

Demonstration: Making Sand Bags

Eric Rains

If you look at photos from WW2, you'll see that U.S. armor commonly had sandbags applied by the crew in the field. It was thought by the crew that it would increase their protection. Commander's frowned on this practice, because the protection gained was not significant and the added weight stressed the mechanical components; possibly a greater problem than the enemy. In spite of this, sandbags found widespread use and certain units even standardized the application to a certain extent. Others were more haphazard in appearance, which is great for modelers. Eric lead off with a selection of photographs showing sandbags deployed in different ways. Aspects of note are:

- Sandbags, although a military standard size, vary in thickness due to the amount of fill. More fill creates fatter sandbags; less filled ones are flatter and wider. The fatter ones show less deformation, creases and folds.
- The sandbags overlap in different ways, sometimes laid horizontally, others vertically. Some are randomly thrown together.
- Ripping and destruction is common, especially if small arms fire is encountered.
- Sandbags have a seam around the side. This is very small in 1:35 scale, so getting it perfect is not important.
- There is always a tie point, where the bag opening is. There is usually a gathering at this point that shows folds and creases. This tie point is often buried underneath the sandbag or by another laying on top.
- Sandbags have varying colors due to manufacturing and weathering. Never paint them one wash of color.
- Reference photos reveal that water can collect and remain around the sandbags, causing dark, wet effects. Use this on your model for ultra-realism.
- Sometimes sandbags are filled with concrete that hardens, but usually they are filled with whatever dirt/sand is nearby. They may be called sandbags but it's rare that they actually have sand inside.
- Some vehicles used frames and other means of support, like jerry cans. Check your references.
- The human element is key. Try to maintain a randomness and it will look more realistic.

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Here are the notes from Eric's hands-on demo:

You'll need a few tools:

- Ceramic tile or similar work surface
- A+B putty. Eric prefers Magic Sculpt, but others are Apoxie Sculpt, Milliput and Kneadatite.
- Sharpened dowels or toothpicks
- Cup of water
- A sandbag "template." Eric uses a Tamiya sandbag from their M5 Stuart kit. It establishes how much putty to start with so your sandbags are all roughly the same size.

The method:

- Get out your putty and mix equal amounts with your fingers until it's thoroughly mixed. Eric prefers to add a little more of the hardener to get a faster, harder set. In hot, humid environments it will set faster than cool, dry environments.
- Eric prefers to build 4-5 bags per sitting or else it becomes tedious.
- Use the ceramic tile and roll the putty ball into a snake shape, roughly the width of the Tamiya sandbag template. Cut it to match the length of the template. The cut end will mash slightly, which is actually good because the real sandbags have this shape at their bottom.
- Decide if the bag your making will be on the bottom of others or not. If it's destined for the bottom, you can skip making the tie point.
- Lift the putty bag carefully and put on the model where it belongs. Eric said you can try using talcum

powder or plastic wrap as a barrier which allows lifting the sandbags when done, but he does not do this.

- Once on the model, sculpt some creases keeping in mind that fat bags don't have that many; primarily they are around the tie point.
- If making a tie point, use a tiny ball of putty, flatten it out and loosely form it around the tip of your pointed tool. Apply to the bag itself and allow it to drape naturally.
- Texturing the bags is possible but tricky. First remove any fingerprints using a wet brush or finger. You can then press cloth or pantyhose into the soft putty. But your creases will not take the texture, so experimenting is key. Let us know if you discover a good way to do this. When dry, the bag can be stippled with Mr. Surfacer to provide some texture.
- Use your leftover putty to make packs or bedrolls.

