

Building Military Dioramas Vol. VII



Verlinden Publications

Liberation

By VP Studios

After the Normandy breakout Allied troops swarmed all over the countryside, liberating one town & village after another. In most cases they were expected by the population, and flags & banners came out of nowhere. Sometimes they were just there. This diorama recreates such an event. An advanced US Army party has pulled into town under the eyes of the delighted civilians.



The 'Jumbo' Sherman mod was built using the now discontinued VP conversion set on a Tamiya Sherman suspension.

All items used for this liberation scene are readily available by surveying the VP catalog, except for the plywood base, which comes from the lumber yard or do-it-yourself store. The areas for the building and park wall were marked and cobblestone sheets were cut to fit and glued to the base. The sides were sanded smooth with a sanding pad and painted flat Black. The Gray color of the resin cobblestones makes it very easy to weather. A wash of a mix of Black + Dark Earth was first applied and gently wiped with a rag, making the resin show through the wash. A treatment with Scotchbrite blends it in and breaks the contrast.





A few tank crewmen taking advantage from the short stop to check out some strange noises coming from the suspension are flanked by a curious boy and a newspaper salesman. Note the oh-so familiar equipment stowage on the engine deck and turret.



The commercial signs break-up the boring side of the house and adds much needed color.



The advanced party led by a Jeep is trying to figure out where they ended up this time while the party at the left has already started.





A closer view of the VP City Residence building. Basic walls are ceramic with resin window frames, doors, and roof. It was base coated with Humbrol 72 khaki Drill, shaded with raw Umber oils and highlighted with a mix of Humbrol 72 + white.

Items used: Tamiya Jeep Tamiya Sherman

VP 0838 Liberation
 VP 0874 Lamp Posts
 VP 0875 Street & Road Accessories
 VP 1145 Cobblestones
 VP 1146 Sidewalk System
 VP 1248 French Commercial Signs
 VP 1438 Liberation Europe
 VP 1443 Welcome GI
 VP 1565 Military Stowage US
 VP 1644 US Tankers Track Troubles
 VP 1731 Jeep Riders
 VP 1799 Newspaper Salesman
 VP 1874 Park Wall
 VP 1880 City Residence

Woodland Scenics Fine Leaf Foliage



This old couple with their granddaughter never believed the day would come when they would be liberated from more than 4 years of Nazi occupation.

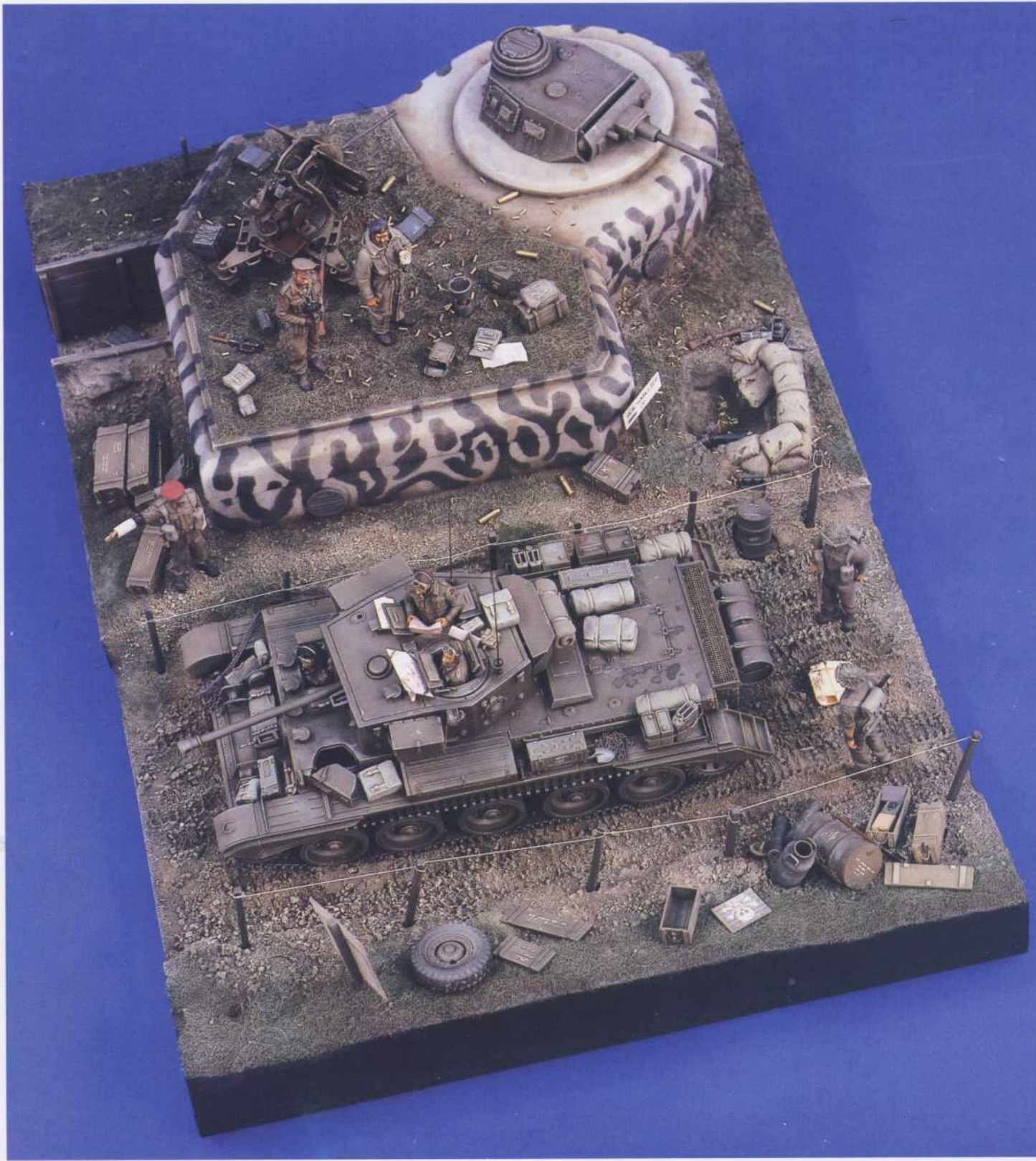


The recon Jeep painted, weathered, and stowed with gear 'a la mode'.

TEA TIME (D-Day+)

Panzer III Tank Turret Bunker

By VP Studios



Advancing on a familiar theme, VP has continued the "Atlantikwall" series with another attractive German bunker, this time utilizing the Pz III tank turret. This kit comes with a single piece plaster casting for the base, integrating the bunker walls into surrounding groundwork, and a separate roof piece, also in plaster. Resin detail parts are included for the turret and air vent panels. The interiors of the walls are textured, and the roof is removable to show off interior details, if desired.



The VP kit was given a treatment of static grass before painting & weathering.



After the VP kit was painted & weathered, a narrow section of styrofoam was cut, shaped, and glued on and built-up with porion plaster in order to include a tank in the diorama. Here the porion has been textured with sand, pebbles, and static grass, and impressions have been made for the tank, figures, and equipment.

KITS USED:

VP #0302 British Tank Commander WWII
 VP #0622 British MP's WWII
 VP #0635 British infantry WWII
 VP #1413 Cromwell tank update set (British Tank Crew Included)
 VP #1657 Ammo & Cases for 5cm KwK L/42 Gun (Pz. III)
 VP #1734 Pz III Tank Turret Bunker
 All other figures & accessories various VP

Tamiya #35221 Cromwell Mk.IV



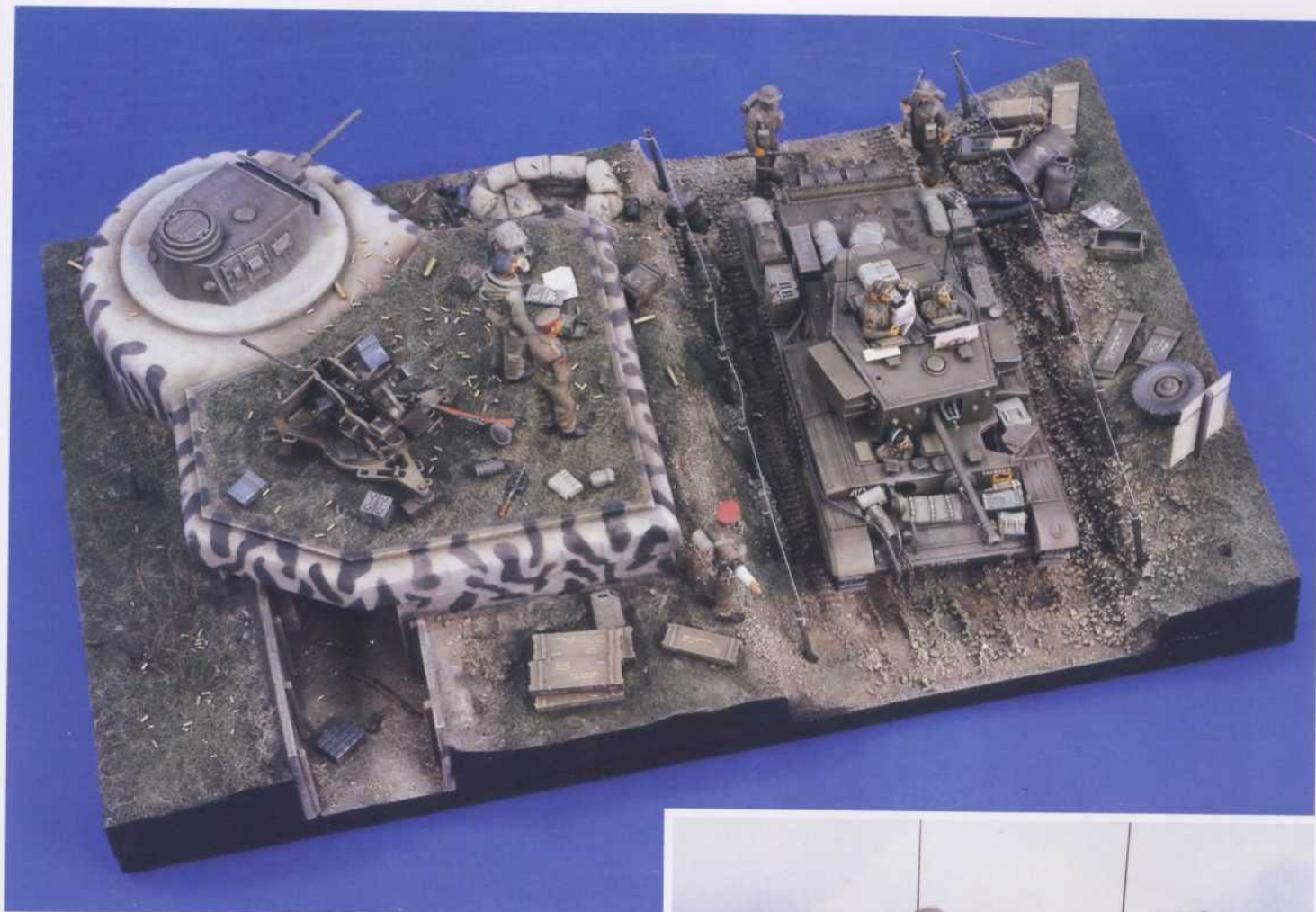


The Panzer III turret is the main point of interest on this bunker. Note the barbed wire wrapped around the base of the concrete bunker.



All sorts of camouflage schemes were used on the bunkers. This one is particularly striking, achieved by brushing on small patches of matt Black and very light dry-brushing with matt 72 Khaki Drill. This is certainly more attractive than plain concrete.

The Germans utilized any equipment that they could find a use for. This obsolete Panzer III turret found a home along the "Atlantikwall". In this case, the Germans supplemented their firepower by installing a 2cm Flak on the roof.



T-time! These two officers are taking tea from an interesting vantage point. Note the the tea-pot and other gear & equipment laying in the grass on the roof.



Fresh off the boat, this Cromwell crew is being directed down the road by an MP as British officers look over the scene.



For added detail and interest, an Mg pit was incorporated into the base. The spent shells were cut from soft brass wire.

These two British soldiers look like they might want a ride! Note the simple fence erected on the sides of the road, adding another touch of realism and detail.

"LET'S GO"

By Greg Cihlar



The desperation experienced by these G.I.'s is very evident, creating a strong atmosphere of suspense. Come on guys, HUSTLE!



The focus of this diorama is the Halftrack, both dividing and uniting the scene: The G.I.'s bailing out of it on one side, and the weary German cautiously approaching it on the other. Incredibly simple, and equally as effective.

I recently acquired a book entitled "Battle of the Bulge Through the Lens", from the makers of After the Battle magazine. In it I found quite a few great pictures from the German attack in Poteau, featuring several American vehicles. I've been looking for an excuse to build the M3A2 Halftrack using the VP Update Set, and these pictures provided me with the inspiration to do so.



Starting with an 8"x 8" piece of plywood, I added a piece of styrofoam cut at an angle to provide an embankment for a halftrack that has run off the road. I always try to compose my dioramas so that they are not square to the base, and I also try to add some sloping ground in order to generate more interest and realism. As usual, I used Cell-U-Clay and small pebbles and sand to form the basic groundwork. While it was still wet I added some roots and static grass. After drying, the entire base was airbrushed with a Black-Brown mixture of Polly-Scale water-based paint. This was followed by several light coats of Browns and Tans to give the grass a wintery look. After I was happy with the color, I added 2 coats of "water", which consisted of Envirotex-light with a couple of drops of Dark Brown mixed in.

The Tamiya Halftrack was built according to the kit instructions, with the addition of parts from the VP Detail Set (#1610). After everything was built, the whole model (minus the machine guns) was airbrushed with a Black-Green mixture, followed by gradually lighter shades of Medium Green, Olive Drab, and Khaki on the open areas, keeping the recesses darker. It was then washed with a mixture of Raw Umber and a second wash of Black to the finer details.



Extra gear and stowage was added to the Haltrack to make it feel like home for the crew. Note the "road" from which the halftrack has deviated.



It is evident that this German is very tense, being unsure of what to expect next. From his vantage point, he doesn't know if the crew is dead or alive, or if they are waiting for him or not. At least the Cal. .50 is unmanned!



The Tamiya Halftrack is a very old kit, but is brought up to today's standards with the addition of the VP Detail Set. The extra gear and equipment, also from VP, help as well. Note the spare ammo boxes & canteen in the mine rack, as well as the gear strapped to the ladder on the side.

After drying overnight, it was dry brushed with mixtures of Medium and Light Greens and Model Masters Armor Sand. After the dried, silver printers ink mixed with a little Raw Umber oil paint was used to pick out the headlights and heavy use areas. Finally, a of the machine guns, maps, boxes, ammo, etc. were added. The three American figures are all VP, slightly converted in order to convey the tense atmosphere of this diorama. The German is a converted Warriors figure, with arms from the parts box, hands & MP40 from VP, and a head from Hornet.



Here we can clearly see the complete scenario. Note the contents of the troop compartment strewn over the floor after what must have been a violent evasive action. "One minute we were enjoying a hand of cards when all of a sudden..."

D-DAY

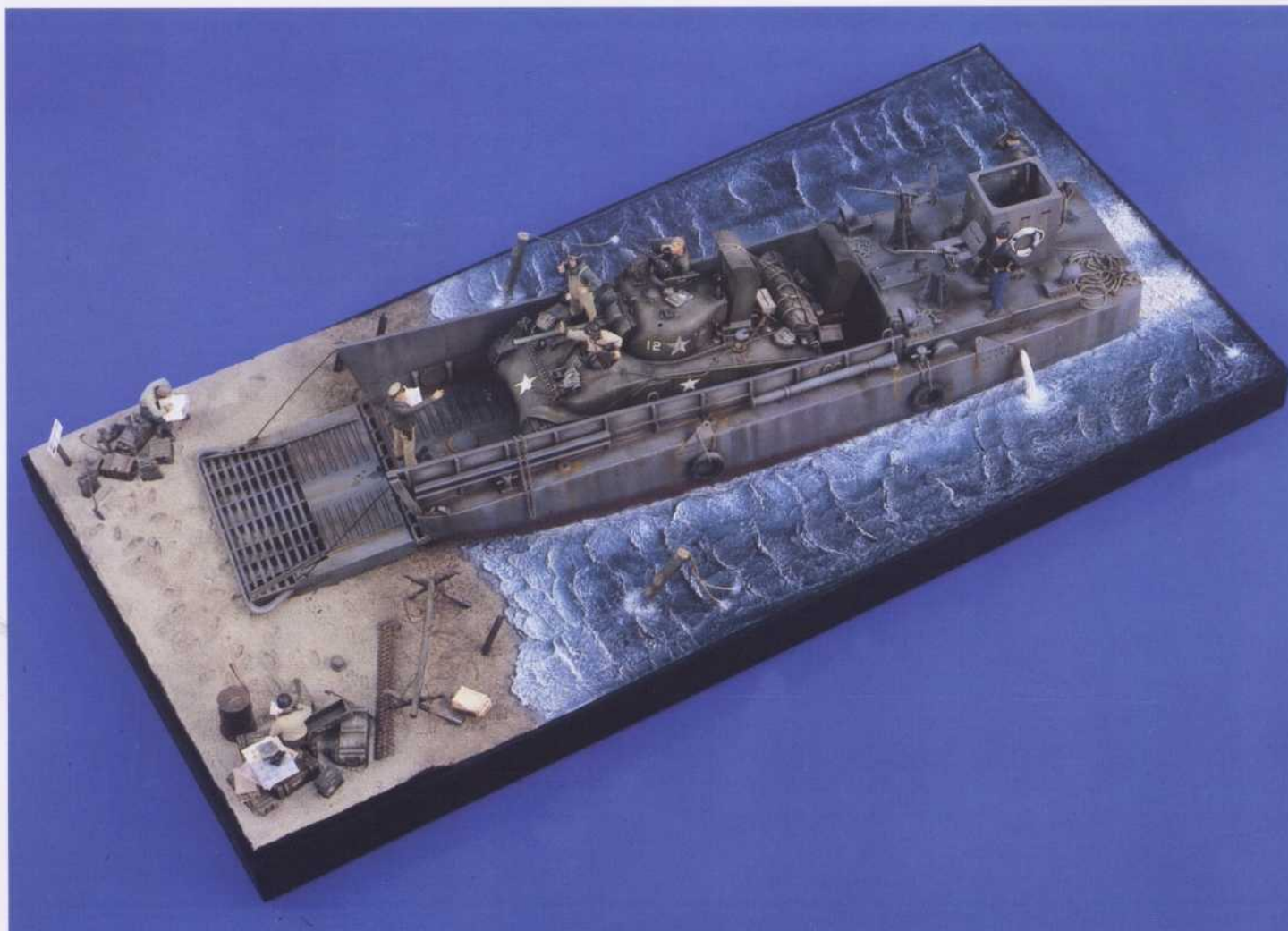
June 6th, 1944

By VP Studios

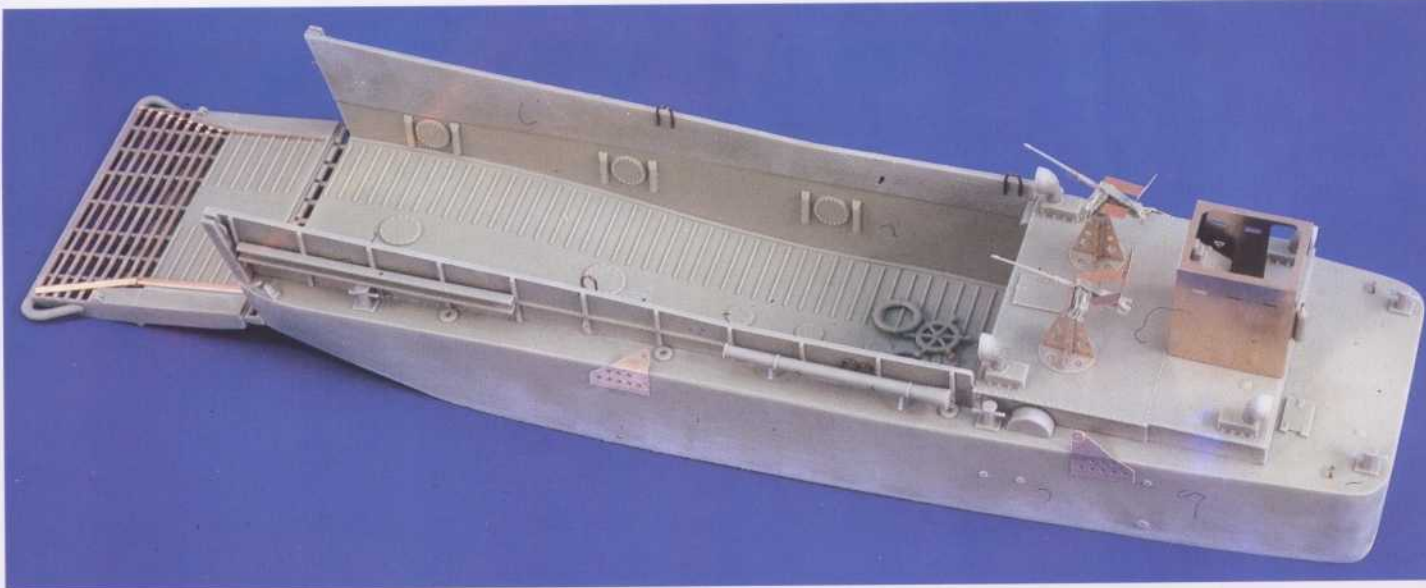
The U.S. Navy played a vital role in the Normandy landings. Obviously, the Navy was instrumental in getting the troops and equipment from America to England, and then across the channel to the Normandy beach. The Navy was involved in almost every aspect of Operation Overlord, from providing fire support to the airborne divisions, to developing loading diagrams for the landing craft. More than 3,300 landing craft were used in Operation Overlord, from the monstrous LST's down to the individual DUKW's. Of these, some 481 were LCM's (Landing Craft Mechanized).

The LCM could be either carried on ship davits or towed across the channel. Due to rough seas, most LCM's were towed across the channel and not loaded with troops until the morning of D-Day. LCM's can be readily identified by their unique perforated bow ramp. The LCM(3) was developed to carry a 30 ton tank, had a crew of 4 men, and was armed with two .50 calibre machine guns. The most important role played by LCM's on D-Day was transporting the engineer teams assigned to demolish the beach obstacles.

The VP LCM(3) model comes with a single-piece waterline resin hull, separate resin gunwales, resin roof & walls for the engine compartment, resin & photo-etched loading ramp, photo-etched coxswains' cabin, 2 resin .50 calibre machine guns, and several smaller resin & photo-etched details. The loading ramp can be displayed in either the 'up' or 'down' position.



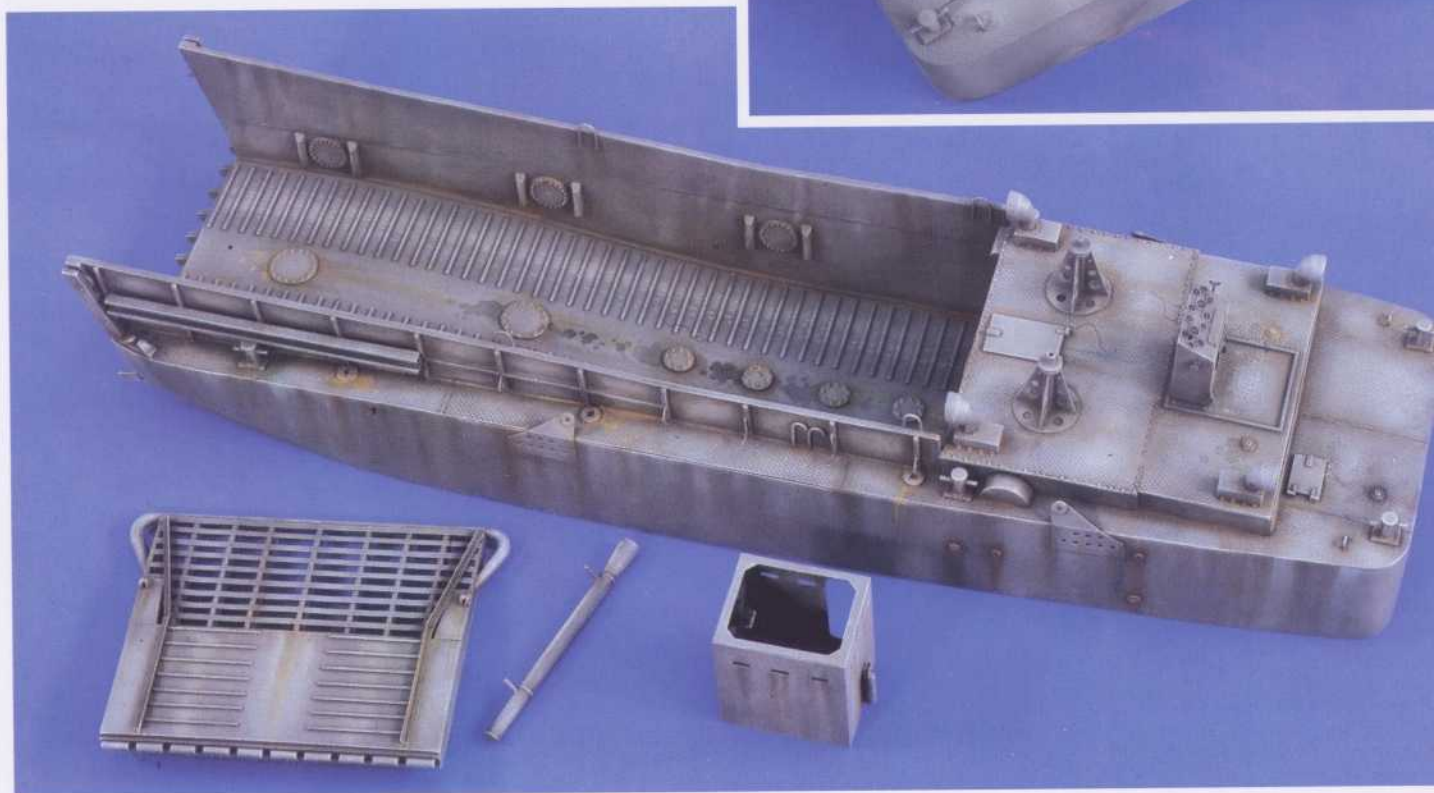
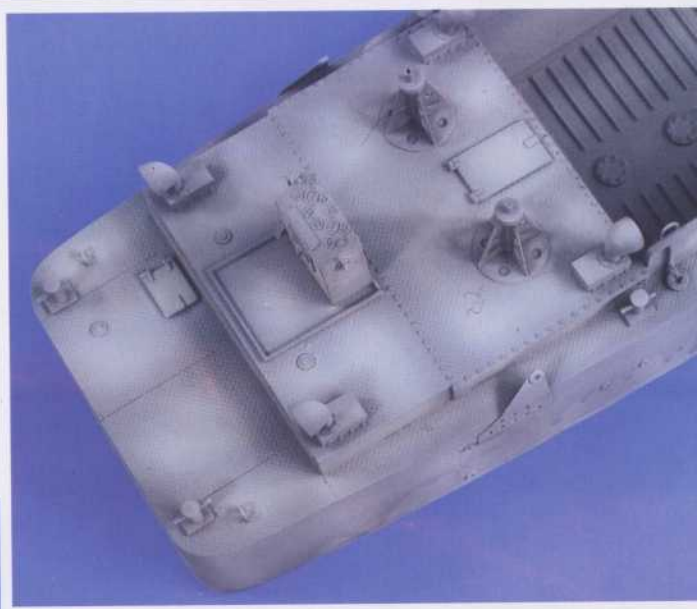
A scene as it may have occurred on one of the Normandy beaches during D-Day: a Sherman tank ready to roll onto the beach.



The VP LCM(3) Landing Craft model ready for painting.

Humbrol Matt 123 was airbrushed over-all, followed by a 'cloud pattern' of Humbrol Matt 127, creating the first dark shades and light highlights.

The model during the weathering process. A coat of matt varnish was first airbrushed over to protect the base paint during the weathering process. Next, several thin washes of dark Gray and dark Brown were applied to 'age' the paint and to further enhance the contrasts. The first local washes of rust are clearly visible.





The finished model ready to enter the water. Various dry-brush runs of light Gray and almost White are executed, plus more local washes and run downs of rust (Burnt Sienna + Yellow oils). Also note the oil stains on the deck and on the floor of the cargo compartment.



The base started out by cutting a piece of hardboard to the required size and edged with plastic sheet. A slice of polyfoam was next glued on, leaving space for the model to sit 'submerged' in the water. The beach was heightened further with another slice of polyfoam and covered with grout cement and fine sand.

The water was next applied using Celluclay spread with a butter knife and shaped with a table spoon and set aside to dry overnight. The base color for the water is a mixture of Pthalto Blue + Titanium White + Raw Umber artists oils.





The basic water mixture is shaded with Raw Umber and highlighted with Titanium White. After dry the wave edges and surf are further highlighted by dry-brushing with Titanium White.



Top view of the deck shows the weathering: rusty areas in various shades, Black oil stains and chipped paint. Also note the metalizing on the cal. .50 machine guns by dry-brushing a metal mix of Silver + Raw Umber on a base of semi-gloss Black. Note the anchor rope disappearing into the water.



Driver, get that engine started! Now!



The foam made by the propellers is made by grout cement, painted off White, dry-brushed White and blended-in with Blue. The bilge pump exhaust flow is made from brass wire covered with epoxy putty textured with a toothbrush and painted White after dry.





The forward beachmaster station. Pushed aside beach obstacle, PSP plating, stacked crates, and maps fill an empty space.



The crew is getting ready to disembark from the vehicle. Points of interest are the layed-out ropes and the tires hanging on the side of the LCM from an old Jeep model.

Items used:

- VP 0016 US Army Field C-Rations
- VP 0051 Barbed Wire
- VP 0088 US Small Arms Ammo Boxes
- VP 0091 Artillery & Tank Ammo Boxes
- VP 0388 P.S.P. Plating
- VP 0619 Tow Chain/Small
- VP 0620 Tow Chain/Heavy
- VP 1108 Oil Barrels Super Value
- VP 1281 WWII Maps, Newspapers, Currency, Playing Cards, Etc.
- VP 1864 US Navy Landingcraft Crew & Beach Party WWII
- VP 1869 LCM 3 US Navy Vehicle Landing Craft WWII
- VP 1883 US Tankers

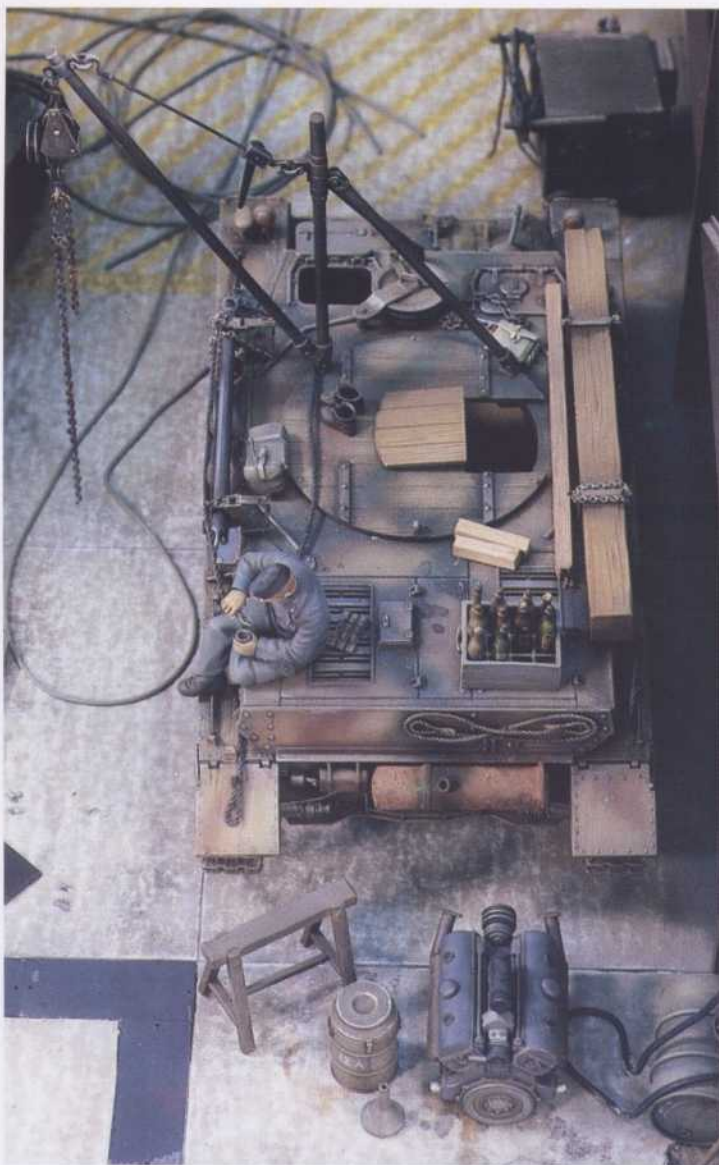
HEART SURGERY

By VP Studios

This diorama was constructed in an attempt to utilize various VP maintenance & workshop items, such as the disassembled Tiger engine and mechanics. Since it is unlikely that a tank crew would remove & disassemble the engine from their tank in the field, we decided to make the scene indoors. This would facilitate the maintenance of the engine without being hampered by weather conditions, and allow the work to be carried-out day and night. The Panzer IV Bergepanzer was used in this case as a means to remove & replace the heavy engine block from the Sturmtyger.



This overall view shows the general layout of the various elements of the diorama. As always, visual balance is critical. Note how the empty areas have been neatly filled with relevant parts & accessories without distracting from the main theme.



His job finished for the time being, the Bergepanzer crewman rests casually on his vehicle with some food & drink.

The framing was constructed with Plastruct 'H', 'I', 'L' & 'T' beams and airbrushed with a dark Red-Brown mixture. Again, this was washed with a mix of raw Umber & Black oils and dry-brushed with a lightened shade of the base color. The sliding door was made from a piece of VP corrugated cardboard and weathered with oils.

For the construction & painting of the vehicles, see VP #1587 Military Vehicles Vol. II.



The base was constructed by first cutting a sheet of 3/8" plywood into 3 pieces, measuring 15" x 15" for the floor, and 15" x 7" each for the walls. The 3 pieces were all screwed & glued together to make a firm base for the diorama. Next, a piece of card-board was cut to size and scored with a sharp knife to represent the concrete floor. A channel was cut-out and fitted with styrene card segments representing removable covers for a buried plumbing channel. The concrete was spray-painted with Model Masters camouflage gray, then masked around the edges and corner and airbrushed yellow to show the "no parking" zones of the workshop. After the paint was dry, the base was gently sanded with 300 grit sandpaper to make it look like worn concrete. Powdered pastel chalks were used to stain the corners and edges of the concrete sections.

The walls were detailed by first cutting sheets of Evergreen corrugated siding to size and gluing them in place. These were spray-painted with Model Masters Silver, and after dry, washed with a mixture of Raw Umber, Burnt Sienna, and Black artists oils. Further dry-brushing with Silver helped to accentuate the raised corrugations on the walls.

Note all of the oil & rust stains on the floor after removing the parts from the engine, a necessity when depicting a scene such as this.

The guy in the foreground looks less than enthusiastic about the work assigned to him, while the foreman seems all too ready to keep everyone busy.

These mechanics look like they know what they're doing. Now let's see if they can put everything back together and start moving again!





Angling the Sturmtyger helps to break-up the lines of the base and draw more attention to the center of activity in this diorama.

Obviously, it was no small matter removing & repairing the engine from the Tiger tanks. Look at that mess!

KITS USED: Italeri #217 Panzer IV
 Tamiya # 35177 German 38cm Assault
 Mortar Sturmtyger
 VP #0790 Tool Set
 VP #0927 Panzer IV Bergepanzer Conversion
 VP #0984 German Tankers at Rest
 VP #1202 Tank Repair Crew
 VP #1294 Panzer IV Engine
 VP #1305 Panzer Mechanics
 VP #1350 Clean Up Time
 VP #1360 Tiger Engine disassembled
 VP #1370 Tiger I Rear Compartment
 VP #1462 Sturmtyger Zimmerit & Fenders



BLOODY TARAWA

By VP Studios



In 1943, the Tarawa atoll in the Gilbert Islands was the southernmost point in Japan's outer defense ring in the Pacific. It held a strategic position on the Allied lifeline linking Hawaii to Australia and New Zealand, and was chosen as the first of the Allied 'island hopping' operations to roll back Japanese forces in the south Pacific. The island of Betio on the Tarawa atoll became the main target for the Allied assault due to its valuable airstrip. Known as 'Operation Galvanic', the Allied attack commenced on November 20, 1943 with the landing of US Marines on the northern coast of the island. The Marines landed with the valuable new LVT-2 'Amtracks' for the first time, and LCVP landing craft amid a ferocious storm of Japanese defensive fire. The first day of the assault saw only a minor foothold achieved by the Americans, as the Japanese were well established in coconut-log defenses and fortified concrete and steel bunkers & pillboxes.

First several washes of a very dark Brown (Humbrol Matt 29 + Black) are applied all over the base. Excess paint is removed while still wet with a soft rag. Soldiers uniforms, various equipment, oil drums, and the Sherman tank are base-painted dark Green (Humbrol Matt 105 + Black). The whole thing is then set aside to dry overnight before the dry-brushing process.



The Japanese threw everything they had at the poorly equipped attackers, killing hundreds before they reached the shore. Through a stroke of sheer luck, on the first day of the assault the experienced Japanese commander, Rear Admiral Keiji Shibasaki, and his entire staff, was killed by well-placed naval gunfire. Had he not been neutralized, he would certainly have organized a deadly counter-attack against the vulnerable Marines on the first night. As their command structure crumbled, the Japanese troops were unable to organize an effective defence. However, as the Americans were to soon discover, the remaining Japanese were not willing to surrender, and fought hard until their deaths. There were few prisoners. After 3 days of fighting, the Marines finally declared victory, but at a painful cost of thousands of human lives.

The stranded Sherman is finished as usual with the system of using the wash & dry-brush technique. The stowed gear (also included in the kit) is painted separately and glued into place.



The backside reveals a slain Japanese officer (note Samurai sword in the sand) and a soldier dead in the pillbox.

VP now produces a full diorama, complete with figures, accessories, and palm trees to recreate the image of Bloody Tarawa. This convenient product eliminates the need to invest in the time & money required to research & buy the necessary figures, equipment, and materials to construct this diorama. No sanding, cutting, sculpting, or mess. It is also much more economical than purchasing all of the items separately, cutting the cost almost in half! It's very easy to finish this diorama with just a little glue and a few hours of relaxing painting and it's done. In this article we show you how it's done.

Ten individual figures (6 separately painted and 4 casted into the base) had to be carefully painted. Note the Marine trousers are "whetted" by overpainting them with a few coats of thinned dark Green.



Dry-brushing over the base-coat with light Browns, sand tones and different shades of Green and Olive, plus new washes of dark Earth and Red-Browns, and again dry-brushing with Earth & Sand shades. The build up of washes and dry-brushes creates depth and raises the detail of the groundwork.



The resin palm trees are warmed-up over a candle and bent slightly to create a leaning effect. They are painted dark Earth and dry-brushed light Earth. The leaves are airbrushed with dark Green and sealed with flat varnish while still on the frames. Holes are then drilled on the tops of the trees to accommodate the leaves, which are bent to a natural shape, and are secured to the trunks with gap-filling super glue. When all is dry, any visible copper or glue spots are touched-up with dark Green and the leaves are highlighted with light Green pastels.

The ocean is painted with artists oils: a mix of Pthalto Blue + Titanium White and Burnt Umber, shaded with straight Raw Umber and highlighted with White. After dry, the wave edges and foam areas are highlighted by dry-brushing with straight white. Also note the fuel spills in the water around the fuel filler cap of the tank and around the floating 55 gallon drums.

THE EQUALIZER

By VP Studios



The Pershing advances with infantry on a German countryside road. This diorama symbolizes the near end of Third Reich: The once superior Panther tank sits disabled and derelict on the roadside as the brand new Pershing proudly passes on its way into the heart of Germany.

A suitable background photo adds realism. One must be careful when selecting a background: this scene takes place during the winter of 1944-45, so no leaves on the trees!

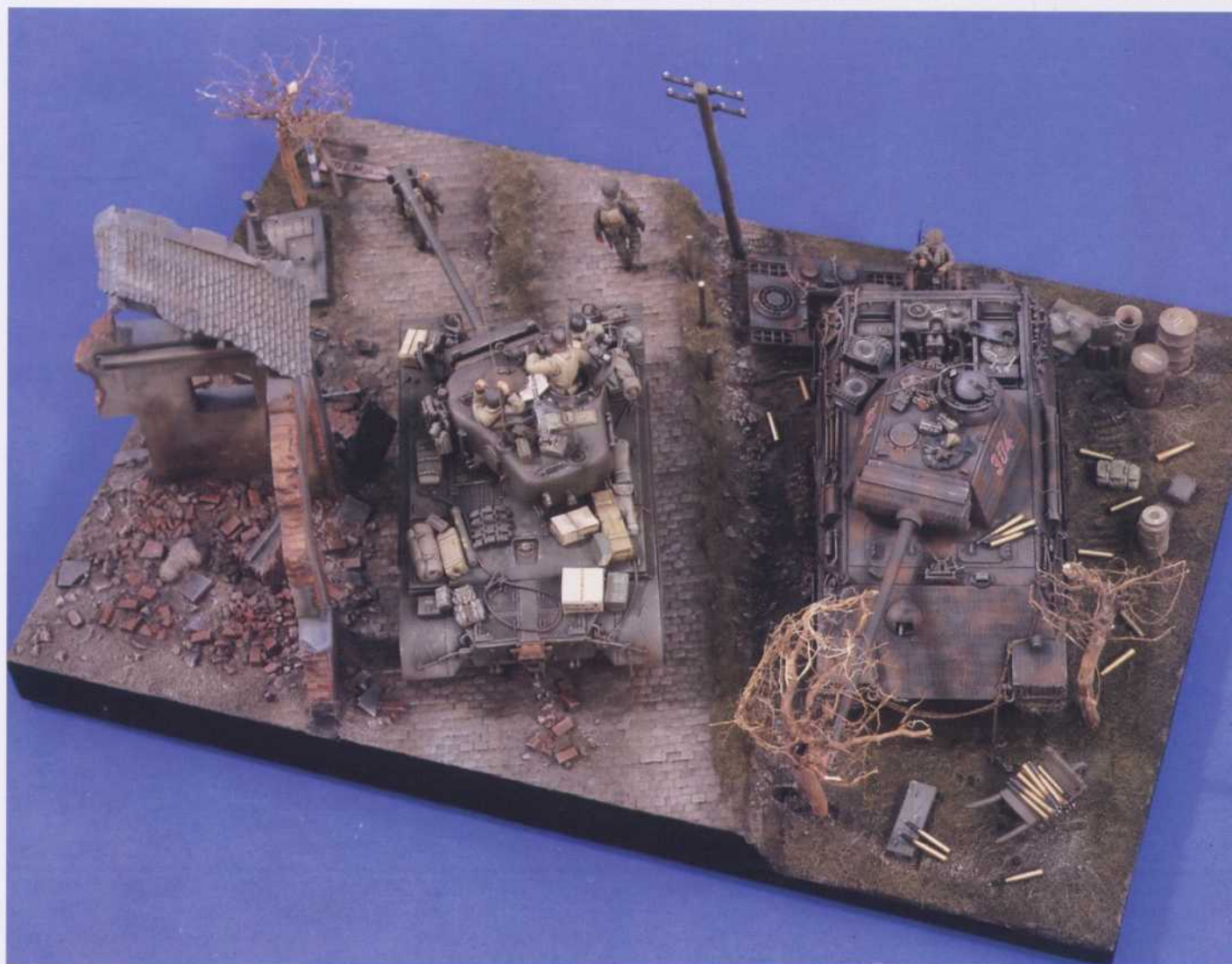
Entering service in the closing months of WWII, the Pershing was the culmination of U.S. tank design lessons learned in WWII. The earlier Sherman series was incapable of withstanding the firepower of the German Tiger and Panther tanks, and was barely able to inflict any substantial damage to the heavy tanks. However, the Pershing was a direct response to the shortcomings of the Sherman, and it made up for the lack of sufficient speed, armor, and armament with a 500 hp engine, increased armor protection, and a more potent 90mm main gun. The Pershing tank became the American equalizer on the battle field, giving U.S. tankers a fighting chance to level the playing field against the heavy German armor. Here we have a simple diorama showing the two opponents facing each other, the vanquished German Panther abandoned on a roadside in the face of the relentless allied advance. For more details of the Pershing model, see VP #1587 Military Vehicles Vol.II. For more on the Panther model, see VP #1486 Military Vehicles Vol.I.



The VP cobblestones were washed using a mixture of Humbrol matt Black + matt 29 Dark Earth + a touch of matt 105 Marine Green, wiped carefully with a clean rag before the paint dried completely. After dry, a few passes with Scotchbrite or steel wool results in a good basic finish, pulling out the lighter shade of resin underneath. Note the remains of an old ruined barn, converted from a VP building kit. Beside the barn is an abandoned German mg pit, spent cartridge cases still littering the ground around it.

VP's U.S. Tank Crew (Winter) is perfect for the Pershing model. As usual, U.S. tanks carry a lot of stowage: tentpacks, bedrolls, C-rations, ammo cases, tow cables & chains, and a bunch of personal equipment. Painting and weathering take almost as long as building the model itself, but the end result is always rewarding.

Noteworthy inside the building are the heaps of broken tiles, bricks, and stone debris. Note the wheel barrow loaded with fresh ammo in front of the Panther, as well as the different shades of green in the grass.





KITS USED:

VP #0479 75mm Panther Ammo
 VP #1145 Cobblestones
 VP #1203 Panther Engine Pack
 VP #1312 German WWII Soldiers Equipment
 VP #1421 Mg34 Machine Guns
 All figures & accessories VP

Dragon T-26E3 Pershing

Tamiya Panther Ausf. G

This overall view shows very well the heavily weathered open engine compartment. A lot of metalizing and many washes of Black, Burnt Sienna, and Raw Umber, simulating fuel & oil stains. On the turret roof can be seen such details as Mg34 ammo boxes, a tankers jacket, pistol holsters, and other equipment. Also note the tank track trail made by pushing the model into the soft groundwork during construction of the base.



SHORT BREAK

Normandy 1944

By VP Studios





Without the tools of war, this Normandy countryside setting could be used as a tourism advertisement today. However, it was very different during the summer of 1944.



Once the Allied invasion at Normandy began, it was only a matter of time before the Germans would be driven out of occupied France. Nevertheless, the Germans put up a determined resistance. As the Allies advanced through the occupied territory, the Germans fought relentlessly in every town and village to the Rhine. Allied armor was no match for the superior German Tiger and Panther tanks, and paid a heavy price for their inferior designs. Here we have an example of the mighty Panther tank as it regroups and prepares to advance to the next field of confrontation with the Allies. No matter what happens, it certainly won't be pretty...

A close look at the SS infantry awaiting the order to move on to the next confrontation.



An alternative technique was used to create the zimmerit on this Panther. Plastic sheet was cut to the size and shape of the area to be covered. A scribe was used to draw lines in a grid pattern on the plastic. The sheets were then glued to their positions on the model, and softened with plastic liquid cement, partially melting it and blending it into the model. A tricky job, but with patience the results are rewarding.

Kits Used:

VP #44 Static Grass
VP #1145 Cobblestones
VP #1606 French Bakery Office
All figure & Accessories VP

Tamiya Panther



Photographed before a most suitable background, the diorama enters a different dimension of light and color.

This diorama features a simple, but effective composition and layout. The old building with a small yard, a few trees, and a grass lined cobblestone road passing by the front. This view also provides an excellent view of the heavy weathering on the Panther engine deck.

