Fire Base Easy



A variety of aftermarket details made it a whole lot easier for Bill Norton to build and detail this Israeli Defense Force M107 diorama.

The aftermarket helps build this Israeli Defense Force M107 diorama

Story and photos by Bill Norton

Not too many years ago, the "aftermarket" for model builders consisted of just a few items – some sheets of decals and a handful of detail parts. Most of us were stuck with building whatever came in the model box. Thankfully, that's no longer the case. Dozens of aftermarket companies offer a wide variety of parts, markings, and accessories, making it possible to model almost any vehicle in any variation.

After some research I realized I could build an Israeli Defense Force M107 self-propelled gun – and pose it in a realistic diorama – all by adding a few easily obtained aftermarket items.

The M107

Italeri's 1/35 scale M107 kit (No. 791) is an outstanding model straight from the box, although it does have a few ejector-pin and sink marks that need to be filled. The sink marks in the center of the drive sprockets at the front of the chassis looked impossible to fill, so instead I covered them with sheet-styrene discs.

To add the Israeli-specific details, I used AEF Designs' cast-resin IDF M107/M110 detail set (No. KI-15). This well-stocked aftermarket set includes the machine-gun pylon, the "David" fire-control computer and radio rack, and a chassis plate for the left-front side of the chassis, **1**. The parts are generally accurate, but they required quite a bit of straightening, filling, and general cleanup before they could be installed.

Using my references, I made the welded traction bars at the front of the hull from Evergreen .015" x .040" styrene strip, **2**. I also added travel-lock rods to the forward hull using styrene stock and a few bits from my parts box.

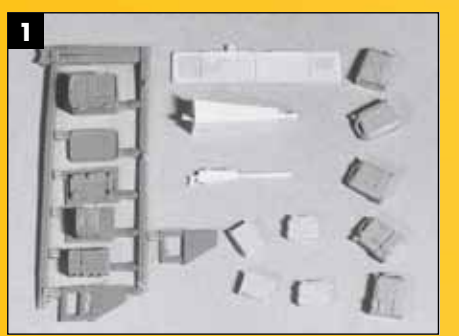
My main objective for the project was to superdetail the M107 – complementing the kit's detail without overwhelming the viewer. As "busy" as my model may appear, there was even more detail that I could have added. Lots of the model's extra detail parts came from my parts box, and the hydraulic lines were made from Verlinden's flexible tubing (No. 47). After I installed the kit's vinyl tracks, I tied them to each bogey wheel to give them more realistic sag and drape.

Painting the model

Once assembly was complete, I airbrushed the model using AEF's Israeli armor sand paint (No. 3501). Alclad II polished aluminum lacquer simulates the chrome finish on the hydraulic rams. Final steps included basic washes and dry-brushing with Testor enamels.

After all the painted details had dried thoroughly, I scratched at the model lightly with the wooden end of a paintbrush to create a random series of barely perceptible scrapes and blemishes in the finish. I paid particular attention to areas where the crew would move about frequently. It's a subtle technique that helps reduce the uniformity of the finish and enhance the illusion of scale. A final application of pastel powder simulates dust and dirt thrown up by the terrain.

The M107's markings came from several different Verlinden marking sets,



AEF Designs' detail set for the M107 includes a variety of cast-resin detail parts that are perfect for modeling an Israeli Defense Force vehicle.



Bill used Evergreen styrene strip to add detail to his M107's hull.



The diorama's figures came from Verlinden. Bill altered them slightly to better represent IDF troops.



4

The diorama includes a long-abandoned brick structure made of Dutton's brick and rubble set.



5

Look out! There's an epoxy-putty snake hiding in the M107's shade!



Careful planning and research ensured that Bill's Israeli Defense Force M107 diorama would be filled with extra detail, but not be overwhelmed by it.

including the Israeli military vehicle set (No. 155), the dry-transfer stencil sheets (Nos. 160 and 161), and the Israeli ID plate set (No. 588).

Mustering the crew

The at-rest modern soldiers also came from Verlinden, **3**. I used figures 191, 220, and 321, but I grafted on heads from head sets Nos. 146 and 147. I also installed an AEF Kova Raful bush hat (No. IE-9) on one of the figures. I modified a few of the uniform and gear details to better represent IDF equipment.

When I painted the figures, I used artist's oil paints for the faces and other areas of exposed skin; it enabled me to blend different shades of paint on the figure for a more realistic look. I painted the uniforms using Testor acrylic paints, and when they were dry, I added shading and dry-brushing effects with Testor enamels.

To model a pair of empty boots, I first removed a pair from a figure using a razor saw. After drilling out the open end, I collapsed one of them by heating it with a candle and squeezing it.

Gearing up

I used a lot of aftermarket parts to detail the scene and merge the M107 to the base and its surroundings. I made some items cross between the base and the vehicle to tie them together. AEF provided the Israeli stretcher (No. IE-12), jerry cans (Nos. I-13 and I-14), the oil can (No. L-6), and the tanker helmet (No. IE-14).

Verlinden details include the printed details (Nos. 13 and 274), Israeli small arms (No. 14), Israeli infantry gear (No. 535), Israeli ration boxes (No. 33), and ammo boxes (No. 33). I added two of Verlinden's 175mm ammunition sets (No. 414), supplementing them with shell crates I scratchbuilt. Painted aluminum-foil strips simulate the steel straps that bind the ammunition bundles together.

The tarps, plastic sheets, and some of the clothing items are made from tissue paper saturated with diluted white glue. These parts are easy to drape and pose realistically when they're wet and can be painted and detailed when they're dry.

The base

I used a thick wooden base so I could dig into it and create both the depression made by the M107s spade and the dry creek. The old stone structure was made from Dutton's brick and rubble (No. DM-22), **4**. The high ground is sculpted plastic foam. All of the groundwork is covered with craft maché, and the rocks are pebbles from my garden.

The ground is painted with a variety of earth tones, with the darkest shades in the creek bed. It took a few coats of paint to cover the porous red ceramic bricks; next time I'll seal them first with a coat of thinned white glue.

Animals

I added a few animals to the scene, too. A coiled snake is taking advantage of the shade created by the gun carriage, **5**, and two birds are surveying the turned-up ground near the spade. The snake is a made from a rope of epoxy putty, and the birds are modified chicks from Tamiya's livestock set (No. 128).

Finishing up

Even just a few years ago, modeling such a specialized scene would have required a tremendous amount of scratchbuilding and kitbashing. Thanks to the explosion of finely detailed aftermarket items, almost any piece of equipment from any era can be modeled. If you're itching to build a particular off-the-beaten-path vehicle, take a look at your aftermarket catalogs – your next diorama may be lurking in their pages, waiting to be assembled. **FSM**

SOURCES

AEF Designs 970-362-4282, www.aefdesigns.com
Alclad II www.alcladII.com
Verlinden Productions, Inc. 636-379-0077, www.verlinden-productions.com