FSM Special

Painting Identification Stripes

An alternative to decals

Story and photos by John Adelmann

Raised details, complex curves, and decals sometimes just don't mix – like when it's time to apply identification stripes to World War II aircraft.

Don't get me wrong, decals are great. Without them, model aircraft just wouldn't have the accuracy and flair of their full-scale counterparts. They work well on flat surfaces.

But for curved surfaces I developed a special painting technique. It worked fine for applying identification stripes and fuselage bands to my Hasegawa 1/48 scale Hawker Typhoon. All it required was a metric ruler, a sharp hobby knife, some low-tack tape, and a little patience.

Base coats. Just before painting the camo pattern, I "pre-shaded" the panel lines and raised details by airbrushing flat black onto them. For a shaded effect, I applied flat white to the



Applying decals on compound curves or over raised details can be difficult. John Adelmann demonstrates a simple, effective method he used to paint stripes on his 1/48 scale Hasegawa Hawker Typhoon.

undersides of the wings one panel at a time, **1**.

After checking the instructions to determine the beginning and ending points of the white identification stripe areas, I oversprayed those edges – intentionally going beyond where the white was supposed to end, **2**. When the white was dry, I applied several coats of Future floor polish and let it cure 24 hours to seal the paint and protect it from the upcoming steps.

Doing the math. I referred to the instructions once again to determine the true boundaries of the black-and-white identification stripes. The tape for masking the stripes had to be applied equally to each side of the wing, so I marked off certain recessed "landmarks" like rivets and gun-shell troughs.

Once both edges were established, **3**, I measured the black decal stripes and found each was 6mm wide. Each wing had four black stripes, for a total of 24mm. I subtracted that number from the width of the masked-off white section (60mm) and divided by 3 to determine that each white stripe was a little more than 12mm wide.

Normally I use a sharp pencil to mark the lines right onto the white paint. This time, to avoid reapplying and remeasuring tape to get parallel lines, I transferred the measurements onto a card. Then I lined up one end of the card with the edge previously marked off near the center of the wing. The marks on the other end of the card aligned perfectly with the second tape boundary, **4**.

Using the old method of measuring, the big problem was how to attach the masking tape to the wing with the card stock in the way. But without the card, getting the tape in proper position was difficult.

To solve this problem, I securely fastened one end of the card to the wing and put a smaller piece of tape on the other end. This allowed me to lift the card without moving it out of position, slip a piece of tape underneath it, and let the card flop on top of the tape. Then I simply lined up the tape with the marks on the card, **5**. It was so quick and easy, I couldn't believe it! I got perfect parallel lines on the first try.



After John sprayed flat black on panel lines and raised details, he airbrushed the appropriate wing panels individually with flat white paint for a shaded effect.



With the kit instructions as a reference, John deliberately oversprayed white beyond the indicated area, then sealed the paint with several coats of Future floor polish.



Low-tack tape marks the edges of the area to be striped. Rivets and other "landmarks" common to each wing half are reference points to assure the stripes' symmetry.



John made a card-stock pattern with the stripe measurements and taped it in place – securely near the root, lightly at the tip. The tape used to mask the stripes is slipped underneath the card.



When the masking tape is aligned with the marks on the card stock, parallel stripes are applied quickly and easily. Black paint is next.

Paint it black. After the white portions were masked, it was time to spray on charcoal black. Even though I cut the tape with a straightedge so it had very sharp edges, the black worked its way underneath in a few places. Without the Future, removing the overspray would have required remasking the black and respraying white. The Future barrier allowed me to remove the excess with a clean brush and paint thinner, **6**.

I placed the landing gear doors in the closed position, laid out the tape, and marked off the stripe patterns. The results were perfectly aligned black-and-white doors.

Fuselage stripe. Next I had to figure out how to avoid applying the kit decal to the Typhoon's rear fuselage, where complex raised detail replicated the aircraft's external stiffeners. There were too many bumps to allow a decal to completely snuggle down!

I cut out the kit decal and used it to create a custom blend of Model Master FS 34151 interior green, FS 36270 neutral gray, and ANA 610 RAF Sky Type S. As with the wings, the area was oversprayed, allowed to dry, and sealed with Future to protect the light green paint from the masking tape, **7**.

I painted the Typhoon's fuselage per the kit's instructions. After the paint dried, I carefully removed the tape and uncovered a perfect fuselage band, **8**.

Finishing touches. The entire aircraft was sprayed with Future and allowed to dry for 24 hours. Then I applied a wash to the recessed panel lines, wiped off the dried excess, and applied the decals. After additional coats of Future to seal the decals, I cut the Typhoon's shine with flat lacquer.

Painting the stripes probably took longer than it would have to apply decals, but I didn't have to coax a fragile decal or flood it with setting solution to make it look like paint. I simply created my own paintlike appearance – with paint! **FSM**

Identification vs. invasion stripes

Allied planners had learned from earlier invasions that careful scheduling, routing, and coded light signals were not enough to protect aircraft from the "friendly fire" generated by other invasion forces. They reasoned that protection could be found in some form of highly visible aircraft identification.

The RAF's Hawker Typhoons were using an effective identification marking instituted in December 1941: four 12" chordwise black stripes, separated by three 24" white stripes, painted beneath each wing. SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force) invasion planners devised a variation of this scheme and, to avoid later confusion, arranged to have the Typhoon markings removed in February 1944.

– Dana Bell

For more information, see Dana Bell's "Invasion Stripe History" on page 44.



Overspray is easily removed with a drop of thinner on a clean brush; the coats of Future applied over the flat white paint serve as a protective barrier.



John painted the light green fuselage band by spraying the general area, protecting it with Future coats, then masking its exact location before painting the rest of the fuselage.



John's technique resulted in a perfect fuselage band. After a coat of Future, he washed the panel lines and applied decals, sealed with more Future. Then he sprayed the Typhoon with flat lacquer.



Painting stripes may take longer than using decals, but the results are impressive.