

Hasegawa's P-38L in 1/48 scale



by Mike Hanlon

Sometimes late at night I can still hear the screaming, then I wake and realize two things; first, that I was the one screaming, and second, that the ordeal was over and there was no reason to fear, it was done, the bastard was finished and delivered and the nightmare was over. Still the dreams come and so in an effort to exorcise my modeling demons, I will share my nightmare with you.

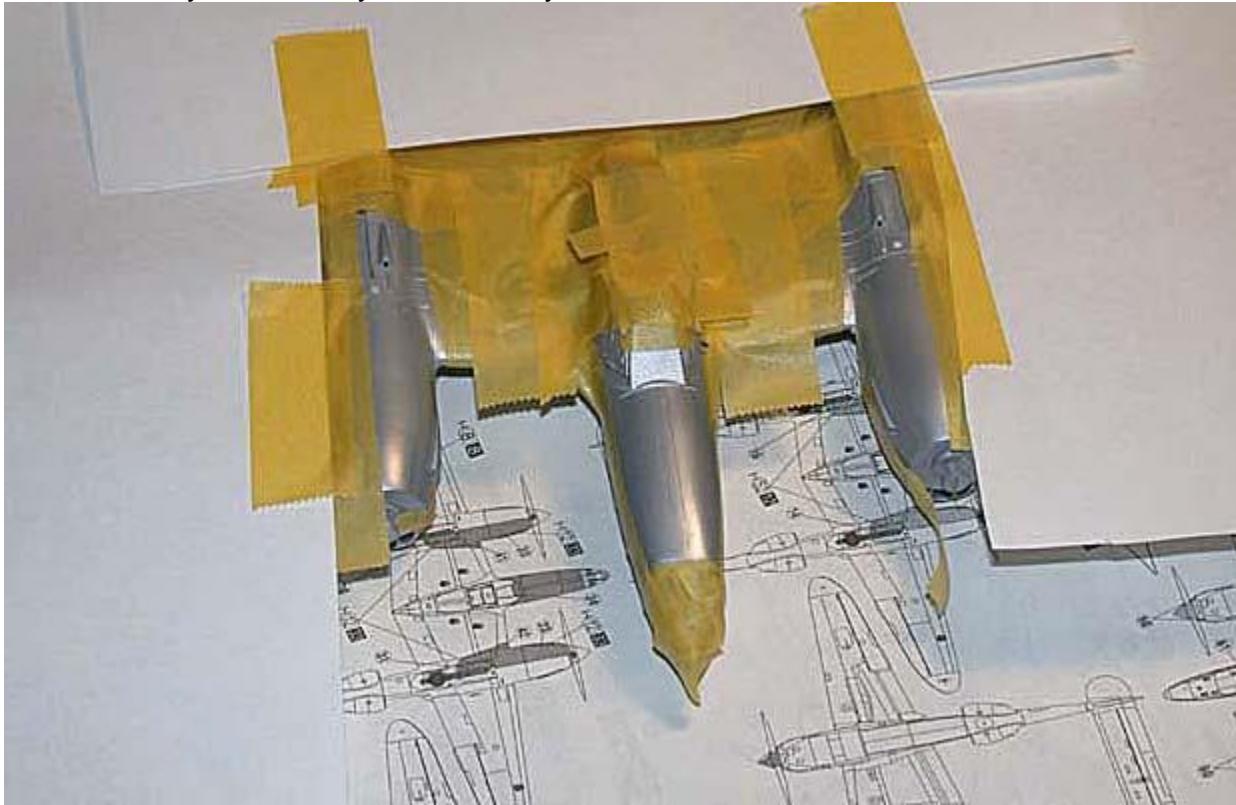
Read on if you dare as I describe the horror of building Hasegawa's 1/48 P-38L.

Released ten years ago, the modeling community rejoiced when Hasegawa announced that a new 1/48 scale P-38 was being released. Until that time the only kit available was the Monogram kit dating from the late 60's. After its release, rumors of fit problems and warping began to circulate. Still like many I picked up the first release and never got around to building it. About three years ago a guy I build models for gave me a list of kits he wanted me to build, among them the P-38. Two and a half years later I had built everything on the list except the P-38 and could stall no longer.

Construction of the kit begins with the interior; there are no real surprises here, the detail is adequate, but not extraordinary. I just added Eduard's color photo-etched belts and painted the remaining kit parts as per the call outs in the instructions. Resin interiors are available for those seeking a more detailed interior.

The kit instructions then move to the main landing gear wells. The instructions call for interior green, but other references describe natural aluminum or neutral gray. I went with interior green. The gear wells consist of a wheel well roof and two sidewalls. The fit of these parts is problematic and it is best to test fit them into the booms. Once the fit

is acceptable, tape the booms together and let the wells set. Alternately, you can glue the booms together and then fit the well pieces in. Either way there is quite a bit of fiddling required to get a good fit. If the wells are off, they will cause fit problems with the main wing, but as you will soon see nothing can really spare you that pain. The instructions would have you install the main gear struts and wheels prior to installing them into the booms, but this is not really necessary. The parts can be added during final assembly without any real difficulty.



Moving on to the booms, the first thing you must do is tape them together and then tape the booms to the upper wing. Click the center section of the horizontal stabilizer into place. If you are lucky, the port boom will be vertical; the starboard boom will be skewed outboard about 60 degrees. I previously had tried to build a P-38F and discovered, after assembling the booms and doing extensive filling that both booms skewed outboard! That kit was a source of spares for this model. If you are patient, you can run the boom halves under hot water and gently work them towards 90 degrees. I was lucky and only had the starboard boom to deal with. Being impatient I just grabbed the two pieces and twisted them. It worked! Once the booms were trued up, I added lead weights to both booms, glued them together and let them set. I then added the intake pieces to the front of each boom. These pieces are slightly undersized. There is no good way to correct this, especially on a natural metal aircraft. I gently sanded and polished the edges and fared them in. You could try to use a spreader bar on each piece, but this only occurred to me after I had glued the parts in place. The intercooler fairings on the aft portion of the booms have intact pieces, which do

not fit very well, requiring more sanding, filling and polishing. The exhaust doors are separate pieces that are, big surprise, undersized!

When I tried to glue the doors in place, I found that the glued part had nothing to grab on to. After removing the doors and letting my gluey fingerprints dry, I polished them out and glued small strips of Evergreen plastic into the sides of the doors. Once set into the recesses of the booms, the strips gave the glue something to grab on to.

Once the booms were completed, I moved onto the fuselage/main wing upper. This single part includes the whole upper wing, upper fuselage pod, and two boom center sections that continue on to include the center section of the booms aft of the wheel wells. There are two cutouts for the superchargers as well. Test fitting this piece revealed that the rear section of the wing was riding high where it attached to the booms. As there is a lip at the rear of the superchargers that coincides seam between the part and the booms, brute force and sanding did not seem to be a good option. I tried sanding the section of the part that included the booms, but the wing



would not drop down as I had hoped. After further examining the part, I noticed that the underside of the supercharger areas had a rather substantial box molded in. This was probably done to give the part more strength and rigidity. It was also the reason the part was riding high. I used a metal rasp to substantially reduce the size of this box and discovered that the wing dropped into place and the step was eliminated. I also discovered that my previous efforts at sanding the rear of the part had created a major gap that would require substantial filling! I substituted the upper wing/fuselage part from the previously mentioned P-38F and after again sanding the supercharger box, the replacement part fit very well. Of course the P-38F part was molded in a lighter shade of gray plastic which would come back to haunt me later.

Before attaching the booms, it is necessary to assemble the upper fuselage/wing part with the lower fuselage. Test fitting showed that the upper fuselage was wider than the lower piece. Installing the assembled interior closed this gap to a certain extant but

sanding and filling is still required. This sanding eliminates the panel lines for the gun bay. You can rescribe these lines or do what I did which was to cover it with a big, honking piece of nose art! The nose cap piece also requires some filling and sanding but this was actually minor. Before joining these pieces I also added some lead weights to make sure that the model would sit on it's nose gear.

Once the fuselage parts were assembled, filled and sanded, it was time to attach the booms. With the supercharger boxes filed down the fit was good with only minor seam work. I also attached the center of the horizontal stabilizer so the whole model was square and true. This is the last opportunity you have to adjust the fit of the booms. It also the point where the model actually starts to look like a P-38. The final step of this assembly is to attach the outer wing panels. The kit is designed to represent a P-38J or L. The distinguishing features of the L model are the compressibility flaps and the landing light. On the J model this is a round light under the port wing. On the L model this light was moved to the leading edge of the port wing. In order to stretch the molds, Hasegawa molded both lights closed and would have you cut out whichever you need. Since my model was an L, I had to open the leading edge cut outs. In spite of taking great care not to cut out too much, I cut out too much and once the lower wings had been added, I had to carefully fill around the masked light and fill the gaps with superglue.

Once everything had set I embarked upon a major session of filling, sanding and polishing. The seams are mostly minor, but there sure are a lot of them. Since this was going to be a natural metal aircraft, it had to be clean. Once the seams had been dealt with I installed the supercharger mounts. These parts require a bit of sanding to get the proper fit.



The scheme for this aircraft was simple, a natural metal finish with red spinners and red upper and lower vertical fin caps. The anti-glare panels are flat black. Since I could easily

paint the fin caps at anytime, I proceeded to apply the natural metal finish. As previously mentioned, the upper fuselage/wing piece was replaced with a spare part from another P-38 kit. Since the gray plastic of the replacement part was a lighter color than the remainder of the kit parts, I was concerned about the difference in the parts showing through the natural metal finish. I decided to use Floquil Old Silver, as it is fairly opaque. After spraying the model, I discovered that the finish would not dry completely! A week after spraying it was still tacky. I ultimately stripped the finish and applied a coat of Alclad gray primer. While it may be an excellent primer, the Alclad was not opaque and the different colored kit parts could clearly be seen under the primer. I polished this out again and started talking to other modelers. It turns out that when I sprayed the Old Silver I thinned it with Diosol, apparently Floquil changed the Diosol formula several years ago and the new formula caused the tackiness of the Old Silver. I was advised that using straight lacquer thinner would eliminate the tackiness. I tried the Old Silver thinned with lacquer thinner and it worked fine.



After the drama of the natural metal finish, painting the fin caps and spinners was blissfully uneventful. I masked off the fin caps and gave them a base coat of flat white before spraying them flat red. The spinners were given the same treatment. I then moved on to the anti-glare panels and discovered an annoying fact. Neither the kit instructions nor any of P-38 decals from three different manufacturers show the demarcation line for the anti-glare panels on the inner booms. I went through my references and discovered that this area was blocked in all of the photographs. While trying to answer this question, a friend won two copies of Jeff Ethel and Robert Sand's

new book, *Fighters of World War II*. I bought one from him and there on page 40 was a picture of a P-38 pilot sitting his cockpit. The inner boom demarcation line is clearly visible and I had my answer. The anti-glare panels on the booms sweep up overlapping the top of the wings.

It was at this point that I realized I had made a mistake. I didn't notice that the windscreens piece also had a part of the fuselage molded to it! This meant that I would have to attach it to the painted model and carefully mask around it to paint it. To add insult to injury, the part was undersized and required filling and sanding to blend in. I pulled out a set of E-Z masks to protect the windscreens panels. I have never had any problems with E-Z Masks and discovered as I was trying to remove the mask from the backing sheet that they had not been cut all the way through. Of course I noticed this after I had hopelessly mangled two of the windscreens masks. I went to Venture Hobbies to get another set and found that they were out of stock. Venture did have a set of Eduard Masks and so I picked those up. I have used Eduard's masks before but do not like them nearly as much as the E-Z Masks, but I didn't want to take the time to order another set and wait so I pressed on. Eduard's masks consist of strips that fit around the edges of the clear parts. Eduard suggests using a liquid mask to fill in the unmasked center sections. I used Tamiya masking tape to fill in these areas. I attached the windscreens and carefully filled, sanded and repainted the antiglare panel and touched up the natural metal finish. Upon removing the masks, I discovered that superglue fumes had seeped under the masks and accreted on to the windscreens side panels. I could not remove the windscreens as it was securely attached to the model so I was left with no other choice but to mask around the damaged sections and polish out the marred sections with a sanding and polishing stick. I carefully masked the windscreens, this time with Tamiya masking tape and restored the antiglare panel and re-polished and repainted the natural metal areas. Once the repairs were complete I used Future Floor Wax on the clear panels, which restored them to some semblance of clarity. Not a perfect fix but better than starting a new model from scratch. It took about ten days to repair this area. After I had finished the model and was cleaning off my model table I found a second set of E-Z masks that I didn't remember having. I love this hobby, it's so relaxing!

I tried something different with the superchargers. I first painted them steel then brushed them with rust colored Black-Out from the detailer. I added a black wash and then sprayed them with Gunze Sangyo smoke. Before installing, I sprayed them with PollyScale flat. The effect was very nice.

At this point I attached the landing gear, this was a fiddly operation but not too difficult. The main landing gear doors really don't attach to anything, you just sort of stick them in place and try not to knock them off. I replaced the kit wheels with True Details resin wheels. The propeller assemblies consist of two spinner part and separate blades. Although lacking alignment pins the blades mounted with no problems. The remaining canopy pieces required some sanding to fit into place and the fit is not perfect. If I could ever learn to cleanly cut a vacuform canopy from its mounting sheet, I would probably have replaced it.

Decals were from Superscale sheet 48-463 and were for "Embraceable You" from the 7th Fighter Squadron, 49th Fighter Group. The national insignias on this sheet were too large for the model so I substituted the insignias from Aeromaster's P-38 stencil sheet. The remaining decals and stencils came from both sheets, I chose whichever decal I thought looked better.

Assembly concluded with the attachment of the drop tanks, mass counterbalances, nose guns and radio antenna. I experienced no further calamities.

As you can see this was a challenging model for me both in basic construction and in self-inflicted wounds. That said it really does capture the look of a P-38 and every once in a while I think of how cool the P-38F looks, I have two more Hasegawa kits plus a really well stocked parts box and then I wake up screaming. Again!