Boeing P-26A Pea-Shooter

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Box Art

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Scale: 1/72
Company: AZ Model
Price: $18.98
Product / Stock #: AZL 7220
Web Site: AZ Model [4]
Product provided by: UMM USA [5]

History

The Boeing Model 248, which became the P-26 series, was designed in 1931 and first flew in 1932, and was one of the first monoplane fighters adopted by the U.S. Army Air Corps to replace such classic biplane fighters as the Curtiss Hawk and Boeing P-12. Retaining some of the features of previous fighters (including an open cockpit, external wire bracing, fixed landing gear, and fixed pitch propeller), the P-26 set the standard for fighters at the time of its introduction. More than anything else, it helped to establish the monoplane as the standard of excellence in design, and most designers throughout the world were at least somewhat influenced by this fighter.

The P-26A was developed using the technology created by Boeing in such commercial types as their Monomail, and minor changes were made to the prototypes, including raising the headrest for pilot rollover protection, before production of the P-26A began in 1934. A total of 136 were eventually manufactured. Later, the plane was equipped with flaps because of its high landing speed. Minor differences resulted in the P-26B and P-26C. Most Army Air Corps units used the P-26A during the Thirties, but all had been replaced by Seversky P-35 and Curtiss P-36 Hawk fighters before the outbreak of World War II. A few were exported to China, Guatemala, and Panama just before the war, and some surplus P-26's were turned over to the Philippine Army Air Force, equipping the PAAC 6th Pursuit Squadron, who used them with some effect against the Japanese at the beginning of the war.

Two P-26A's survive today, one at the USAF Museum at Wright Patterson AFB in Ohio, and the other is in the collection of the Planes of Fame Air Museum, where is has been flown on occasion using the registration N3378G. Both are ex-Guatemalan aircraft.

The Kit

The first kit of the Boeing P-26A in 1/72 scale appeared about 1971, issued by Revell along with a number of similar 1/72 scale types which included aircraft of World War I, the Thirties, and World War II. All of these kits had exaggerated panel detail, sparse interiors, and simplified detail, and the Revell kit is no exception. It is surprising that no-one had come out with a replacement kit until the AZ Model offering currently under review. The Revell kit is currently available as competition, and for a long time it was all we had. Some of us built a LOT of them. But the AZ Model product is of a

much later generation and contains some features not available in the old Revell kit.

Consisting of 48 grey styrene parts, a resin radial engine, and a small transparency which serves as a windshield (although the box art says "Injected Canopy"), the kit has the correct basic outline and quite a bit of cockpit detail. As is true with most of these limited production kits, a lot of trimming is required to smooth out the rough spots, but this is nothing that a relatively competent modeler can't handle.

References

For whatever reason, there is not a lot of information available on this airplane. The best source is the Squadron Mini-Series on the subject. There was a Profile published on the plane a number of years back, and I found this useful. Another "Fighters" book yielded a good cutaway drawing, and some on-line sources from Google gave some more good data. You'll have to look for information on this one.

Instructions

The four-page instruction sheet contains a good historical sketch, a sprue diagram, a paint guide, and 12 assembly drawings which were quite useful since they included a rigging diagram. Color and marking information is on the rear box cover. Although the kit is described on the box art as "U.S. Army Fighter," this particular issue has decals for three aircraft with foreign markings, including Chinese, Guatemalan, and Philippine. I presume that another issue will include decals and markings for U.S. Army aircraft, as many Army units flew them during the Thirties. Otherwise, Starfighter Decals produces a series of P-26A markings for the Revell kit, and I have found these to be excellent. They would also be useful for this kit.

Assembly

It is best to follow the instructions to the letter on this kit. However, in the cockpit interior, the first step has some problems as the rear bulkhead is not the same as shown in the instructions. There is a small knob on the bottom that needs to be removed if the seat is to fit properly. The entire interior and sidewalls can be painted silver, with some black details. A seat belt needs to be added. The instrument panel comes in two pieces and must be glued together before it is attached to the cockpit wall. There are no decals for this part.

The one-piece wing is molded in the correct dihedral angle, but it needs to be carefully trimmed where the sprue attaches. Also, when the fuselage is joined, some filler is needed, and the wing needs a lot of trimming before it will fit into the fuselage since the fit is poor. There is a choice of tail wheels, and they are different, but there is no indication why one should be used instead of the other. I used part 21 rather than the parts 22 and 29. The thin film windshield looks like it could be used, but I had an extra from a Revel P-26A I was building at the same time, so I used that instead.

The landing gear butts into the lower wing surfaces without any problems, as do the horizontal stabilizers which butt-fit against the rear fuselage mountings. The resin engine is nicely cast, but the cylinders seemed to be out of alignment, and the small plastic crankcase cover mounted in front of the engine had the prop mounting hole slightly out of position. The instructions say to mount the engine with the single cylinder pointing downwards. All photos of the P-26A, and nearly all radial powered aircraft for that matter, show the single cylinder pointing straight up, so I did it that way. The exhausts are glued from behind the engine, and the whole assembly, after the cowling is in place, mounts into the hole in the forward fuselage. Only a little trimming was required, and the engine and mounting is quite impressive. However, the exhaust system is upside down in the instructions, as the exhaust ring should be on top, not on the bottom as shown. (Actually, it is on top, but the engine is what is upside down.) The prop is quite nice, although it has to be glued to the engine faceplate--no turning prop on this kit. The headrest should be mounted on the fairing behind the pilot's head, not on top of the seat inside the cockpit as the instructions show.

Painting and Finishing

I have always admired the Filipino Army pilots who flew these planes against the Japanese when the invasion occurred in December, 1941. These aircraft were handed over to the PAAC, and while some evidently were camouflaged in a two tone "desert" scheme, this one was apparently flown in the old U S Army yellow and blue colors, with Philippine insignia replacing that of the U.S. Decals are provided for one PAAC airplane, and this has the yellow and blue colors with olive drab painted over the American markings. The decals provide the markings, but not the OD paintovers, so I used white decal sheet and sprayed it OD. It worked great, and I was very satisfied with the result. Incidentally, the box three-view drawings show the cowling to be almost purple, whereas the box art shows blue, its more logical color. One thing left out is the black walkway at the wing roots. All of the photos I have of USAAC P-26A's in the blue-yellow scheme have the black walkways, but the kit instructions do not show them. It is difficult to comprehend why the Philippine AC people would have removed them, so I included them. I have found no photographic evidence of any PAAC P-26 in any markings, so I assumed that they followed USAAC practices.

Rigging

This airplane had wires going everywhere, so I included them, using my electronic wire rigging technique. I straightened out the strands of wire, rolled them perfectly straight, cut them to the required length, and white-glued them into their proper position. They are very fragile, but look like the real thing. I included the flying and landing wires as well as the low frequency radio antennas. The model would look naked without wire bracing.

Recommendation

I built this kit alongside an old Revell P-26A for comparison, and even used the extra kit decals for the Guatemalan version, but the AZ kit comes off very well by comparison. It has much more detail, no boiler plate rivets to remove, and although it requires some trimming and filling, makes into a much more convincing model. This one is worth getting. Highly recommended.

Thanks to UMM-USA (Unique Master Models) and IPMS-USA for the review sample. It was an enjoyable build.