

Monogram's 1/48 scale F-105 Thunderchief



By Bryant Dunbar

I remember growing up and looking through various books and periodicals of military aircraft. The Republic F-105 always struck me as a very unusual and perhaps backwards looking aircraft with its unusual air intakes. It wasn't until later when I read Jack Broughton's books "Thud Ridge" and "Going Down Town" that I truly appreciated and understood what the F-105 Thunderchief was all about.

The F-105 "Thud" or "lead Sled", as its pilots liked to refer to it as, was designed to deliver nuclear weapons at supersonic speed. Fortunately the F-105 was never called upon to fulfill that mission. What the F-105 did do was to fly more air strikes and deliver more ordinance to North Vietnam than any other aircraft during the Vietnam war. As a result the "Thuds" suffered more losses than any other aircraft but statistics showed that the number of "Thuds" lost versus missions flown reflected a relatively low loss rate.

The F-105B was the first of the F-105 family to become operational on May 27, 1958 but it was the F-105D that would result from a number of improvements and eventually be deployed to Vietnam in early 1965 with F-105Fs and F-105Gs to follow. This was the beginning of what many would later refer to as Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's F-105 phaseout program. Over the course of seven years of flying missions over North Vietnam from 1965 to 1972, of the original 610 F-105Ds produced only one quarter of their number remained at wars end. Of all the "Century Series" fighters none saw more combat than the F-105.

As a result of the attrition of the Vietnam war F-105s returned to the US to go directly into US Air Guard and Air Force Reserve units. Consideration had been given to reopen Republic's F-105 assembly lines but never happened. As for Monograms 1/48 scale version of the Republic F-105D the same thankfully can not be said. Originally released in 1978 by Monogram and re-released earlier this year it still holds up well to today's standards in the modeling world. Granted this kit has raised panel lining and doesn't come with little extras like photo etch metal pieces but it still holds true to good model engineering and overall accuracy.



Upon opening Monogram's F-105D kit I noticed it came in the typical Monogram boxing of the 1980s with a separate top and bottom, not the more recent flimsy one piece boxes. The only differences from original release and new release are new box art to reflect new decals and the fact that the manufacture name is replaced by Revell. Sad to say, like the real F-105s having disappeared so to has the Monogram name in this case. Having said that I still refer to the kit as being a Monogram kit and not a Revell kit since they are the ones who designed and originally released the kit.

Inventorizing the contents of the box I was confronted with a straight forward model molded in dark olive drab plastic, sealed in a plastic bag with exception to the clear parts and instructions which were floating free. One sheet of decals comes with the kit with options for two F-105Ds of the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing, Korat, Thailand, 1968. The decals appeared to be of good quality and would not have posed a problem had I used them but I chose to research after market decals for an aircraft stationed at Takhli, Thailand. The reasons for this choice I'll explain later. The instructions were a four-page booklet consistent with Revell kits as opposed to the single page folding map style that was typical of Monogram kits.

Looking at the kit itself I believe the most impressive aspect is the length of the fuselage halves. This is a 1/48 scale kit but their length makes one think the manufacture put 1/32 scale parts in the kit by accident. Once you've accepted in your mind that it is the correct size then you take a look at the wings, which appear just the opposite and now you start

to rethink everything all over again. Safe to say the F-105 was a rather long aircraft and yes the wings were short with an extreme sweep not to forget they also incorporated the engine inlets as well. The rest of the kit is straightforward with simple but well detailed parts for the cockpit and landing gear.

Assembly starts with the cockpit and nose wheel well before the fuselage halves are put together. Monogram should be applauded for their faithful representation of the cockpit instrumentation. For reference I used Bert Kinzey's F-105 Thunderchief in Detail and Scale as well as Ken Neubeck's Walk Around F-105 Thunderchief and both supported Monogram's efforts for accurate detail. I airbrushed the cockpit with an interior gray followed by brush painting of particular instrument panels and boxes with flat black. After that I retouched various switches with gray and indicator lights with an amber, red or blue using a detail brush. The last item to be painted was the radarscope central to the main instrument panel. Here I mixed a deep maroon color and again applied the paint with a detail brush. The control stick was a similar affair with a black grip only here I touched the buttons with a drop of silver first then a smaller red drop to show the sliver mounting ring around each button.



The one aspect of the cockpit that is not accurate to most photographs of the F-105 is the ejection seat. The seat as designed by Republic had a cushioned bucket while the pilot's parachute acted as the cushion for his back. Whenever the pilot was absent from the cockpit so was the parachute/cushion so to speak. In the case of the kit it appears that Monogram incorrectly attempted to mold a cushion into the seat with the shoulder harness dangling down over it. Void of any cushion like detail it just doesn't look right even for a cushion. In all fairness to Monogram I can see them doing this because the kit does come with a pilot figure and the need for more detail is not needed if he were to be added. However I prefer showing as much of the cockpit as possible. To correct this problem I was able to get a resin replacement seat made by KMC. The resin seat is very accurate and well defined. With this seat I was able to paint the bucket cushions the appropriate drab greens, the shoulder harness light gray, the head rest red and the

ejection handles yellow and black. As a final touch I gave the entire seat a wash of very thinned out black to give it a weathered look.

Once the cockpit was completed, and the nose wheel well and main wing spar were in place it was time to glue the fuselage halves together. Overall a simple process despite the long length of the fuselage but its good to keep a few rubber bands handy to secure the nose and tail as you go. After that was complete I puttied the seam line with Tamiya's model putty. The fuselage halves had matched up well with little to no problem areas when sanding but the sanding process did take a little longer than usual. As a result of the raised panel lines I took my time and carefully sanded between the many detail lines to save them. In the end it was well worth the effort.

The instructions call for the petal speed brakes aft of the exhaust nozzle to be mounted next however the speed brakes were natural metal finish so they would need to be painted separately and added after the final camouflage scheme of the aircraft was completed. Instead I primed the entire model to include its wings, which had yet to be glued together, with Model Master camouflage gray FCS-36622 due to the kit being molded in olive drab plastic. I studied many photos and it's hard to confirm but I believe that many F-105s were painted camouflage gray in their wheel wells. The only way to get some determination was to look at the inner main gear doors, which faced out while the landing gear were down. If the doors were indeed the same color as the rest of the wheel well then most were gray with some aircraft being white. My intention was to primer the aircraft the same color as the interior of the wheel wells, and then airbrush a fine line of gloss black over each panel line on the entire kit. This is a technique I've found works very well with models with recessed panel lines, it was interesting to find the same technique would work almost as well with raised lines.



Next I glued the wings together making sure I had complete paint coverage for the wheel well panels. Now it was time to attach the wings to the fuselage. Monogram engineered the kit to have the wings slide over a sleeve that also acts as the engine intake. Understandably this seems necessary to provide strength and support for the wings where they meet with the fuselage. From most angles it's generally not an issue but looking at the finished product head on you can tell that the inside of the intakes is not

accurate to the real aircraft. It's something that could be corrected with a lot of effort but I chose to leave it as is considering when the kit was originally released it was of acceptable standard for the time. Also I wasn't inclined to have my wings break off due to a lack of support. During the wing attachment process I found it necessary to run a couple of rubber bands under each wing and over the fuselage with a paint bottle in between to provide tension. The wings tend not to want to fit snug against the fuselage along the top surface thus the rubber bands hold them in place until the glue has cured.

At this point I decided I didn't want to use the kit decals of which depicted aircraft that flew out of Korat. I've read Jack Broughton's books and also having a distant relative who flew "Thuds" out of Takhli I'm partial to F-105s that flew from that base. Having been sometime since I read Jack's books and not knowing my relative's unit I wasn't too picky just so long as I found a decal sheet of an F-105D that was stationed there. Norris Graser was kind enough to let me check out his collection of Super Scale decals. Not only did I find a decal sheet that depicted an F-105 stationed at Takhli but one with some nice artwork to boot. Super Scale's sheet number 48-269 depicts F-105D 59-822 "The Polish Glider" a real find in my opinion. At a time in U.S. Air Force history when artwork was limited I thought this was an F-105 that accommodated my criteria as well as having a bit of humor.



Aside from F-105 59-822's unique artwork she would otherwise conform to the standard four color paint scheme consistent with most F-105s of the day. Now that I had an almost white F-105 with black lines running all over it I again airbrushed the appropriate areas that were to remain camouflage gray. These areas consisted of all under side surfaces and all interior surfaces of the wheel wells and landing gear doors. Being careful to airbrush in thin coats the black panel lines would show through the camouflage Gray.

With a little time and patience I was able to achieve an appropriate weathered look. This same process would be carried out with all the subsequent colors.

The next color to follow was medium green FSC-34102. By airbrushing the medium green next I was able to get a good contrast of where I would need to apply the dark tan FSC-30219. Once these two colors were done it made it easy to apply the final color dark green FSC-34102. The dark green has very little contrast to the medium green and can be difficult to determine exactly where the color is to go. So by doing the scheme in this order it was like fitting the last pieces of a puzzle into place. In doing the camouflage scheme I was able to accomplish it freehand with very little masking. The only areas that were of concern were the canopy and over spray around the wings. While working on the upper surfaces it was easy to over shoot with a green or tan paint and get the gray fuselage adjacent to the area. Simple use of wide pieces of masking tape provided enough coverage. Aside from the natural metal finish of the speed brakes the only other area that needed to be painted was the nose cone. The nose cone was a standard flat black. Once painted I added some lead air gun pellets on the inside to provide ballast and glued it to the fuselage.

The next area that needed to be tackled was the landing gear and unfortunately the Monogram kit suffers from something I don't think exists in any other kit that I know of. Prior to getting to this stage of the project I was notified that the model is too heavy for its main landing gear. While perusing Norris's decals he informed me of one case in which by walking by a completed F-105 and causing a little air current it would wobble sideways as the main landing gear would flex. It turns out I was informed by the modeler that built that particular model that it eventually did break the mains. Whether the failure was due to the shear weight of the model or Norris's repeated demonstrations was not confirmed

To correct the problem I went on line and was lucky to find Aeroclub Scale Accessories still makes a white metal copy of the Monogram main landing gear. I ordered a set and was surprised to find that that the replacement landing gear are exact copies to the plastic kit ones. After a little trimming and clean up to remove some flash I was back in business and continued with the project. Painting was a simple affair, painting the struts silver and detailing the brake lines with red paint. A small drop of Elmer's white glue where the landing lights should be gives a realistic representation of glass. The nose landing gear was a similar process only with a black brake line instead of a red one.

The last area to be painted was with regard to the speed brakes. I used Model Master stainless steel metalizer on the outside and exhaust on the inside. With the model on its landing gear it made it easy to mount the brakes with consideration to the bottom one. The bottom speed brake is molded to look drooped, as it would be on the real aircraft while at rest

Now that painting was completed the model needed to be prepped for the decals. I used my old airbrush to shoot generous amounts of Future Floor Wax over the entire model. After letting the model sit for a couple of days I applied the Super scale decals. Despite these decals being a bit old they went on with little fuss and only small amounts of Decal

Sol were necessary to get a couple of decals to lay over some panel lines. Once all the decals were in place and dried I got out my collection of pastel chalks and weathered the underside of the model. I used a combination of greys and browns to convey hydraulic and oil leaks underneath the engine. At first I thought I had over done this effect but have since been told it looks correct. To lock in the weathering I once again shot the model with Future to seal the chalk in place.



The final process for this model was to reverse the glossy effects of the Future by flattening the model back down. I prefer to use Polyscale Flat with a drop of dish soap as a leveling agent. As of this writing the aircraft looks complete save for the 500 lb. bombs. The construction and painting of the external fuel tanks were a straightforward affair using the same techniques I used to paint the aircraft itself. I intend to add the 500 lb. Bombs and display the model the only way an F-105 should be displayed, fully fueled and ready to go “downtown”.

Overall I found this kit enjoyable to work on and am happy with the results. Despite the problems encountered I kept in mind the simple fact that the kit was originally created over 20 years ago and yet it still holds up well even by today’s standards. As for the landing gear issue I found it more humorous than a problem and figured the extra expense of getting metal replacements will only insure the model’s survival in the future. Having said all that I actually ordered two sets of metal landing gear as I’m already working on the F-105D’s brother the Monogram F-105G “Wild Weasel” in the same scale. While it is nice that Revell is releasing these kits it would be great if at some point in the future someone does do this wonderful aircraft justice and designs a new 1/48 scale kit with today’s engineering. I know what you’re going to say that Trumpeter is coming out with a 1/32 scale Thunderchief. My question to that is where are you going to put the darned thing once you’re finished?