

# BIPLANES WITHOUT TEARS

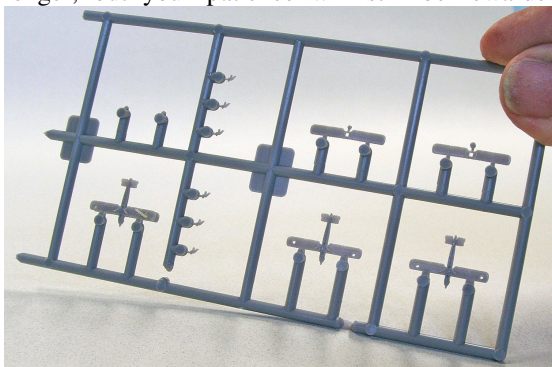
by L. L. Gill

The thought of preparing 1:600 or 1:700 miniature biplanes for naval wargames seems pretty daunting at first. The dang things are small! Unless you are young, you'll probably have to use a magnifying glass to work on them. However, a little modeling effort definitely pays off several times over. The miniatures really are eye catching when they are painted and decaled – especially when using the colorful schemes of the '30s. They make quite an addition to any game!

I have found several simple tricks that make preparing biplane miniatures quite a bit easier. You might want to give them a try, working in assembly line fashion:

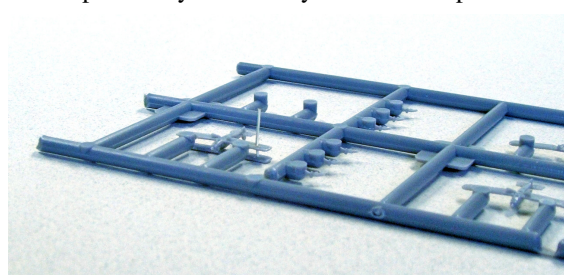
- 1) When preparing small plastic aircraft miniatures, it is best to keep them on the plastic sprues until painted. This makes them much easier to handle and steady while working on them. In most cases, it is also best to keep the fuselage on the sprue until after the wings and floats or landing gear are assembled and painted.
- 2) The *Trumpeter* biplane miniatures come with struts, but the biplane miniatures from other manufacturers do not. These includes the Japanese aircraft available for *Sudden Storm*, spotter floatplanes for warships, and biplane miniatures for the early days in the Mediterranean. I've found that simply adding wing struts makes these biplane miniatures much sturdier and also really improves their appearance. This is easily done if you are patient. Use the following steps:

- A. Drill one small hole in the center of each outer bottom wing of a biplane with a pin vise and a # 74 (or smaller) micro drill available from any good hobby shop. It's best to use a sharp punch or pick to make a small starter indentation thereby making sure the drill doesn't slip and stays in the center of the wing. There isn't enough room for multiple struts, but don't worry. You only need a hole for a single strut. Metal miniatures may take a little longer, but your patience will still be rewarded.

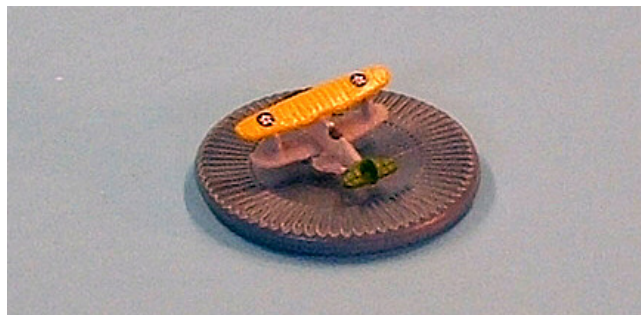


- B. Glue on the bottom wings and let dry.
- C. Next, glue the top wing to the fuselage and let dry. Be careful to ensure the upper and lower wings dry parallel to each other.

- D. Then, cut some small plastic rods for struts twice as long as the gap between the wings for ease of assembly. A 0.5mm or 0.8mm diameter rod from *Plastruct* or *Evergreen Scale Models* works well and can supply many struts. You can also use thin brass wire, found at a model railroad shop, if preferred.
- E. Run the plastic rod through the hole in the bottom wing until it meets the underside of the top wing. Glue the rod top and bottom with liquid cement and let dry. Substitute Epoxy if using brass wire or working with metal miniatures.
- F. Then, cut off the excess extending from the bottom wing and you've got a nice strut without having to do agonizing measurements or pre-cutting of the strut lengths. It really strengthens the miniature and gives a nice strut look when painted. Even though it's only a single strut, the eye sees what it expects to see and gives the expected strut appearance from a distance. You'd have to study the miniature from close up to really notice they are not multiple struts.



- 3) Paint the miniature in the selected color scheme using the sprue to maneuver it and let dry. Decals are also easier to apply while the miniature is still attached to the sprue. Then, you can cut the miniature off the sprue and do some minor finish touch up on the attachment point.
- 4) I like to mount the planes on a small plastic stand so they "fly" above the wargame surface. There are several ways to do this. You can make your own with small plastic poker chips painted light blue. Then, glue a clear rod in the center of the poker chip for the airplane miniature to be mounted on. This can be done by using the clear plastic mold cylinders found on the ends of the *Trumpeter* 1:700 sprues or by using clear glass "bugle beads" available at any bead store. When the rod is dry, cement the plane to the top of the bead/cylinder. It will dry strong and really looks great. The miniature will appear to be flying above the poker chip base with enough clearance even for fixed landing gear.



An easier alternative is to purchase the acrylic aircraft stands made by *Litko Gaming Accessories*. These come ready to go with clear hexagon bases in many sizes. For 1:600 or 1:700 miniatures, use the small 1" hex bases with 1" or 1½" clear rod "stands." They are quite inexpensive and can be procured for less than 50 cents per stand in packages of ten, not counting postage. Then, glue a small rare earth magnet to the top of the rod "stand" and another to the underside of the miniature. These magnets are available in bulk from companies like *Primal Horizons* in many sizes from any good hobby shop for about 15 or 20 cents apiece. Take care to ensure the two magnets are aligned with the poles oriented correctly so they attract rather than repel each other. Finally, position the aircraft miniature on the stand and let the magnets "click" together.

The result is a sturdy connection to the aircraft stand that allows you to effortlessly turn and position the airplane miniatures as desired or even remove them. Gone is the worry about breaking a delicate glue bond between stand and the miniature. This is definitely a better solution for the rough and tumble likely to result from handling by your average wargamer. An added benefit is the ability to quickly switch from one miniature to another, reducing the total number of aircraft stands needed for a game. Just 'click on' the particular planes from your collection needed for the current scenario and you're ready to go. End result: quick, cheap and easy.

You can also handily indicate altitude Levels by placing a small D6 on the rear face of the clear aircraft stand base. The upper face of the D6 displays the Level of the flight so all gamers can observe it. Use a white D6 for Levels 1 – 6 and a red D6 for Levels 7 – 12. Simply reposition the D6 when changing altitude. Dice will typically remain on the stands with normal handling. But if necessary, you also can add a small piece of clear, double-sided tape to the rear face of the base to provide a little stickiness to help keep the D6 in place. When the tape loses its grip, just replace the tape.



1:600 Cant Z 506 on Litko stand

Whichever method of basing you choose, you will have dressed up your games with great looking miniatures that are also practical and can be maneuvered and handled by their bases during a game to avoid damage to the small airplane miniatures and help preserve their finishes.

In summary, a little patient modeling time spent employing a few simple tricks will enable you to add impressive visual appeal to your naval engagements and help bring aircraft and the vertical dimension to life. It can be done, and it's not hard.