

Advancing cautiously, a German soldier peers around a knocked-out Renault UE carrier in Glenn's small scene. A little groundwork and attention to detail were all he needed to turn one small model and a figure into a snapshot that tells a thousand words about the conquest of France.



VIGNETTES: *Scale storytelling*

A master of little scenes offers insight to his worlds

Modeling and photography by Glenn Bartolotti

The best dioramas tell stories.

Not only do great dioramas place models in historical context – they use figures, buildings, and groundwork to relate something about a vehicle or event. And the best ones tell a story that's easy to see.

Large dioramas can be exciting – even breathtaking – with bunches of vehicles, dozens (sometimes hundreds) of figures, and numerous structures sprawled across an expansive base. Such grand displays dominate contest tables and attract crowds.

But think about the big dioramas you've seen. The best ones

probably comprised several small dramas tied together by a common element or event. And, chances are, it's those individual stories that stuck in your head.

Sometimes, smaller is better. A small scene, or vignette, removes distractions and leaves no questions about the builder's purpose. But a smaller scene also means fewer elements, so the modeler's choices of figures, poses, and positioning have to be spot-on.

I had an overall idea when I started this scene from the fall of France in 1940. But along the way I changed my mind and made changes that altered the mood of the vignette.



1 Glenn's impetus was Mirage's 1/35 scale Renault UE light personnel carrier. Able to complete only one side's track run acceptably, he figured he'd have to finish it as a disabled vehicle. Now, all he needed was the right scene.



2 With missing track, Glenn decided the diminutive Renault would have come to rest at the bottom of an embankment on a roadside. The base is a styrene box with terrain made from styrene foam covered with spackling. After adding fine sand for dirt, then planting static grass, Glenn pressed the Renault into the still-wet groundwork so it is in – rather than on – the scenery.



3 Next, Glenn added the human element: a German infantryman looking over the knocked-out vehicle from an unused corner of the base. Note the vehicle's diagonal placement on the base as part of the off-center composition. The figure is from Dragon's German Mine Detectors set (No. 6280), but Glenn planned to arm him with an anti-tank rifle.



4 With everything settling into place, Glenn painted and weathered the Renault. He used artist's oil washes, then mixed turpentine with ground pastels to build up dirt and soil on the running gear. Details and stowage were emphasized with artist's oils. Glenn attached the long grass (a model railroad item) with white glue.



5 For the water, Glenn mixed EnviroTex Lite (a pour-on, high-gloss plastic coating) with a touch of olive green paint. While the EnviroTex was still wet, he sprinkled a few leaves over it. The leaves come from a plant in Glenn's native Florida that fit the scale perfectly.



6 Dissatisfied with his initial figure choice, Glenn returned to the Dragon set. This time he chose a walking instead of standing figure. Substituting a resin head from Hornet and arming the figure with a Mauser rifle completed Glenn's composition. The once-static scene is now characterized by nervous energy, action, and drama.

In a few square inches, Glenn's vignette documents the 1940 German invasion of France. Next time you consider building a diorama, think small and plan ahead. But don't be satisfied too early: Constantly examine the scene, and don't hesitate to change a major element to improve it. **FSM**

