

Accurate Miniatures 1/48 F3F-2



By Mike Hanlon

Accurate Miniatures exploded on to the modeling scene in the mid 90's. By 2001 it was over. Although still in existence, the last kit produced by AM was a 1/48 Vultee Vindicator designed but never released during the 90's. Today's management seems content to crack the bones and suck the marrow out of the original team's work. The original Accurate Miniatures kits have been re-released by AM as well as being reboxed by Eduard and Italeri. In turn Accurate Miniatures has reboxed bag shots from Eduard, Revell, and Italeri.

Released in 2000, the F3F-1 and F3F-2 were AM's only foray into the world of biplanes. A first in modeling, the kits included photo-etched details including the flying wires. The decal sheet included options for every -1 and -2 in service.

I built the -1 soon after its original release; the -2 languished until recently when the club decided to do an "Anything Navy" contest. In the last few years, Yellow Wings Decals has released several sheets of decals for the little Grummans including squadron and individual aircraft markings and section stripes and chevrons, which enable the modeler to finish these colorful aircraft without having to mask and paint the fuselage stripes and upper wing chevrons. Although the kits include complete markings for all aircraft,

Accurate Miniatures would have you piece together the squadron codes and serial numbers from individual numbers and letters. The Yellow Wings sheets have the codes and serial numbers printed together as one piece and so are much easier and quicker to apply.



Construction begins with the interior which was painted in Aluminum lacquer on the real aircraft. To replicate this I used Alclad Aluminum. Accurate Miniatures always had their own ideas on engineering kits, the F3Fs are no exception. While assembling the interior, one of the sidewalls is must be folded and glued to the cockpit floor. The instrument panel is molded in clear plastic and includes a decal for the rear of the panel. The rest of the panel is painted black while the gauges are left clear to allow the dials to be seen, a lot of work for a panel that really can't be seen in the completed model.

Once the interior is painted and assembled, the fuselage is glued together trapping the tail wheel strut and tail hook between the fuselage halves. The remainder of the fuselage assembly is uneventful. The interesting part is installing the landing gear. Accurate Miniatures has an aversion to simple landing gear assemblies. I do not believe that any other their other kits, certainly not the Avenger, Dauntless or Yak, had landing gear struts where a pin was glued into a hole. As such, great care must be taken when mounting the main struts.

When Bill Bosworth was still with AM, he did a series of builds including hints to get around problem areas. He did an F3F-1 build which is still available on the AM website here:

<http://www.accurate-miniatures.com/builds/f3f-1/f3fbuild.shtml>

Even carefully following his instructions the landing gear is fiddly. On the first kit I built nine years ago I wound up with one side shorter than the other. This time they were even (more or less).



Once the fuselage is together it is time to begin painting the sub-assemblies. The one big difference between building models of biplanes and monoplanes is that the biplane needs to be painted and decaled before final assembly. The metal surfaces of the real F3F (the fuselage, tail planes and cowl) were painted with an aluminum colored lacquer. The fabric surfaces (the wings) were painted with a silver colored dope on the lower surfaces and an orange-yellow dope on the upper wing which wrapped around the leading edge of the for the six to twelve inches. I used a variety of Alclad shades for the fuselage and wings. I wasn't concerned with the specific shade of aluminum. I just wanted different shades on the fuselage, wings and control surfaces. The upper wing was painted with Gunze Sangyo Yellow-Orange.

The aircraft I chose to depict was a Marine aircraft from VMF-1. Although Yellow Wings supplies the color fuselage band and wing chevron, I still had to mask and paint the

cowl with Model Master Willow Green. Once the paint had dried, I began to apply the decals. The majority of the decals came from Yellow Wings. Close examination of the squadron insignias showed crisper detail on the Yellow Wings decal. I did use the national insignias and tail stripes from the AM kit. The white of the national insignias was just short of being translucent. I could see the yellow below the decal as I applied it, but once set it was not really noticeable. Nevertheless, I would use an aftermarket insignia next time.



Once everything had set, I attached the canopy, the engine, the cowling, the tires (three pieces per side), lower wings, tail planes and upper wing. Once set I added the interplane struts. This is an area where AM's engineering shines, the cabane struts are already molded to the fuselage and set the proper angle for the wings and struts.

The one thing about biplanes that scares modelers is the rigging wires. Accurate Miniatures answered this concern with photo-etched wire sized to fit the wings as well as other photo-etched accessories. Ten years passed since this kit was released, what was once a state of the art accessory is now showing its age. The photo-etched

material is stainless steel which is very difficult to cut particularly in comparison to modern Eduard sets. Once cut, extreme care has to be made not to bend the wires. I was fortunate to have two sets of wires to work with, but it still took me two nights and four hours to install six pieces.

While not perfect, the end result is pleasing and distinctive. If you want to try a biplane the Accurate Miniatures F3Fs are a good place to start.

