

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

BOEING 299BA IN 1/144 CONVERTED FROM MINICRAFT KIT

(April 2016)

As World War II came to an end United States airlines started looking towards the post-war world and the development of new airline routes using new airline equipment that had been developed during the war. One of the major airlines, then known as Transcontinental and Western Airlines but later renames Trans World Airlines, planned to develop new air routes in Europe and the Middle East and needed a long range aeroplane to test new routes.

TWA decided to convert a Boeing B-17G for the role and selected one with very few flying hours because it had only been flown direct from the factory to storage. It went to the Boeing factory in Seattle where all military equipment was removed and it was fitted with improved engines and avionics, a toilet and a small comfortable passenger cabin with windows. Boeing's designation for the B-17 was Model 299 and all the variants had a letter suffix so, since Boeing had already reached the designation of Model 299Z, TWA's custom converted B-17G became the Model 299BA.

TWA used the 299BA in a series of flights in the middle east, not only to develop new air routes but the establish relationships with existing airlines in the region including Iran Air, Saudia and Ethiopian Airways. As a result of this negotiations TWA entered an agreement to provide Iran Air with technical training, expertise and management, a deal that was sweetened when TWA



presented the Shah of Iran with its Boeing 299BA, crewed by TWA staff. This arrangement ended after two years and the Boeing was sold to the French National Geographic Institute which used it for scientific, and global mapping, flights. The Institute used the Boeing until about 1967 and it was scrapped in 1972.

I knew nothing about this aeroplane until I was looking through the decals on offer from Airline Hobby Supplies. I was actually looking for some Boeing airliner decals and came across the Draw Decals set for this civilian B-17 by accident. How could I resist.

The other reason for finding this version of the B-17 attractive is because the Minicraft 1/144 B-17G is not one of the world's great kits. It must date from some time in the '60s or '70s and is not the most accurate B-17 you are likely to find. In particular, the guns and turrets are cumbersome and badly shaped so it seemed to me that a version with the turrets and guns removed might look a whole lot better.

Conversion is not terribly difficult with the major bit of surgery being removal of the chin turret and filling in the gaps where the other turrets used to be. Since the finish is polished metal there was a lot of filling and sanding, and then more sanding, to get a smooth finish. These days I'm trying to replicate a bare metal finish by applying two coats of Tamiya TS-17, polishing it up with Micromesh, and then applying two coats of TS-83, which is also polished. The end result doesn't look too bad.

The decals went on nicely and livened up an otherwise very uninteresting looking model. Neither the Draw Decals set or the kit decals provide the nose windows so they came from the spares box.



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