

DRAGON 1/72nd scale P-61 Black Widow



By Dick Smith

One of the most famous Northrop P-61 night fighters was the “Black Widow” from the 548th Night Fighter Squadron named “Lady in the Dark.” On the night of August 14, 1945 “she” claimed the last aerial victory of World War II by forcing a Hayabusa Ki-43 “Oscar” to crash into the sea. A 1/72nd scale model of that aircraft is produced by Dragon, kit #5017-01.

Construction starts with the painting of the cockpit and wheel wells “interior green,” FS-34151, and not “chromate green” as indicated in the kit instructions. “Lady in the Dark” was a late “B” model P-61 and was equipped with a quad .50 caliber top turret and four fuselage mounted 20mm canons.

After painting the instrument panel “aircraft interior black,” FS-37031, glue it to the front portion of the cockpit floor. A light dry brushing with light gray will bring out the details of panel. Seat belts can be made from strips of paper dipped in black coffee and while still wet draped over the seats.

Paint the sidewalls, glue them into position along with the cockpit interior and then close the fuselage sections. The plastic in the fuselage was slightly warped in my kit and will need tape to hold the pieces together until the glue dries.

Paint the radiator intakes on the leading edges of the wings silver and then cement the top and bottom wing sections together. This model is very tail heavy

and will require quite a bit of weight in the forward portion of the model to keep from becoming a “tail sitter.” The bulbous nose radome is ideal for holding about a dozen BB’s secured with a puddle of white glue.



Additionally, fill the engine cowlings with BB’s and secure them with white glue and set these parts aside to dry. Glue the wings to the fuselage. The joint here will require an application of putty.

Next assemble the twin engine booms and attach them to the wings. It is important that the booms are exactly square to the wings or the horizontal stabilizer will not be level.

The radome that was filled with weights is now attached to the fuselage. The joint is very poor here and will require several applications of filler to blend it into the fuselage. When all of the putty has dried, sand it carefully to blend the seam together with no visible gaps. With the sanding complete, spray a coat of primer to hide any imperfections in construction.

“Black Widows” in the Pacific were delivered to their units in gloss black. The glossy paint made the aircraft virtually invisible in the night skies but the humidity, blowing sand and the tropical sun quickly dulled the paint. To duplicate this scheme, paint the entire aircraft with Model Master “aircraft interior black” and then pick out selected panels and spray them with Tamiya’s “NATO black.”

The contrast of these two “blacks” will add a subtle impression of weathering to the model. Additional weathering can be accomplished by lightly brushing streaks of silver to the leading edges of the wings.

With the painting complete, apply a coat of gloss to provide a smooth surface for the decals. The “Lady in the Dark” figure was painted on both side of the fuselage but unfortunately the starboard side decal figure is facing the wrong direction on the sheet. A color drawing of the aircraft’s artwork can be found on the centerfold pages of Squadron Signal’s “P-61 Black Widow in Action.”



The extensive framing on the “greenhouse” canopies is somewhat of a daunting painting task but can be made simple by first masking and painting all of the vertical braces and when dry, mask the horizontal frames and then paint them.

Attach the canopies with white glue along with the landing gear, gear doors and etched metal antennas and “Lady in the Dark” is ready for a night mission.

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