

# Boeing B-52H, 319th BW, 46th BS, Grand Forks AFB, North Dakota, 1981. By Colin Ovens

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Kit: 1/200<sup>th</sup> Scale Italeri (out of Dragon)- kit no.852.



On opening the box, I was quite impressed to find a very crisply moulded, virtually flash-free, and, considering the very small scale, a very nicely detailed set of components in a light grey, hard plastic. On the other hand, I was not too impressed with my first look at the instruction sheet, but, on studying it, it did seem to be quite logical in its approach to building the subject. I had never built a B-52 in any scale before, and was quite unfamiliar with the aircraft, so I decided to follow the Italeri instructions- after all they do know best... don't they?

The decal sheet offers two examples:-

- a) from the 319<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 46<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron;
- b) from the 17<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, 34<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron.

Both airframes are camouflaged. Option a) also carries a large "Yosemite Sam" character on the tail fin, and option b) bears the large yellow winged "2" of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Force on its fin. I opted to build my model in the former scheme.

Construction began by drilling a small hole, as indicated, in each fuselage half, either side of the nose to locate the bulges that cover the ALQ-117 ECM system. After this, the very basic cockpit, complete with moulded-in seats, was installed in one fuselage half, and painted black- there is no point in trying to detail this tiny item, and anyway the cockpit windows are so small.

That done, the fuselage halves were joined together. Straightforward? It was not! When I test-fitted the fuselage halves, I discovered that they were badly warped, touching only at the extreme nose and tail, and I deemed that the use of tape to hold the halves

together, while the cement was curing, would be unsatisfactory. I rather reluctantly took the “hot water” route to cure the problem, which it did- almost: I still had to use some tape halfway along the length of the fuselage. The join was not as good as I had hoped, and much filler had to be employed, with the consequent re-scribing of panel lines.

After all these shenanigans, the wing halves were assembled without any fuss. This was followed by attaching the bomb-bay area to the fuselage, and afterwards I fitted the clear component that made up the cockpit roof and windows, which fitted quite well. These windows are tiny and therefore I painted the inside of this clear part black- they are too small and too thick to see any detail of the interior (if there was any). The rear fuselage, aft of the tail fin, the fin itself, the wings, and the stabilisers were also fitted at this stage. The rear fuselage needed some filler to make a tidy joint. The fit of the tail fin and the stabilisers was very good- but that of the wings... Well, suffice to say that the top of the wing roots required a *lot* of filler to achieve a good wing/fuselage blend; the fit was, to put it mildly, very sloppy indeed!

The main landing- gear came next. Here, care was taken to ensure that the legs were placed to ensure that all eight wheels would be on the ground when they were fitted, at the end of the build. In the event, they did not! Great care had to be taken with the very vulnerable outrigger undercarriage legs near the wing tips- I really ought to have fitted them much later in the build, and they were a constant worry as to whether I would break them as I (carefully) manoeuvred the model about during its construction, but, as it happened, they survived intact.

Next, I fitted the eight engines and their mounting pylons. This was where common-sense should have kicked in- it didn't, and I blithely attached them in their respective locations under the wings. The under-wing recesses for attaching the engine pylons were, in my example, too wide, as were the recesses for attaching the two weapons pylons inboard of the inner pairs of engines. A lot of filler was expended in the fitting of the pylons, and still the things are not totally satisfactory.

By now the “Beast” was ready for painting. This was where things got messy. In my innocence/ignorance, I painted the airframe as per Italeri's instructions. They stated that gloss white (FS17875) was to be used for the undersides; that was correct. However, they also stated that matt Forest Green (FS34079), matt Interior Green (FS34151), and matt Pale Green (FS34227) were to be used for the upper camouflage. I was suspicious about these last two colours, as FS34151 is not an exterior colour, and FS34227 is the pale green used by the Israeli Air Force as a component of their upper surface camouflage scheme, and is not used by the USAF. However, a little research showed that the upper surface camouflage of a Strategic Air Command B-52H in 1981, should be painted with

FS34079 Forest Green (Xtracolor X110)

FS34159 SAC Blue/Green (Xtracolor X118)

FS34201 SAC Tan/Green (Xtracolor X119)

(Please note! Colours from Xtracolor are gloss (and therefore “decal-ready”), and thus their Federal Standard numbers will begin FS1\*\*\*\*, and matting them with varnish automatically brings them into the matt FS3\*\*\*\* series.)

So painting commenced, using the patterns provided in the kit instructions. Of course, I should not have fitted the assembled engines and pylons, the weapons pylons, and the 700 US gallon wing tanks on their short pylons, before painting the “Beast”. I think that, being faced with the realisation that there would be a very laborious process to get the pylons to fit neatly under the wings, I must have forgotten that painting the damn’ things and avoiding the leeching of paint onto the white underside would be a nightmare, even with the help of masking tape...

The SAC camouflage pattern is not as easy as it looks, but, very slowly, I did it by hand painting. (There were *three* repaints!) The mess that I’d made of the painting, where the camouflaged pylons met the white undersides of the wings, was not making me very happy either, and that was after several attempts to neaten these areas. Then, to cap it all, I found the *official* (i.e. correct) SAC camouflage pattern for the B-52... It was not the same as Italeri’s version! I was so annoyed and all progress stopped on the “Beast”, and it was “parked” well out of sight and mind. That was about three weeks after starting the kit, in August 2013.

Now, fast forward to late-May 2015...

I found the “Beast” lurking in my spare bedroom, and I thought that it might be a good idea to finish the thing... So, I sanded down the old camouflage paint to provide a good base onto which the new paint could “key” successfully. So, now aided by the official UASF diagram of the scheme, I commenced the *fourth* layer of camouflage on the upper surfaces. (Maybe I should have stripped off the previous paint layers- but, once more, common sense was thrown to the winds: after all, why make things easy when one can make them difficult?)

Eventually, I had the correct pattern in the correct colours; then realised that I had used Humbrol gloss white for the undersides of the “Beast”, and that was probably why they were a somewhat creamy, not pure, white- not good. So I masked the camouflaged areas and airbrushed FS15785 Gloss White (Xtracolor X141) over the undersides; then when that had dried, masked out the white areas adjoining the pylons and repainted these. How I wish that I’d left fitting the engines and pylons, etc, to the very end...

Then I started the decaling. The kits decals were used as the choice of “Yosemite Sam” was an obvious one to me. Strategic Air Command did not allow nose (or tail) art, except when an aircraft was participating in either a national, or international, bombing competition, and the subject of my model was temporarily based at RAF Marham for the Great Strike Bombing Competition, held in mid-1981, and, especially for this occasion, it wore the “Yosemite Sam” character on the tail fin. The decals were well printed but were *very thick and very matt*; they are not by Cartograf that Italeri now uses, but by their earlier supplier, Zanchetti-Buccinasco. At one point I felt that I was doomed to drown in the copious amounts of Micro Set and Micro Sol decal-setting solutions that I had to use to get the damn’ things to settle down and conform to the surface of the model, but I successfully swam ashore and let the decals cure overnight.



The following morning dawned- the day of our June meeting, and still the “Beast” was not finished. I had to fit the wheels. These had been pre-painted while still on the sprue; unfortunately, the all of the wheels had a large mould line around their circumference; this had to be removed after releasing them from the sprue, and the tread area of the tyres had to be repainted. One of the very tiny outrigger wheels slipped from my fingers and I feared that the carpet monster had eaten it, but, after about fifteen minutes frantic search, I rescued it, and started to clean up the mould line, and it promptly pinged out of my fingers, again... around twenty minutes later the carpet monster, having again failed to eat it, spat it out, and so I hastily got the wheel cleaned up and fixed in place. Now the model was almost finished, and I checked that my efforts of nearly two years back, in making certain that all the wheels would sit neatly on the ground, still held good- the rear landing gear does not, so I will have to sand down all the tyres to achieve this goal. The last stage was to unify the finish of the model, as I had matt decals sitting on gloss paint. To do this, I used Micro Scale’s Micro Flat varnish. Just a little in the airbrush cup, thinned with just a few drops of water was sufficient to give me the finish that I wished for. I decided that, in spite of the white undersides being specified as a gloss finish, for this very small scale it would look better if I gave that area a matt finish. It looks fine.

So there, on my work-desk, stood the “Beast” all complete, after nearly two years. The time was 4.55pm and would be at our Club meeting starting at 7.30pm. I then prepared my evening meal... After washing-up, I picked up the “Beast” to pack it for transport to the Club... That was when I’d realised that, in my haste to get the varnishing finished, I had forgotten to mask the cockpit windows, to restore their shine, and I carefully had to paint Klear over their matt covering- in fact, they could really do with a second coat.

By the way, the kit also includes very delicately moulded parts to make two AGM-28 Hound Dog air-launched stand-off nuclear-tipped weapons. Unfortunately, only one of the kit options, that of the 17<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing aircraft, which is depicted in the markings it carried in 1974, can carry these weapons, as they were only in active use from 1959 to 1976. The weapons pylons are used for a variety of other weapon types, and in fact they are not always seen to be fitted to various B-52H airframes.

So there it is- finished at last- barring another touch of Klear to the cockpit windows, and an attempt to get all of the wheels to contact the ground.

Would I build another one..?

# ***NO!***

Colin R Owens 05/06/2015