Coloring a Kikka



Nakajima's Kikka was Japan's answer to Germany's Messerschmitt Me 262. Add a delicately applied finish to Fine Molds' 1/48 scale kit and you'll have a show-stopper straight from the box.

A realistic finish makes this pioneering Japanese jet a showpiece

By Francisco Soldán Alfaro

Say the words "first jet fighter" to aircraft modelers and they'll immediately think of Germany's Messerschmitt Me 262. The sleek twin-engine fighter is a well-known, familiar subject. The sharklike fighter rightfully struck fear in the hearts of Allied airmen and marked a giant leap forward in the history of air combat.

Say "*Japan's* first jet fighter," though, and some modelers may scratch their heads. Although it looks much like the Me 262, Nakajima's Kikka isn't as well-known as its Axis cousin, although there's definitely a bloodline between the aircraft.

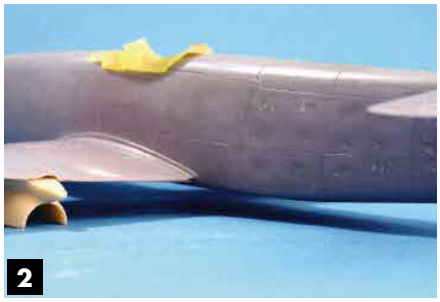
During World War II, the Japanese air attaché to Germany witnessed some of the Me 262's first flights. After sending enthusiastic reports home to Japan, Nakajima was directed to develop a single-seat, twin-engine attack aircraft based on the Messerschmitt design.

Dubbed the Kikka, the Japanese aircraft was slightly smaller than the Me 262. It had a metal airframe with fabric-covered control surfaces, and its underwing engine nacelles enabled its designers to install and test different engines without reworking the fuselage and wing structures. Several engines were tested before engineers settled on the Ne-20, which was similar to the axial-flow BMW 003 turbojet.

Although it was a bold step forward, the Kikka was truly too little, too late; the aircraft didn't make its first flights until August of 1945. Despite several setbacks, the ambitious program had approximately 25 aircraft under construction when Japan surrendered in September.

Kits of the Kikka are few and far between, so I was happy to discover Fine Molds' 1/48 scale kit (No. 10SP) for sale on HobbyLink Japan's website (www.hlj.com). Rivaling the detail of a Hasegawa or Tamiya kit, the box contains finely molded light-gray styrene parts, a white-metal Ne-20 engine (with a cast-metal mount), and custom-made canopy masks. While the kit offered plenty of detail, I knew I could enhance it with a carefully applied, realistically weathered finish. Here are the basic steps I used to build and finish my Kikka.





1 Construction started with the cockpit. Although I planned to model my Kikka with its canopy closed, I still made an effort to realistically detail the cockpit. I used a mixture of Tamiya acrylics to simulate Nakajima's interior green. Fine details were picked out with Vallejo acrylics and a detail brush.

2 The fuselage goes together nicely. This version of the kit includes a single white-metal Ne-20 jet engine and a cast-resin mount for the left wing. I removed the kit's styrene engine mount with a razor saw and installed the engine mount with gap-filling super glue. A little sheet styrene helped blend things together. I also added a few ripples to the rear fuselage by carefully scraping the panels with a curved hobby-knife blade, then smoothing them with fine-grit sandpaper.



3 Thankfully, many photos of the full-size Kikkas survived the war and are available for reference. Like a lot of late-war Japanese aircraft, it had a roughly applied, less-than-showroom finish. To simulate it, I first applied an overall coat of Tamiya flat aluminum (XF-16) with an airbrush. After it dried thoroughly, I again used the airbrush to apply the uneven green top coat to the aircraft's upper surfaces.

4 By working slowly and checking my references regularly, I was able to recreate the Kikka's splotchy finish using my airbrush. I used a combination of Tamiya's acrylic paints for the green finish, and lightened and darkened the mixture for different areas to break up the finish even more.

5 I drybrushed several areas of the fuselage with bright-silver paint to simulate wear and tear along panel lines and high-traffic areas of the airframe.









6 With the bulk of the finish completed, the white-metal engine could be completed and installed. Like the rest of the aircraft, it needed some realistic detail painting to set it off – it's a real focal point of the model.

7 I added the model's decals, then turned my attention to the engine. I painted the engine flat aluminum, then used darker metallic colors and dark earth tones to simulate heat discoloration.



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8 Lighter washes of artist's oils and carefully applied pastel powders helped weather the airframe and highlight its panel lines. When I was satisfied with the model's overall appearance, I added the landing gear and the balance of its smaller detail parts.

Although it's not as immediately recognizable as Germany's Me 262, Nakajima's Kikka marked an important step in the development of the jet-powered fighter.