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5

Building a better BUFF

Assembly tips and detail improvements for ModelCollect's 1/72 scale B-52H

BY PAUL D. BOYER



Even brand-new kits can use some correction. Paul Boyer shares some techniques to improve the accuracy of this Big, Ugly, Fat ... umm ... Fellow.



The ambitious flight plan put forth by ModelCollect to produce new, up-to-date kits of U.S. Air Force strategic bombers rolls on with several versions of the venerable Boeing B-52 Stratofortress. But there has been some turbulence along the way, with the manufacturer offering corrected parts for its initial B-52G kit.

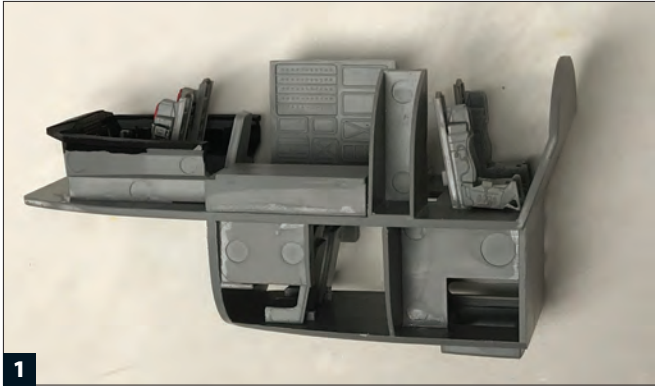
So when the kit of the B-52H model was issued, I expected a smooth ride. Well, not so much. Before we take off, be sure your seatbelts are securely fastened.

A reasonably acceptable model can be made out of the box—if you don't look too closely and if you don't know the B-52 well. I'm not a BUFF expert, but some dimension errors and shape problems were obvious. Some puzzling detail mistakes and omissions, and questionable design decisions



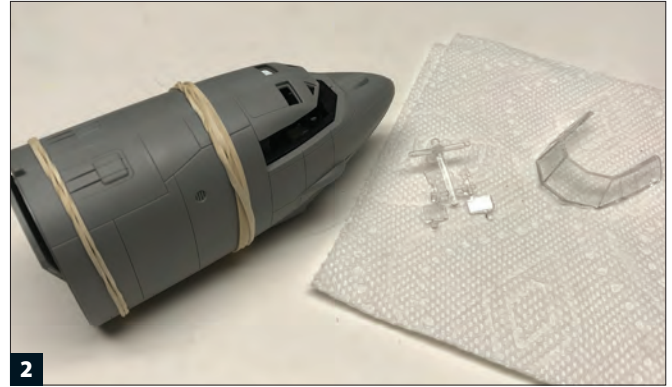
by the manufacturer are going to frustrate beginners looking to build the ultimate B-52 model.

So what follows is a tour of the improvements I made to my BUFF. I'll also show you some diversions to avoid some air pockets during assembly. I modified some kit parts, scratch-built some antennas, but had to divert to aftermarket markings. Still, my model isn't perfect. I'll have to head for an alternate aftermarket destination to fix other problems someday.



1

In the cockpit, the kit provides moderate detail for six crew stations, but any assembly and paint work you do aft of the pilot and co-pilot seats is wasted—you can't see any of it on the finished model. I didn't have alternatives, so I installed the kit's ACES II seats even though they are not correct for the B-52. Also, the seats on their rails won't fit under the low ceiling of the lower crew stations.



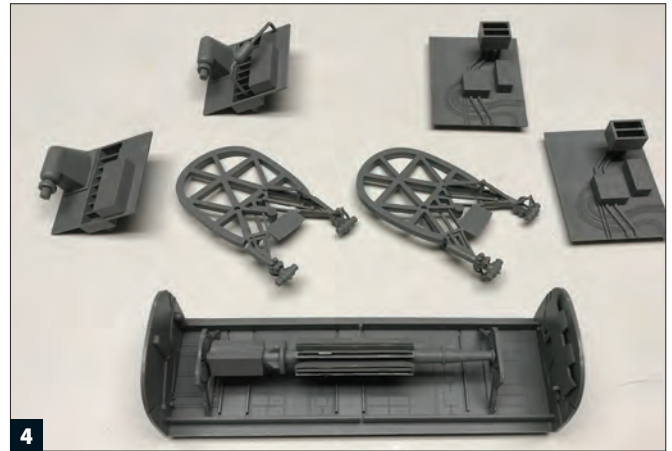
2

I decided to build and paint the fuselage in forward, center, and aft sections, then assemble them and add the wings later. With the forward fuselage closed, I worked on the "glass." The wind-screen fits perfectly, but the small overhead windows needed to be sanded on all sides and repeatedly test-fit.



3

I burnished Bare-Metal Foil to mask canopies and windows. Then with a sharp blade, I scored around each pane and remove the foil from the framing. I rubbed off what little adhesive is left with my fingers.



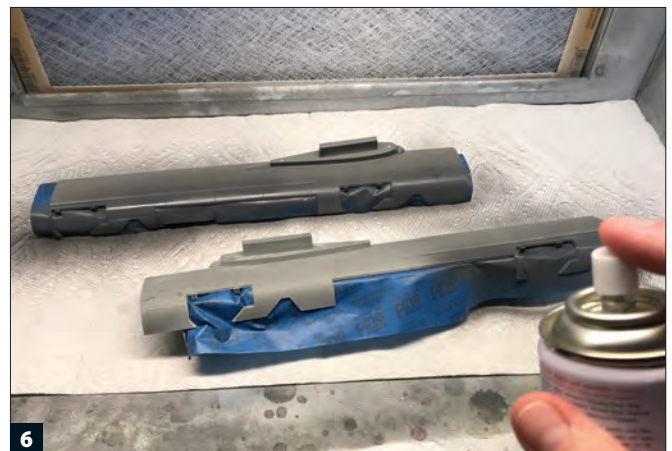
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I built all the bomb-bay and landing-gear subassemblies and prepped them for painting.



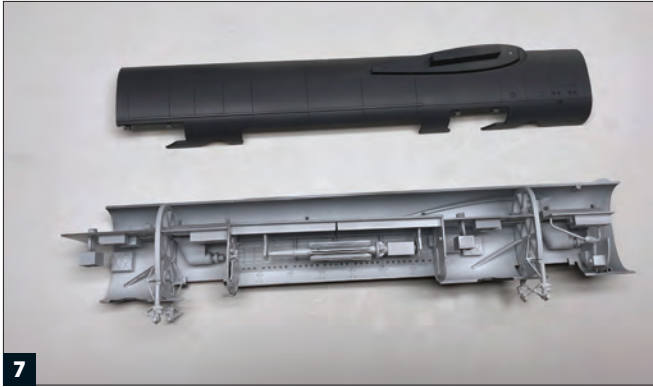
5

I sprayed the interior surfaces of the center fuselage section with Tamiya Fine White Primer, then did the same on the bomb-bay and landing-gear subassemblies.



6

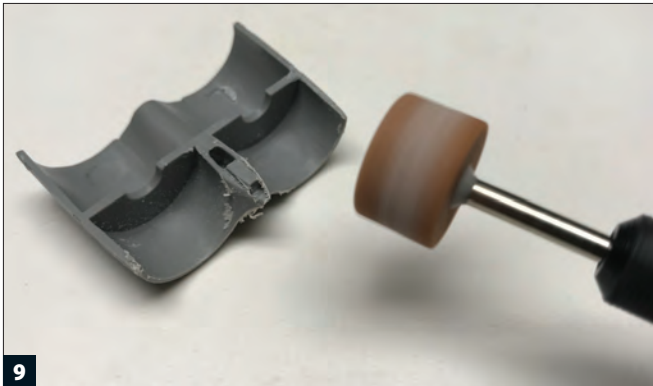
After adding the subassemblies to one side of the center section, I masked the interior surfaces with tape and sprayed the outer surfaces of both halves with Tamiya spray-can gunship gray (AS-27).



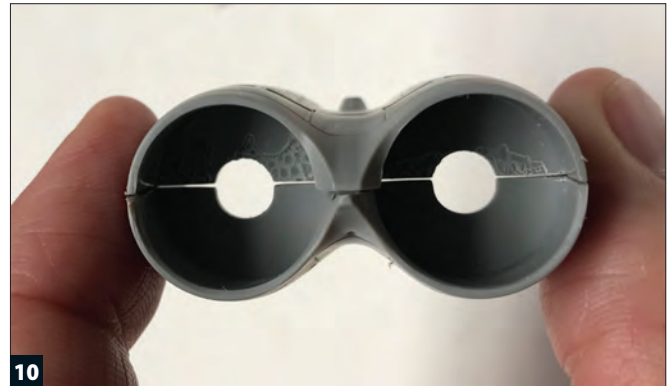
7 Here are the painted halves of the center section.



8 Next I glued the halves together and wrapped rubber bands around the assembly to ensure the glued surfaces were making good contact. I touched up the seams with a brush later on.



9 The shape of the engine intakes is not correct with the divider being too thick and squared off. I found a grinding bit that was exactly the right size and used it in a motor tool to flare out the intake ramps and correct the shape.



10 Here's a before-and-after-shot of the intakes. The top half is kit stock, the bottom half has been flared open. I had to correct each nacelle half separately as the engine fans in an assembled nacelle would not provide room for the grinding bit.



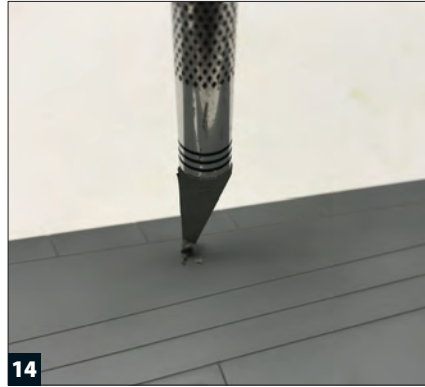
11 After assembling the nacelles, I cleaned up the seams inside the intakes with a homemade tool of sandpaper attached around a cutoff drop tank half with double-sided tape. This tool reached the seams without damaging the fan or intake cone of the engine.



12 There is a rectangular intake near the root of each wing's leading edge, but the kit parts don't show it. I cut away a small section of plastic from the root of both lower wing halves to represent the intakes



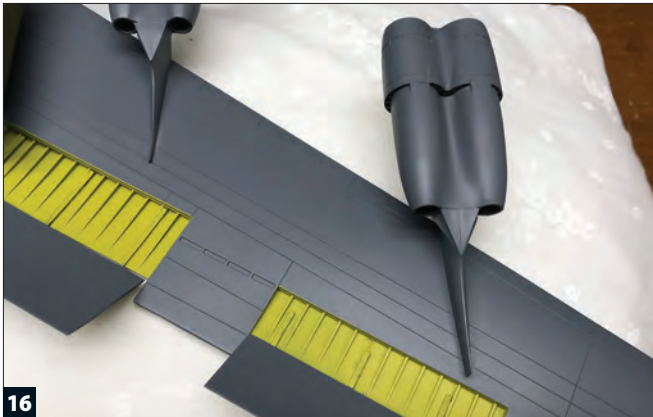
13 Here's the opened intake in the left wing.



14 You have to open holes in the wing for the tip tanks and external weapon pylons. Impressions for these holes are molded on the inside face of the bottom wing halves. I use a blade to first center the hole from the inside, then broaden the holes from the outside.



15 The suspension arms molded to the dropped flaps are very thin and break off easily. I reinforced them with a drop of gap-filling superglue applied where they meet the flap.



16 I painted each engine nacelle separately with the spray can of gunship gray, then attached them to the wing. There's only one small hole and pin at the leading edge of the pylon, but no other mounting pins or holes to guide assembly. I had to eyeball the attachment. I found that aiming the aft tip of each pylon at the third rib from the outside edge of each flap bay aligned the pylon as liquid cement flowed into the surface joints.



17 With the engine pylons attached and the joints cleaned up, I sprayed each wing assembly gunship gray before attaching the wings to the fuselage.



18 I applied a piece of Bare-Metal Foil to simulate the oleo strut of each outrigger.



19 The fit of the outriggers to the wing is poor. I had to cut down the "pin" and shave off the tip of the triangular aft support to get each strut to fit into the opening in the wing.