

Mitsubishi Ki-15 (BABS) 120" Wing Span (3m) Plan.

The **Mitsubishi Ki-15** (九七式司令部偵察機 *Kyunana-shiki sireibu teisatsuki?*) was a Japanese [reconnaissance aircraft](#) and a light attack [bomber](#) of the [Second Sino-Japanese War](#) and [Pacific War](#). It began as a fast civilian [mail plane](#). It was a single-engine, low-wing, [cantilever monoplane](#) with a fixed [tailwheel undercarriage](#); it carried a crew of two. It served with both the [Imperial Japanese Army](#) and [Navy](#) (as the **C5M**). During [World War II](#) it was nicknamed "**Babs**" by the [Allies](#)

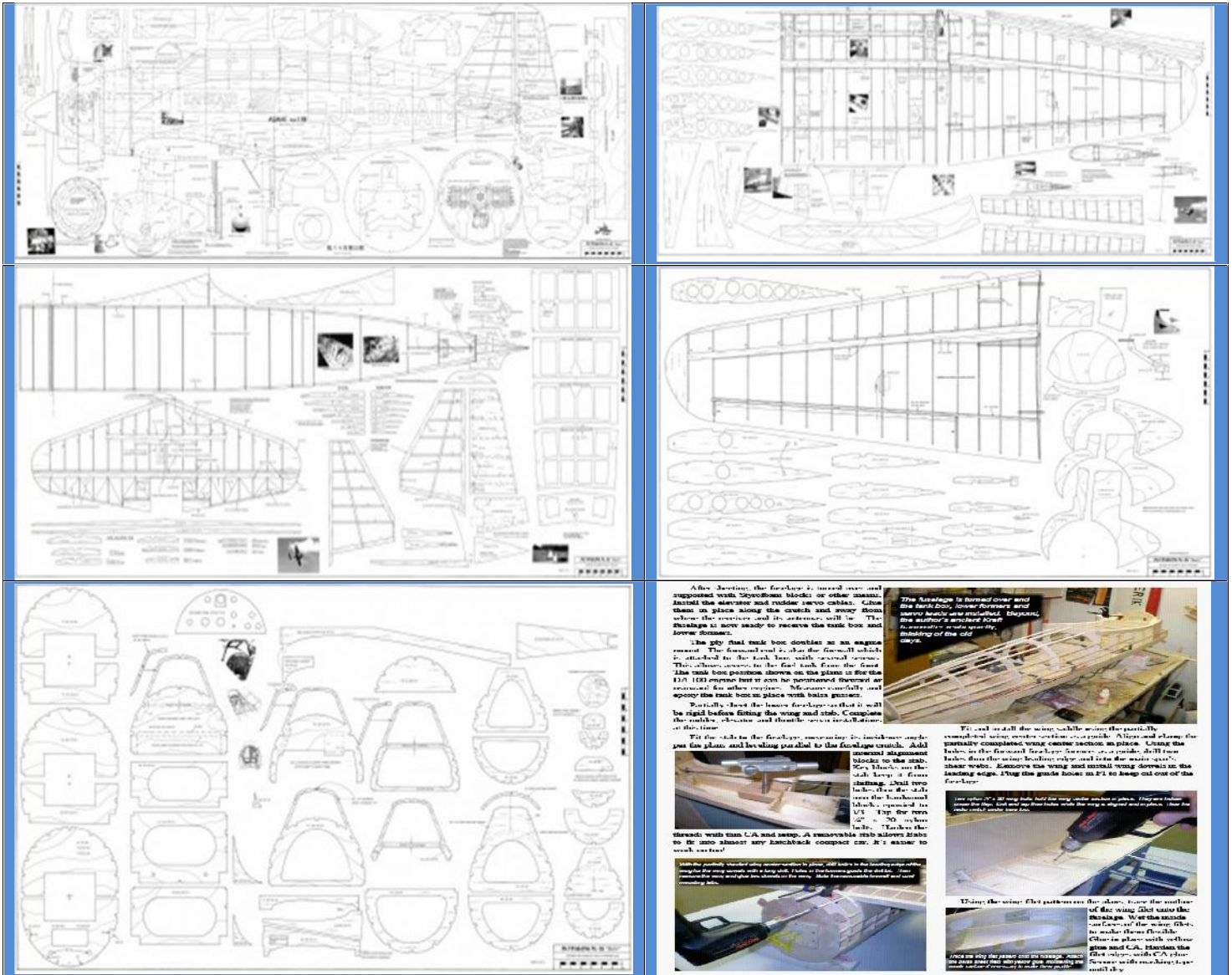


Design and development

The Ki-15 was designed by the [Mitsubishi](#) corporation to meet an [Imperial Japanese Army Air Force](#) requirement of 1935 for a two-seat, high-speed reconnaissance aircraft.^[1] The resulting aircraft was a low-wing cantilever monoplane with a fixed, [spatted undercarriage](#), similar to other all-metal [stressed-skin](#) monoplanes developed elsewhere in 1930s, such as the [Heinkel He 70](#) and the [Northrop Alpha](#). Power was by a single [Nakajima Ha-8 radial engine](#), giving 560 kW (750 hp) at 4,000 m (13,120 ft). The first [prototype](#) flew in May 1936, with testing proving successful, the aircraft meeting all performance requirements, reaching a speed of 481 km/h (299 mph) and showing good handling characteristics.^[2]

Service testing was completed without difficulty and the type was ordered into production under the official designation **Army Type 97 Command Reconnaissance Plane Model 1** In May 1937, a year after the first flight, delivery of the first of 437 production aircraft to the army began.

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World record flight to Europe and other civilian use

Despite the relatively weak engine and fixed undercarriage, the Ki-15 was remarkably fast. During the initial flight testing, the Asahi newspaper [Asahi Shimbun](#) obtained permission to purchase the second prototype. The aircraft was given the designation *Karigane* (Wild Goose), flying on 19 March 1937,^[3] being named *Kamikaze* and registered as **J-BAAI**. It was the first Japanese-built airplane to fly to [Europe](#) and caused a sensation in 1937 by making the flight between [Tokyo](#) and [London](#), for the [Coronation](#) of [King George VI](#), between 6 April 1937 and 9 April 1937 in a flight time of 51 hours, 17 minutes and 23 seconds, a world record at the time^[4] Following the success of the Japan-England flight, a small number of Ki-15s were sold to civil customers. One of the early production aircraft was named "Asakaze" (**J-BAAL**) and was also used by the "Asahi Shimbun"; others were used by various civilian operators as mail planes.

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Operational history

The Ki-15-I was almost immediately placed into operational service at the beginning of the war with China in 1937. The aircraft proved useful in the early period of the [Second Sino-Japanese War](#) and performed missions deep into Chinese strategic rear areas, as far as reaching [Lanzhou](#). Its high speed gave it a distinct advantage until the [Chinese Air Force](#) acquired [Soviet Polikarpov I-16](#) fighters. This aircraft was used for level bombing, close support and photo reconnaissance before being eventually replaced by the [Mitsubishi Ki-30](#).



Plans were already in hand to improve the Ki-15-I, and in September 1939 the **Ki-15-II** was put into production with the 671 kW (900 hp) [Mitsubishi Ha-26-1](#); the smaller diameter of this both reduced drag and overcame one of the major shortcomings of the initial version: poor forward field of view past the large-diameter of the initial [Nakajima Kotobuki](#) engine. The improved version entered production in September 1939 as the Ki-15-II.

The Japanese Navy, impressed by the performance of this aircraft, ordered 20 examples of the Ki-15-II under the designation "Navy Type 98 Reconnaissance Plane Model 1," or Mitsubishi designation **C5M1**, even before the Army. The Navy acquired subsequently 30 **C5M2** aircraft which had an even more powerful 708 kW (949 hp) [Nakajima Sakae](#) 12 engine. They were used for reconnaissance duties. In a subsequent upgrade, the army also experimented with an even more powerful engine with 783 kW (1,050 hp) [Mitsubishi 102](#) radial in the **Ki-15-III** which did not enter production.

When production ended, approximately 500 examples of all versions of the Ki-15 had been built, the majority in front-line service when the Pacific War began. By 1943, the Ki-15 had been relegated to second-line roles, but numbers were expended in [kamikaze](#) attacks in the closing stages of [World War II](#).