

## Hasegawa P-400/P-39 1/48<sup>th</sup> scale



By Mike Hanlon

The Bell P-39 was a radical departure for aircraft design in the late 1930's; the mid-engine design allowed for an exceptionally maneuverable and heavily armed fighter design that was well ahead of its time. It's true potential was crippled when the USAAC refused to allow the aircraft to be equipped with a supercharger, limiting both high altitude performance and speed. The addition of increased armor protection for the pilot added weight and further hobbled speed and performance. Never loved by the USAAC or the RAF the Airacobra found a home with the Soviet Air Force, which had no need for high altitude performance and found the rugged well-armed fighter just the ticket for low altitude combat on the Eastern Front.

In 2006 Hasegawa released the first of their P-39 series, the P-400 Airacobra. The P-400 was an export version originally produced for the RAF. It differed from the original P-39 with the substitution of a 20 mm cannon for its original 37mm gun. Rejected by the RAF in 1941, the P-400 was sent to the USSR and also supplied to USAAC units in Australia and New Guinea. The P-39D was essentially identical to the P-400 and also served in the Southwest Pacific in 1942.

Hasegawa continues to maximize their molds by using inserts to allow production of multiple variants of the same basic kit. Fortunately and unusually for them, the inserts on the P-39 actually fit! I chose to model a P-39D and this required substituting a set of Ultracast resin exhausts for those supplied in the kit.

One of the nice things about this kit is the doors actually fit closed. It has always bothered me to see a P-39 model with both doors hanging open. For one thing the starboard doorway was blocked by the throttle so the pilot always entered and exited via the port door and secondly given that these were "car doors" how practical would it be to leave them hanging open in the field? The doors are molded in clear plastic so that the side windows could be molded in place. This means that the windows must be masked inside and out and that care has to be taken to ensure that the doors are painted thoroughly so that they do not appear translucent on the finished model.



Construction of the cockpit is straightforward; Bell used a variation of interior green close to FS34097. I used Gunze Sangyo paints for the interior with a set of Eduard Color photo-etched seatbelts. The instrument can be painted or Hasegawa provides decals as an alternative. I painted my panel. Once the interior was complete I added the doors to the fuselage halves to ensure that they fit. They did.

Before assembling the fuselage halves, I added weight to the nose. While I added enough weight to the nose, I put it in too far back and when I later added the landing gear, it raised the nose high enough to shift the center of balance and turned my model into a tail sitter. Since I had painted the model, I thought I was screwed! I ended up drilling a hole into the nose of the model and dropped lead bird shot dipped in white glue through the hole, which proved time consuming and messy. In the end it took around forty pellets to bring the nose down. The point is to make sure your weight is as far forward as possible.



Assembly of the fuselage and wings was uneventful, as previously stated, the gun inserts in the wings fit perfectly. I did find that when I added the wings to the fuselage there was a step in the lower nose area. Sanding and filling minimized this, but I would probably add the lower wing first and then add the wing tops. The tail planes fit flush.

Once the major assemblies were together, I masked the canopies with Tamiya tape and attached them to the fuselage. The wheel well interiors were painted with FS 34097 and masked off. The plane I was building was Olive Drab over Neutral Gray. I pre-shaded the panel lines with black and used Xtracrylix Neutral Gray on the lower surfaces. I had previously used Xtracrylix OD on a P-40 and found it much too dark, so for the P-39 I used Gunze Sangyo Olive Drab. Once the paint had dried I mixed some Tamiya Yellow Green in with the Gunze OD and thinned it heavily and over sprayed the model concentrating on the center of

the panels and high spots on the fuselage. This gave a very nice weathered effect and broke up the monotone effect of straight OD.



Once everything had dried I attached the landing gear and discovered my error with the nose weight. After that had been dealt with, I glossed the model with Future and proceeded with the decals. I used Aeromaster sheet 48-595 Airacobras at War Part III. Nip Nemesis II was flown by Lt. Dan McGee at Port Moresby, New Guinea in June 1942. The decals performed flawlessly, and in a small miracle for me I didn't screw any of them up and only needed one sheet to complete the model.

Final assembly presented two challenges, one based on the kit design and one of my own making. The drop tank provided in the kit attaches to the four anti-sway braces. No pins, no alignment marks, nothing! Miraculously I got it right the first time with superglue, no glue marks, and no misalignment. My second problem came when I removed the canopy masks. No matter what I tried I couldn't get the mask on one of the doors to come off. After a few days and several different attempts, I discovered that I hadn't masked the window at all! I removed the paint, Future and Flat coat with a microbrush dipped in Windex. My previous attempts to remove the phantom mask hadn't screwed up the clear section too badly and I repaired the damage with Future.

Overall this is a very nice kit with a few small areas of concern. Hasegawa has already released a second later version the P-39N/Q. Next time a Russian bird with no drop tank and a decent set of canopy masks!





