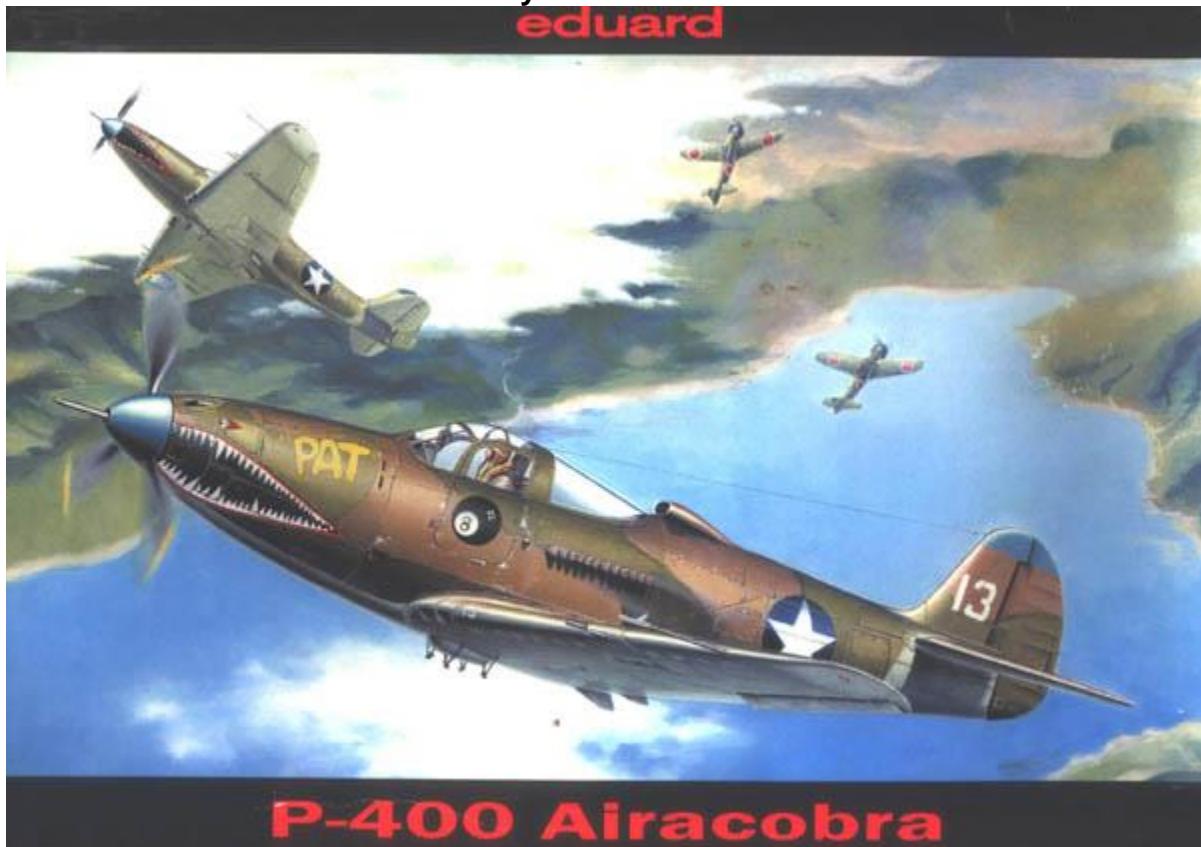


Building Eduard's P-39/P-400

by Dick Smith

eduard



Most World War II pilots that flew the Bell Aircraft Corporation's P-39 Airacobra generally agree it was not much of a fighter once the battle rose to more than 12,000 feet. But, like it or not, it gave many future aces in the Southwest Pacific their first chance to fly a fighter in combat.

When the Royal Air Force rejected their original order for the P-39/P-400, most were diverted to Australia to outfit the Fifth Air Force groups fighting the Japanese in New Guinea in the early months of 1942.

Until the recent release of Eduard's 1/48th scale kit, the only other quarter scale Airacobra was the old Monogram offering. The Eduard kit is a gem that contains a number of extra parts which will enable you to build virtually every model of the P-39 and P-400 series.

Construction starts with the assembly and painting of the nearly twenty parts that make up the cockpit. The instructions call for the "front office" to be painted Model Master "interior green" (FS-34151). However, it might be a good idea to check if the model you are building came from those rejected British stocks. If so, the interior should be painted "RAF interior green."

The P-400/P-39 had a “car door” type cockpit entry so much of the interior will be exposed. A little extra time detailing this part of the project will pay dividends. I added some paper belts with etched brass buckles from True Details (#48706) to the pilot’s seat to add interest.

With the cockpit complete, assemble forward portion of the fuselage that holds the weight that will keep the Airacobra firmly on its nose gear. It is a good idea to use five-minute epoxy to hold the weight solidly in position.



With all the cockpit and nose components properly aligned, cement the fuselage sides together. Pay special attention to the joint at the rear of the cockpit around the air scoop. This may need some extra sanding and filling.

While the fuselage is drying, assemble the main gear bays and air inlets and outlets for the oil coolers in the wing. Cement the top portion

of the wings into place and attach them to the fuselage. The engineering of this kit is excellent and the wing-to-fuselage joint should only require a small amount filler and sanding. Complete the basic aircraft by attaching the elevators and check for any gaps or seams.

The vinyl canopy masks, included in the kit, can now be applied to the clear parts. A little water with a drop of dishwashing liquid will aid in the placement of the masks. If you want to display your model with the “car doors” open, don’t forget to mask the clear windows, on the inside and out, at this time.

The model I built was one flown by Lieutenant Richard Suehr. His aircraft was one of those “rejected” and was painted in the British standard scheme of dark earth and dark green in a camouflage pattern shown on the instruction sheet. I used Gunze Sangyo “dark earth” (H-72) and “dark green” (H-36). RAF specifications called for the underside of aircraft in 1940 and 1941 to be painted “Sky-Type S,” a grayish-green color. The references I used show this particular aircraft with gray undersides. I used “sky gray,” XF-19, from Tamiya.

Two reference works used were "P-39 Airacobra in Detail" by Bert Kinsey from Squadron/Signal Publications, and "P-39 Airacobra Aces of World War 2" by George Mellinger and John Stanaway from Osprey Aircraft of the Aces, # 36. These books contain

excellent photos, information, and drawings of many P-39 and P-400's from all theaters of World War II.

While the camouflage colors are drying, assemble the very delicate landing gear parts. Bell Aircraft painted the landing gear legs, gear bays, and gear doors the same color as the cockpit interior. The twelve-stack exhaust ports, that distinguished P-400's from other P-39's are painted a rusty brown.

Lieutenant Suehr was assigned to the 39th Fighter Squadron, which painted their propeller spinners and fin caps a medium blue. I used Gunze Sangyo's "sky blue" (H-25) to duplicate this color. When the spinner is dry, insert the 20mm cannon and attach the prop blades to the backing plate.

Spray a coat of Future acrylic floor wax or Testors Glosscoat over the model to provide a smooth surface for the decals to adhere. The kit decals provide the early World War II insignia for the wings and fuselage. The decal sheet also provides the white "19" carried on the tail of Lieutenant's Suehr's P-400.

Complete the model with a shot of Testor's Dullcoat to seal the paint and decals. Remove the canopy masks and your model is ready for display. In summary, this is an excellent offering that easily comes to the top of the list of all P-39/P-400 Airacobra kits.



