

HU-16A Albatross

by Gerry Nilles

Scale: 1/48

Company: Trumpeter

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The Albatross, originally named the Pelican, is the last and the largest of the five amphibians built by Grumman Aircraft. Grumman's history of building amphibians goes all the way back to its beginning years as a company, when in 1933 it produced the single engine JF Duck. However, it was not until 1937 that the first of its four twin-engine, amphibious flying boats, the JRF (G-21) Goose, began production. The J4F (G-44) Widgeon, the Goose's smaller sibling, appeared a couple years later in 1940. Of note is the fact that although these two aircraft saw very extensive and almost exclusive military usage, in the beginning their primary market was actually commercial and civil aviation. It would not be until after the war, in 1946, that Grumman produced an exclusively commercial amphibian in the form of the larger (G-73) Mallard. That said the Navy, being very pleased with the



Goose as an excellent utility aircraft, looked to Grumman for a larger replacement.

Design work on the (G-64) Albatross began in 1944; however, it would not be until late 1947 that the first prototype flew. Although the Navy initiated this project, the Air Force also showed great interest in the aircraft because of its search and rescue potential. As a side note, the designation of HU-16 for the Albatross came about in 1962 because of the implementation of the military's new "common" designation practice. Prior to that, the Navy used the designation UF-1 for the initial production Albatross while the Air Force used SA-16A. Also of note is the fact that the majority of the later "B" models, with its longer wing and taller tail, actually started

out as the original production "A" version. With the exception of 21 new built HU-16Cs, the other 241 HU-16Bs were rebuilds. This rebuild program, initiated by the Air Force in 1955, and quickly adopted by the Navy, included increasing the overall wingspan a total of 200 inches and the deletion of the leading edge slots in favor of a change in the leading edge camber. Because of this significant change to the size of the wing, the fuselage length also increased as did the size of both the vertical and horizontal stabilizers.

The service life of the HU-16, within the US military, lasted almost three decades. The Air Force retired the Albatross in 1973, along with transferring 55 of its aircraft to the Coast

Guard. The Navy's last HU-16 went to the Naval Aviation Museum, in Pensacola, in 1976, while the USCG continued its use of the Albatross until 1983. The Albatross also proved very popular internationally and no less than nineteen different countries operated them. As noted above, the aircraft's primary function within the US Military as well as most international operators, included both utility and search and rescue duties. However, 37 specially modified HU-16Bs also functioned in an Anti-Submarine Warfare role, which the US supplied to a half dozen friendly nations as part of the Military Defense Aid Program. These ASW versions of the Albatross are easily

recognizable because of their bulbous nose radar and the MAD boom fairing located at the base of the rudder. Overall, the Albatross, which had a total production run of 466 units, proved to be one of the most successful utility amphibians in history.

My initial impression, as with my recent "In Box Review" of the Trumpeter A3D-2 Skywarrior, is that there certainly is no lack of detail or parts in this kit. This is a multimedia kit that provides both photo-etch (including seat belts) and white metal landing gear struts.

All right, that said, this kit comes with a very highly detailed almost a complete

interior, and when I say almost complete I am talking about from the cockpit to rear main cabin bulkhead and everything inbetween, (which, incidentally, is one continuous sub-assembly including all the landing gear bays). The only interior detail missing is the lavatory compartment located just aft of the main cabin, however the door is there.

As a side note, the Albatross offered four different interior configurations. There is the standard utility/rescue layout with three stacked litters and one or two passenger seats, (the one provided with the kit), a cargo only style, a rescue/medivac setup, and a passenger only transport. However, regardless of the



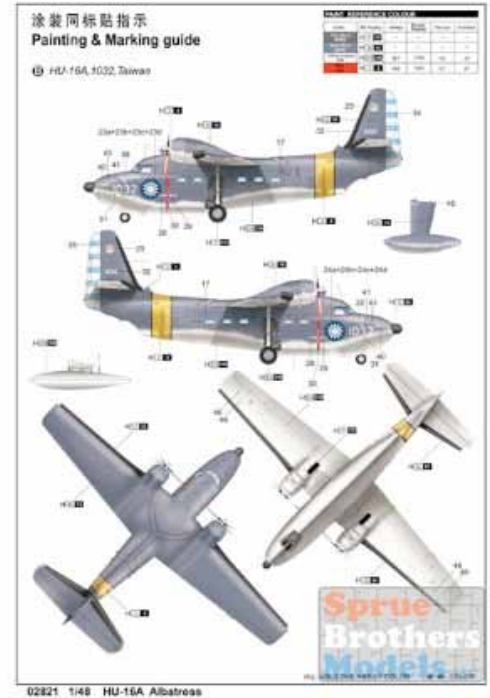
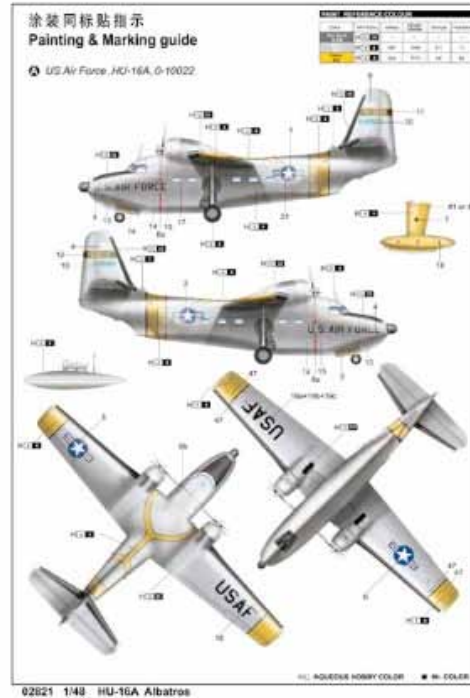
Picture Courtesy of National Museum of the U.S. Air Force

interior layout the bulk of the detail, located in the cockpit and at navigator's station, remain the same.

Now, if you are into building little electronics boxes you are going to be one happy modeler because the cockpit and the navigation station have a bunch of them along with some great looking seats and other goodies. Great potential here for super detailing especially considering that the large cargo door, located on the top of the fuselage and just above the main cabin, is a separate part as are the two access hatches located above both the pilot's and co-pilot's seats.

As for other significant kit observations, there are many, starting with the landing gear assemblies and bays. The main gear bays, prominently located on the side of the aircraft, look extremely well-detailed including separate, very finely done, hydraulic lines. As I noted above, all of the struts are white metal, although the nose wheel strut does come as an optional injection-molded part. Personally, I plan to use the stronger white metal one, mainly because there is no counter-weighting information provided, and if it is significant I feel that it is better to be safe than sorry. Trumpeter's policy of providing rubber tires continues with this kit.

The engines, as with the other sub-assemblies, are equally as detailed. Each engine consists



Picture Courtesy of Sprue Brothers Models.

of 50 individual parts along with separate prop blades that, thankfully, include alignment keying into the hub. Overall, kit construction looks to be straight forward, regardless of the part count.

However, Trumpeter has taken a rather unique approach to assembling the fuselage in that it comes in four pieces and for all practical purposes, these individual sections are hung on the interior sub-assembly with a break at the main landing gear bays. Perhaps I am being a little over cautious, but I plan to do regular fit checks, as I go along, to make sure the fuselage quarter-sections and interior sub-assembly stay aligned.

The kit comes with two choices of markings including a standard USAF Rescue

Albatross and a Chinese Nationalist Air Force HU-1A. Both are interesting. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, when it comes to potential color schemes for this kit, and if you are seeking some of the more colorful US Navy UF-1 schemes I have noticed that at least one after market decal company already has them in development.

This looks to be one of those kits that time and patience are necessary in order to do it justice, and as such, I would only recommend it to the more experienced model builder. My thanks to Stevens International for the review sample.

[Thanks to Chris Banyai-Riepl and www.internetmodeler.com for permission to use Gerry's article. - ED