

## 1/48<sup>th</sup> A-26K Counter-Invader Conversion



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This kit is the ProModeler A-26B Invader with Paragon resin conversion set # 48101 used to make it into an A-26K 'Counter Invader'. The Paragon resin pieces are very well done and I highly recommend the conversion kit if you can still find one. The kit itself is typical "old Monogram" – very accurate in shape and it looks great when you're finished, but it will require a significant amount of puttying and sanding to fill all of the seams and gaps between major pieces. Also, before you start, there are some things you need to know. There are three different releases of the basic A-26 kit. The first release was the Monogram A-26C with the glass nose. This is the only kit that does not have provisions for the lower gun turret and it's probably the easiest one to use. Both the later Revell and ProModeler A-26B versions have provisions for a lower gun turret and you will have to fill the hole – which is NOT easy, but not impossible either – it just takes a lot of sheet plastic and filler to get that big hole filled. I didn't realize this when I started and in retrospect, using the 'first release' glass nosed A-26C would have made life a lot easier. It's a very straight forward build however and only minor plastic surgery is required to do the conversion.

Starting with the cockpit, you have to remove the small, right hand kit seat and replace it with a resin seat, then add new resin pieces for the right hand instrument panel, control stick and rudder pedals. There is no provision in either the kit or the aftermarket parts for the gunsight that should be mounted in front of the pilot on the left glare shield – I didn't realize that one was required until after I was finished, so my kit is missing it. Add one to yours. You can skip the steps for the gunsight assembly and turret assemblies as they aren't used for the A-

26K. I closed up the bomb bay doors, but it would have been a **lot** less work to leave them open – they really aren't designed to be closed – just a hint.

The conversion gives you a resin plug to fill the hole for the upper gun turret and if you follow the instructions and remove the turret ring beforehand, it's an easy installation. I installed the three small glass windows before gluing the fuselage halves together and masked them off.



Once the fuselage was assembled, I removed the rudder and made the cut to remove the kit nose. The instructions aren't terribly precise on exactly where to make this cut and I would suggest that you spend some time here to get it right. The cut should be well in front of the leading edge of the nose gear well. Try cutting the nose slightly farther forward of the kit's molded separation line & then carefully sand it back while test fitting the resin nose. If you do it right, very little putty will be required here, but be sure to keep everything square. I left the second resin piece containing the guns off until all of the other airframe sanding & puttying was finished to keep from destroying the gun barrels. While you're working on the nose, the model needs a lot of weight to keep the nose wheel on the ground – I hammered some lead sinkers into a rectangle & sized it to fit into the large resin nose piece. You can either glue them in now, or wait until you put the second nose piece on, but don't forget them.

Now the typical 'old Monogram' assembly problems really start to show up. You've already found that the fuselage halves don't fit together without a step on the upper surfaces and the bomb bay doors won't go in the closed position without another fight. Next you'll find that the stabilizer assembly has a significant gap between the fuselage and the lower tail – plan on some shimming and putty here, ditto for the two engine nacelle assemblies, the nacelle fronts when you try to attach them to the wings and the wing to fuselage joins as well. Do not add the landing gear, gear doors or engines yet and leave all of the under wing "stuff" off as well; you don't need it for the A-26K.

I held off on the sanding & puttying until all of the major assembly was finished & then did it all at once. After that, the conversion proper was a piece of cake. 4mm has to be removed off of each wing tip to get the external fuel tanks to fit properly – I scribed a horizontal line from nose to tail on the inside faces of the tanks so that I could get them aligned properly when attaching them to the wings. The instructions are very clear on where to locate the 4 external stores pylons on the underside of each wing and the replacement cowlings and resin air intakes are likewise very simple to install, as is the replacement rudder. The propeller blades are a little more involved, in that you must remove the blades from the kit prop hub, drill locating holes & then glue the new paddle blades into the kit hub. I used the tip of a number 11 blade to make a starting hole for a drill and used a pin vise to drill out the required hole. If you take your time to get that starting hole located right, it's a snap. Just don't overdo the depth of the hole.....



At this point I painted the model using White Ensign enamels. I think they match the FS595 colors much better than any other paints currently available & they are semi-gloss and very easy to apply. Don't forget the deicing boots and the light gray fin tip. After painting the aircraft proper, I took some extra time to add the very distinctive, heavy exhaust stains common to all variants of the A-26 series. After looking at many photographs of actual Invaders to see how the exhaust flowed back along the cowlings, I sprayed a fairly heavy coat of medium gray and then I added a lighter coat of brown shading. As an experiment, I tried a light top coat of Tamiya smoke to blend everything in, but that ended up being overkill and I should have quit with just the gray and brown. Regardless, the final effect was more than worth the effort.

Finally, the multitude of “fiddly pieces” had to be applied. The photoetch fret gives you a locating guide for the 12 nearly invisible vortex generators that go on both sides of the vertical fin just in front of the rudder hinge. Since I wasn’t building a contest model and in hopes of finishing it before the decade ends, I cheated and left them off. Betcha didn’t notice that. Having lost the tiny resin rotating beacon piece, I drilled a hole in the top of the fin, stretched a piece of sprue to the diameter I wanted and glued the sprue into the hole. Unfortunately, I had already painted the model at this point and didn’t get too fussy about trying to putty it in, so it might not be the neatest job in the world, but it’s better than the resin piece was. Next I stretched a piece of clear sprue to a smaller diameter and added that on top of the mounting as the beacon itself. Then it was on to the antennas – and boy, does the Counter Invader have LOTS of antennas. First



I carved the VHF and UHF blades and the TACAN and IFF antennas out of sheet stock and attached them. Then I used the sheet stock to make the 2 piece mounting for the horizontal whip antenna. I used the photo etched metal for the towel rack antenna that runs crosswise on the underside of the fuselage and stole the VOR (horn) antenna from a C-47 kit. It’s a little oversized, but it worked. If you wanted, you could cut out a mount from plastic & use the PE piece, but it doesn’t have the thickness of the real antenna. Finally, I stretched and shaped more sprue to make the 3 HF antenna mounts and the vertical FM whip antenna mount and glued them into place. I used a pin vise and a .025" drill to open up 2

mounting points on the leading edge of the vertical fin for the HF antenna wires and also in the vertical FM whip mount. I used .022" brass wire for both the HF antennas, the vertical HF feed line and both FM whips. To attach the wires, I first glued them into the holes in the leading edge of the fin & let the superglue dry and then I glued the lower wire to its forward mount and let that dry. After it was secure, I used a pair of flush cut wire cutters to clip the wire at the mount. I then repeated the process with the upper HF antenna wire. Getting the vertical feed wire attached was a little tricky and I needed a third hand to hold the model at that point.

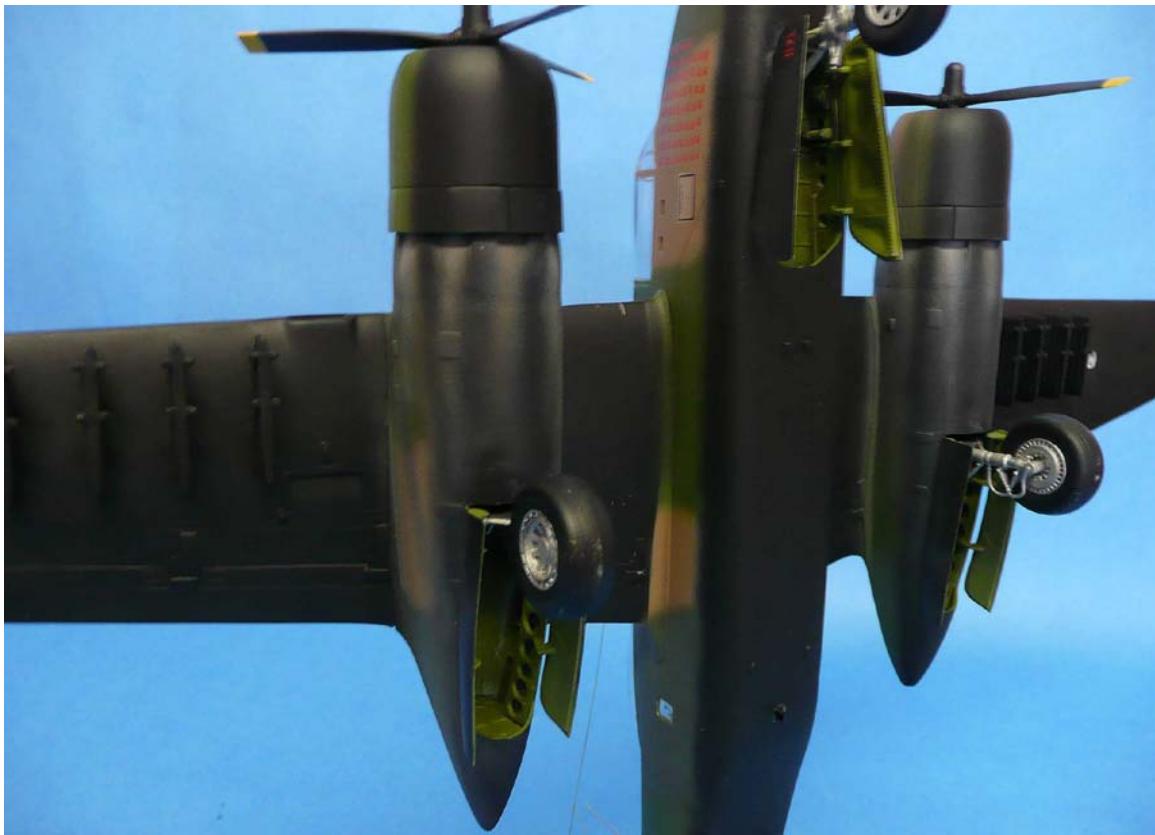


I carefully measured the length of the wire from the fuselage feed horn to the antenna wire & then cut it to length. I glued it to the feed horn first and let that dry. Then I put a dab of superglue on the tip of the wire and touched it to the HF antenna wire, tilted the model so that gravity held the two wires in contact & prayed that the glue would dry before they fell apart. It took a couple of tries, but was pretty simple in the end. For the FM whip antennas, I simply cut them to length and glued them to the mounts. If I had it to do all over again, I would use .020" wire and drills as the .022" wire looks just a tad oversized.

Finally, I used a set of Aeromaster 48-343 decals for the markings. Incidentally, between the Paragon instruction sheet and the decal instruction, they do a pretty good job of showing you where most of the antennas should go. You can also refer to the Squadron/Signal A-26 Invader "In Action" book for more help.

I didn't arm up the a/c because most of the underwing stores normally carried by the A-26K's aren't available and I didn't have the inclination to try to scratch build all of the racks & Willy Pete bomblets and flares that were normally carried there.

If you must arm up your bird, finned nape canisters, 500 lb 'slick' GP bombs and CBU-14 dispensers were also carried and are available in 1/48<sup>th</sup>.



All in all, I was quite pleased with the final outcome and the finished product really shows off the menacing look of the A-26K.





