



MIKE ROOF

by Michael Devine



MD. First off let's start with the obligatory questions of how old you are, where you live, and how long have you been building models? How long has it been since you really started to get involved in modeling on a more serious level? How old were you at the time?

MR. I'm 55 and live in the piney woods of the South Carolina piedmont. I've been modeling for almost 50 years.

I built my first model, a carded box 72nd scale Dauntless Dive Bomber, at six years old. My aunt took me to a local Five & Dime store for my birthday and told me I could get anything I wanted that cost less than a dollar. I picked a little airplane kit which left just enough money to also get a tube of glue. Of course, my aunt had to buy the glue for me. At that time, "model glue" was kept behind the counter at the cash register and only sold to adults! I remember that I used too much glue on the landing gear and propeller which both melted off. LOL!

I actually developed a more "serious" modeling side over a number of years. After that first kit, I was hooked, and I built models with steadily increasing regularity and complexity. Still, up and until I saw a Monogram model box picture of one of Sheperd Paine's dioramas (the Jeep with 37mm AT gun), I looked at models more like toys than something that I could put my own creative stamp on. I guess I

was about 11 or 12 years old when I saw that first diorama picture.

MD. What is your main inspiration for modeling? What got you started?

MR. As I was growing up, I had an older cousin who built models. He was the first person that I ever knew who actually painted his models, but at the time, even his builds were more like toys in my mind than anything else. It was that first Shep Paine diorama that really got me to look and think about model building as something more creative and interesting. Models could be more than just the sum of the parts in the box. I eventually went on to try to build and copy every one of Paine's Monogram military vehicle dioramas. A year or two after that first "Monogram Tips on Building Dioramas" epiphany, I discovered "Military Modeler" magazine (the old Challenge Publications magazine that was pub-

lished in the US). That was another major influence on me as a budding modeler.

Finally, in about 1974, a local hobby shop owner turned me on to the newly established local IPMS chapter. That was really important because it cemented in my mind that model building was something that adults do, and in fact, there was a whole social aspect of meetings and model shows. Between those three things, my teenage years were a real modeling growth period.

MD. How active are you in the modeling community such as frequenting the boards, going to shows, entering those shows, model club meetings, group builds, etc?

MR. I'm very active in my local modeling community. Ever since I joined my first IPMS chapter as a junior member, I've been a member of one modeling club or another. I spent 26 years in the US Army, and one of the first things that I did after moving to a new duty station was to look up the local IPMS chapter and join.

At one time, I was very keen to enter just about every IPMS modeling show that I could get to, but today, I'm a "post competition" modeler. The only shows I regularly exhibit at are AMPS events. I still find that the AMPS judging feedback provides something valuable to me as a model artist. For any modeler

who really wants to hone his craft, skills and art, AMPS is the way to go.

About five years ago, we established a local AMPS chapter, and I'm very active in it. We do group builds and host annual shows, and our meetings often feature how-to demonstrations. I'm also very active in traveling to and assisting with judging at AMPS shows, and I occasionally present seminars on various modeling related topics.

I do participate quite a lot in online modeling forums. I like the capability to post extensive and photo heavy build blogs, and find that I can really get down in the weeds with sharing techniques and the details of my various builds. Although I do have a couple of published magazine articles to my credit, I share my work now through the internet.

MD. Where do you see the modeling industry to be in 10 years from right now? Where are we headed?

MR. Well, that's a hard question.

I believe that CAD and CAM will continue to enable mainstream kit manufacturers to develop, design and manufacture new releases with ever increasing levels of detail. I do think that we're already approaching an equilibrium between detail and parts count and the degree of construction difficulty the average modeler is willing to accept. Still, we'll see new and more detailed releases over the next decade only limited by what modelers will purchase. The speed that new releases can be developed, designed, and manufactured will increase somewhat because of these technologies, but we're probably getting close to the practical limit now between when a kit is announced and it becomes available. I'm not in the camp that believes that 3D printing will take over or supplant injection molded kits. Injection molding just has the advantage in mass production when you're looking at global markets. I do think that we'll see more and more 3D on-demand printed AM accessories. CAD and 3D printing will also be the future for mastering resin kits, conversions and up-dates. However, 3D production limits will still give resin the advantage in production for widespread marketing and distribution.

Because of the internet, the potential learning curve for new modelers has become very, very steep. Information about skills that once took years of solitary work to "discover" and learn are now available to the new modeler with a just a few key strokes. We see this already with the extraordinary high levels of finishing skills that so many modelers have. Average modelers today are able to create finishes that rival the best work of master modelers from 20-25 years ago. This trend will continue, I think.

Increasing levels of out-of-the box detail added to this steep learning curve in finishing



techniques means that the future of modeling for the individual lies in the aspects of artistic expression and creativity. That's where the individual modeler will have to develop to set his work apart from the rest.

MD. What is your favorite subject to model?

MR. I have gone through most of the same "periods" that other AFV modelers have gone through. Over the years, I've had my "North Africa" period, my "Arab-Israeli Wars" period, my "Tiger Tank" period, etc.

Now I find the subjects most interesting to me are the ones that require the most work to research. I enjoy the search and discovery of new bits of information about the technical or historical aspects of my subjects. I also enjoy replicating and depicting these generally unknown aspects, so I'll spend considerable time and modeling effort to construct and show these things off to the viewers of my work.

In the end, though, it's always the human element that's the most relevant to me. The machines existed in the context of the men and the history, and my subjects have to have that human context to hold my interests.

MD. When it comes to movies, what movie that is somehow related to modeling is your favorite? Whether it's set in a movie set in an era that you love to model or a movie like *The Butterfly Effect* with the crazy kid who never leaves his room and builds model planes all day. As long as it has something to do with modeling.

MR. I guess I always find the little side nods to scale modeling really interesting. Like the scene in "The Wild Geese" where the character Rafer Janders son Emile is building a model kit on the table in their house, or in the new "Battlestar Galactica" where the character Admiral Adama retires to his cabin to work on his wooden sailing ship model.

MD. If you could pick one product and or tool that you feel revolutionized the industry, what do you think it is?

MR. Wow... I guess I'd have to say the airbrush. I can find a lot of substitutes for just about every other tool in my workshop, but a decent airbrush is the one thing that I couldn't replace with anything else. Is that "revolutionary"? I don't know... But learning to airbrush seems to be a pretty hard dividing line between neophytes and "serious" modelers.

MD. What do you like to eat, drink, and or smoke while you're at your bench?

MR. I generally keep a glass of iced tea at my bench, but I rarely have anything there to eat. Maybe a handful of pretzels grabbed on my way through the kitchen up to the workroom.

MD. How would you describe your "style" of modeling?

MR. Huh? Well... I guess I'm more of a realist who understands that some amount of impressionism is needed to fool the viewer into seeing the model as something more than just a miniaturized 3D blueprint of the subject. That is, I'm not a technocrat when it comes to colors, although I'm a sticker for mechanical and historical accuracy. The construction of the model should be as mechanically accurate as possible, and details are important to that accuracy. Historical accuracy is important to create a model that is "true" to its context. However, because we work in miniature, the aspects of scale lighting have to be dealt with so that the viewer's eye is fooled into perceiving the model as "real." This last bit actually requires, in my opinion, a great deal of "artistic license" or impressionistic presentation. The art is found in how the modeler balances these two seemingly contradictory things, technical accuracy and impressionism. In the end, often the model that looks the most realistic is the one that's been finished using the more impressionistic techniques. The perception of realism in scale requires an impressionistic approach.

MD. On average, how much time do you get to spend at your bench every week?

MR. When I'm in the groove, I generally build or paint for about 4-5 hours a day, so over a week, I might get in 25-30 hours of "bench time." Of course, real life often cuts into that.

MD. What is currently on your workbench? What are you working on? Do you have an idea for your next project and if so, what is it?

MR. Right now I'm building an AFV Club Churchill Mk. III with the "full Monty" Voyager PE treatment. This will be the central piece in a vignette depicting the crew in the process of rearming and refueling the tank after an operation. There will be two other vehicles in the scene to balance the composition and a number of figures, most of which will have to be heavily converted.

I always have a number of projects in various stages of research. I'm thinking that I'll probably do some WWI subject.

MD. Do you have friends who also share a passion for modeling like you do? What percentage of your friends are modelers themselves?

MR. Honestly, since I've retired, and excepting family, I don't have any friends who are



not modelers. I guess the percentage is just about 100%!

MD. On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the most, how serious are you about modeling?

MR. Oh, at least 11 or 12... LOL!

MD. How well does the term "Modeling Nerd" apply to you? You may ask yourself what I mean by "Modeling Nerd" so let's put it this way, when you hear the term "Naked Model", what comes to your mind first, an unpainted Sherman showing its resin and brass or a beautiful blonde woman showing her ass?

MR. Hmmm... Well, I think "nerd" has some condescending connotations. But, aside from that, I'd have to say "Modeling Nerd" applies to me totally.

MD. A lot of people are going to read this interview. That includes a lot of people who

own companies in the modeling industry. Now that you have their attention, without calling them out by name, tell me in broad and respectful terms what would you like to say to the people involved with the business side of the hobby? What are they doing right? What are they doing wrong? What would you like to see them do? The floor is yours...

MR. First, I fully appreciate that the folks who run the companies are businessmen first. If they're not making money, then they won't be in business long, and if they go out of business, then we don't have their products anymore. It's really easy to lose sight of this as we throw out comments and criticisms from the "gallery of peanuts."

I would, however, encourage the folks who run the larger, mainstream kit companies to recognize that armor modelers are just as serious about the accuracy and detail of our subjects as modelers of other genres. If you

can produce a beautiful kit of an aircraft, automobile, or nautical subject that is multimedia with full interior details, with parts engineered to fit like a glove, don't think that armor modelers won't buy similar kits. Armor modeling has advanced as an art and craft from the 1950's and 60's just like other modeling genres. If you treat armor modelers like children and manufacture kits of glorified, put-it-together-yourself toys, then many of us will find your company's attitude patronizing and condescending. It only adds insult if you're already producing beautifully detailed kits of non-AFV subjects since that shows the AFV toy-kit development and marketing is deliberate.

When it comes to picking a model off the shelf at my LHS, your company's approach to AFV kit development and marketing does factor in. When I have a choice, accuracy and fidelity of detail are the criteria that I will use to either pick your kit or your competitor's. If your kit is a toy, and your competitor's is a detailed engineering miniature, then I'm sorry to say that it won't be your kit that I buy.

MD. What are your general thoughts of what goes on in the forums?

MR. Generally, I think that the internet forums are an overall positive for scale modeling. However, one downside of the internet is that it's so easy to use that many modelers become lazy and risk-averse. Instead of trying something or cracking the research books themselves, they'll post a question and expect someone else to do their work for them. Learning to model is an experiential exercise. Modelers have to sit down and physically do the things that they all too often just ask questions about. Avoiding a common mistake is one thing, but expecting someone else to write you out detailed instructions for every little task you have to accomplish is entirely different. Discovery and learning are processes in modeling that should be joys and not burdens to be avoided.

In the end, the only way that model on your bench will get built and painted is if you sit down and do it. Making mistakes is part of learning, and improving on each build is our measure of progress as artists. You can't be so afraid of mistakes that you never do anything without asking for someone else's opinions and instructions first, and you can't expect that you'll achieve perfect results from the very first no matter how much you've posted and read.

The internet, as wonderful as it is, is no substitute for experience.

MD. Disagreements and debates are part of life. Having a nice healthy respectful debate with like-minded people is not necessarily a bad thing. With that being said, is there anything you'd like to say to those who can't



disagree and debate in a respectful manner on the forums and instead just try to belittle others and make them look foolish while simultaneously letting the world know just how wonderful they think they are?

MR. Ho-boy...

First, there are some internet forums that I no longer participate on because some individuals on them are allowed by the moderators to be total jackasses. Yea, I know the world is a big place, and it takes all kinds, but my time is limited, and I choose to not spend it in the company of jerks.

In the end, group norms are enforced by everyone on the site. If you read something that you think is out of line, even (or especially) if it's not directed at you, speak up. If you sit idly by and allow others to be bullies, then the bullies will take over.

Guys should understand that it is possible to discuss a subject and disagree without being disagreeable.

Folks also need to understand is that the internet really is "worldwide." You're often exchanging views and comments with others who don't speak your native tongue. Misunderstandings caused by cultural differences or language are easy to make.

You need to be very careful with references to culture or humor. Not everyone has the same sense of humor, and what you might find hysterical, the other guy might find totally offensive in some very personal way. If you do say something that was unintentionally offensive, don't be afraid to apologize. Everyone screws up sometime. Accusing the other guy of being too sensitive or "thin skinned" is just another way of saying that you don't think his opinions are as valid as your own.

You need to learn to separate the message from the messenger. If you disagree with someone's message, don't make a personal

attack on the other guy. Keep your comments directed at what he's saying and not how he's saying it or at his person.

At the same time, don't go out of your way to find something offensive in the other guy's comments. Unless you think someone's being deliberately provocative, sometimes it's better to let some minor comment go. If the other poster is persistent in saying something you find offensive, then maybe you should say something, but even then, try not to be provocative yourself.

If you're stating your opinion or preference, then make it clear that's your opinion and not a fact. Appreciate that someone else can have a different opinion or interpret the significance of some fact differently than you. That doesn't make the other guy a bad person. It just makes him someone who sees the matter from another perspective.

Always remember that modeling is an art form. Much of what someone does on his builds is based on his personal style and interpretation. Learn to recognize the difference between matters of individual style and interpretation and matters of objective fact. This applies to your own work, too. Style and interpretation are always matters of taste and opinion. You may not like it, but that doesn't make it wrong. Finally, when we're exchanging views, ideas and comments online with folks that we really don't know, if the other guy doesn't seem to understand or agree with your point of view, assume that the problem is because you have failed to communicate to him. Give the other guy the benefit of the doubt before you write something that can't ever be undone.

MD. Do you have anything to say to all the beginners out there who are so inspired by other modelers work, but they doubt that they will ever get to that skill level?

MR. As with so many things in life, modeling is a process that is open-ended and has no natural limit. You can always improve no matter how long you've been at it. It's the modeler's experience of the process of modeling and striving for improvement that is the reward. Taking yourself from a state where you can't do something to a state where you can should be a satisfying and enjoyable. Confidence in your own abilities will always grow as long as you challenge yourself and succeed. The work you see done by others tells you that what you want to achieve is possible. You can achieve what others have done if you're willing to put in the effort and not be afraid of pushing your limits.

I can guarantee that every modeler whose work you find inspirational is always striving to improve himself. You may see his work as the pinnacle of perfection, but he sees every flaw and mistake and is already planning his next build to overcome those shortcomings. He started out just like you, and if you stick with it, someday you'll be where he is now, still looking to improve your own next build.

MD. In your early modeling days, was there any modeler in particular whose work you really looked up to and have always wanted to emulate?

MR. I've found inspiration and motivation from so many different modelers over the years, from my cousin who showed me the first painted models I'd ever seen to Shep Paine who first showed me that modeling could be something much more than just "sticking the parts together" and on. Really, I've always looked for modelers who were more skilled than I am for inspiration, believing that with persistence and practice, I could one day achieve what they had done.

Even today there are modelers whose works just blow me away. A number of today's figure painters simply astonishing. I like to say that when I grow up to be a real figure painter, I want to paint figures as well as Keiichi Aoki. LOL!

What area of modeling have you struggled the most with in the past? PE? Painting? Weathering? etc.

MR. Figure painting has been an area that I've really worked hard on in the last few years. I've been able to get at least satisfactory results in the past, and I've never been ashamed of my figures. However, they were never quite as nice as I wanted. So, for the last 10 years or so, I've really put a lot into upping my figure game.

MD. Now every modeler has at least one part of modeling that they just plain hate to do. For me it's cleaning up road wheels, what's yours?

MR. After what I just said about figures, it

might not be too surprising that I really don't enjoy converting and reposing figures. I'm a competent, workman like figure modeler, but I still have a ways to go before I'll really be happy with my figure work.

MD. Now to flip things around, what is your favorite modeling task?

MR. I pretty much enjoy every aspect of modeling, and I'm not sure that I have a particular favorite task. I guess I especially enjoy doing something that I find fresh and challenging – pushing my skills and creative limits.

MD. If a manufacturer were to come to you and ask what three models you would like to see them produce and add to their product line, what would you say?

MR. Oh, major hard question. There are just so many significant subjects that have not been kitted that it's really hard to pick just three.

For instance, the WWI German A7V is long overdue for a state of the art kit. The British Mk V Rhomboid is another subject that really needs doing. The Takom and Tamiya Mk IV's are very nice, but many of the final, tank-heavy operations at the end of WWI relied on the Mk. V. The British Mk. A Whippet is another overdue subject.

(It's funny, just as I was about to send this to you, a buddy called me up to tell me that Meng has announced a new A7V! Oh happy days!)

The tanks of the inter-war period need kitting, too. The US M1917 6-ton was a pretty significant AFV that would be a great subject. The Mk VIII "Liberty" or "International" is another one.

Cold war subjects from the 50's and 60's – Another area ripe for some manufacturer. I could go on...

MD. Now if a tool manufacturer were come to you and ask what three new tools you would want them to develop that would solve or improve a modeling problem that you and other modelers have, what would these tools be?

What problem would the tools solve?

MR. Another hard question...

I'm a "right tool for the job" kind of guy. Sort of like a more subtle Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor. It doesn't have to have the most horsepower, but if it's just right, the work generally turns out better for it.

So tools I'd like to see and have on my workbench –

A sanding tool with replaceable abrasive strips and cords of various widths, diameters and grits. This would be useful for getting inside of openings (like the holes on road wheels) and removing mold seams, etc. Something like a Flexfile but with strips that are different widths and an option for abrasive cords.

Another tool I'd like to see is something that can reach down into an area to sand ejector pin marks, etc, without disturbing the surrounding details. Kit makers are always making parts like hatches that have raised details surrounding ejector pin marks. Filling, sanding, scraping and otherwise cleaning up these marks is a real PITA while trying to preserve the surrounding details.

I've made my own sanding tools for this purpose from toothpicks (cocktail sticks) shaped with various width curves on the ends with thin strips of fine, 320-400 grit sandpaper glued to them with contact cement (Walther's Goo). Similar ready-made tools (shaped sanding sticks) in various widths and grits would be useful.

Finally, I think there's room for an enterprising manufacturer to come up with more PE working tools.

We need a heat-proof portable table that can be set up with MICRO-SIZED clamps and other bracing and blocking features to hold PE assemblies square and flat for soldering. All of the clamps that are available are too large and exert too much force for much PE work.

Also, most of the available spring clamps are rather crudely made and don't work well for very fine or small parts. Maybe something with screw clamps.

