



RESOURCES FOR MODELERS

MODEL REVIEW TBM-3, Accurate Miniatures 1:48

Reviewed by Nat Richards

For an aircraft that played such a significant role in the Second World War, and at the same time earned such an outstanding reputation from those who flew it, the Grumman TBF series has been sadly under-represented by the model manufacturers.. there just was not a decent kit of the TBF available from anybody at any price. ..Until now!

Airfix, Frog and just recently Minicraft and Hasegawa have each produced a TBF/TBM kit in 1/72. The Hasegawa kit is very nice indeed, Minicraft's offering is nice, but rather plain and spartan on detail. Of the older offerings, the Frog kit needs some help, but will build up nicely; Don't even bother looking for the Airfix kit, out of production and seriously nasty.

I can remember building an old kit of the TBF in 1/48 during the mid-60's, complete with electric motor to turn the prop.. .That kit was from Lindberg (I think. ..but don't quote me on that) and was, otherwise wholly unremarkable.

That takes us to the venerable Monogram offering in 1/48 of the TBF. . replete with folding wings, opening bomb bay and drop-ping torpedo. Not up to contemporary standards by any stretch of the imagination, but for many years your only alternative. This is not to say that it could not be built well.. with a lot of reworking and re-scribing it can look exquisite.. just ask Robert Rizzie to show you his TBF. You may remember this model from OrangeCon last October. Perhaps you thought it was the AM kit, but in discussion with Robert, he related the saga of re-creating the Monogram kit into an accurate, highly detailed, truly a work of art, model of the Avenger.

This now brings us to today. If you have not yet seen one of Accurate Miniatures' TBF/TBM kits, please make an effort to get a look at one... they are truly deserving of the "Kit of the Year" awards they have received.

Accurate has offered the kit in five variations; TBF-1, TBF-1C Atlantic. TBF-1C Pacific. ThM-3D and TBM-3 Late war markings. Actually these are essentially the same kit with differences in the cowling, weapons fit and decals. This is a mark of careful planning and strategic marketing on AM's part. The external differences between the - 1 and the -1 C is that the latter did not have the single .30 caliber machine-gun in the nose (offset to starboard). The -3 differed from the -1 in that it had the -20 engine offering 100 additional HP than the -8 engine. And the -3 had an oil cooler intake on the lower lip of the cowling ring. Otherwise the kits are identical except for the ordinance supplied. The only model of the TBM not able to be represented by the AM kit is the - 3E and it's derivatives. The -3E was some 11.5 inches longer than the -3.. perhaps AM could be persuaded to do another fuselage with this in mind at some future point.

The history of the TBF/TBM is well known. Designed as a successor to the Douglas TBD Devastator which found itself out run by technology faster than it's successor could be developed.

Why does this aircraft have two designations? The US Navy used a system to designate aircraft based upon: 1. The role of the aircraft, 2. The manufacturer of that design, and, 3. The number of that type of aircraft that particular manufacturer had already designed (Though the 1 was always omitted, the first number used would appear with the second design). Hence, the TB represents that the role this design was intended to fulfill was that of Torpedo Bomber. The F was the designation for Grumman (Just in case you are wondering, G was used to designate Great Lakes and later, Goodyear), and since Grumman had never submitted a TB design before, there was no number used (Also, in case you were wondering, there was a TB2F design based upon the F7F Tigercat, but it was never built). The M designation in TBM represented the General Aircraft Corporation a division of General Motors. Grumman was so heavily committed to production of the F6F Hellcat that it could not produce enough TBFs and F4F Wildcats (used mostly on the escort carriers as they were more suitable to the short decks than the F6F) to meet the Navy's requirements. Therefore, the production of these aircraft was transitioned completely over to General as the TBM and FM. Both Grumman and General produced the -1C model, but by late 1943 when the -3 model entered production, all of them except the two prototypes were built by General. So, with the change of manufacturer came a change in designation.

The model I chose was the TBM-3 with the cover painting depicting the attack on the Japanese cruiser Yahagi. List price is about \$ 33.00, but I have seen Squadron selling them for as little as \$ 23.00.

The kit itself is molded in a 98 medium gray and 28 clear parts. The package design and quality is excellent - protecting the kit from damage in shipment or while waiting for a spot on your work bench. The moldings are crisp and highly detailed throughout. My kit was totally flash free. Perhaps the first thing you will notice when you open your kit is that the surface detailing is exquisite. The aircraft's interior is so highly-detailed it removes much of the need for a photo-etched or resin detail sets.

The instructions AM provides are pretty vague on part placement, but a test fit usually answers any doubt to exact location. Speaking with Bert Kinzy' (of Detail & Scale fame) he has been contracted to develop the instructions for future AM releases similar to the instructions he has done for Monogram's Pro-Modeler series.. .but those will be a while down the line. I would recommend a lot more time than usual test fitting parts for location and alignment on this kit. The fit of all parts is excellent.

The molded in cockpit detail includes structure, wire conduits. control cables and detailed fixtures. Comparing the cockpit to the drawing in an old Air International issue, the kit looks perfect. The instrument panel is molded in clear plastic with integral rudder peddles. I liquid masked the instrument faces on the front of the panel and painted it black. I then painted the inside of the instrument faces (from the back of the panel) black and then used a toothpick to scratch the black off to represent arms and dial marks and then put white over the entire instrument face. This worked surprisingly well. Another way to do this would be to use a set of Waldron instruments, punch them out to appropriate diameters and insert them into the panel from the back side. I did have some difficulty figuring Out where exactly the bulkheads and instrument panel were to be mounted to the fuselage, but was able to make it all work. The turret is a work of art all by itself and consists of 11 parts.

The engine fits together beautifully, though care needs to be taken in mounting the engine to the engine bearers, as the cowl is a tight fit and if the engine is off center, the cowl will not fit correctly.

The major structures go together with little difficulty'. One brilliant part of the kit design was the inclusion of a single piece wing spar to assist in aligning the wings. The wings went on as slick as any kit I have ever built, only a minor amount of shimming for a perfect fit. I do have some long-term concern about the undercarriage.. When built-up this is a hefty model, and the gear legs look a little rickety under the weight.. but are holding up so far!

The bomb bay and wheel wells are detailed with the necessary structural shapes and wires and hoses. The instructions are pretty vague on how to mount the bomb and torpedo racks in the bomb bay, but again, test fitting quickly shows the way to make them fit.

The clear parts are magnificent and fit cleanly. One really nice feature is that the kit includes two sets of windows for the openings just aft of the wing trailing edge. The U. S. aircraft carried flat, oblong windows here, while the British Fleet Air Arm examples carried bulged, round windows - both are provided in the kit. This lends to making your model into a Avenger Mk III that operated from a number of British carriers during the war.

The TBM-3 kit includes a Mk 13 torpedo, with optional tail arrangements (original, quick-fix and final-fix). The kit also includes parts for the TBM-3D night bomber version including a ASD radar pod (that can be mounted on the starboard wing of a TBM-3D) and yagi-radar antennae.

The paint scheme is overall Gloss Sea Blue. The one thing in AM's instruction sheet that would be welcome in other kits is a table listing the colors, cross referenced by paint manufacturer.

The model comes with markings for an aircraft operated by VT-10 flying from USS Intrepid (CV-11...the same ship that is now a museum in New York City). Alternate markings for -3D of VT(N)90 flying from USS Enterprise (CV-6) are also provided (Does this mean that the -3D kit comes with alternate markings for a -3 flying from Intrepid???? I wonder?) The white "Stars and Bars" are a little thin and the blue reads through, so I replaced them with some aftermarket ones and doubled them up so the white stays white.

In summary, this kit is well deserving of the praise it has received. I give it a 10!

For another review of this kit. I call your attention to the current issue of the IPMS Journal for a detailed review (and cover photo) of the TBF- 1 C variant.