. The left wheel has been repaired but there are still traces from bullet hits (some of which have been already patched). Autumn 1917, 2nd Battle Air Group Airfield. (See front cover profile)**



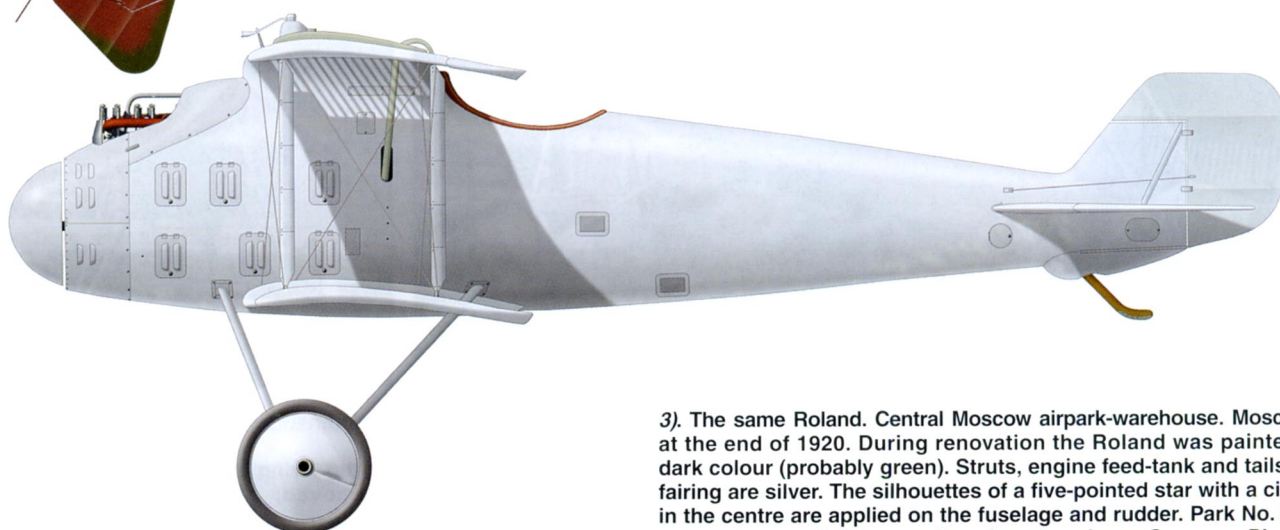




1). LFG Roland D.IIa 539/17. 7th Corps Air Detachment of the 2nd Battle Air Group. Autumn 1917. The machine bears original German camouflage, with non-standard location of camouflage paint on the top wings and tail (most likely the result of repair by its previous owners). Wheel repaired. Engine metal panels are partly missing. The identification marking (German cross) cut from the starboard side is not patched up. Bullet holes patched partially. Sources: Photos 7-11.



2). The same Roland. The 1st Air Squadron of Moscow Revolutionary Air Detachment, Slavyansk, January 1918. Fully overpainted in silver, markings on fuselage, empennage, and (probably) the wings are absent. As seen in the photo, the Roland is shown with dismantled radiators. Source: Photo 12

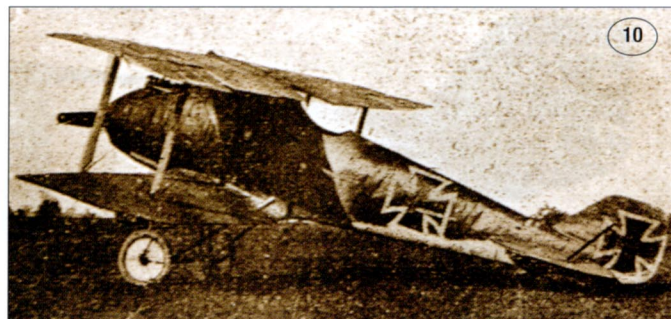


3). The same Roland. Central Moscow airport-warehouse. Moscow, at the end of 1920. During renovation the Roland was painted a dark colour (probably green). Struts, engine feed-tank and tailskid fairing are silver. The silhouettes of a five-pointed star with a circle in the centre are applied on the fuselage and rudder. Park No. 301 marked on the fuselage, tail and upper wings. Sources: Photos 16-17.



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9 and 10). The Roland on the 2nd Battle Air Group airfield, circa Autumn 1917

11). Autumn 1917, the 2nd Battle Air Group Airfield. It is clearly seen that the upper wings and horizontal tail bear non-standard camouflage, obviously the result of repair by its previous owners.

12). Commander of the 1st Air Squadron of Moscow's Revolutionary Air Detachment, Ivan Schuman, tries out the Roland cockpit, January 1918. Note the shadows from the upper wing which implies that

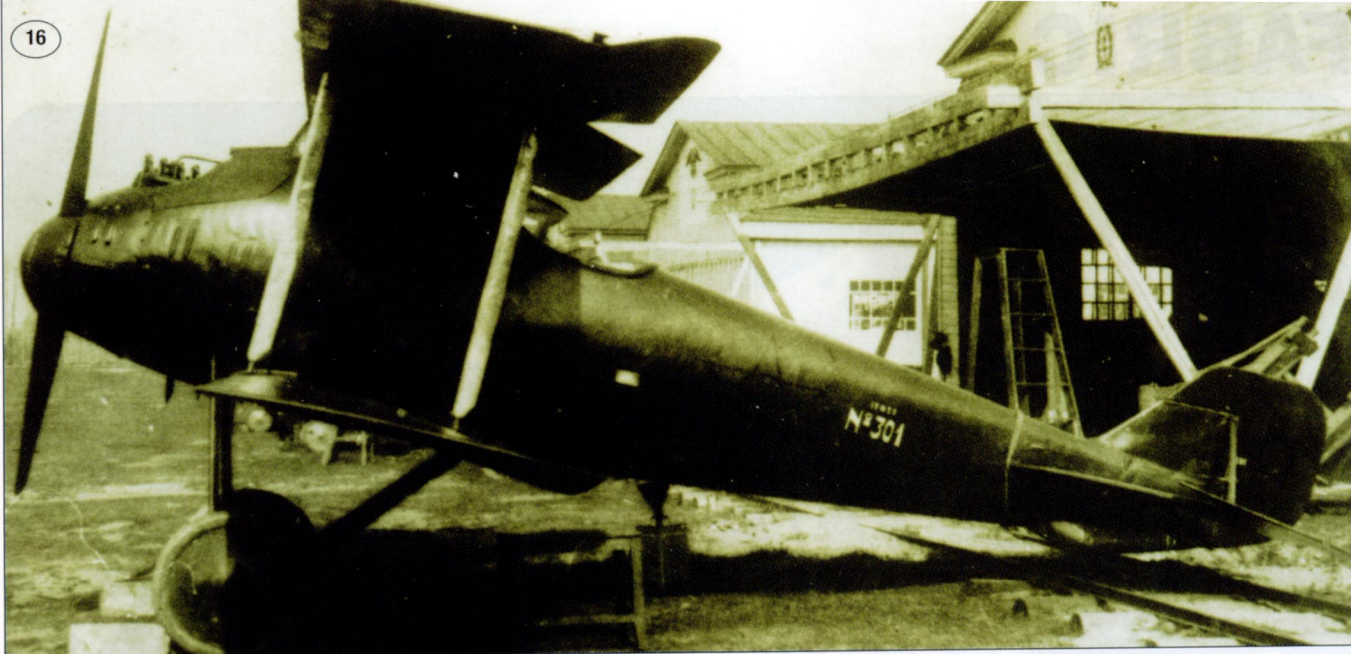
the radiators were dismantled.

13 and 14). The Roland at the 'flying laboratory' of Zagoryanskiy N. Wings and tail are removed; July 1918. Khodynka field Moscow.

15). Within the 3rd Corps Air Detachment of the Red Air Fleet. Here the Roland fuselage can be seen covered with tarpaulins. Nearby stands an equally forlorn Spad 7. Winter 1918/1919, Morshansk, Eastern Front.







In reports dated January 1919 we find mention of a Roland. The 1st Air Detachment under the command of a military pilot *Shtabs-capitan* (Captain) Kaputovskiy with six aircraft in service, was based at Ekaterinodar. In the lists of detachment assets are registered a Roland (number not given) with Opel 185-hp engine No.1112461. In February 1919 the detachment went to the Front (Krinichnaya), but the Roland was no longer mentioned in documents of the detachment. In March 1919, the commander of the 1st Air Park of the Volunteer Army, Captain Yakovlev, reported from Simferopol, that Roland No.895 of *Shtabs-capitan* (Captain) Ljashchenko from the 1st Air Detachment was under repair. It was the last mention of a Roland in the Aviation of Volunteer Army documentation.

#### Acknowledgements:

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#### Sources:

Russian State Military Archive (RGVA), Moscow.  
Russian State Military History Archive (RGVIA), Moscow.  
*Winged Prisoners of Russia (Krylatije plenniki Rossiji)* by Alexandrov A O, Petrov G F St.Petersburg, B&K, 1997.  
*Air Fleet Herald (Vestnik vozdushnoy floty)*. 1918.

WS

The Central Museum of Armed Forces, Moscow.  
The Central House of Aviation and Cosmonautics, Moscow.  
Family archive of military flyer Spatarel I K.  
Archive of Petrov G F.

16 and 17). After repair at the central Moscow air-park-warehouse. On the fuselage can be seen drawn silhouette of a five-pointed star and park No. 301. (Moscow, 1920)

18). An unknown red military flyer poses for the camera. On the star-board side of the Roland is the devil attacking the workers' and peasants' star. 2nd non-separate detachment of the 2nd Fighter Squadron, Kiev, 1922.

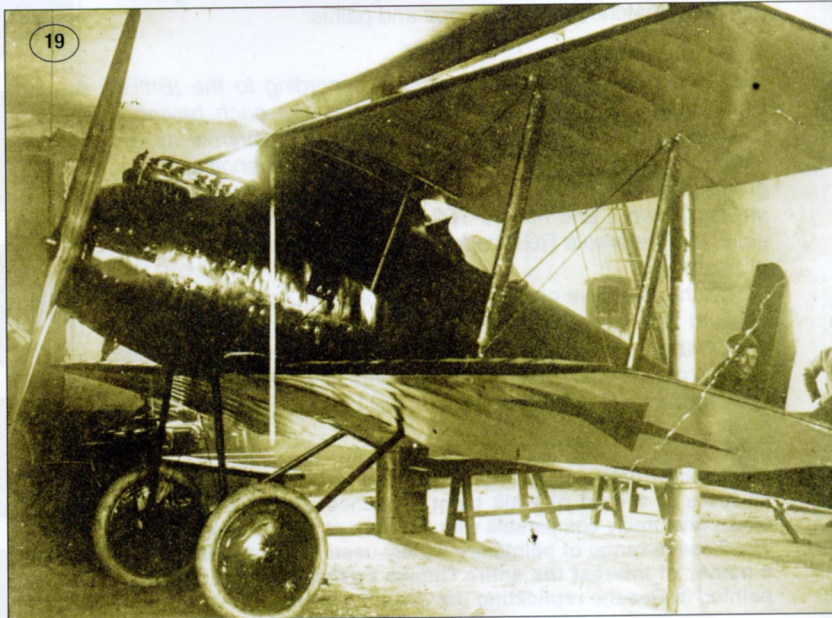
19). The last known picture of a Soviet Roland newly overpainted according to the standards of the time: uppersurfaces in green colour, undersurfaces in light blue. 2nd permanent base, Kharkov, 1924.



17



18



19





## Rolands in Russia – once again by Marat Khairulin

It often happens - missing data comes to light only *after* publication and so it was following our article 'Rolands in Russia' (*WINDSOCK Worldwide Vol.26, No.4*). Since that issue we have found two more photos of the ex-German Roland D.IIa during its early period of service with the Red Air Force. The caption to the original colour profile can now be corrected to provide the correct date and locale, and our all-new colour artwork reflects the new data.

As regards the history of the Russian Rolands, we still have some questions to answer: the first appearance of the Roland when it carried the devil emblem, and when the D.IIa entered service with the opposing Volunteer Army service. My grateful thanks to the following for helping me with this update: Sergey Vlasenko (Kiev), Eugene Ushakov (Odessa); also Aleksandr

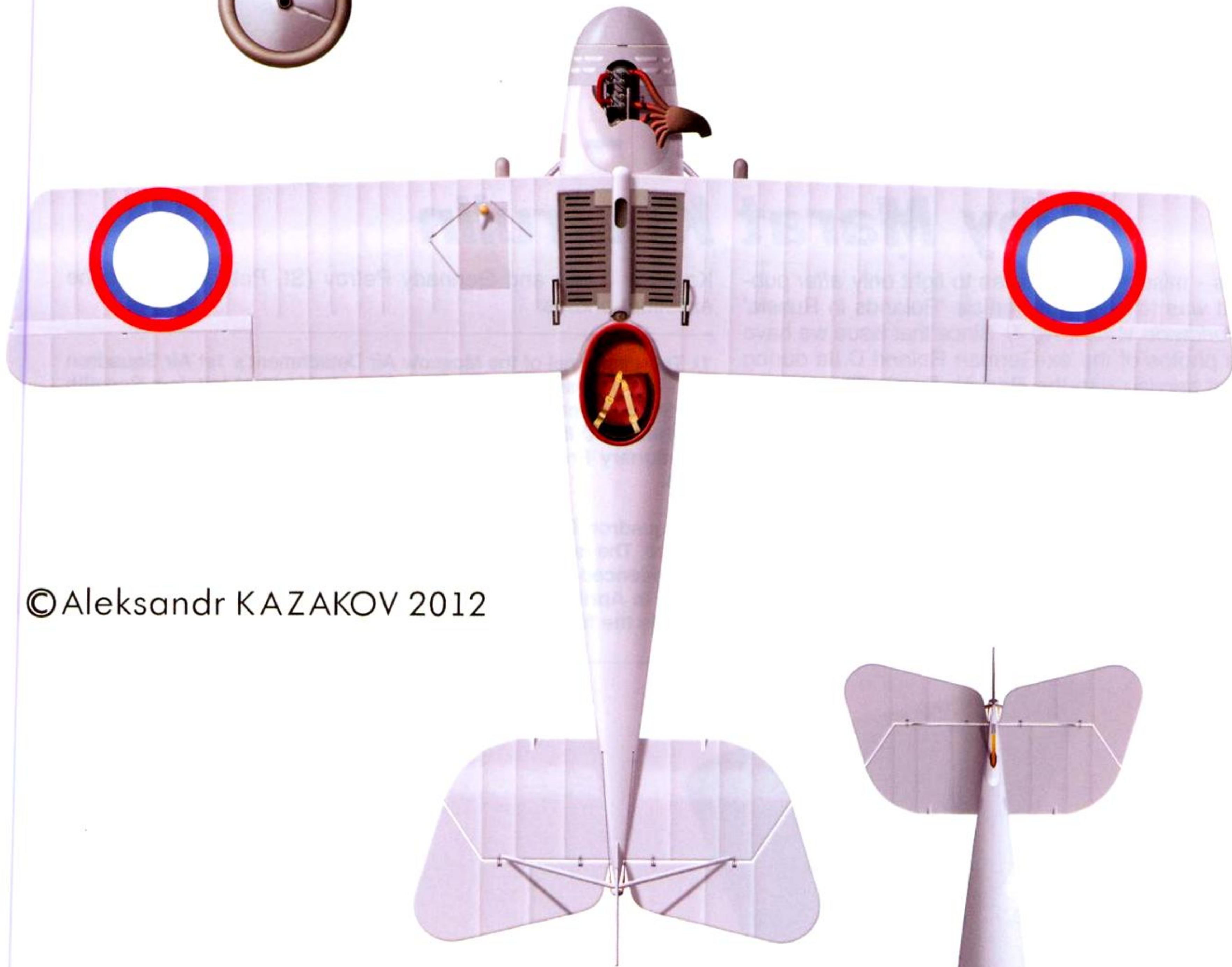
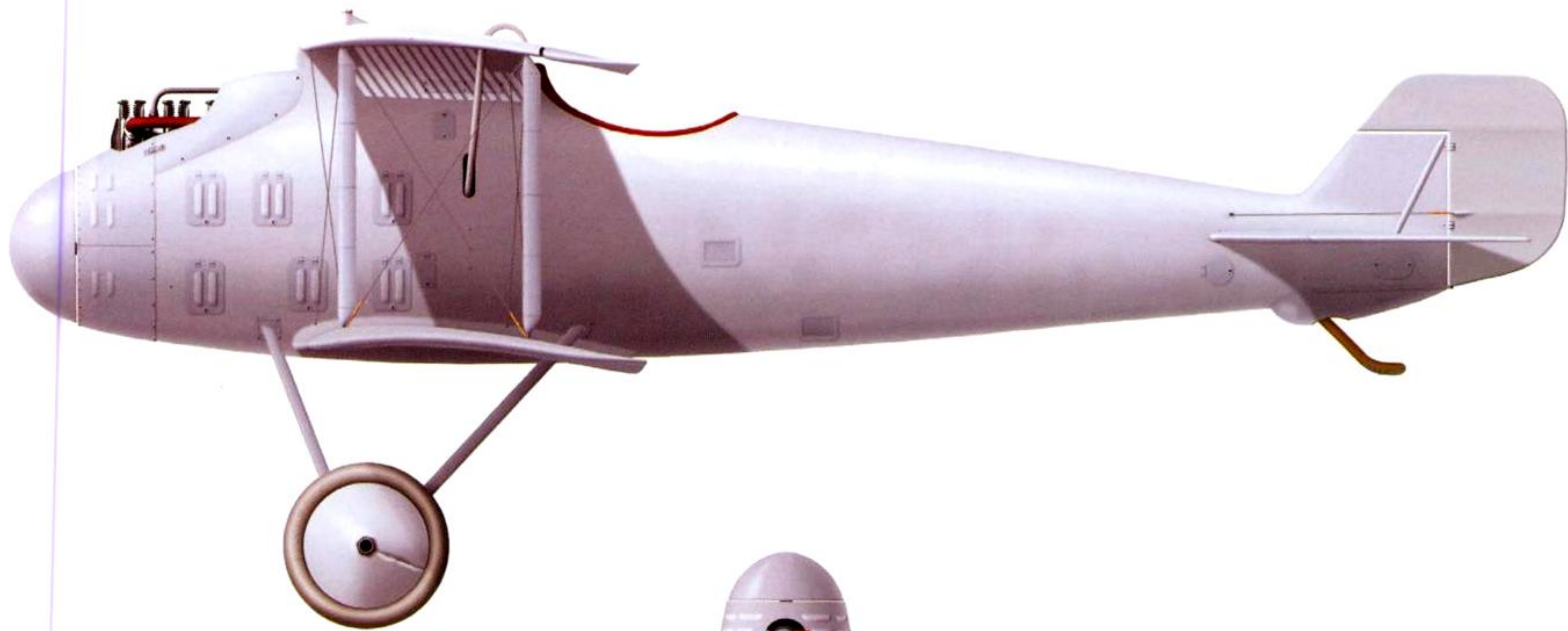
Kazakov (Orel) and Gennady Petrov (St. Petersburg) for the excellent photos.

1). The personnel of the Moscow Air Detachment's 1st Air Squadron with its commander, I P Shuman in the centre. At left, is a Sopwith 1½ Strutter bearing typical Russian wing roundels and, at right, the Roland D.IIa with its radiator and gravity tank removed. 'Revolutionary Front against ataman Kaledin', Pologi station, April 1918.

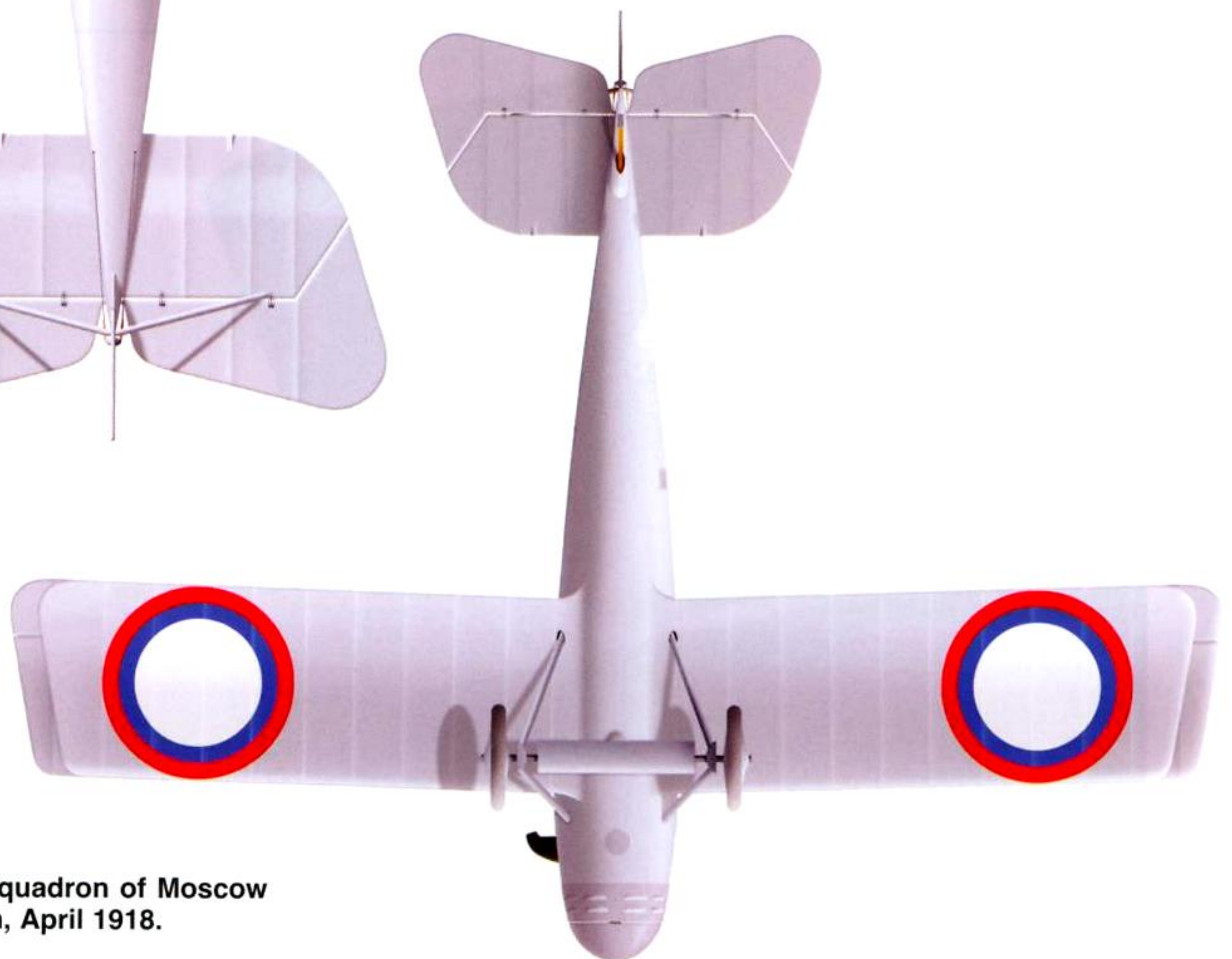
2). Squadron Commander Shuman poses in the aluminium-doped Roland. The radiator unit has been removed but the shutters remain as evidenced by the oblique 'shadows'. The photo was probably taken in April 1918; comparison with that reproduced in *WS 26/4* reveals the full-chord roundels of the lower wing surfaces.







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1). Roland D.IIa (serial No. 539/17), 1st Air Squadron of Moscow  
Revolutionary Air Detachment, Pologi station, April 1918.



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