

The diorama base

With the shipwreck completed I moved onto the diorama base itself. I cut a thin sheet of composite wood into a 13x14 inch base. To this I glued green sculpting foam I picked up from a local florist. I then took a hot knife and cut a basic layout. The four sides were blocked out using architect foam core board. I often like my bases to have varied elevations, even the sea bed. It is my opinion that a base with its elevations at the rear always draws the viewer more quickly into the story. Once the ship was positioned to my liking I began laying broken up drywall into the base. I love working with this as it is cheap and the results quite natural. You only need to break up a section of drywall with a mallet and peel off one side of the cardboard. It can be glued in place with white glue. The drywall dust may be gathered up and used later as well. Once I was happy with the position of the broken up drywall I filled the gaps with Sculptamold using only a very small amount of water. When everything is nice and dry I thin white glue with water and brush it over the entire base. I then sprinkled the crushed drywall rubble all over the base.

As this dried I pressed in all the crates, ammunition, and personal effects that would have tumbled from the hole in the hold as it filled with water and then ejected its contents. I tried to keep the debris field narrow and most of the heavier items just outside of the hole in the hull. Items that would have been on deck, but were heavy enough to sink directly to the bottom, such as the BMW motorcycle and bicycle, were kept nearby. I spent a bit of time during the build rounding up appropriate items for the debris field. According to a documentary I viewed on the sinking of the USS Indianapolis, life rings and lifebelts used cork as a floatation device, and after three days cork becomes saturated and loses its buoyancy, so I could include both of them so long as they were lashed to something. Same held true for full bottles and jugs. Ammunition, ammunition crates, weapons, pots and pans, barrels, personal gear, and bed rolls of every imaginable description were individually placed into the still moist ground work and painted in place...a rather unknowable task. Items which piled up on top of all this were painted elsewhere and added later.

The front corner edge of the diorama is one of the first place the viewer's eye is drawn to, as this is the location of the bow. I include lots of little details here such as the open waterbottle and the flipped over schmeisser ammo pouch, both Dragon Gen 2 items. The wood crate is a Verlinden item. The Iron Cross came from a Royal Model set to which I added a small triangular section of tape to represent citation ribbon. It is a very small detail which I always wanted to include.



A demonstration in why you always keep everything. Nearly all the items in the debris field came from the spares bin. Of note are the old Tamiya whicker 88mm shell cases recycled from an old diorama. I tried to paint the wooden ammo crates in various colours of German Grey and Green whilst leaving others in natural demonstrating the huge variety of kit used in North Afrika.



A Verlinden skeleton was converted for use here. He serves to help the viewer conclude the amount of time the wreck has sat at the bottom. Since he still has some tissue on him, you can conclude that this wreck has been sitting at the bottom for about 30 days. I replaced his head with a plain skull and removed his continental boots, replacing them with Tropical high lace up boots. I also used an Aber belt and Dragon holster. I added rotting flesh by applying Gunze Mr. Dissolve Putty to part of his rib cage and skull. Note the rifle cartridge laying nearby.

