

Martlet V



The Tamiya F4F in 1/48th scale

By Mike Hanlon

When it came to naming aircraft, no Axis or Allied power could top the Royal Navy for truly sucky names. The RAF had Spitfires, Typhoons and Hurricanes; the US Army Air Force had Thunderbolts, Mustangs, and Lightning's, The US Navy had Hellcats, Wildcats and Avengers; although the Germans lacked the imagination to give their aircraft official names, but at least Messerschmitt and Focke-Wulf sounded dirty, and the Royal Navy... had Rocs, Skuas, and Fulmars.

Boy that really struck fear into the Germans. Heinz look out! There's a Gannet on your tail! Achtung Admiral! Albatrosses are attacking the fleet!

In case these names aren't familiar to you, the Royal Navy, which prior to World War II never took aviation very seriously, (after all Nelson didn't have any aircraft at Trafalgar) named their fighter aircraft after birds. The attack aircraft folks had it worse; their aircraft were named after fish! How would you like to go to war in an aircraft named after a tuna!

When the US began supplying Britain with aircraft at the start of World War II, the Royal Navy was faced with a problem. The American aircraft had fierce names like Avenger, Hellcat, and Wildcat. This simply wouldn't do! The simple, yet bureaucratically confusing solution was to rename the aircraft. Hence, Avengers became Tarpons, Hellcats became Gannets and Wildcats became Martlets. Around 1943 the pilots of the Royal Navy got tired of being snickered at by their American counterparts and the names of American aircraft came into common usage and were eventually officially adopted.

In case you are wondering, a Martlet is a European House Martin.

The Royal Navy operated Martlets from 1940 through the end of the war. The first kill scored by a Martlet took place on Christmas Day 1940 when a Martlet I shot down a Ju-88 over Scapa Flow. It would be nearly a year before US Navy Wildcats scored their first kills following Pearl Harbor. The aircraft was extremely popular with Fleet Air Arm pilots as it was one of the first fighters they had that was designed as a dedicated carrier fighter. Previous FAA fighters were all modified RAF designs like the Gladiator and Hurricane.



Released in 1994, Tamiya helped kick off the golden age of 1/48 scale modeling by introducing the F4F-4 Wildcat. The Martlet V was identical to the FM-1 Wildcat produced by Eastern Aircraft. In 1942, the US government wanted Grumman to concentrate on producing Hellcats. As a result Wildcat and Avenger production was switched to the Eastern Aircraft division of General Motors. Prior to this time, General Motors had no experience producing aircraft of any type. The FM-1 differed from the Grumman produced F4F-4 in only one major area. The armament was switched from six .50 caliber machine guns to four.

As I have stated before, the Tamiya Wildcat is one of the nicest kits on the market. The only flaw is the lack of variety in the schemes. F4F-4's served were used exclusively by the US Navy. Camouflage was Blue Gray over Navy Gray. A few may have been painted in the later tri-color scheme, but these aircraft did not see combat. FM-1s were

painted in tri-color, the Atlantic scheme of neutral gray over white and when supplied to the Royal Navy, in the US equivalents for Fleet Air Arm camouflage.

Having built this kit before I am going to go through the build sequence quickly and highlight the major differences from building the standard F4F-4. The F4F-4 interior parts were painted Bronze Green, which is close to FS# 34092. FM-1s were painted in the more typical Interior Green approximately FS# 34151. This color was also used for all of the aircraft's interior surfaces. I used PollyScale Interior Green. I modified the cockpit floor of the kit by removing several sections of interior floor. Wildcats did not have a true floor in the cockpit just two runners for the pilot's feet. You can also add an oil tank below the cockpit if you wish, but I did not go that far. The only other addition to the cockpit was a set of colored photo-etched seat belts. The British fitted their own Sutton Harness into Lend Lease aircraft so I used Eduard's Sutton harness set with the Tamiya seat. The remainder of the fuselage was painted and constructed per the kit instructions.



Before assembling the wings, I filled the outer gun panels with superglue and sanded them flush. It took several applications to do this, as the panels are very deeply inset in the wing. As a result some of the countersunk rivet detail was lost. If you are a masochist you can replace the lost rivets. Since the wing roundels go over this area, I didn't bother. It will never win a contest, but you really cannot tell unless you look closely. Once the wings were filled I glued them together and attached them to the fuselage. I left the landing gear, rudder and tailplanes off the model while painting; they will all click into place later.

American aircraft manufacturers originally tried to match British camouflage colors. As the war progressed, close enough became good enough. As a result, the standard FAA colors of Dark Slate Grey, Dark Sea Grey, and Sky were replaced with Olive Drab, Dark Gray and Sky Gray. I used Tamiya Dark Sea Grey for the Dark Sea Grey, Gunze Sangyo Olive Drab 1 for Dark Slate Grey and Tamiya Sky Grey for Sky. I cut paper masks for the camouflage and corrected any over spray problems after the mask were removed.

After painting the landing gear was attached. The landing gear is complex and is inserted into the fuselage after it has been assembled. If you leave the engine off you can get a better view through the front of the fuselage to help install the struts into their mounting slots. Once the gear was in place the tail planes, rudder, engine and cowling were installed.

The decals came from Eagle Strike sheet 48016 Royal Navy Grumman Martlets 1941-1944. The aircraft operated from HMS Fencer in the Bay of Biscay during the summer of 1944.

The Tamiya Wildcat is a truly nice model; this simple conversion allows you to produce a distinctive scheme. You can also make fun of the Brits naming system and that is always a good time! Anyone want to build a Tarpon?