

My German Paratrooper Diorama

This figure was made for Ray, as part of my contribution to the auction that was held by the 1/6th Collectors Club, when they were trying to raise money for the Ghurka's. This so far is the only figure and base that I have done, that I was terrified of ruining. As the figure is not mine, and I have been trusted by Ray to make a diorama for it, and I thought at various points in creating it, that I may have bitten off more than I could chew.



Figure and base construction

*To start with for this diorama, I had to find a base that I could use for this, and I came across this company while I was doing an internet search. <http://www.dalescraft.com/uk2shop.htm> On their website, look for the Sycamore Plaques - <http://www.dalescraft.com/uk2shop-18.htm> They come in a variety of sizes and shapes, and are excellent for making diorama bases. **Note:** that they have to be sealed before any water based products are applied to them, because as with any wooden product. They will warp if any water is allowed to penetrate into the wood.*

Below are some pictures of what the plaques look like on their website:



Once I had the base selected for this diorama, I then set about trying to get the pose right; these are some of the pictures both myself and Ray used to try to decide on the pose.



I was given a sort of free rein by Ray in the construction of the base, although I was told it had to be from the Italian theatre. So I decided on a rocky landscape, and I managed to get hold of some large stones, to sort of represent the rocks. Also some sand and model ground cover from Games Workshop. The first thing I did was to make up a thick mixture of PVA glue; this was then painted onto the top of the base to seal it against the plaster. When this was done, I then left the base aside to dry off.



Once I was happy that the base was sealed. I then put some Duct Tape around the top edge to set the border, between the landscape itself and the sides of the base. As I wanted to make sure that the curved edges of the base were protected from any damage or any paint I would use. Making sure that the square inside edges are pressed down so that none of the plaster seeped under it. I then made up a thick mixture of Polyfilla, which in the UK is similar to Plaster of Paris.

This was then placed on the middle of the base, and sculpted it to form the landscape, when I was happy with the basic shapes I wanted. I placed the large stones in the mixture, and then played about rearranging the stones and mixture to make the final landscape using the figure to get the final pose. To set the mixture and the stones in place, I then used a runny mixture of PVA glue and water mixed together. This is like a final subtle sculpting of the landscape, plus it bonds everything together and also strengthens the whole base.



While that was drying I then sprinkled the sand and other ground cover into the wet plaster, pressing it down with my finger in some places to make sure it sets with the plaster. The pictures above show the base once I had let it dry, I then put it on its side to carefully shake off and loose ground cover.

Note: Do this on some newspaper, as you can save and reuse the same ground cover again. I then made up some more of the thinned PVA glue, and painted it onto the places that were showing through as the white of the plaster. Especially paying attention to make sure I got the sand in between the rocks. Once I was happy that all of the plaster was covered, left the whole base aside for three days to fully set. The next step I did was to test fit the figure onto the base, to make sure that the feet are flat on the ground. This where another problem arose, which was that I could not get the figure to stay set in the pose I wanted. So, I had to take the trousers off the figure and tape the joints up. This was done with the Duct Tape, similar to the way I used it on my Sepp figure.

The only major problem that I found with doing this was that to get the figure in the pose I wanted, and stay fixed in it. I had put the tape tightly into the waist joint, knees and ankles. **Note:** Make sure you have the trousers back on the figure before you place the figure in a pose like this. Because once you tape up the joints, you will never get the trousers back on again. Just do as I did, which was to lower the trousers to tape up the body, pull them back up and then raise the legs to tape the knees and ankles.

I then dressed the figure again with the boots and gaiters, and again set the pose I wanted. I then made a note of where each of the feet went on the base. I then drilled four holes in the base for the screws that would go through the base into the figure's feet to hold it in place. I also used a countersink drill bit on the holes on the underneath of the base, so that the heads of the screws would not stick out from under the base. **Note:** Make sure that the screws are not too long, because if they are they could come straight through the top of the boot.



I then placed the figure on the base, lining up the boots with the holes in the base, and then I placed the base on the edge of my work bench and put the screws through the base into the figure's feet.

Note: Making sure I pressed down on the top of the foot at the same time as I tightened up the screws, as this makes sure the foot is flat on the base. With this figure I wanted a little bit of detail on the feet, so I placed the left foot on top of the rocks. And with the screws I came up between the rocks into the foot, which pulled the boot onto the rocks. As I could see the screws I disguised them, with a bit of plaster, PVA and the sand ground cover in between the rocks.

It was then once this had set I thought that the base still looked a bit bare, so I found a thin twig in the garden. Trimmed it to look like a bush, and then tied onto it some lichen to make the leaves. This was then painted with various shades of green and brown, to lose the bright green colour of the lichen. Another hole was drilled in the base, and the twig (bush) was pushed into it to fix it to the base.



Once I was happy with the figure and the base, I then removed the Duct Tape from the base edges, making sure that I did as little damage possible to the landscape edges. When that was all removed, I then painted the edges of the landscape with thinned PVA glue, and sprinkled some of the sand onto the edges. This was to lose the plaster colour and make sure that the landscape had a defined edge to it. Again this was left for two days to dry completely.

When I went back to the figure and base, then started off with painting the uniform trousers with a thinned mix of PVA glue and water. This allowed me to fix the folds in them and pose the trousers as I wanted; this was also done to the jacket. This is when I had the idea about the jacket flying out at the back, to try to add some effect to the pose. To get the back of the jacket into the position I wanted, I put a piece of plastic rod between the base and the jacket. I then painted it with the PVA mix to set the pose, adding folds where I wanted. Once that had set I removed the rod, and the jacket was set in a sort of flying open pose.

The two final things that I did with the figure was to add mud onto the lower legs; this was done with a thin mix of plaster and brown acrylic paint. This was brushed onto the gaiters, trouser bottoms, boots and on some of the trouser folds. I also added some lightly onto the jacket edges and elbows to simulate dirt. This was then drybrushed with a lighter brown colour, to simulate dried mud. Around the right hand boot I added some neat PVA glue to look like a puddle, as when it goes clear when it dries. This was built up slowly around the boot, adding some of the sand and brown paint to it, to make it look like mud, also to make it look like the boot has sunk into the ground.