

VACUUM SCENERY

What can you do with it? by John Treadaway

I wanted to create some wrecked buildings for the up coming Hammer's Slammers show game I was organising on behalf of the South London Warlords. In the news at the time I was thinking about building them (mid summer 2006) there had been numerous shots of the unfortunate business in Israel and the Lebanon and one of the features of that kind of urban conflict is, inevitably, heavily wrecked buildings.



Cab of Earthmover



Hover tank at speed - vehicle by Old Crow painted by Kevin Dallimore buildings by Amera Plastics

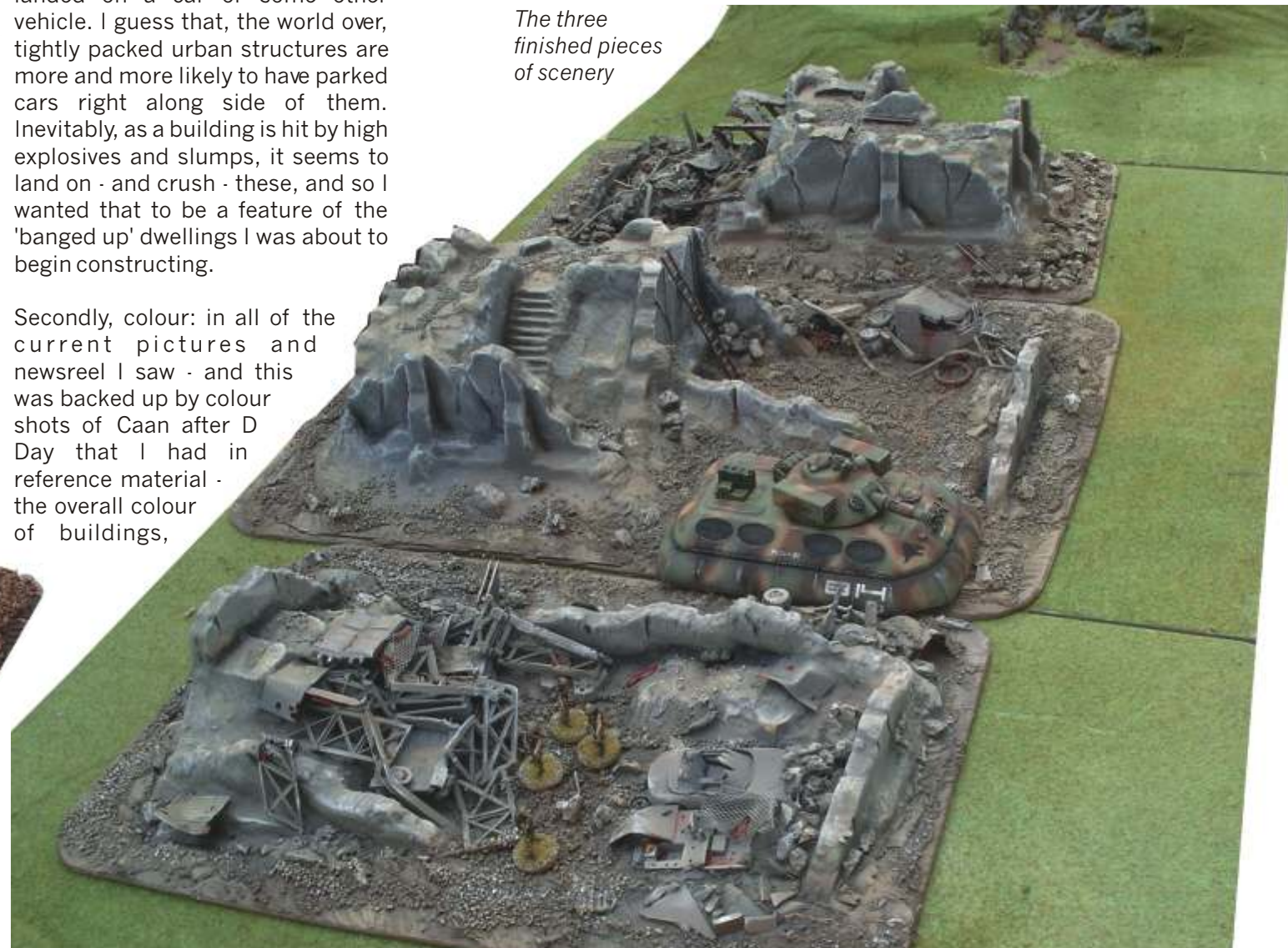


The basic vac form shapes based with scatter, brown grouting filler and crushed cars added

Watching the TV I was struck by a couple of things. Firstly, almost all of the buildings seemed to have landed on a car or some other vehicle. I guess that, the world over, tightly packed urban structures are more and more likely to have parked cars right along side of them. Inevitably, as a building is hit by high explosives and slumps, it seems to land on - and crush - these, and so I wanted that to be a feature of the 'banged up' dwellings I was about to begin constructing.

Secondly, colour: in all of the current pictures and newsreel I saw - and this was backed up by colour shots of Caan after D Day that I had in reference material - the overall colour of buildings,

The three finished pieces of scenery



rubble, crushed cars and indeed just about everything else seemed to be a universal tan/grey. The dust that settles in the surrounding area when a building is destroyed seems to ubiquitously coat the locale in a universal light brownish colour and that was also something I wanted to reproduce.

Where to start

My mate Kevin Dallimore had recently purchased some vac-form styrene buildings from a company called Amera. They looked an interesting starting position but I hadn't painted a vac-form model since I built a Bellona Roman Marching Fort some years earlier. I'd been pretty disappointed with that previous foray into the vac-form world (but then, hey: that was 1973...) so I wondered what I'd be letting myself in for.

Amera make complete houses, factories and fortifications plus useful things like road sections but



Trooper with an ATGW launcher takes cover behind a crushed vehicle - all Mid-tech troopers painted by Graham Green

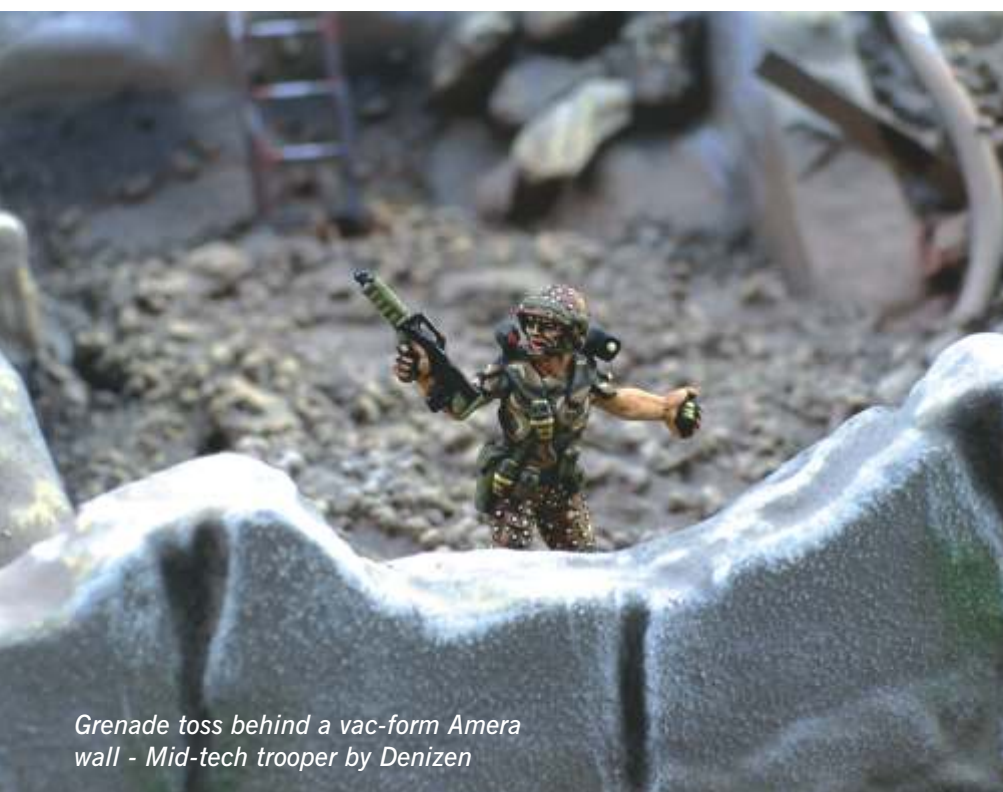
they also make some wrecked structures. I bought three items via their website: two of the "Bombed-Out Building" (Z211) numbers and one "Demolished Buildings" (Z227) and - on Kevin's suggestion - a can of Games Workshop "Rough Coat" spray paint.

The reason for the spray paint is that the vac form pieces were, as anticipated, quite smooth in finish and I realised that - without something to give a little surface texture - the 'dry brush' paint technique that I usually use would be

hard work. I usually coat buildings like this in PVA and dust with sand, but I wanted to try something quicker, easier and - hopefully - more subtle.

Cutting and basing

I cut up a couple of the smaller pieces from the "Demolished Buildings" set to 'ring the changes' by modifying one of the "Bombed-Out Building" sets. I butt stuck the cut-up pieces against one of the larger items, filling any gaps with a



Grenade toss behind a vac-form Amera wall - Mid-tech trooper by Denizen

mixture of PVA and sand. By doing this, I achieved three large but different destroyed buildings.

My next task was what to decide what to mount the finished models on. That wasn't much of a decision for me, really, because I almost always use the same material: I tend to use sheet styrene for projects like this and this project was to be no exception: the buildings were stuck to three large rectangles of 3mm Bextrene sheet using hot glue. I made sure that the bases I cut were large enough for extra ground work around them (between 450mm and 550mm across) and I rounded the corners and bevelled the edges of the thick sheet material with a sanding drum mounted in a Dremel mini-drill.

I use styrene because it is such a stable and robust material compared to something like foam board, but doesn't require serious tools to cut and shape like MDF would.

The edges of the vac form were blended in using my favourite basing compound: dark brown tile grouting. I love it: it's self coloured and very robust and every tub that's bought and employed on a modelling job like this is one less tub to be bought and used to commit the crime of actually grouting bathroom tiles in chocolate brown. So that's a positive result for home decor fans everywhere...

Smashed cars

The next thing I wanted was the crushed cars. Scouring high street 'Pound Shops' (disingenuously named, I feel, as almost nothing I found in them for sale actually cost a pound...) I looked high and low for toy cars that might suffer being ascribed a nominal 1/60th scale (around 28mm 'scale', I guess, whatever that is...). This search for suitable props was a surprisingly difficult task. Sure, I came across lots of useful other vehicles: some excellent 1/50th scale 'SAS Jeeps' so covered in stowage, crates, sand chutes and jerry cans that they were

worth for the extra kit alone. And I found a pair of superb articulated low-loaders with big, heavy earth moving equipment on their backs. The trucks themselves when fiddled with (I removed the cab from one to stop it looking too 'Eddie Stobart' for an SF game and replaced it with a resin cab) look splendid - my conversion makes a great tank transporter. But I digress... After much investigation I finally ended up with a motley collection of toy cars in, frankly, scales ranging from (I'd hazard a guess) 1/48th to 1/72nd.

I used two techniques to hide the disparity of sizes in these vehicles, and this is pretty important for me as I am a notorious fascist when it comes to different scales on the table-top. Firstly, on vehicles that were a little small I replaced items that gave the game away. For example, I had found an interesting



Making a call - Denizen Ventauran marine and a crushed car

little, two seat buggy that was just too petite to pass for 28mm and capable of carrying two people. The seats were ripped out and replaced with a larger item and so it became something like a single seat 'quad bike' and the scale felt 'right'.

Conversely, to hide the size of



Launching a Buzz-bomb from the wreckage of a building

vehicles that were a little on the beefy side, I made extra use of a tool that all of the toy cars were to have lavished upon them to varying degrees: a sledgehammer. Die cast cars are, I have to say, surprisingly

the remains from the tarmac front drive: I'd had to hit them that hard!

Anyway, after a pleasant twenty minutes of gleefully pounding things, I had my collection of flat cars to stick on my vac-form buildings. The vehicles were stuck down with hot glue but other items were added to the base using either super glue or PVA. Small bits and bobs like girders (Plastruct 'I', 'H' and 'T' beams), tubes, corrugated iron (purchased as plastic sheet), chain link fences (car repair wire mesh) and items of general detritus (spare wheels and so forth) were stuck on with super glue. Sand, gravel (Talus from Antenociti's Workshop), rubble (cork chips from the same supplier) and such like were stuck down with PVA.

One last item I used as 'dressing' on these models were items from one of the platform constructor sets. I have to say that, having bought a couple of cartons of the stuff from Urban Mammoth at Sheffield Triples last year, they had languished in my spares box as I found the tediousness of assembly so mind numbing, I think I'd have to be doing a serious prison stretch to have the time and patience to put together much of the material.

However, elements from these sets, plus the odd bit of Hornby model railway footbridge, added convincing industrial wreckage to the models, and this was superglued in position.

robust. I'm not an inconsiderable mass and standing on them in big boots did virtually nothing except end my dancing career via a twisted ankle. A two kilo club hammer didn't put much of a dent in them either and - shockingly - I had to resort to the full sledge hammer and then digging some of

Adding texture

Next was the finish for the vac-form walls themselves. I gave my can of Rough Coat a long, hard shake and did my best to spray the plain plastic areas with the grey paint-and-grit mix. The can needed a good shake and subtlety in use doesn't really work: being light handed when pressing the button on top of the can doesn't get the desired effect as you get paint but no grit (and the texture's the point: I've already got plain grey primer, thanks!).

When all the bits that needed coating in the sandy stuff were suitably treated, the whole model was then sprayed with regular grey car primer to cover everything, including the bits that the Rough Coat didn't touch.

After drying, the whole shebang - buildings, cars and other items - were then sprayed with a coat of Tamiya Deck Tan, paying attention to

the upper surfaces, where the dust from the destroyed structure would fall.

Paint and varnish

The scenery was then dry brushed with a succession of lighter and lighter shades of a grey/cream colour using a large flat brush. I added rust to the metal detritus using some dark brown paint (GW Scorched Brown) and some orange to show recent rust. I then used a combination of chalks to then add more rust in a more subtle way (stains on walls and so forth). I used orange and brown rust colours for this process - Antenociti and MIG powders weathering powders - and green chalk for verdigris and mould stains on walls.

Lastly I used a dark 'smoke' colour MIG powder to brush into corners of the buildings to add emphasis and depth to the rather softly defined shapes of the vac-form

mouldings.

To hold all this in place I gave the constructions a thorough coat of about the best matt varnish in a can I've seen: Testors Dull Coat. This brings all of the colours together, darkening the chalks slightly and more importantly - keeping everything (chalks included) exactly where they should be: on the model.

My final finishing touch was to dry brush gun metal colour (GW Bolter-gun) and a little bit of silver highlight (GW Mithril) onto metal areas. I did this after the varnish as the Testors is very effective at matting down the colours which rather ruins the shiny effect of any metallic colours if the varnish is applied over the top (as indeed it should do: it called ull Coat after all, and it does exactly what it says on the tin!).

For the game (and to give a sense of scale to these accompanying



The die cast 'low-loader' set came with some excellent earth movers which - with a paint job - will dress the table very well

photographs) I painted some of the excellent Denizen Ventauran Marines using spray can Tamiya sand. This was then over painted with washes of black Humbrol and thinners, then dry-brush highlighted after the details were painted in. Matt varnished with the Testors they had visors painted in using coloured Tamiya lacquer.

These figures are shown on the models, as I said, to highlight the size of the terrain and - frankly - to show off these fine miniatures. They are painted up as West Riding Yeomanry from the Hammer's Anvils supplement (product placement moment!) and - though they aren't going to win any awards at the Salute painting competition (secondary product placement moment!) I think that they are a testament to the fine casting and sculpting of the figures themselves that good effects can be achieved with fairly simple techniques. Chub Pearson - the man behind Denizen Miniatures - no longer sculpts in 25/28mm (which is a great loss to gamers I believe) but his Fantasy and excellent SF ranges are still available from his web site.

In conclusion

Are vac form buildings worth the effort? It's a big question: in 1973 I was deeply disappointed with my Bellona Roman Marching fort. All of the palisades and gates were single sided vac form and looked awful. So - as a thirteen year old - what I did was replace them all with new palisade and gates made from plastic kit sprue. I felt a lot better about the fort afterwards, as I recall, and that's the key: one can buy ready made ruins (and indeed pre-painted ones from the likes of Conflux) in resin. But if - like me - you actually want to build scenery yourself, rather than buying ready cast, or if the pre-built stuff available isn't what you actually need, then cutting up resin is hard (messy) work. And not cheap. So maybe this route is a way forward.

Vac-form is quite cheap - the Amara buildings were just over a tenner - but they need finishing and the tin

More mid-tech troopers from Denizen Miniatures. The Amara buildings work well if they are give some texture

of Rough Coat paint cost eight pounds from GW. Amara's product is also easy to cut about, but I think needs basing (for strength), and a fair amount of work to bring out what little detail is there, plus - if you're like me - it has to have extra detail added to bring the models up to a standard I would be happy with.

If you like building scenery - like I do - vac-form's a good place to start. If you don't like building scenery, and don't want to use cheap (and cheap looking!) scenery - which is what vac-form is if you don't do much to it - then this sort of scenery may not be for you. I enjoyed myself immensely. But then, I'm quite weird!

John Treadaway



Gunner in the 'platform set' wreckage - all figures by Denizen Miniatures

Building, painting, construction and photography by the author unless otherwise stated



Thunderbolt division half track on a tank transporter - conversion from die cast with resin cab.