Monty's Mammoth Mystery Models Manifest!

The origins of the figures, vehicles and guns featured in the 'Monty's Desert Battles' photographs

We're frequently asked 'Where did you get that?' or 'Who makes those?' by readers trying to unravel the mystery of whose models we picture in RF photographs. For 'Monty's Desert Battles' I went to town on conversions in my (nearly achieved) goal of making everything $1/72^{nd}$ scale, helping my eyesight, but making manufacturer recognition even more difficult than usual. So, to ease your suffering, here are all the answers in graphic detail, page by page, covering every photo in our latest publication. With the book in one hand and this list in the other you should be able to identify everything you see.

Front cover

This shot shows a cast hull Sherman II converted from a Dragon M4A1 kit (when it was affordable!) with suspension and transmission cover parts from a cheap 'copy' of a Hasegawa M3 Lee. The track and sand shields are from the Italeri cast-hull Sherman, and the turret box is from the Italeri M4A2, with other scratch built additions such as the 'flimsies' (petrol cans) on the front guard and refueling funnel at the rear. See page 78 for a shot of the same model before painting.

Page 3

The figures are converted Valiant Miniatures plastic and unmodified Valiant metal (the guys in shorts), with IBG QLD trucks and a Raventhorpe metal Ford/Chevy portee and 6pdr AT gun. Anyone spot the 'HD' (Highland Division) graffiti on the Tripoli road sign? The Valiant plastic is not brittle and is very easily carved and sanded, so creating shirt sleeve arms, open collars etc is relatively easy with a bit of practice. I also removed equipment such as entrenching tools and bandoliers on some figures to add variety.

Page 5

This shows an HQ group of lightly converted Valiant 'British Infantry' officers, Italeri 25 pdr gun crew and an orderly made from a Frankenstein-like collection of odd arms, legs and torso. All the figures – including the Dingo's officer driver - sport various Valiant heads, this season's 'must have' accessory. They include a couple with jauntily angled forage caps cut from heads in the Valiant German Infantry set and a Scot wearing a Tam o'Shanter converted from the British Infantry head in the beret. Behind them are, L to R, an Airfix Crusader, Revell Daimler Dingo and a Britannia Miniatures Dorchester armoured command vehicle. The latter had its mudguards replaced with plastic card and an open top hatch and front visor added. I also created more roof stowage with Green Stuff putty and fitted piano wire aerials and bigger, chunkier wheels/tyres from the Airfix RAF recovery set.

The top shot is of a more or less straight-from-the-box Valiant Vickers MMG and crew. The only change was to sand off the camouflage on the helmets (slice off the bulk with a sharp knife and then use sand paper to get a rough finish) to simulate the common 8th Army improvised sackcloth helmet covers. I used this technique a lot on the Valiant British figures as there are a limited number of spare plain helmets in each set. Not a great demand for vegetative helmet decoration in the desert!

The bottom photo features a mixture of converted and standard plastic Valiant and five old hard plastic Esci 8th Army figures. The riflemen are converted from Esci standing firing torsos grafted on to kneeling 'Tommy' gunners' legs. Last seen on sale in the 1990s, most of these figures were obvious copies of the Airfix 8th Army set, but enlarged, so they now conveniently match the stature of Valiant infantry. I'm still hoping for a re-release, even though the plastic is very hard and brittle. Interestingly, the Plastic Soldier Review site, which often witters on about Valiant's 'scaling' doesn't have a thing to say about the stature of these similarly-sized chaps. Boo! To me all these guys are about an inch high, which at $1/72^{nd}$ scale is 6ft. Maybe slightly tall for an average WW2 height, but definitely not out of scale.

The vehicles are a portee and 15cwt truck converted from the Italeri 25pdr set Quad, a vehicle that provides the basis for several of my other conversions. The other two are a metal Raventhorpe Morris 15cwt and a Ready-to Roll Bren carrier, the latter originally mastered by yours truly. The vehicle crews are Valiant heads on everything from metal Raventhorpe to Italeri plastic driver/sitting figures. The 6pdr is Raventhorpe (another master I made many moons ago) and the anti-tank rifle is a plastic one from the Italeri Kangeroo kit. The ATR man is a strange mixture of an Esci Bren gunner's modified body and Valiant arms. He also wears the very handy and separate Valiant British Infantry small pack. I should have been a surgeon...

Page 8

This is simple! It's a 15cwt wireless truck, again based on the Italeri Quad chassis and bonnet. The plans (originally in 1/35th scale) came from an ancient copy of Military Modelling magazine and everything from the windscreen backwards is scratch built in plastic card, with some metal sand channels and a Green Stuff rolled awning. The aerials were cut from thin piano wire. The wheels – necessarily smaller than the biggies on the Quad - are from (I think) one of the Airfix RAF vehicle sets.

Page 15

Top shot is the Italeri Bishop SP 25pdr with a standard Valiant officer pointing out to a colleague where he's just bought his newspaper. I added an Italeri limber from the 25pdr set (frequently towed by Bishops) and some Green Stuff stowage.

Below are two Ready-to-Roll Chevy 3 tonners (with type 13 cab) and a Hasegawa M3 Stuart OP with added hatch stay and wire spool on the mudguard, plus a piano wire aerial and the characteristic 8th Army pennants made from paper glued on and then stiffened with thin superglue. It's commanded by an Italeri 25pdr set officer with a Valiant head. Finally, the Scammel breakdown truck is a plastic card conversion using the Airfix Tank Transporter tractor as a basis, with larger wheels added to help visually 'scale up' the 1/76th cab and bonnet.

On to the Germans, and the top shot shows my Rommel-like CO and 2i/c (both Chiltern metal figures) and a Valiant staff officer, all standing in front of the Roden Sdkfz 263, commanded by an Italeri 25pdr set officer wearing a Valiant head. I just added a spare tyre and Green Stuff stowage.

The bottom photo shows all of these plus two more Valiant German figures and, L-R, a Britannia Sdkfz 222 (I made that!), a Britannia Sdkfz 10 tractor and a towed ACE Pak 38 and Ready-to-Roll Horch command car.

Page 19

In the centre is an Attack plastic Pz III PzBegWg Ausf E (command tank). Attack make some really interesting kits but I need a few months rest after making one as they demand a lot of work. I added the ubiquitous Valiant commander (the German Infantry officer figure), crate, jerry cans, spare track etc.

To its left is...well, to be honest I'm not sure, as I mixed up tracks, turrets, guns and hulls from the 'twin pack' Armourfast Ausf J Pz III and Italeri Ausf L kits (which are actually Ausf Js as well) and after adding various missing bits from the suspensions and track guards I can't tell them apart. In both cases I drilled out and laboriously added plastic strip to the track treads to give them more detail: crazy but worth it. Just remember this concoction every time you see a Pz III in the photos. The commander is the top of a Valiant figure with a Feldmutze head. As with all the other tanks, I added spare track for added armour and Green Stuff stowage.

Now utterly deranged, I couldn't even build a normal Pz IV, so the one on the right has got a mixture of Italeri and Hasegawa bits, plus an Airfix muzzle brake to make it an Ausf F2. The commander is a converted Valiant German officer (the one with the map) and also wears a Feldmutze head. Finally, the PZ III behind is as described above, with a Grubby Tanks metal jerrycan 'cluster' on the roof, towed by a Revell Famo recovery tractor. Its driver is from an Italeri 3 ton halftrack with a Valiant head and I filled the back with a spare tyre, boxes, track links and a length of chain: none of which you can see in the photo. Duh!

Page 20

This is just a 'straight from the box' Italeri Quad and 25pdr with Valiant heads replacing the crew's standard noggins. The gun commander was a tank crewman from the spares box (I think he's from the Italeri Pz II), again, with a head change.

Page 22

This is an Attack Phanomen Granit ambulance. I just added the red cross flag and covered the roof stowage with tissue paper hardened with thin superglue.

Page 23

The infantry here are standard metal Chiltern greatcoat infantry and behind them there's an ACE Pak 36(r) with Valiant plastic crew and a Roden Opel Blitz. Just for fun (!) I left off the Blitz's bonnet side louvres and added some wiring to the engine which you can only see through an electron

microscope. At the back is a wood-bodied QLD converted from the IBG QL fire truck kit. The wood-bodied versions were mainly used by the RAF. Finally, the wrecked Sdkfz is an old Fujimi kit, usefully with separate 'rubber' tyres that I ripped off to make it look even more broken.

Page 24

From L-R, we have a more or less unmodified MAC Einheitsdiesel Kfz. 86 Radio Car kit. There's lots of detail inside so I left off all the glazing, except for the windscreen, and left the door open in the cab (see also page 79). I also left the cab and body assembly unglued, so I can lift it off to a) eventually add some signallers inside and b) remove dust, spiders etc. Finally I cut off the top section of the lovely but very fine extended aerial, drilled out the remainder and replaced it with piano wire with plastic detail. I then fitted the bottom section with two thin piano wire prongs that fit into two tiny holes drilled in the body rear. This allows me to remove the aerial when the truck is consigned to its storage box. The only other addition was a Green Stuff bundle on the roof.

Next are an Italeri 'twin pack' Kubelwagen, with added scratchbuilt radio and Italeri driver/Valiant crew (see also page 79), and a Hasegawa Sdkfz 7 half track with Raventhorpe/Britannia crew and Green Stuff, plastic jerrycan, stockinette camouflage netting and model ship chain stowage. The roof was covered in tissue soaked in superglue – the method I use on all my canvas tilts to give them a coarse, wrinkly canvas texture (a sort of anti-Oil of Ulay...).

Finally, we have an ACE s.F.H.18 -15cm Schwere Feldhaubitze 18 posing as a 10cm gun. Not the easiest kit I've ever made! The crew are all conversions from the Valiant German Infantry set and involved masses of carving and sanding to remove webbing and equipment and even pockets in some cases.

Page 25

This shows the venerable Skytrex German 105mm with a retreating Ready-to Roll German Ford 3 tonner (another one of my masters). One of the crew is a Valiant-headed Raventhorpe metal figure, but all the others were created from Valiant figures as described above.

Page 27

On to the Italians, and the top picture shows a Chiltern German officer (metal) with a Mirliton officer's head, standing next to a Waterloo 1815 soft plastic figure from their 149mm heavy artillery set. The guy saluting is from the Italeri 90mm AA gun set with a Mirliton soft cap head replacement. They are standing in front of the command caravan shown below.

The bottom picture shows the same figures, plus a Raventhorpe German officer with Mirliton head and a Skytex Fiat 508 car (the Italian Kubelwagen) with Grubby Tanks crew. The caravan – based on a photo shared on the Society of Gentlemen Gamers site some time ago (Alan McCoubrey must have been involved) - is the Revell 'Monty's Caravan' body mounted on a Grubby Tanks metal Lancia heavy truck. This is just replacing what Monty's caravan builders pinched in the first place.

Page 28

Top shot shows three Italeri M13/40s, which with their mudguards intact are dead ringers for M14/41s. The commander is our old friend the 25pdr officer with a modified Valiant German forage

cap head. Behind are two Skytrex Lancia heavy trucks, although one started life as an SP 90mm and is wearing the body from the Grubby Lancia of the previous page (waste not, want not...). In both cases the windscreens were rebuilt and cabs 'boarded up' to avoid having to crew them.

Underneath are, L-R, a Raventhorpe metal Fiat 626 3 tonner (another master I did a long time ago) with added part awning from piano wire, tissue and Green Stuff putty. Next is a massively modified Skytrex AS 37, with new bonnet and radiator and added cab and tilt. Then it's a Grubby Tanks Dovonque 2 tonner with 20mm Breda AA gun from the Italeri Sahariana kit, followed by a Raventhorpe metal Dovonque with a portee Waterloo 1815 47mm AT gun. All the figures are Mirliton.

Page 34

The top shot shows Mirliton Folgore figures, resplendent in all their scruffiness. Underneath is more of the same, plus Mirliton 47mm AT gun, supplemented by a Raventhorpe MMG gunner and crew figure with Mirliton heads and MMG. The duffed up Fiat is from I know not where, a long time ago.

Page 37

The top picture shows Valiant infantry and converted mine clearing and marking figures, plus two half Valiant/half Esci conversions and some Esci firing riflemen. The engineers' White scout car is by Italeri and the Stuart is a Corgi diecast M3 Stuart on loan from Dave Tuck and resprayed by Marshy's Motors in Plymouth.

The middle shot shows an Italeri Matilda (it was actually made by Esci when I bought it), with scratch built Scorpion mine clearing gear (see also page 55). The crew are Valiant-headed spares box torsos. It's followed by an Esci/Italeri Valentine and then a Britannia 2pdr portee, one of my few 1/76th scale vehicles, although it matches in pretty well. At the rear is a Ready-to-Roll carrier.

Bottom pic shows the mine clearers again, plus three Dragon Sherman IIIs, two ready-built (but price-reduced in a sale) and one constructed from the kit before their prices went through the roof! In the background are Airfix Crusaders, R to R carrier and a scratch built 6pdr portee.

Incidentally, the mine warning signs are from the side of the Valiant German Infantry box and the smoke and flames and dust clouds are from my favourite three colour hamster bedding pack (black, grey and sand...do hamsters play Desert WW2?), with flames painted on with fluorescent acrylics.

Page 38

This is pretty straightforward, showing Ready to Roll carriers and a scratchbuilt Quad-based portee, launching plastic Valiant and old Esci infantry against Mirliton Bersaglieri.

Page 42

A metal BW Models 5.5" gun is loaded by Italeri 25pdr crewmen with Valiant heads.

Opposite, a very old FROG kit of the Martin Baltimore. Not a lot of detail, but a rare find. In this century Azur have produced a much better but horrifically expensive version.

The top view shows largely converted and standard Valiant German infantry supported by some old Esci Afrika Korps plastic figure conversions. The AT guns are Raventhorpe metal, as is the 20mm AA in the rear and the trucks are the Opel Blitz from page 23 and a Ready to Roll German Ford.

In the middle are the ACE Pak 36(r), a Hasegawa Flak 18 88mm with converted Valiant and old Esci crew, and a UM kits' Marder III with Italeri 25pdr/Valiant-headed crew.

At the bottom we have a close-up of Valiant Germans, old Esci hard plastic Afrika Korps conversions and some Italeri soft plastic DAK figures, all with Valiant heads. The MG 42 gunner firing over the oil drum (I have an unrealistically high proportion of these guns in my German units – but it was starting to replace MG34s in Rommel's units during 1942) was a Valiant MMG gunner who underwent extensive surgery. The Pak 38 is from Raventhorpe (mastered by me just after the last ice age...).

Page 45

This shows three of the diecast Corgi Stuarts from Dave Tuck's generous lend-lease scheme.

Page 47

Extreme close-up of a Valiant kneeling officer, with some equipment and his Sten gun carved off and his head replaced with the peaked cap option. The radioman also lost some of his baggage to the knife and got a tissue 'canvas' rain cover/ sun shade for his radio.

Underneath, we have L-R, an Italeri (or Academy) Kubelwagen, two Britannia Sdkfz 222 armoured cars, and an Italeri Sdkfz 250 SP 25mm conversion. At the back are a Kubelwagen and the captured 25pdr from page 20, with a Roden Sdkfz 232 armoured car, Britannia Sdkfz 10 and another Italeri or Academy Kubelwagen in the foreground. All the crew figures are a mixture of various plastic bodies and Valiant heads with a few Britannia metal passengers.

Page 48

This picture shows an Airfix Bofors 40mm with a Italeri 25pdr/Valiant headed crew and a Bedford QLB gun tractor scratch built using the QL cab and bits from the Airfix RAF refueling set.

Page 49

At the top, L-R, we have Airfix Crusaders, a Forces of Valor Grant in the foreground and Hasegawa Grant/Lees in the background fitted with old 1/76th scale S&S Models replacement Grant turrets, generously donated by my good friend John Durston. The scout car is an old Matchbox kit. Crews are Valiant conversions or heads on other bodies.

In the middle is an Italeri (or old Esci) Sdkfz 250 with hard plastic Valiant and Old Esci Afrika Korps OP team.

At the bottom...loads of stuff, most of which I've already described. Middle right is a MAC Opel Blitz SP 20mm AA and that's an ancient Esci (now Italeri) Pz II at the front.

An Italeri Jeep sits behind an Italeri 25pdr Officer with a Valiant head and a 25pdr crew conversion radio operator. The map table is scratch built. Note the rocks holding the map down.

Bottom right is a Raventhorpe metal gun with old Esci hard plastic and Valiant crew.

Page 52

This features a Raventhorpe gun with Valiant crew.

Page 53

The top photo shows Italeri 25pdr set guns and crews with Valiant heads. The HQ is as shown on page 51.

In the middle are converted Valiant infantry in the foreground and more Valiants and old Esci hard plastic 8th Army figures beyond.

At the bottom, L-R, are a Ready to Roll carrier, Britannia 2pdr portee with Raventhorpe crew, Valiant MP figure and an Academy Jeep converted to a Military Police Jeep, complete with stakes, signs and 'flimsies' with moon-shaped cut-outs. The latter were used to house hurricane lamps, which hung on stakes and shone through the hole to mark the edges of the 'Moon' track in the darkness. Other tracks (and symbols) included 'Sun' and 'Star'.

Page 55

This features another view of the Italeri Matilda Scorpion conversion and following Valentines.

Page 56

All Valiant German Infantry figures with a metal Raventhorpe 20mm AA gun.

Page 57

Mirliton Folgore crew figures and mortar.

Page 58

Valiant metal 8th Army figures with Raventhorpe kepi heads.

Page 59

Top: a Ready to Roll 'Conus' with Airfix and Raventhorpe crew

Below, a shot of two Ready to Roll Tanakes. Everything on this page kindly on loan from Dave Tuck.

Page 60

A Mirliton Breda AA gun and crew.

This shows the Sherman IIIs and Crusaders from page 37. The new addition is an Airfix Emergency set K2 ambulance with bigger wheels to help it 'grow' a bit from 1/76th to 1/72nd.

Page 63

The top shot is the Matchbox (now Revell) Stuka D.

The bottom picture shows Skytrex metal Lorraine SP guns with Valiant-headed (and spares box bodied) crew. The camouflage netting (used on several other vehicles) is medical gauze kindly sent to me by Simon Raines. I couldn't find any in Plymouth.

Page 64

The top image features Raventhorpe 6pdrs with mainly Valiant (and some 25pdr set) crews, infantry and mortar men.

The bottom picture shows, L-R, the UM Marder III, an Italeri Semovente and a Pz III and Pz IV as previously described.

Page 65

This portrays a Britannia Miniatures 2pdr with Raventhorpe metal and plastic Valiant and Italeri 25pdr set figures.

Page 66

The top shot features Italeri/Esci Valentines, a Ready to Roll carrier and Raventhorpe drunken infantry (I mean medic and casualty). All the crew figures are Valiant conversions.

The middle pic features more Pz IIIs. That's a short barrelled Ausf J in the foreground finished in Grunbraun and a long barrelled Ausf J behind it in Gelbraun. The book explains the colours. Armoured cars are Britannia and the QL in the distance is an old Archer Models resin cast from the year dot. German infantry are Chiltern (with an Esci/Valiant medic conversion) and the Aussies are the usual mix of Valiant, old Esci and Italeri 25pdr crew conversions.

Bottom is the bog standard Hasegawa Flak 18 with a mix of...well, just have a look back at the info for page 44.

Page 68

Old Esci Aussies on the left. They retained their heads as they had decent sized helmets. The Bren gunner is a conversion of the kneeling tommy gunner. On the right that's an Italeri Marder I with more of Simon's netting and a 25pdr crewman with a Valiant Feldmutze head.

Page 70

The top shot shows re-bonneted and re-radiator-grilled Skytrex TL 37s and a Fiat 508. Crews are Raventhorpe with Mirliton heads. The 75mm Mod 06 guns are a real blast from the past. They were made by a firm called Akheton in the 1980s (or was it the 70's...). Having had them for years I

recently went for a complete plastic barrel/breech assembly rebuild and added a plastic folded gun shield on one and piano trail spikes on both. The crews are a mixture of Mirliton and Italeri. The command group is pure Mirliton. Note the large scale use of Mr Raines' extremely useful camo netting.

The centre shot shows two Italeri (Esci when I bought them) Semoventes, with Green Stuff sandbags. Crewman is an Italeri 25pdr officer with a converted Valiant German forage cap head.

Finally, two of the Italeri 25pdr sets actually constructed as intended. I just messed about opening a door and roof hatch. The radio truck is the Quad conversion on page 8.

Page 71

A Grubby Tanks telephonist and Italeri observer lurk in the bushes.

A Valiant mortar and crew with minor modification - mainly battle dress carved into 'pullies'. The man with his hand in the air is from the old Esci 8th Army set, which included a 6pdr AT gun and two crewmen, of which he is one.

Page 72

Top right is the Italeri 90mm Autocannone, made almost straight from the box with added netting and a blanked off cab.

The Hasegawa Humber II armoured cars in the bottom picture record a moment of madness when I decided I'd discard the original kits Mk III turrets and 'expand' the Mk II versions from two of the 1/76th Matchbox (now Revell) Humber models. I'm still not sure why. The crewman is Raventhorpe, stowage is Green Stuff.

Page 73

This scene shows scratch built buildings with plastic palm trees bought at the Penarth wargames show (Crusade) from an unknown trader. They make a large range of jungle plants if that's a useful clue. The carriers are Ready to Roll, the Stuart is a Corgi (if that makes sense) and the Pz III J is as described before. The Sdkfz 251 C armoured personnel carrier is a Dragon ready-made model that came finished in a desert paint job based on a famous Alamein photo. Technically the APC in the shot was a B not a C and anyway I repainted it because...well, I just did. Most of the infantry are described earlier in this endless listing.

Page 76

These are all explained in the text.

Page 77

The British and German figures are lightly converted or standard Valiant, with desert paint jobs. The Italians are both standard Mirliton Bersaglieri.

The 'nude' shot is of the Sherman II described right at the beginning of this marathon. Note the use of the Valiant British Infantry small packs and Green Stuff bedding roll.

To the right is the Dragon Sherman III kit, with Green Stuff stowage and paper pennants.

The bottom shot shows how useful the Italeri Quad can be for deserty conversions. L-R, these are a Ford 15cwt (with Airfix Quad wheels plus added wheel nuts!), an early model Ford/Chevy 6pdr portee and to its right a later model version. It is not recommended to remain in the driver's seat during firing. All the new bodywork is constructed from plastic card, strip and L-shaped angle iron.

Page 79

On the left is an Italeri 'two in a box' Kubelwagen with added scratch built radio and head phones plus a Valiant SMG in case they tune in to anything by Chris de Burgh. This was based on photos of a preserved vehicle in a great little book on WW2 German radios (who shouted 'Nerd!'?).

To its right is the Grubby Tanks Dovonque as featured on page 28.

Below is the MAC radio truck from page 24. Note the collected MIG productions 'Beach Sand' on the windscreen.

Finally, at the bottom, are two conversions on the Italeri Sdkfz 250 armoured personnel carrier. On the left is an Sdkfz 253 artillery observation vehicle (basically a roof with a hole in it welded on top of the 250) and the rare SP 25mm, for which only one photo and no plans exist of the original. I used a Skytrex Hotchkiss 25mm AT gun on mine, although the one photo actually shows the Hotchkiss-Puteaux version. Alan McCoubrey (of Society of Gentlemen Wargamers fame) has also daringly built the SP 75mm infantry gun version for which no photos, no plans, no memories and no clue what it really looked like exist.

Page 80

And finally...yes, we're there...the last one...hurrah! Virtually all the vehicles in this photo have already been described. The Daimler armoured car is by Hasegawa and the 15cwt behind the ambulance is by IBG.

Well that's it — all is revealed. If you need any more info (and after you've seen your GP) just drop us an e-mail or log on to the 'Rapid Fire WW2 Wargame Rules' Facebook page and ask away. As I state in the book, I did choose to do the army building for Monty's Desert Battles the hard way and if you value your sanity you may choose other routes. Either way, I hope you enjoy the book and that you get as much enjoyment out of the model making and subsequent gaming as I did.

Richard Marsh