

TIPS ON BUILDING DIORAMAS

Sheperd Paine's classic series on making models come alive!



ENGLAND MAY 1944

Maintenance personnel from the 458th Bomb Group hurriedly prepare a combat-weary B-24J to serve as the new group assembly aircraft. The garish paint scheme being applied to this veteran "warbird" accurately depicts the markings applied to the 458th's second assembly ship during May of 1944. Note that one hurried crewman has spilled a bucket of bright red paint on the hardstand. When completed, this aircraft replaced "First Sergeant," the initial assembly aircraft created for the 458th Bomb Group.



B-24J LIBERATOR

by Sheperd Paine

During the Eighth Air Force's massive bombing effort against Nazi Germany, numerous mid-air collisions occurred that involved the multitude of American bombers that filled the European skies. It was all too apparent that the heavily-laden bombers, quite often flown by inexperienced aircrews, encountered considerable difficulty during assembly in the poor visibility that was prevalent in the skies over the North Sea. In an effort to overcome these tragic incidents, a number of war-weary "Liberators" were stripped of their armament and repainted with gaudy, but easily recognizable color schemes. These aircraft led the bomber stream until the formation was completely assembled. Their mission complete, they would break away from the bomber stream and return to their bases. Undoubtedly, crewing an assembly ship was felt to be relatively safe duty, but the old warriors often carried large quantities of aerial flares, and several aircraft were lost in fiery mishaps. Our diorama graphically portrays the preparation of a new assembly aircraft for the 458th Bomb Group during May of 1944.

Building a diorama is an interesting and realistic way of displaying a favorite model. A scale model aircraft placed in an authentic setting will receive more attention and comments than the usual static model display.



This overall view of our "Liberator" scene clearly displays an extremely important aspect of diorama construction. Note that the sections of the concrete hardstand are not parallel to the edges of the base. Likewise, random positions have been selected for the aircraft, ground equipment, and figures. By utilizing this technique, the "reality" of a particular moment in time can be captured quite realistically.

Before you begin to construct your diorama, take time to plan your creation so that the final result actually appears to be a three-dimensional “snapshot” of an event from the past. A diorama should be more than a display of your modeling talent. With a little advance planning, you can arrange the various components that you plan to use into an extremely interesting scene. Nearly every 1/48th scale Monogram kit has scale figures that are usable in Second World War dioramas. Though they are certainly some of the smallest items in any diorama, the figures can be instrumental in making your creation an “attention-getting” success. Our modeler purposely modified the various figures that he used as little as possible to show that an interesting scene can be created using virtually “stock” figures. Position your figures so that they are looking at or pointing to objects and activities that you want your friends to see.



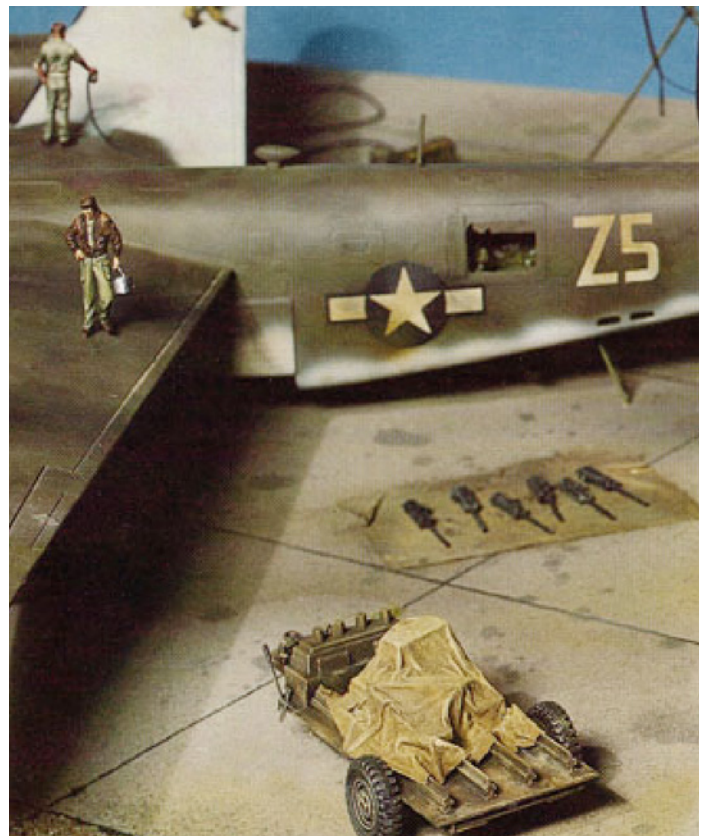
Having just returned from yet another mission, two curious flight crewmen pause to assess the new paint scheme. Undoubtedly, they are unsure as to whether or not they will have to fly this gaudy “Liberator.” The fascinating air compressor was fabricated from an HO scale farm tractor and various pieces from the scrap box. The photo of the compressor prior to painting will give you an insight into the fabrication of this item.



While the ground crewman on the wing continues to apply the base coat of white paint, others can be seen adding the garish dots and nose markings. The buckets and spray gun are metal railroad accessories, and the paint brushes are fashioned from stretched sprue and .010 sheet styrene. Note that the gun openings in the turret are covered with sheet styrene and drilled to simulate the openings for the gun barrels.

The base for our diorama was created with a 3/4” thick chipboard panel, and edged with a thin strip of walnut veneer. The hardstand was made with a sheet of illustration board painted to simulate a well-used maintenance area in England. Look at the color photos and think about taxiways and maintenance aprons you have seen. Notice the grass forcing its way through the seams on the hardstand. This is a “neat” little detail that contributes a great deal to the overall reality of the diorama.

Unless you are familiar with the realm of model railroading, you may be unaware of the limitless number of accessories designed for model railroad use that are perfect for aircraft and armor dioramas. Cast metal tool boxes, air tanks, water buckets, and a seemingly endless array of similar items are available in HO and O gauge. Fortunately, O gauge is the same scale as your “Liberator;” but don’t neglect the smaller HO items. As you can see in the construction photos, our modeler modified an HO scale farm tractor into a very intriguing air compressor unit. A large assortment of structural shapes, such as the I-beam used for the air compressor chassis, are available in wood or styrene. Use your imagination, and you will discover that the model railroad accessories are unbelievable sources of items for your diorama.



Assembly aircraft were primarily used to form bomber groups after takeoff so defensive armament was unnecessary. Note that the machine guns have been removed from all of the turrets and waist positions and placed on a tarp fabricated from facial tissue. The bomb cart found in the Monogram B-17G kit has been super-detailed with extruded plastic I-beams and model railroad components.

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

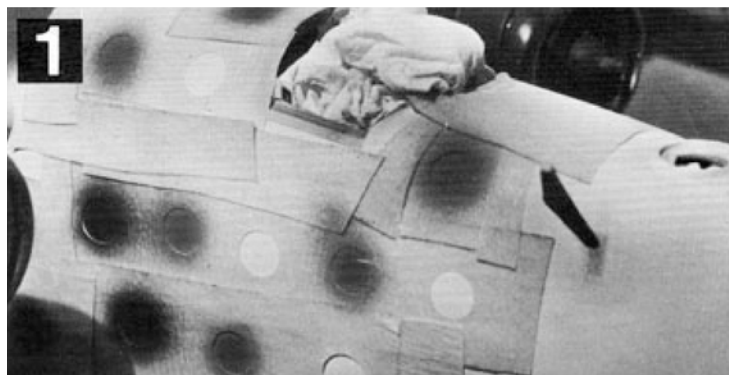
Painting your diorama will surely be the most time-consuming portion of your work. Weathering may appear to be quite difficult but practice will help you develop techniques that are best suited to your ability. A process that is very effective for aircraft weathering requires that you use two different types of paint to avoid the possibility of dissolving the paint that is already dry. For example, paint the olive drab surfaces as shown on the photo of "Buzz Job" on the next page. Using the same type of enamel paint that you used for the basic color, paint the gray under-surfaces. To weather the basic color scheme, use black, brown, and gray tones of water base acrylic paints. This type of paint will not affect the primary coat, and will enable you to remove any paint that you desire with a damp cloth. This is great, as it allows you to "work" various areas to your delight. For instance, in order to simulate the streaks that occur from the "Liberator's" radial engines, apply several small drops of black and brown tones around the rear of the engine cowling. With a damp tissue, wipe the droplets along the nacelle toward the trailing edge of the wing. Ideally, the colors will blend and fade into the olive drab surfaces as shown in the color diorama photos. If you are unfamiliar with this technique, practice on spare wing and fuselage surfaces that you may have in your scrap box.

A similar technique that will provide satisfying results, particularly on landing gear struts and engines, utilizes antiquing glaze as used on furniture. Once the silver paint on your gear struts has dried, brush on some antiquing glaze. Allow it to build up somewhat in corners and depressed areas, and when it is dry, you will be quite amazed how the contours are accentuated.

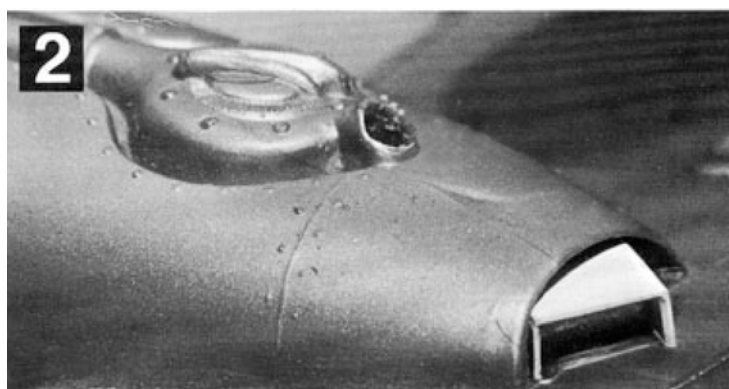
When you are finished, you will have created a work that you will surely be proud of.



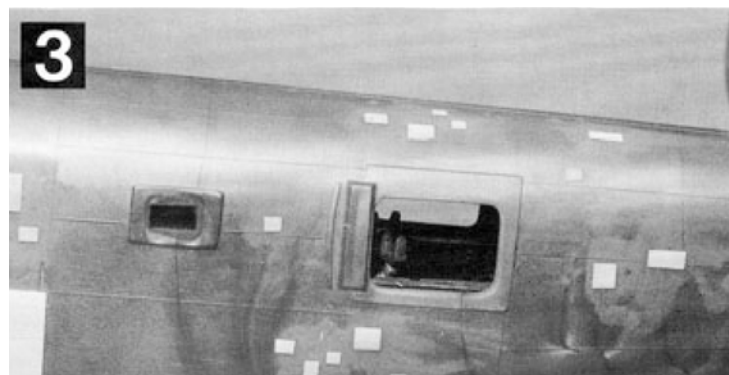
This photo depicts an aspect of creating any diorama that will directly affect the overall impact of your completed effort. In reality, it is unlikely that the ground crew would begin to paint the red and black details until the entire aircraft had been sprayed white, but in the interest of creating a more captivating scene, our modeler decided to use his "artistic license" and portray the event as shown.



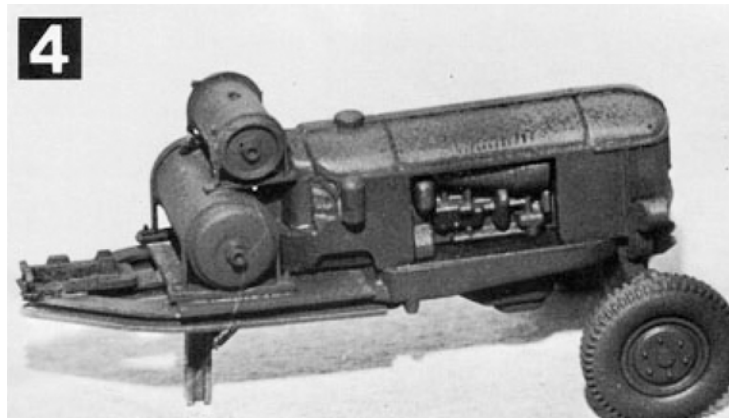
The red and black dots can be painted quite easily by using an ordinary paper punch to create masks to apply to the fuselage. Use masking tape for the masks, and be sure to attach it firmly to the fuselage to avoid overspray around the edges of the dots.



The rear of the nacelles and the exhausts can be opened as shown. Oil cooler housings fabricated from sheet styrene have been added to the outboard nacelles to replace the molded cooler details.



Small square and rectangular pieces of .010 sheet styrene are ideal for simulating patches affixed to the external skin to cover flak damage and bullet holes. In color photos, note how subtle, yet effective this detail is.

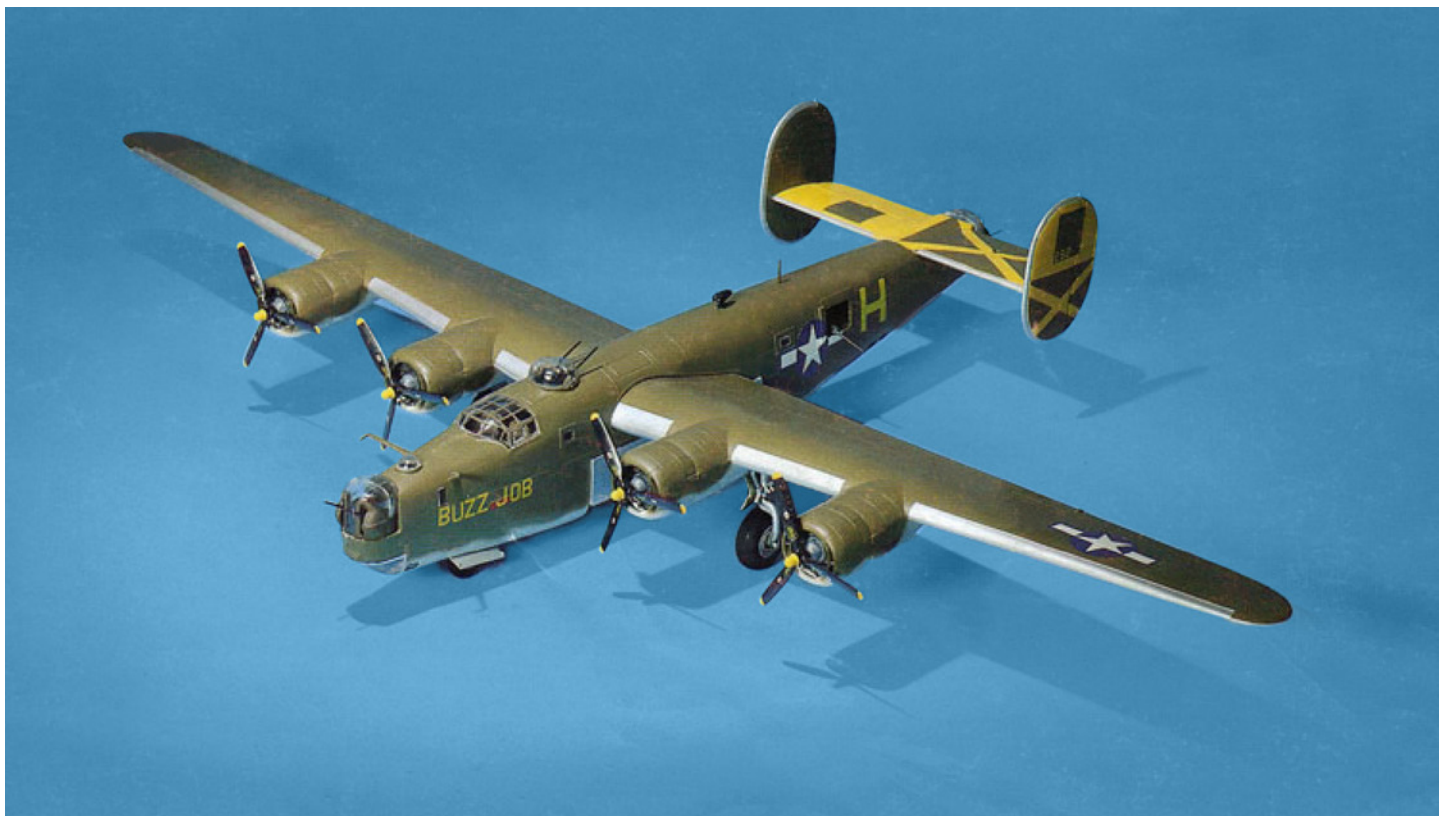


The air compressors were fabricated from the forward section of two HO scale farm tractors, and detailed with sheet styrene, extruded I-beam, and HO scale air tanks. Once painted, these compressors look quite realistic.

The two "Liberators" below represent the two variants of the B-24 that can be constructed utilizing the decal sheet provided in the kit. Note that these aircraft were intentionally constructed without any additional modifications or weathering to stress that an extremely good-looking model can be created using the components provided in the kit. Note that decal positions and color descriptions are also provided in the instruction booklet.



This photo shows the "Liberator" piloted by Captain William Adams of the 455th Bomb Group. While assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force, this aircraft operated from an airfield near San Giovanni, Italy. Note that the "Aces High" marking on the right fuselage was created by Monogram specifically for this color scheme, and was not actually on this specific aircraft. The 455th Bomb Group supported ground actions during the amphibious landings at Anzio and the siege of Monte Cassino. Following the cessation of hostilities in Europe, the unit was deactivated in Italy during September of 1945.



The olive drab "Liberator" depicts a Fifteenth Air Force B-24J assigned to the 485th Bomb Group. "Buzz Job" is portrayed as she appeared while operating from an airfield near Venosa, Italy during June of 1944. The brilliant yellow combat recognition markings on the rudders and horizontal stabilizer indicated that this aircraft was assigned to the 485th Bomb Group. Additional weathering would be quite effective on this aircraft as the olive drab paint was particularly vulnerable to chipping and fading.