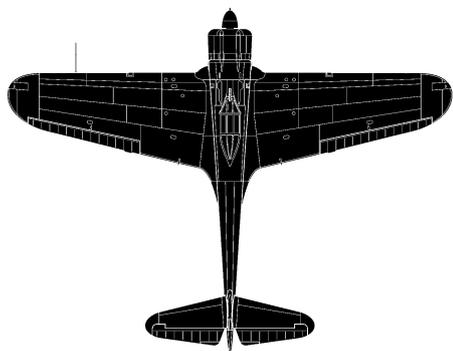


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

Ki-43 Oscar



The Ki-43 Hayabusa, called “Oscar” by the World War II Allies, was the primary Imperial Japanese Army Air Force fighter of that conflict—the higher public profile of the Mitsubishi Zero notwithstanding. It was much liked by its pilots, despite inherent weaknesses in its design. It was a tight-turning and swift dogfighter, highly maneuverable, and with an awesome rate of climb. Even so, the Oscar’s greatest advantage was its extremely long range.

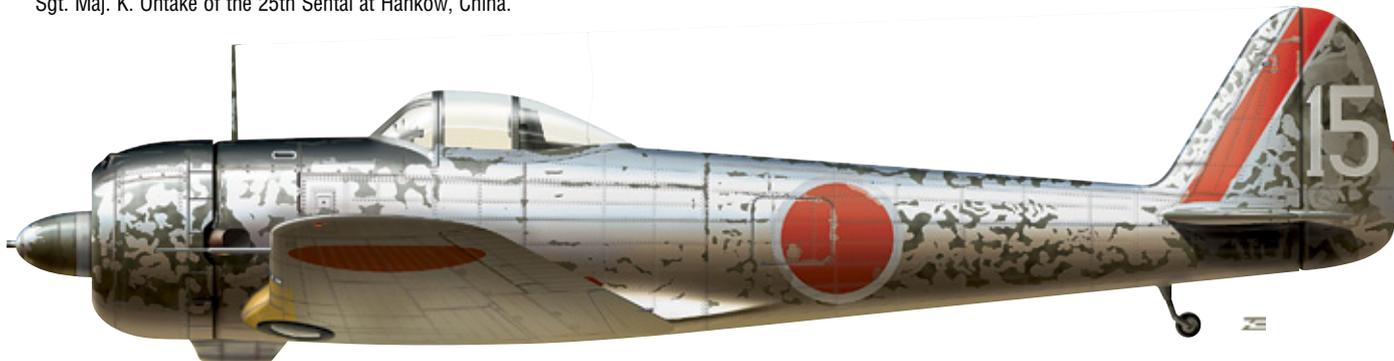
The Nakajima-built Oscar derived from the earlier and very successful Nakajima Ki-27. Its designers were tasked with almost the same requirements levied on the Zero. The JAAF wanted an airplane that was faster and longer ranged than the Ki-27, with the same degree of maneuverability. The Nakajima response was to reduce weight and drag, resulting in a clean, all-metal, very lightweight

fighter that encountered persistent structural difficulties. Attaining the goals set by the government had induced the designers to cut structural weight to the point that many early Ki-43s experienced wrinkled or collapsed wings during high-speed pullout. Massive rework of airplanes already in the field and a redesigned wing for airplanes going into production partially solved this problem.

Still, the airframe of the Hayabusa was never as robust as its American opponents, and was susceptible to destruction from bursts of machine gun fire. The early versions of the fighter did not have rubber-coated self-sealing fuel tanks or armor protection for the pilot. Worse, its armament was limited to variations of two guns mounted in the cowlings. This was no match for the concentrated firepower of the typical US fighter.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: Japanese Army Air Force Ki-43 Oscar—#15—as it appeared in late 1943 when flown by Sgt. Maj. K. Ohtake of the 25th Sentai at Hankow, China.



The Oscar is feted by Japanese schoolgirls.

In Brief

Designed by Nakajima ★ built by Nakajima, Tachikawa, and Japanese First Army Air Arsenal ★ first flight January 1939 ★ crew of one ★ number built 5,919 ★ **Specific to Ki-43 II:** one Ha-115 radial engine ★ armament two 12.7 mm machine guns; two 250 kg bombs ★ max speed 329 mph ★ cruise speed 273 mph ★ max range 1,990 mi ★ weight (loaded) 5,710 lb ★ span 35 ft 6 in ★ length 29 ft 3 in ★ height 10 ft 9 in.

Famous Fliers

Top aces: Satoshi Anabuki (39), Isamu Sasaki (38), Yasuhiko Kuroe (30), Chiyoji Saito (28), Goichi Sumino (27), Moritsugu Kanai (26), Isamu Hosono (26), Tomoari Hasegawa (22), Katsuaki Kira (21), Naoharu Shiromoto (21), Saburo Nakamura (20).

Interesting Facts

Nicknamed by Japanese as Hayabusa (“Peregrine Falcon”) ★ used after World War II by French air arm against Viet Minh ★ produced more Japanese aces than any airplane ★ served as mainstay of Army’s large “Special Attack” (Kamikaze) program ★ flown (with PLA star) over Tiananmen Square in Beijing on Oct. 1, 1949, as Mao Zedong proclaimed People’s Republic of China ★ subject of Japanese Army feature film ★ film’s song, “The Kato Hayabusa Fighter Wing,” found on Japanese karaoke menus.