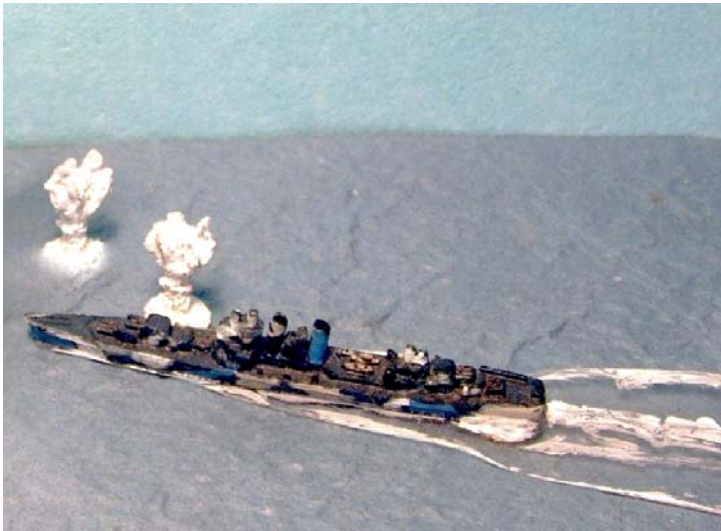


BASING AIRCRAFT FOR WARGAMES.

One problem when presenting aircraft on a wargames table is the artificiality of the base required to hold them up. In the past I have used a weight with a single wire with the aircraft or formation on it. A tripod with the aircraft or formation on top, various plastic or metal counters etc. While each system has its advantages, it does look ugly in photographs and very artificial in use.

Therefore, a year or so ago I set out to change all that with a new system. I had seen people put their model soldiers or ships on clear plastic and it certainly looks good. , Because terrain and circumstances differ model soldiers with heavily sculptured bases can look great in one situation and horrible in another. There is nothing as awful as a group of infantry with stones and grass on their base, standing on the first floor of a building or on a paved road. The same applies to model ships if the tabletop colours change to allow for shallow water, or just the various hues of the sea.

Having decided to try clear plastic, I purchased some from my local hobby shop. Mounted up the ships did look better, but the plastic was not glass clear. Then I spotted some shirts in a local shop. These were boxed with a cellophane, or thin plastic with the clear quality of good glass. A quick experiment showed the plastic was easily strong enough, and best of all, it comes on lots of containers, so its not hard to get a lot of it to use, even with my huge model collection. Moreover, of course it is free.



Left. USS Nashville shown on a clear plastic base. Note that after experimentation I found it easier to cut the bases as elongated triangles. If it is to be clear and unobtrusive, then the front edges of a rectangular base are not needed.



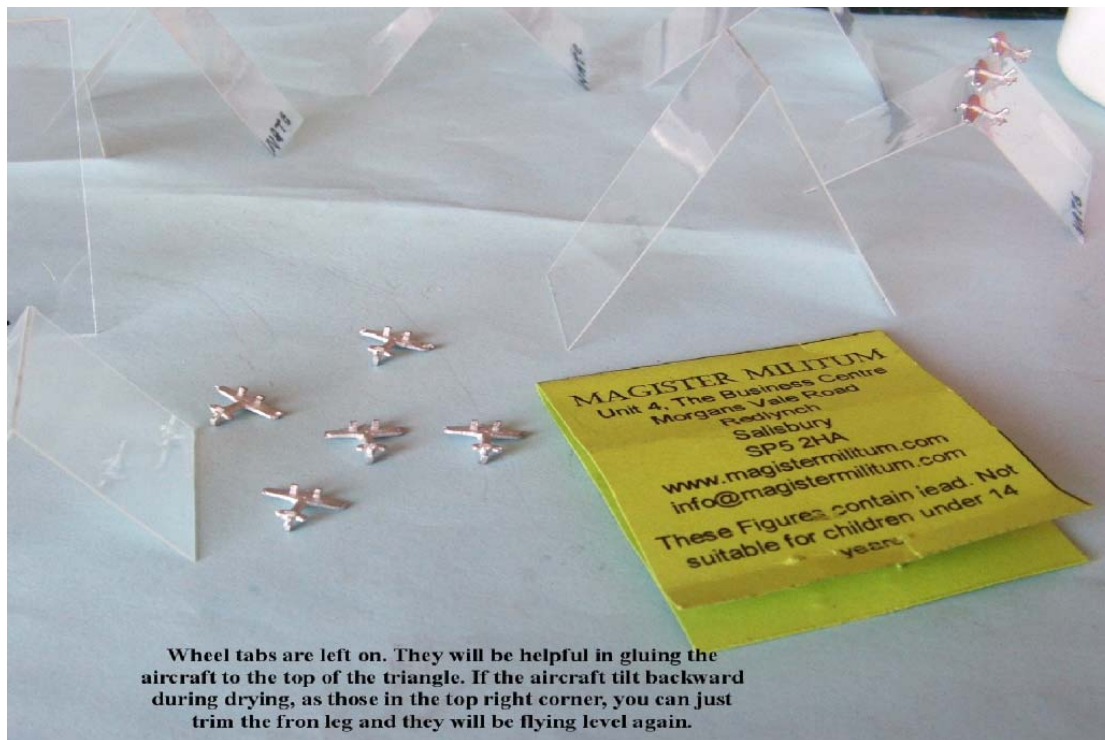
It was while rebasing some of my fleets that I ran out of plastic box tops and it being late at night I searched around for an alternative already available at home. My eye fell on some clear off cuts from pages I had laminated, and then trimmed down. To my surprise the material was even clearer than the shirt box material, but not quite as strong. The main problem when used as ship bases was a tendency to curl up at the edges, something the thicker plastic did not do. However it was then that the 'Eureka' factor cut in. Although not strong enough to use for ship bases, it was certainly strong enough to hold up model aircraft. With scissors and glue I set about cutting and had soon made some aircraft stands. However these early ones were bulky. I had erred on the side of caution and made them very sturdy. The result was that although better than a solid wire stick, they were still too easy to see and needed something heavy on the base to make them stay upright. A weight on the base was one of the things I had been trying to avoid.

The photograph at left shows one of these early bases in action during a wargame. The metal base is as obtrusive as the very things I was trying to replace and the structure itself was bulky. As such it was similarly as much of an eyesore as what I wanted to replace.

After constructing a rather large number of these bases, without even testing them on a tabletop, I noticed that some glues I had used, dried with a white mark that was very distinctive, spoiling the effect I was trying to achieve. It was then, when looking at some of the scraps left over, that I decided to see if I could base some individual aircraft on single stands. The first attempt still used a weight but had only a single arm of plastic poking up, with the aircraft on top of that. It was far better than the others and at a distance on the tabletop, almost invisible except for the base. That idea would do well for heavier models such as 1:100 or 1:144th scale and so forth, so I put it aside until the next time I need to base some of those. The plastic will need to be fairly strong, but I'm sure it will work.

What to do? I was getting rid of the scraps, and in doing so bent some over so they would fit into the bin more easily. Once again the 'Eureka' factor cut in. If the aircraft was on a two legged stand of sufficient width to hold it up, there would be no need for a heavy base and not necessarily a need for a flat base area on top to hold aircraft. That would only be needed for large formations.

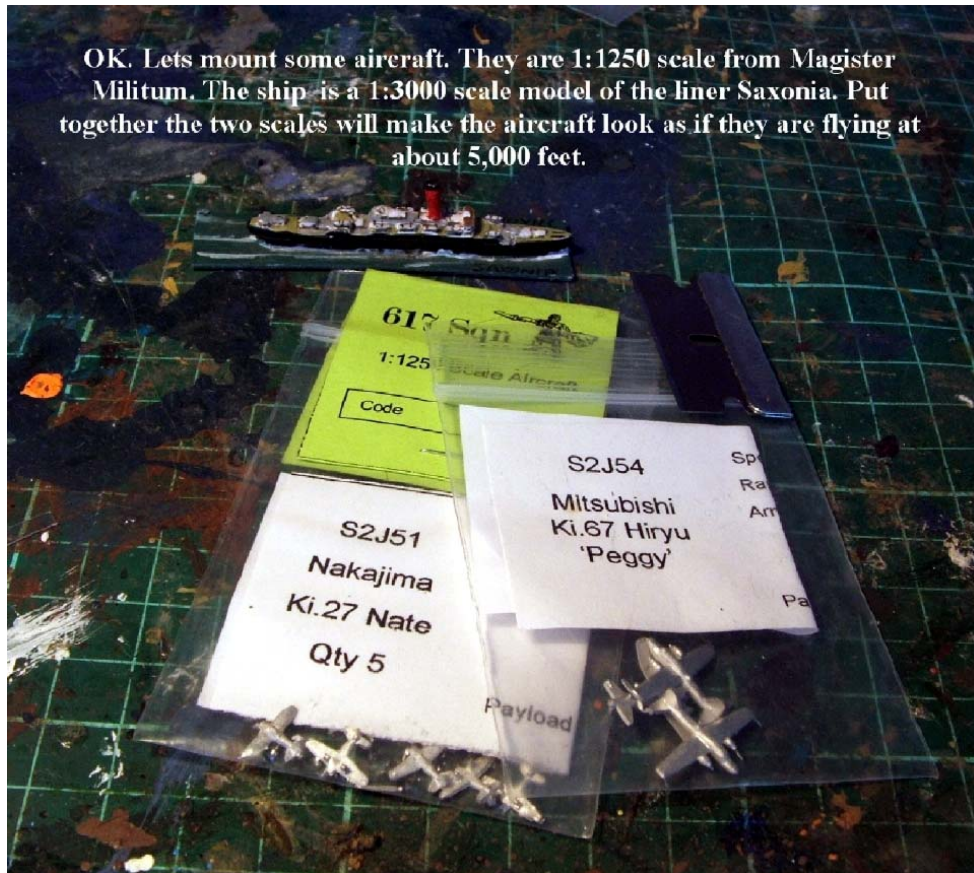
The first attempt had the aircraft riding saddle style, with the legs out each side. It worked well and was very stable. Only two very clear legs also made it hard to see, especially at a distance along a tabletop. But when placed to attack a ship, the legs got in the way unless it was small enough to fit between them. So the next phase was to turn the models 'fore and aft'. This had all the advantages of the previous attempt, but now when the aircraft were attacking a ship, they could be placed right over the model, one leg either side, without any difficulty. As the models usually have tabs to represent wheels, they could be used to help balance the models while gluing as per the photograph below.



Super glue is not necessarily a good one to use. Although strong and fast drying, it can cause the plastic to take on a white or opaque colour where it dries. I experimented with various types and in the end settled for a very 'tacky' style thick glue, that not only held the models well, but dried completely clear. In fact, almost as clear as the plastic itself.

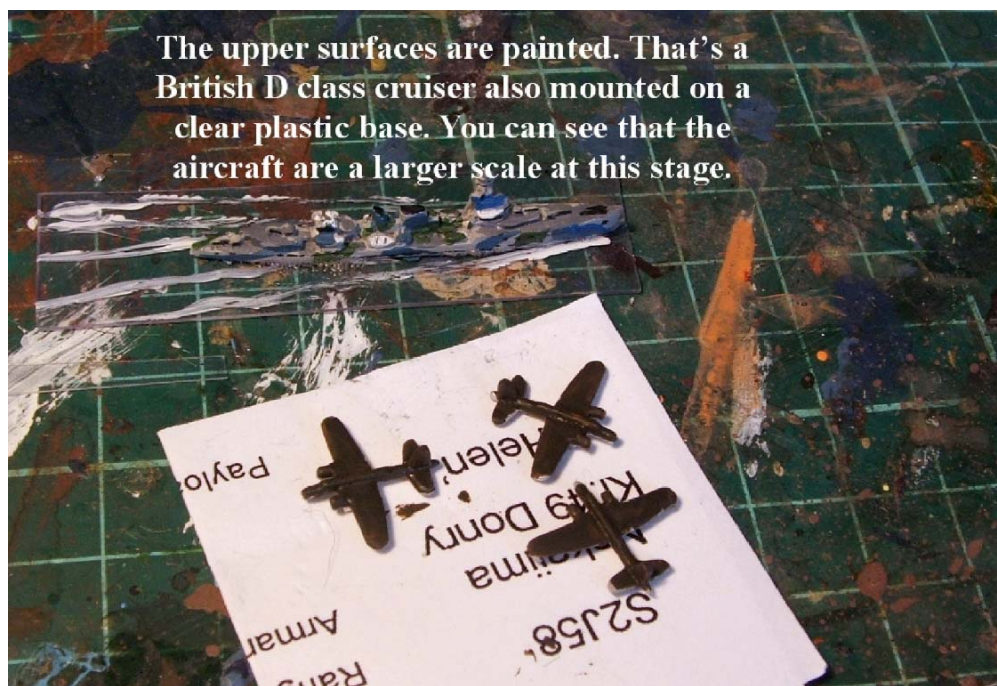
Note that the air bases shown in this and most photographs are left over scrap after trimming laminated pages.

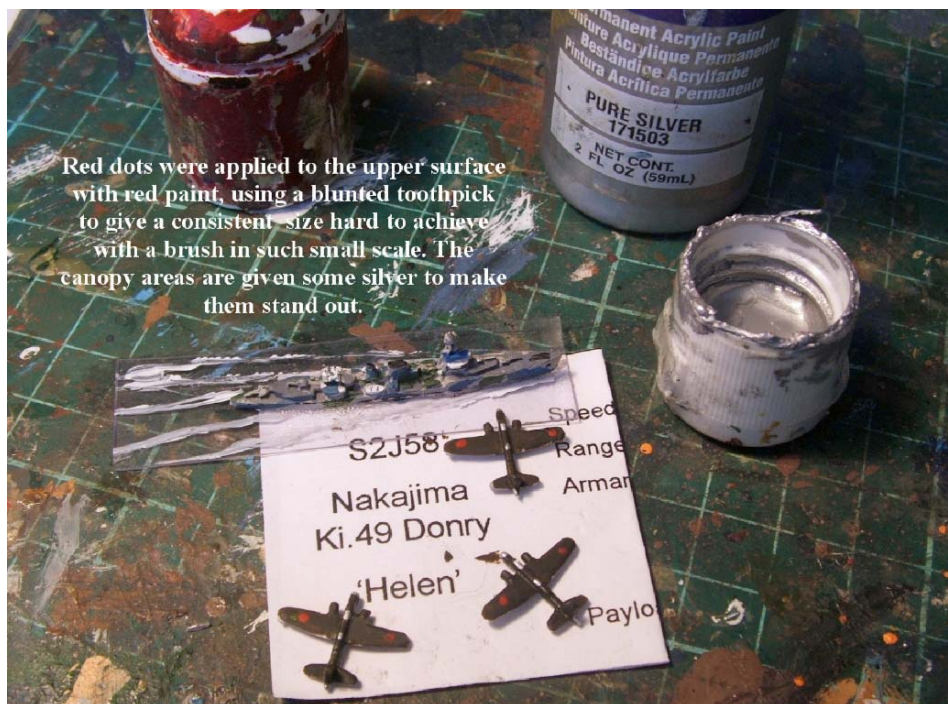
OK. Lets mount some aircraft. They are 1:1250 scale from Magister Militum. The ship is a 1:3000 scale model of the liner Saxonia. Put together the two scales will make the aircraft look as if they are flying at about 5,000 feet.

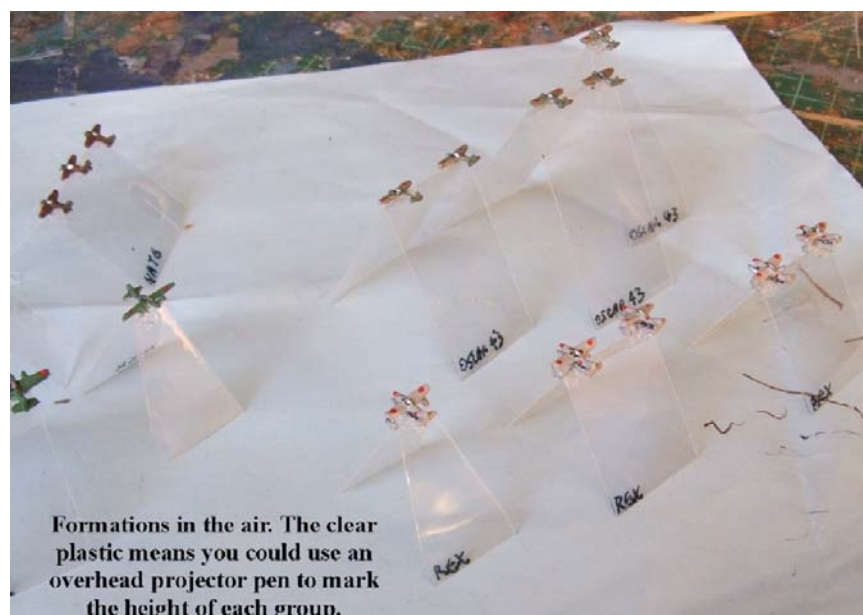
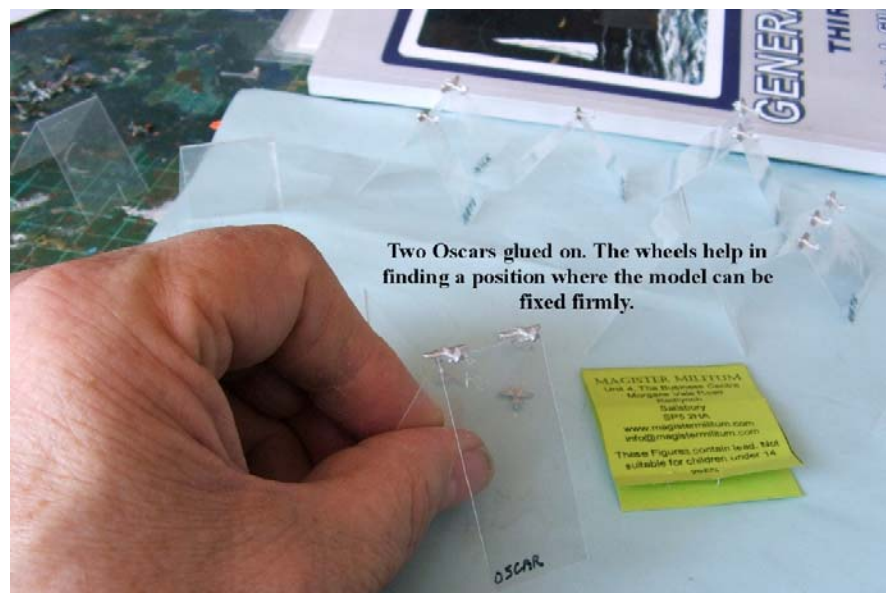


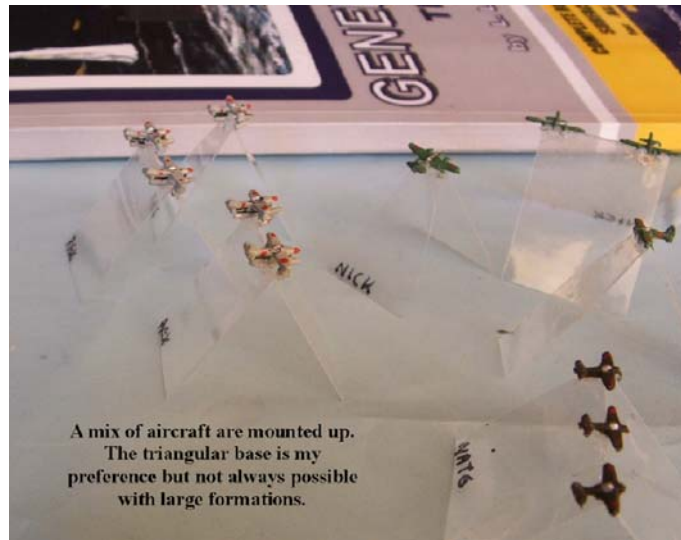
First we paint the underside grey. The Ki49 was usually grey underneath and dark olive on the upper surfaces.

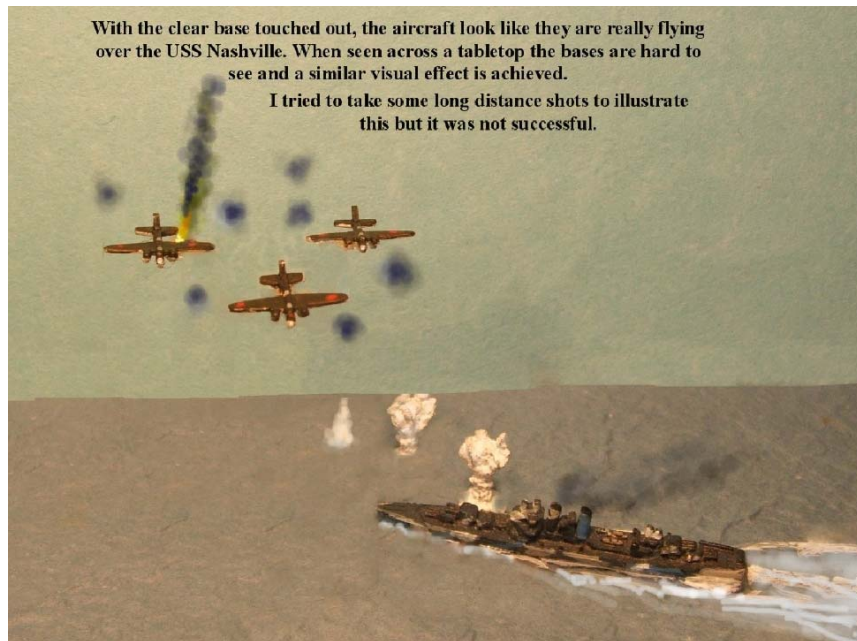












During the basing up, I put some aircraft in formations, and mounted others singly, or in pairs. That enables me to adjust the number if any are shot down. Others have been mounted on bases that are little more than just above the surface. This is particularly important for torpedo bombing and for skip bombers. However it is possible to indicate varying heights for the same models by mounting them on a low base, but providing some spare higher ones. As the bases are triangular, they will easily fit over a blank one and sit tight enough to be moved without falling off.

Note that when mounting the aircraft, each of the legs have to be wide enough to provide stability side to side, and spread far enough apart to do the same fore and aft. If after gluing, you find they are tilted one side or the other, just snip some off the bottom of one leg to get them on the level again. I have actually 'tilted' some dive-bombers quite deliberately, and the effect is quite good once they are over their target.

Because the bases are clear laminating plastic you can write on them with non permanent overhead projector pens. I chose to put the names of the aircraft types on, but kept that low near the sea, so as to not ruin the very effect I was trying to get. In addition its possible to write the height aircraft are at, and alter it if this changes. Its probably also possible to simply make a mark on the base of large formations to indicate how many have been shot down, or damaged.

I hope the ideas put forward here are of help to other gamers.

Mal.Wright. January 2nd. 2007.