

Hasegawa 1/48 scale Nakajima B5N2 "Kate"

by Dick Smith



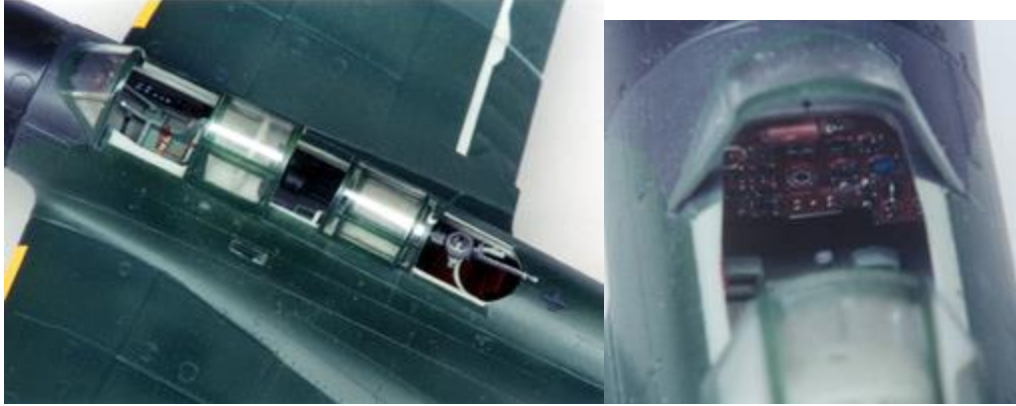
The release of last summer's motion picture "Pearl Harbor," caused a flood of interest in the modeling world in the Japanese aircraft that took part in the attack on United States forces stationed on the Hawaiian Islands on December 7, 1941.

The Mitsubishi "Zero" fighter and the Aichi Type 99 "Val" dive-bomber have been well represented in all scales. But the Nakajima B5N2 "Kate" attack bomber has been somewhat ignored by manufacturers. The Nichimo 1/48th scale "Kate" has been around for many years but because of its age it lacks the detailing we have come to expect in a modern kit.

Hasegawa has filled that void with a new B5N2 "Kate" in 1/48th scale. This kit features a highly detailed cockpit, an 800-kilogram deck-piercing bomb, exceptional parts fit, and markings for two of the aircraft that took part in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Construction starts with the painting and assembly of the more than thirty individual parts that make up the three-man cockpit. There has been much discussion and debate about the correct interior colors of World War II Japanese aircraft. Most researchers and modelers have come to agree the closest match to the actual Nakajima color is RLM-02. I used Model Master's version and found it a very close match to the colors described on the web-site: <http://www.J-aircraft.com>.

The instruction sheet indicates the other colors that are required for the rest of the cockpit detailing. There are decals for the type 96, model 3 radio, the pilot's instrument panel, and for the pilot's seat that simulates the "lightening holes" in the metal back.



To finish off the cockpit, I used a set of Eduard Imperial Japanese Navy style etched metal seatbelts from set #48-282. The belt set includes early and late style harnesses. Since my "Kate" was one from the Pearl Harbor attack, I used the early version. These belts appeared to be constructed in part from leather, so I painted those portions with Model Master's "Leather." I brushed the rest of the belts with a light tan highlighted with silver hardware.

With the cockpit complete, I cemented it into the fuselage sides. The instructions next, call for the building and attaching of the five-piece scarf-ring machine gun and mount into the rear of the cockpit section. I chose to complete this detail after I had finished painting the model's exterior.

The wings and horizontal stabilizers follow in the construction sequence. The model features flaps that can be posed either in the up or down position. While the instructions call for attaching the flaps to the wing at this time, I chose to delay this part until final painting. After the wings have been cemented together and dried, assemble the flaps, and dry fit them into position. If you want to show them in the lower position, do not glue them into place at this time.

There are tabs that locate the flaps into the wing. I cut them off so they would not interfere with the placement of the control surfaces after the wings had been painted. The kit provides clear lenses for the wing tips that serve as covers for the navigation lights. I drilled tiny holes in the back of the lenses and placed a dot of Tamiya clear red and blue paint into the holes to simulate bulbs.

When the clear red and blue dots were dry, I attached the lenses to the wings with a drop of five-minute epoxy. When dry, I sanded and polished the lenses flush with the wings. A square of masking tape protected the lenses until painting was complete. Attaching the wings to the fuselage went well with only a small amount of sanding and fitting. The engineering of this kit is excellent. I used only a tiny bit of filler where the rear portion of the wing meets the underside of the fuselage.

The engine for the "Kate" is a "model within a model." I sprayed the twin banks of cylinders with Model Master "gunmetal." The rest of the engine parts were painted in Model Master's "buffing aluminum." A slight rubbing out of the aluminum with a soft cloth gives sheen to the paint that simulates real metal.

Assemble the engine parts, being careful not to forget to insert the soft plastic cap that holds the shaft for the propeller that will be added later. I dry-brushed the entire assembly with Testors silver to bring out the details. Before inserting the finished engine into the cowling, I painted it with Gunze Sangyo gloss black on the outside and Model Master RLM-02 on the inside. In addition, there are two exhaust ports that are painted a rusty brown. I painted the propeller with Model Master's "buffing aluminum" and attached it during final construction.

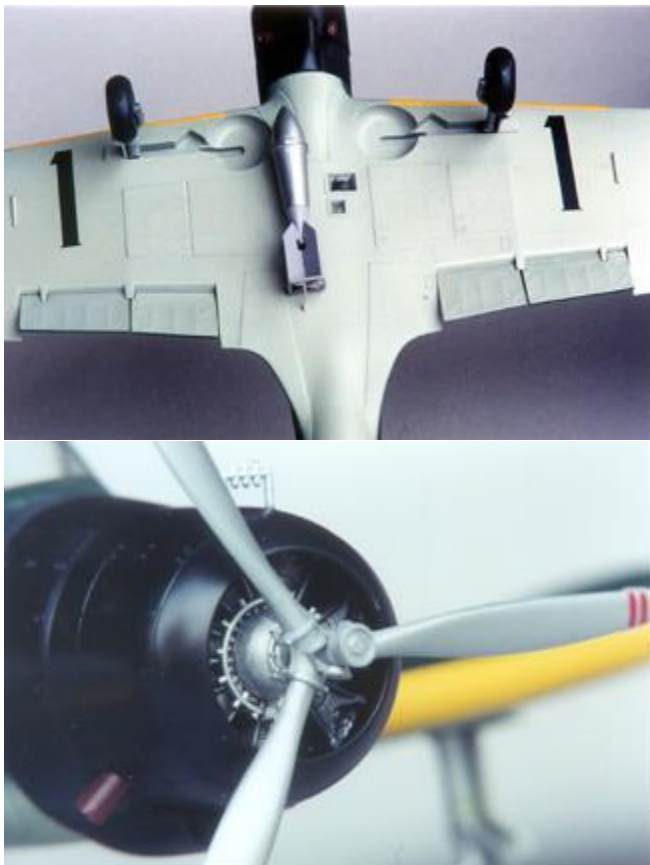
The "Kate" I chose to model was the commander's aircraft from the carrier Akagi's first wave of attacks on Pearl Harbor. The kit provides the decals for this aircraft but I chose to use Eagle Strike Production's, #48035, "Akagi/Zuikaku" Pearl Harbor, Part II.

Following the color scheme from the decal sheet, I airbrushed the underside of the "Kate" with Gunze Sangyo "IJN light gray." The topside was sprayed with Gunze Sangyo's "IJN dark green." There is a soft demarcation line between the green and gray colors on the fuselage. The tail of the commander's aircraft was painted a distinctive red with bright yellow markings.

After carefully masking the tail sections, I undercoated the area with light coat of gloss white. I then oversprayed the surfaces with Model Master's "guards red" tinted with a small amount of orange. (I have found undercoating with white helps bring out the intensity of bright colors.) As soon as I finished painting the red, I removed the masking tape. Removing the tape immediately lessens a chance for a "paint ridge" to form between the colors.

The landing gear was assembled and painted Model Master "non-buffing" flat aluminum. The tires were sprayed Gunze Sangyo "tire black" and dry-brushed with gray to show wear.

The 800-kilogram deck-piercing bomb was assembled and the forward portion was painted flat aluminum. The fins and the rear portion of the bomb were reportedly made of wood and other non-metallic materials so I painted them light gray. The bomb attachment points were assembled and painted the same color as the underside of the fuselage.



With the basic painting of the model completed, all that remained was the flat black scallop on the forward portion of the fuselage. I used an artist's circle template to cut a tape mask from to fit the fuselage sides. I sprayed the area with Model Master's "aircraft interior black" to contrast the glossy black on the cowling.

When I was sure all of the colors were dry, I sprayed Testors Glosscoat on the entire aircraft to provide a smooth finish for the decals. The Eagle Strike Production's decals went on with only a little setting solution. The large Hinomarus for the wings were very opaque and the dark green fuselage color did not

show through the decals. I had a small amount of trouble getting the red and white fuselage band to sit properly. Despite careful placement, the band tore once while I was attaching it. Setting solution finally did the trick. The yellow markings on the vertical tail stood out in sharp contrast to the rest of the aircraft colors. These decals are quite thin but at the same time opaque and are well worth the \$10 price-tag.

The last job was the masking and painting of the "greenhouse" over the cockpit. This job is made simple with the use of Squadron's new set of pre-cut vinyl canopy masks, #83426, for the Hasegawa kit. The masks are set in place with the aid of a tiny amount of dishwashing liquid in water brushed on to the clear parts of the canopies and windscreens.

With the painting complete, I sprayed a mix of 50/50 Testors Dullcoat and Glosscoat to get a satin finish over the entire model. After I removed the canopy masks from the clear parts, I carefully brushed on a coat of Johnson's "Future" floor polish to give the transparencies sparkle.

I finished the model with the painting and attachment of the tail wheel, pitot tube, radio antenna, and the deck-piercing bomb that resulted in the sinking of many of the ships on that fateful morning in 1941. One item is left, the painting and attachment of the machine gun to the rear portion of the cockpit.

The mount is painted the interior color and the gun Model Master "buffing gunmetal." When the paint is dry, carefully squeeze the u-shaped mount together slightly and slip it into the slots on either side of the cockpit wall. Drybrush the tiny gun lightly with silver to bring out the details and then glue it to the scarf-ring. (This "out-of-order" step must be done carefully and gently or the scarf-ring assembly may be damaged.) Although, the instructions call for the gun to be mounted earlier in the sequence, I find sanding, masking, and painting made easier without having to deal with tiny parts that always pop off and end up broken or missing.

This is a delightful model to build and a great improvement over the Nichimo rendition that filled the gap for many years. The exceptional fit of parts, the highly detailed cockpit and engine compartment, and Hasegawa's close attention to detail, easily places this model into the category of "super kit." The Eagle Strike Production decals may be a bit expensive but I feel they add much to the finished kit. This is the second "Kate" that I have built from the new Hasegawa kit and looking at the decal offerings, it is not the last for me.



