

# Quick and easy weathering

Adding accents to panel lines and shadows with sludge

By Paul Boyer    Photos by William Zuback and Jim Forbes

**Y**ou've seen them – you know, those models with the evenly accented panel lines and perfectly shadowed interiors. How do those modelers do that?

There are several ways to accent panel lines and shadow interiors. For accenting panel lines, some modelers use a sharp pencil to draw in each line. It's not hard to do, but it's time-consuming. Since most recessed panel lines are lightly engraved, the pencil has to be sharpened often to fit its point inside the lines. As for shadowing, a pencil isn't very effective.

Some modelers prefer to use a "wash" – a dark, thin paint that floods the panel lines and recesses. This works well, but can be difficult to apply cleanly. Also, you have to use a wash that won't loosen the paint beneath it.

Though accented panel lines aren't popular with all modelers, I think they look great when done right. The key is to avoid overdoing the effect, making the lines look garish.

For example, at a recent modeling club meeting, a couple of 1/48 scale models of



**1** Liquid dishwashing detergent and water are added to Polly Scale acrylic paint to make the "sludge wash."

camouflaged Russian aircraft drew my attention. All the panel lines were darkened and the gear struts, gear bays, and cockpit were perfectly shadowed. I asked the builder, Randy Dieck, how he did it. "I got the idea out of *FineScale Modeler!* It was in one of Pat Hawkey's articles," he said.

So I dug back into the archives and found Pat's article "Weathering model airplanes" in the February 1999 issue. The wash technique was shown in two photos on Pat's trio of B-25s, but I figured the

Discover an easy way to apply a wash to panel lines and recesses. Paul borrows FSM author Pat Hawkey's method to finish his 1/48 scale Tamiya A-1H Skyraider.

readers would like to see more. I used his technique on the 1/48 scale A-1 I built for the "Easy camouflage with soft masks" story in the July 2001 FSM.

**Sludge wash.** There are two key elements to success with this technique. First, the model must be glossy – the wash will go on better and come off easier than on a flat paint. Second, the wash must be made with soapy water – the soap reduces the adhesion of the paint.

The beauty of this technique is that it can be made with any color – even white! First, mix five parts of water and two parts of Polly Scale water-based acrylic paint. Consider the color scheme of the model to determine which color to use for the wash. A predominately tan tank could use a chocolate brown wash. Black panel lines on an all-white airplane are too stark; use medium gray. Light to

medium gray looks good on a black airplane. For my A-1, I used neutral gray for the undersides, cockpit, gear bays, and landing gear struts, and black for the upper-surface camouflage.

To this mixture, add three parts of liquid dishwashing detergent (such as Joy or Dawn), **1**. Just stir, don't shake – that will create a lot of suds. The result is a thick slippery wash that I call “sludge wash.”

The ratio of paint/soap/water isn't critical, and you can adjust it to your desire. If you find it difficult to remove the excess wash, you need more soap in the soup.

**Slappin' on the sludge.** Once the model is overcoated with clear gloss and dry, it is ready for the sludge! I use an old  $\frac{1}{8}$ " brush to apply the sludge. I don't have to be careful because I can remove what I don't want. However, the more I put on, the more I have to work to remove the excess. I brush the sludge along all the recessed panel lines, **2**, into the gear bays, **3**, inside the cockpit, over the landing gear struts, **4**, and into the wheels, **5**. Vigorous brushing causes bubbles, so I go easy.

The Polly Scale sludge wash dries in 15-30 minutes. Wet spots look shiny, dry areas flat. A hair dryer speeds the drying. Once the wash is dry, the excess can be removed. While the sludge can be removed with a damp cloth, I prefer using dry cotton swabs for better control. Just a little pressure is needed, **6**. I roll the swab as I wipe, avoiding paint buildup on the wiping surface. I go through a lot of cotton swabs, but I like how they work.

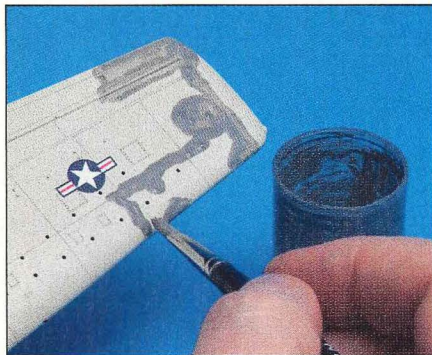
To remove the excess wash in tight areas (such as landing gear struts), I use a Microbrush, **7**. The wash gives depth and definition to the struts and wheels, **8**.

Once all the excess is removed, the paint remains inside the panel lines and in the corners and low spots of the bays. I check for areas without enough wash and reapply if necessary. If I'm not satisfied with the wash (maybe the color doesn't look right), I can remove it with soap, water, and a toothbrush, and start over. The last step is the final overcoat of clear flat (or clear gloss) to seal the wash and the decals.

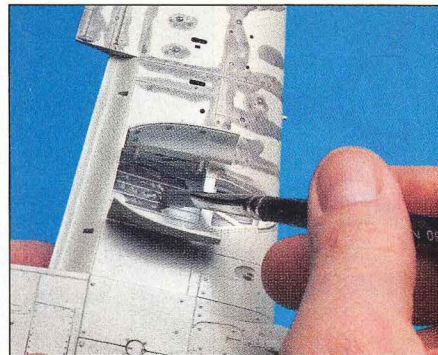
I hope you'll find the sludge wash method as easy and effective as I have. It's fun to get dirty! **FSM**

#### SOURCE

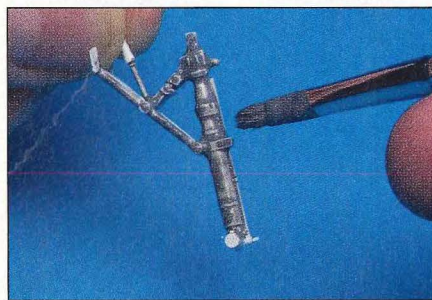
**Microbrushes** Microbrush Corp., 1376 Cheyenne Ave., Grafton, WI 53024, 262-375-4011, [www.microbrush.com](http://www.microbrush.com)



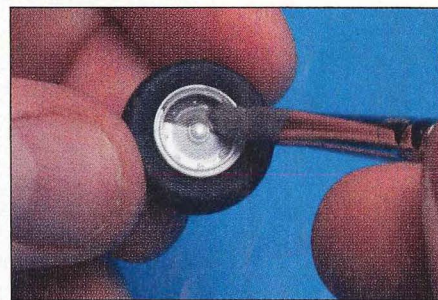
**2** After the model has been overcoated with clear gloss, the sludge wash is applied to all recessed panel lines.



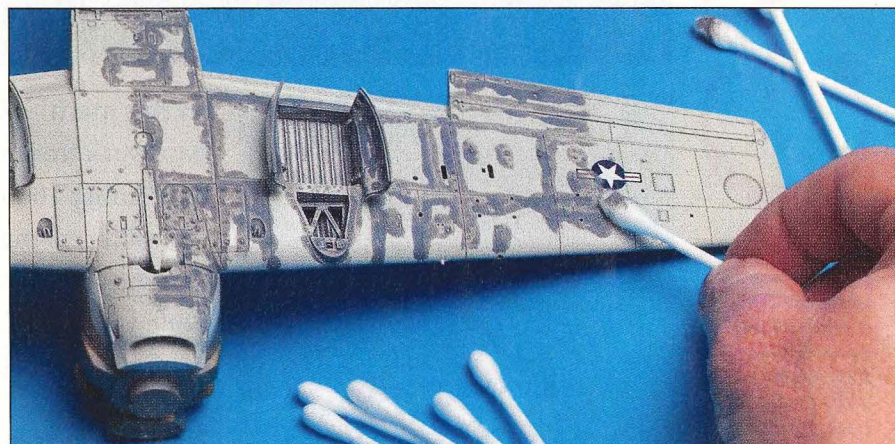
**3** The sludge goes into the cockpit, wheel wells, and other deep depressions to simulate shadows.



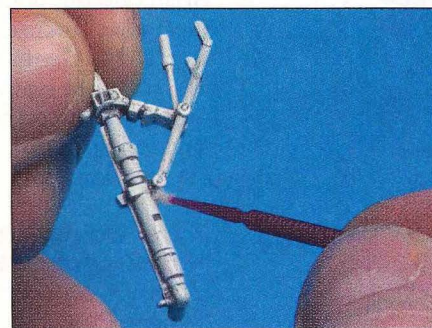
**4** Even the landing gear struts get sludged! Medium or dark gray works best on white.



**5** More sludge is applied to the wheels and helps define the rims, hubs, and bolts.



**6** Once the sludge is dry, the excess can be removed with dry cotton swabs.



**7** To remove the sludge from tight recesses, use the tiny ball of absorbent fuzz on a Microbrush.



**8** Compare the bland, sterile main landing gear on the left to the “sludge washed” unit.