MUSTANG MANIA

Tamiya's P-51D in 1/48 scale
By Mike Hanlon

If you don't know the history of the North American P-51 Mustang you are obviously an illegal alien and should turn yourself over to the nearest Federal authorities.

Tamiya first released the 1/48 scale P-51D in 1995, shortly after Hasegawa released their Mustang. Each kit has advantages, but in my opinion Tamiya's comes out ahead by virtue of its dropped flaps. Due to the loss of hydraulic pressure after the engine has shut down, it is very rare to find a picture of a D model Mustang with its flaps up. The Hasegawa kit lacks this feature and so falls a distant second in the rankings of Mustang kits (at least in my opinion.)

A client I build kits for asked for a P-51D, I showed him several decal sheets so that he could choose a set of markings and he chose two! Hence the double build. The first kit is "Grim Reaper" flown by Capt. Lowell K. Brueland and served with the 355th FS #54th FG of the 9th Air Force in late 1944. The aircraft is in natural metal with invasion stripes on the lower fuselage and wings. The second aircraft is "Dinna B" flown by Lt. Willie Willis of the 462nd FS VII Fighter Command flown from Iwo Jima in 1945. All of the markings for this aircraft with the exception of the antiglare panel are decals. Even the spinner is natural metal.

Since the models are virtually identical, I will describe the building process as one build. I will note any variations.

Construction begins with the cockpit. Having just completed Tamiya's P-47, the eight years difference in kit design is readily apparent. The P-47 cockpit is a masterpiece that

only requires seatbelts to make it rival the best resin cockpits. The P-51 cockpit from Tamiya has shallowly molded sidewall detail, an instrument panel with empty gauges and a seat lacking

belts and very basic in detail.

The later Korean War release contains a decal for the instrument panels, but I was building the original release. No resin cockpit replacements were available when I built the kits so all I did was replace the seats with resin versions from Ultracast. These are a great improvement and 90% of any cockpit is the seat. The instrument panel is located so far under the coaming that only a penlight will reveal the lack of detail, but I didn't know this until after I had closed up the fuselage. When painting instrument panels I paint the panel in a dark gray and then paint the gauges with a true black. I follow this up with a drop of Future in each gauge and which highlights each gauge very effectively. I normally pick out the needles with a white Prismacolor pencil, but of course in this kit there is no needle detail.

The Mustang cockpit is a dark interior green, I used PollyScale's interior green and applied a wash of the same color darkened with a couple of drops of black. I then drybrushed the interior parts with a lightened version of the interior green. The sidewall detail was carefully painted with flat black and dry brushed with a dark gray. The radio compartment and lower radiator section are molded in one piece with the cockpit floor. The radio was sprayed flat black and dry brushed with neutral gray. The radiator housing and radiator piece were sprayed with Tamiya's flat aluminum. The radiator received a black wash on its grills.

The Ultracast seats were painted interior green with olive drab seat cushions. The belts were painted in a light gray with the buckled picked out in silver pencil. The seats

attach to the kit armor plate. The plate has a rectangular box molded to it that fits into a similarly shaped depression on the Tamiya seat. The Ultracast seat understandably does not have this depression, so I had to sand the raised section of the armor plate down in order to mount the replacement seat. Once the interior parts were assembled I joined the fuselage halves together. The fit is very good and the seams required only

minor clean up. There is no seam on the forward fuselage as Tamiya molds this piece as a separate part. The chin scoop is also separate and again fits very well.

Before I start repeating this over and over, this kit fits as well as any kit I've ever built. Any seam work I did on either kit was minor and probably a result of my own hamfistedness. I will not comment further on the fit, take my word for it the fit is exceptional.

I now return you to our regularly scheduled review.

Once the fuselage was done, I painted the wheel wells. There has been more than a little debate on this, but I went with interior green for the well except that the rear of the well is actually the wing spar. The spar is painted zinc chromate yellow. I followed my usual weathering techniques for this area.

The wings attach to the fuselage with no problems what so ever, did I mention the fit was … never mind. Don't forget to open up the mounting holes for wing pylons. I left these off so that I could more easily polish the wings in preparation for the metal

finish. I also left the tail planes off until later in assembly. This was particularly helpful, especially in decaling “Dinny B”.

It was now time to polish the models. I used polishing pads ranging from 3200 grit to 12000 grit. The Mustang has a lot of lumps and bumps so this is a little more tedious than other natural metal aircraft I have done. Once I had the models polished out I sprayed them with

SNJ. The wings on the actual aircraft were painted with aluminum paint. I chose to stick with several light coats of SNJ. I dislike shiny natural metal models, the real aircraft tended to have a dull finish, similar to an aluminum garbage can. I sprayed the flaps with Tamiya flat aluminum to differentiate the finish of the wings and the flaps. On the real aircraft the flaps were natural metal.

Once the SNJ had dried I masked I set the model that would become “Dinny B” aside and masked off the lower area of the fuselage and lower wings on “Grim Reaper” in preparation for applying the invasion stripes. One advantage of the SNJ is that it can be masked over without lifting. I used Tamiya masking tape to outline theses areas and sprayed it white using Tamiya flat white. Ever see a model with invasion stripes and notice that you can see the demarcation of the black and white stripes through the decal? There are two solutions to this. Use two insignia decals to increase the opacity of the insignia or do what I do, copy the decal sheet on an office copier then cut out the copied insignia and use it as a mask for the area where the insignia will be. I attach this mask after I mask off the white stripes. This technique eliminates the dark/light shadow under the insignia decal. Areas around the decal can be touched up with a brush if necessary. I use PollyScale flat black for the stripes as this brushes well for minor touch ups. I them masked off the antiglare panels with Tamiya masking tape and sprayed them with Gunze Sangyo olive drab.

Once everything had dried I attached the landing gear, gave the models a gloss coat of Future and began decaling. “Dinny B” has no paint other than the antiglare panel even the spinner is natural metal. As you can see from the pictures, the rear stripes are red and cover a substantial area of the model. I left the tail planes off and decaled them separately.

The decals came from Aeromaster sheet 48-285 “Mustangs Forever”. The stripes are made up of eight decals applied in stages. They offered no significant problems and Aeromaster provides additional striping for touch ups. The sheet is presently out of production but is not too difficult to locate. I got mine from E-Bay.

“Grim Reaper” comes from Aeromaster sheet 48-225 “Ninth AF Mustang Aces” and also includes Aeromaster’s P-51 stencil sheet. This sheet is also out of production but is not too difficult to obtain. SuperScale sheet 48-791 has a different aircraft from the same squadron, this Mustang is named “Killer”, so if you like the scheme but cannot locate the Aeromaster sheet try the SuperScale sheet instead. The only part of this scheme that caused concern was the checkerboard around the nose. It turned out that I had nothing

to worry about, the three part decals performed flawlessly. I used Gunze Sangyo insignia blue to paint the spinner. It matched the blue in the checkerboard perfectly. All in all the decals on both models worked very well and presented no problems whatsoever.

There is one area on this model that is below par it is the canopies. Tamiya designed the sprue such that the attachment point is on the side of both the bubble and the windscreen. It is virtually impossible to detach both parts from the sprue without marring it. I obtained a replacement vacuform canopy from Squadron. Ultimately, I obtained several sets of canopies. Due to my hamfistedness and lack of experience with vacuform canopies, I couldn't get a satisfactory result. I went back to the kit parts and cleaned them as best I could. Just as I was completing both models the modeling gods laughed at me. Tamiya announced the release of a new P-51D with revised canopy parts!

There is one other minor area where this kit can be improved, the cuffed Hamilton Standard propeller blades are quite thick and the cuffs are exaggerated. Ultracast makes a set of replacement blades, which are quite an improvement. I acquired two sets and proceeded to assemble them. The first set on "Dinny B" presented no problems. For some reason (stupidity?) the second set didn't work. I could not get the spinner pieces together without a significant gap. I shaved, sanded and cut down everything I could, but the spinner pieces just would not come together. In the process, I broke off three of the resin blades. Ultimately

I threw in the towel and used the kit blades with a spinner from another kit. Spare parts anyone? This time everything worked well. As you can see from the pictures, the Ultracast blades really do improve the looks of the aircraft, but I could not get hold of a third set and I was getting anxious to finish the models.

Tamiya's release of the new kit with revised canopy parts really does address the major shortcoming of this kit. In addition, the new kit has decals produced by Cartograf so all in all it should prove to be very popular. It also means that the older versions, such as the ones I built should be relatively inexpensive to acquire on the second hand market. Once I get hold of the new kit, I will be building a Mustang or two for myself.


Grim Reaper
GQ U
463702
Dinny B
615
472518