Tamiya's 1/48th "Rufe" Floatplane

By Mark Murray

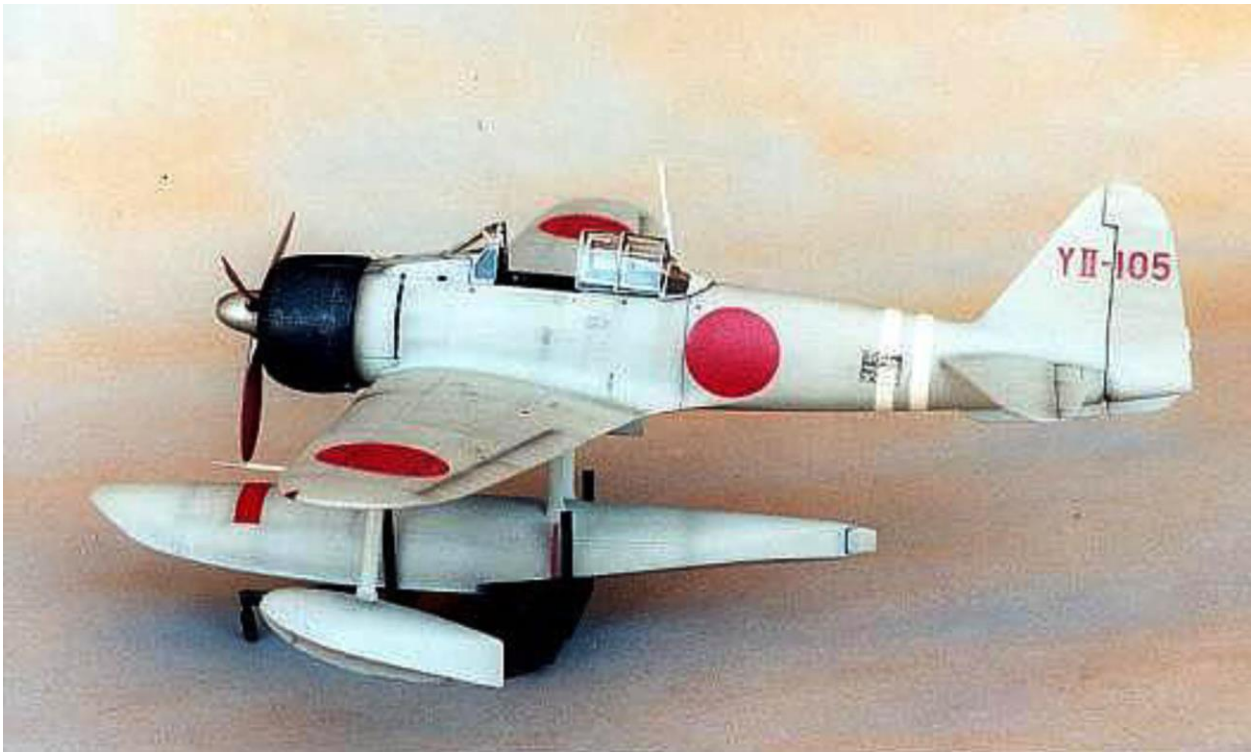
This kit was one of Tamiya's first aircraft kits to ever be released, according to the stamping on the sprues, this kit was stamped in 1970. I guess this one could perhaps be considered an antique by today's standards. Not being of the Royal Order of the Micrometer Police, I didn't measure out the scale length or wingspan on this example by the manufacturer, I figured that it looked right when I tried to piece it together during my dry fit stage, so that was good enough for me.

Some of the accessories in this kit include; two pilot figures (one standing, the other sitting to be posed in the cockpit,) bombs on bomb racks, a beaching cart, two canopies (one molded as one piece, the other in separate sections so as to pose for an open cockpit,) and a boarding ladder. This is a lot more than what we seem to get in today's kits.

The decals gave options for seven different versions that could be built, three overall gray, the others being green and gray.

I usually dry fit my projects before I build them. As this helps eliminate problems later, when you're actually gluing things together. To do this, I'll tape the pieces together, and do a run through assembly. A couple of potential problem area's that showed up were in the thinness of the trailing edges of the wing fillets on the fuselage, the fit of the main pontoon support to the underside of the wing, and the gaps that were evident in the fit of the front windscreen to the cowling area. Knowing where the trouble spots were, I could begin to build this kit.

I generally build my models in units. The first naturally is the cockpit. Since I was building this as an out of the box model, I didn't have to worry about adding any extra detail to this area. The cockpit is represented by a floor, with the control boxes on the right side and the rudder pedals molded as a single piece, the left side interior wall, the rear bulkhead, the control panel, the control stick and a seat. The instruments are represented by decals, which really weren't so bad once applied to the instrument panel, and the dial faces were glossed over. The color



of the cockpit was painted with a mixture of green, silver, light gray and a drop of blue. I know that a lot of modelers use a blue-green that is supposed to represent a color known as Aotake, however I've yet to see a cockpit of a Japanese airplane painted this color. The only detail allowed for OOB aircraft interiors, is the addition of simple seatbelts. Mine were made of tissue paper straps, and bits of plastic card to represent the buckles. These were added to the seat that had been painted silver. Before adding the seat to the cockpit, and inserting the whole thing into the fuselage, I did my usual shading and dry brushing to bring out the details of the various knobs, switches and dials.

With the fuselage halves and cockpit all glued together, I deviated from the instructions and fitted the bottom wing half to the underside of the fuselage. Then I mated the tops of the wings with the bottom. This way, I could avoid any possible problems that might arise from the wing fillet join. As far as I can recall, there weren't any problems that were encountered. Perhaps dry fitting beforehand pays off ? Now assembly proceeded very quickly with the additions of the rear horizontal stabilizers, the floats and the building of engine/cowl unit. However I did not join this last unit to the fuselage, due to painting it separately, and adding it after the main airframe was finished being painted. As mentioned earlier, the main center float had a slight mismatch to the mounting boss on the underside of the wing. This was cured by some careful sanding before and after the joining of the two units. Now that all of the main pieces are assembled, it now looks like an airplane, time for painting it. Oh, before I get ahead of myself, during this mad rush of building, I took the time to carefully fit the front windscreen to the fuselage. The gaps on the underside of the windscreen were corrected by a combination of sanding the underside of the windscreen that is hanging lower than the other, sanding down one of the machinegun humps on the cowl and shimming one side of the windscreen that was leaving a gap of about a 16th of an inch. With patience, and a lot of swearing, a good fit was eventually attained.

This "Rufe" represents one from the 11th Air Flotilla. So the paint scheme was calling for the overall grey, with twin white bands located at the rear of the fuselage, just in front of the vertical stabilizer. I used Testors I.J.N. gray, mixed with a some Radome Tan and a pinch of White. Don't ask me the percentages of the mix, as this wasn't

recorded, and the model was completed a while ago. Besides, I just kept mixing until the color looked right to me. This was sprayed all over the model in one session. Of course I'd already masked off the cockpit so there wouldn't be any over spray in it. Once this had dried thoroughly, say for about a week, I went forward with spraying on the Hinomaru's. I measured the ones on the decal sheet, and cut circles of the same size in some friskett paper, this was then laid over the wings and fuselage sides in the appropriate areas and shot with a slightly faded red. The fact that none of the Hinomaru's had the white outer edging made this an easy job. The warning stripes for the propeller on the main float, along with the beaching gear marks were also masked, and sprayed after the other markings were dry. By the way, one thing I should mention here is, when spraying colors on planes such as these, (meaning combat aircraft that were often left out in the elements,) I usually spray the upper horizontal surfaces in a more washed out color than those on the sides and the bottom. The fuselage bands were then masked and applied once all the other markings were done. I used Floquils Antique White for this, With regular white on the very top, again keeping in mind the idea of weathering. The engine cowl was sprayed a black with a couple drips of dark blue mixed in, this I believe softens the harshness of the pure black. It was at this time that I chose to spray on the gloss coat for the few decals that I had to use. These were the markings on the tail, and the little data block on the left side of the fuselage, just in front of the horizontal tail. With these in place, I sprayed on a second clear coat to seal the decals, and proceeded with the weathering that consists of smudges and stains. To create the grime that is on these aircraft, I usually shoot a combination of clear blacks, browns and various darker grays. These are sprayed at hinge joints, access panels, around gun barrels and other areas where grim and dirt are ever present. I also dry brushed silver and aluminum on the wing root areas, and the bottoms of the floats and on the engine cowl to imitate rubbing wear from abrasion and handling. Once all this was done the airframe was given a coat of Gunze Clear Flat on the tops, and part way down the sides, with a custom mixed semi-flat from mid-sides to the undersides.

The propeller was assembled and painted Testors Chrome Silver all over, then gloss coated and masked so that the back of the prop blades could be sprayed the flat reddish brown that was common on most Japanese aircraft of the time. I used hypo tubing for the pitot tube, as it's a lot stronger than a thin plastic piece in the kit. I masked the canopies with Black Magic masks, sprayed them with a base coat of black, (to represent the interior color of the framing,) then shot them the same color as the rest of the airframe. I painted and weathered the beaching trolley, glued the plane to it, and Voila, I had a finished Rufe floatplane. By the way, I should've mentioned this earlier, when you assemble the main float, make sure you put in a fair amount of weight in the front, otherwise you'll have the model flopping onto it's tail.

For a model that was produced in the very early 70's,this kit holds up VERY WELL when compared to today's kits. Yes, you could go out and buy the Hasegawa example, but you'll generally end up paying two-thirds more than what this kit sells for. Except for the minor fit problem on the windscreen, This was an enjoyable build.