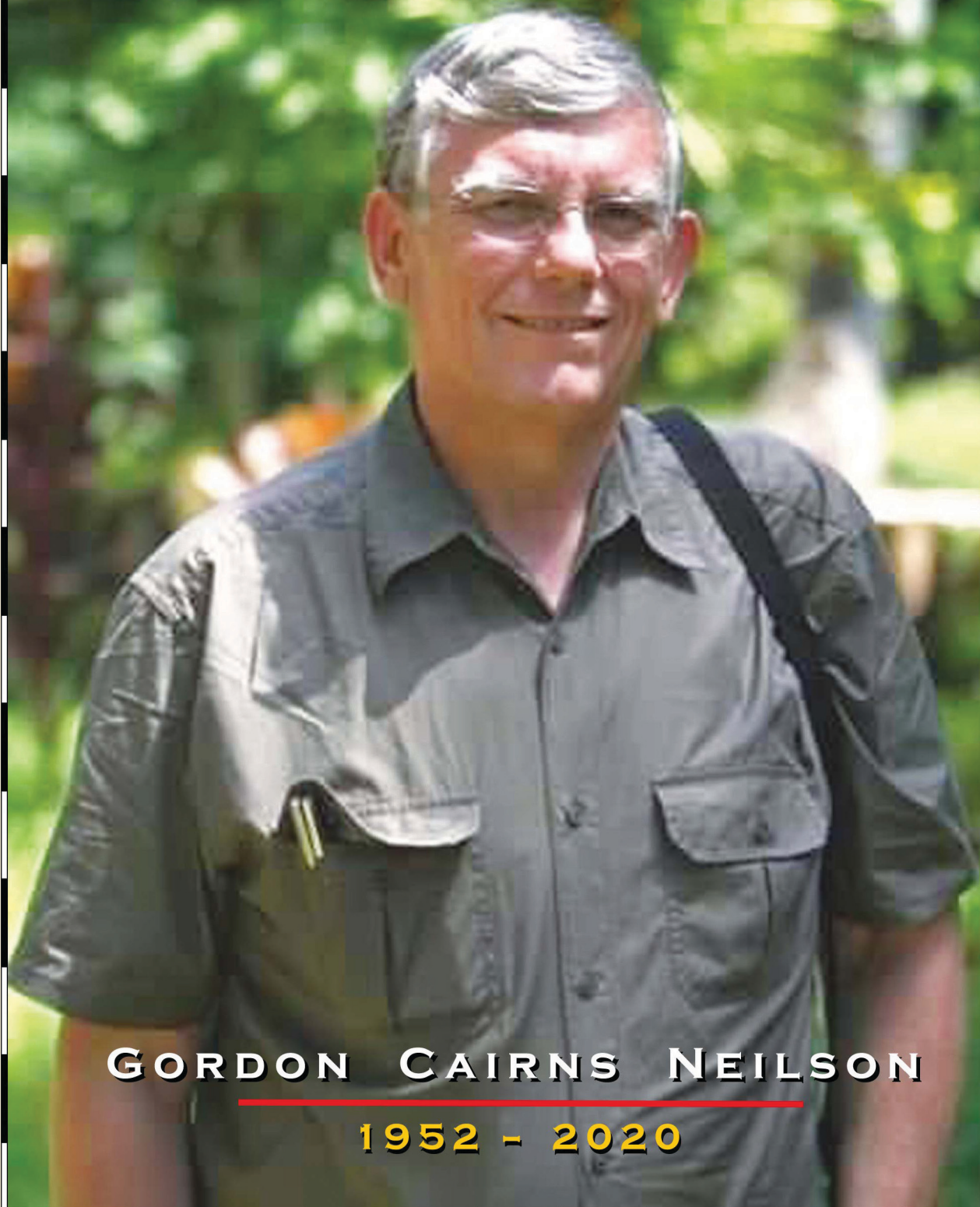


# COLLECTOR

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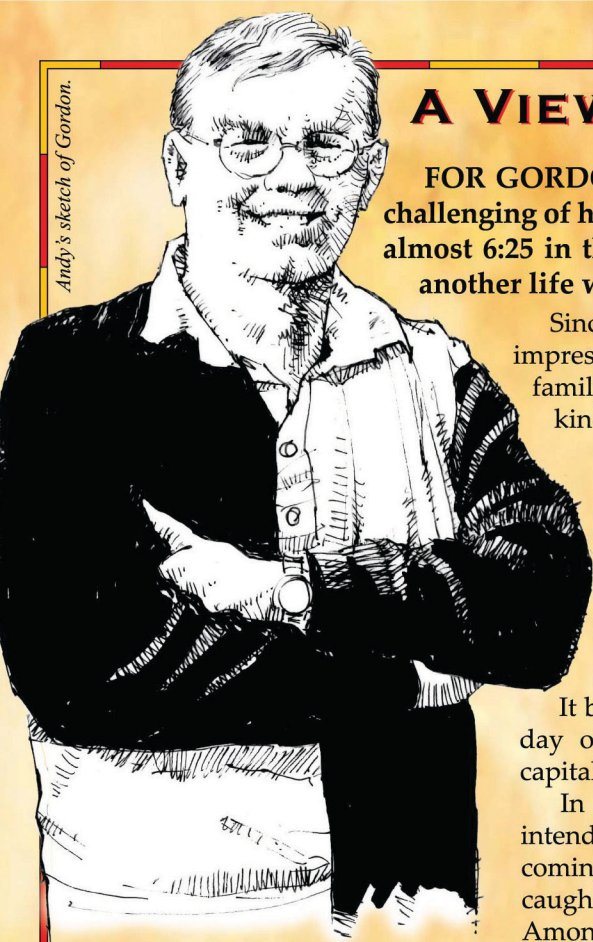
SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE



GORDON CAIRNS NEILSON

1952 - 2020

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY



# A VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES...

FOR GORDON, these past four months had been among the most challenging of his all-too-short life. On Wednesday February 19, 2020, at almost 6:25 in the evening, he slipped away peacefully and gently to another life where there is no pain, no suffering... and no worries.

Since that day I have been both humbled and amazed at the impressive volume of emails from all over the world sending our family their happy memories of meeting Gordon and stories of his kindness, advice and, of course, their admiration for his dioramas.

This very special edition of 'COLLECTOR' is dedicated to my brother and includes some of his best work as well as a few of his smaller, lesser-known models.

It's also a partial retelling of Gordon's own life and how he came to live and work in Hong Kong and be an integral part of the King & Country story. Gordon's unique contribution to that story goes back almost 40 years... before K&C was even thought of.

It began one late November day in 1979 when Gordon, having a day off from work, journeyed through to *Edinburgh*, Scotland's capital to visit the famous castle that sits above the city guarding it.

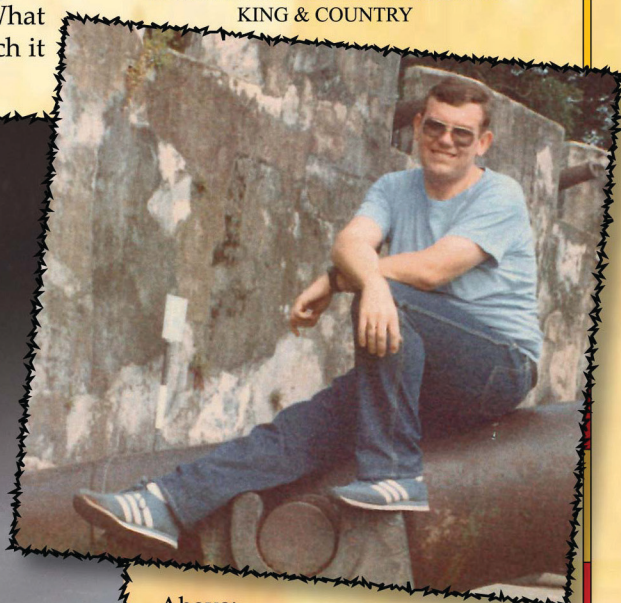
In addition to enjoying this historic monument Gordon also intended to go 'window-shopping' to buy some family presents for the coming Christmas. On that particular day one of the shops that caught his eye was called 'The Toy Tub' and Gordon stepped in... Among all the fluffy toys, plastic kits and Star Wars models Gordon

spied a small glass display cabinet in one corner filled with all-metal, hand-painted, toy soldiers.

One particular set of figures 'jumped-out' as the perfect choice for his elder brother's Yuletide present... A *Royal Marines Colour Party* made by *Blenheim Military Models*.

Little did Gordon or me realise just how much that first modest purchase of little toy Royal Marines was going to dramatically change our lives from that day on... What follows is just a brief glimpse of that change and how much it changed Gordon.

*Andy C. Neilson*  
ANDY C. NEILSON  
CO-FOUNDER & CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
KING & COUNTRY



Above:  
Gordon on a visit to nearby Macau in 1986.  
Left:  
That original set of Blenheim toy soldier Royal Marines Colour Party that Gordon sent to Andy as a Christmas present.

# Gordon

**GORDON CAIRNS NEILSON** was born on a cold, dark evening in October 1952... I remember it well because it is one of my earliest childhood memories ... and I was actually there!

That night my Dad and myself were ushered outside onto the landing of our third floor tenement building that we shared with three other families.

Inside, on the other side of the door our local doctor and a midwife were delivering a small baby brother who would later be christened 'Gordon'.

At that time our little working-class family, Mum, Dad, me and the 'new arrival' lived in a rented, two-room flat on the third floor of an Edwardian-built, brick tenement building at 17 Renfield Street, Renfrew, Scotland.

Back then in the early 1950's, just seven years after the end of the Second World War, Renfrew was enjoying a little taste of Britain's post war prosperity and there was full employment for many of the town's 25,000 adult inhabitants.

Situated on the south bank of the River Clyde and just 6 miles down river from Glasgow, Scotland's most populous city, Renfrew's main industries were ship building and engineering.

The town's prime location in the west central Lowlands of Scotland also ensured it became the historic county town of Renfrewshire.

In addition it was called the 'Cradle of the Royal Stewarts' for its early links with Scotland's former Ruling Family and in 1397, this gained it the status of a 'Royal Burgh'.

*It was also a great place to grow up in!*



*This very busy Ancient Egypt display measures 21" x 21".*

**MUM & DAD**

Our parents, *Betty and Billy Neilson* were also Renfrew born and bred and so we had no shortage of family relatives living and working all over the town.

Dad, when Gordon was born, was a highly-skilled carpenter by trade who worked at one of the great cotton mills in nearby *Paisley*. During the recent war he had served his apprenticeship in a small local shipyard that before the war had built the lifeboats for the mighty Cunard Liners, *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth*.

After hostilities had broken out the shipyard went over to naval orders and was now building *M.T.B.'s (Motor Torpedo Boats)* and *Landing Craft*. This was where Dad learnt his trade while waiting for his 'call-up' for the Royal Navy.

Mum meanwhile had left school at 14 and entered 'domestic service' as a lowly housemaid in a large, wealthy household in Glasgow... shades of *'Downton Abbey'*.

She was rescued from this drudgery when, thanks to the war, she joined *The Women's Land Army* an organization created during WW2 so British women and girls could replace the men serving in the armed forces who previously had worked in agriculture and on the farms.

*Diorama measures 20" x 40".*



Renfrewshire Scotland

Mum and Dad first met each other in 1946, married in 1947 and had me in 1949. Gordon was to follow almost 4 years later.

**AN EARLY STRUGGLE**

Throughout his life Gordon had to handle a series of health problems which began at very early age...

Just a year after his birth the young Gordon was struck down by **Poliomyelitis**, a disabling and life threatening disease that can infect the spinal cord sometimes causing paralysis.

When Gordon caught this deadly disease there was no vaccine to prevent it. One was developed in 1955 by *Dr. Jonas Salk* and came into widespread use around the world but alas, too late for Gordon.

For the next three years Gordon was to stay in hospital and undergo a number of surgeries... traumatic for anyone, especially a young child.

Polio was to leave Gordon with a much weakened right leg which eventually would, in adult life, be two inches shorter than his left leg.

During all that time in hospital our parents were only allowed to see him for one hour, once a week on a Sunday afternoon. As for me, I was not to see him at all as children were not permitted into the hospital at any time unless they were patients.

**FINALLY GETTING TOGETHER**

I was nearly eight years old when Gordon finally arrived home using crutches as I remember and having his weak

right leg strengthened and supported by strong, metal calipers.

A few weeks after returning home Gordon threw his crutches away, determined to walk on his own, albeit with a limp that he would carry for the rest of his days.

I, meanwhile was just happy to see him back and have a new playmate... During his absence I had been building up a small selection of my favourite toys... *toy soldiers* and *Dinky toy cars*. I was delighted that Gordon shared my interest and was as careful and protective of my playthings as I was myself.

This combined interest in the same kinds of toys allowed our now joint collection to grow by leaps and bounds! Mum 'n' Dad, Grannies,



Aunts and Uncles never had to scratch their heads wondering what to buy Gordon and Andrew for Christmas, Birthdays or any other special occasions... Toy Soldiers, model cars (especially *military ones*) and any kind of toy revolver or rifle was always the

preferred choice for both of us.

In those far-off days Gordon and me could always be found somewhere in the house or down in the tenement's back yard playing with our '*Sojers*' (*Scottish for soldiers*) alongside the other kids from our neighborhood or just by ourselves.

**THE TOY SOLDIER BUG**

In the mid-late 1950's and well into the 1960's virtually every city, town and village in Britain was fortunate to have a wealth of independently-owned toy shops as well as other retail outlets such as newsagents and even some post offices that sold *toy soldiers* and/or *Dinky* and *Corgi* diecast vehicles.

Many a day Gordon and yours truly could be found after school gazing wistfully into the windows of our favourite shops at all the many, much-desired items on offer.

When funds were available, thanks to the generosity of our parents or close relatives the pair of us, with money burning a hole in our pockets, would descend on these favourite stores to make our purchases... *a few toy soldiers here... a little armoured car there*. Slowly but surely our collections expanded and our joint collecting bug grew ever stronger.



*"A Gordon for me, a Gordon for me,*

*If ye're no a Gordon ye're nae use to me.*

*The Black Watch are braw an' the Seaforths and a'*

*But the cocky wee Gordon's the pride o' them a'"*

# 'A Gordon for me'

*This is the chorus of a popular song by the Scottish music hall singer Robert Wilson. The Gordon Highlanders were a famous Scottish regiment in the British Army, the other Scots regiments mentioned in the full song are the H.L.I. (The Highland Light Infantry), the Black Watch and the Seaforth Highlanders... Now, alas, all gone.*

*It was also one of my Mum's favourite songs and I can remember her singing it to me when I was just a wee toddler I'm convinced that she liked it so much that when her second son was born she determined that he was going to be called... Gordon.*

## 'THE ENGLISH MANOR HOUSE'

### GENERAL CROMWELL MUSTERS HIS TROOPS

Another of Gordon's finest buildings... and my own favourite. This was designed and built to display K&C's first English Civil War 'Pike & Musket' releases and had its premiere at the *Chicago Toy Soldier Show* in 2014. The stonework on the model is exceptionally good and adds a lot to the structure's character and historic authenticity.

*Dimensions: 42" x 24"*



# 'PREPARING FOR A SIEGE'

PIKES, MUSKETS & CANNONS 1642



Gordon took Andy's original design and transformed it into a great-looking 16th. Century 'star' fort complete with artillery ramps and gun emplacements. The garrison is provided by K&C's own English Civil War 'Parliamentary' Pikemen and Musketeers.

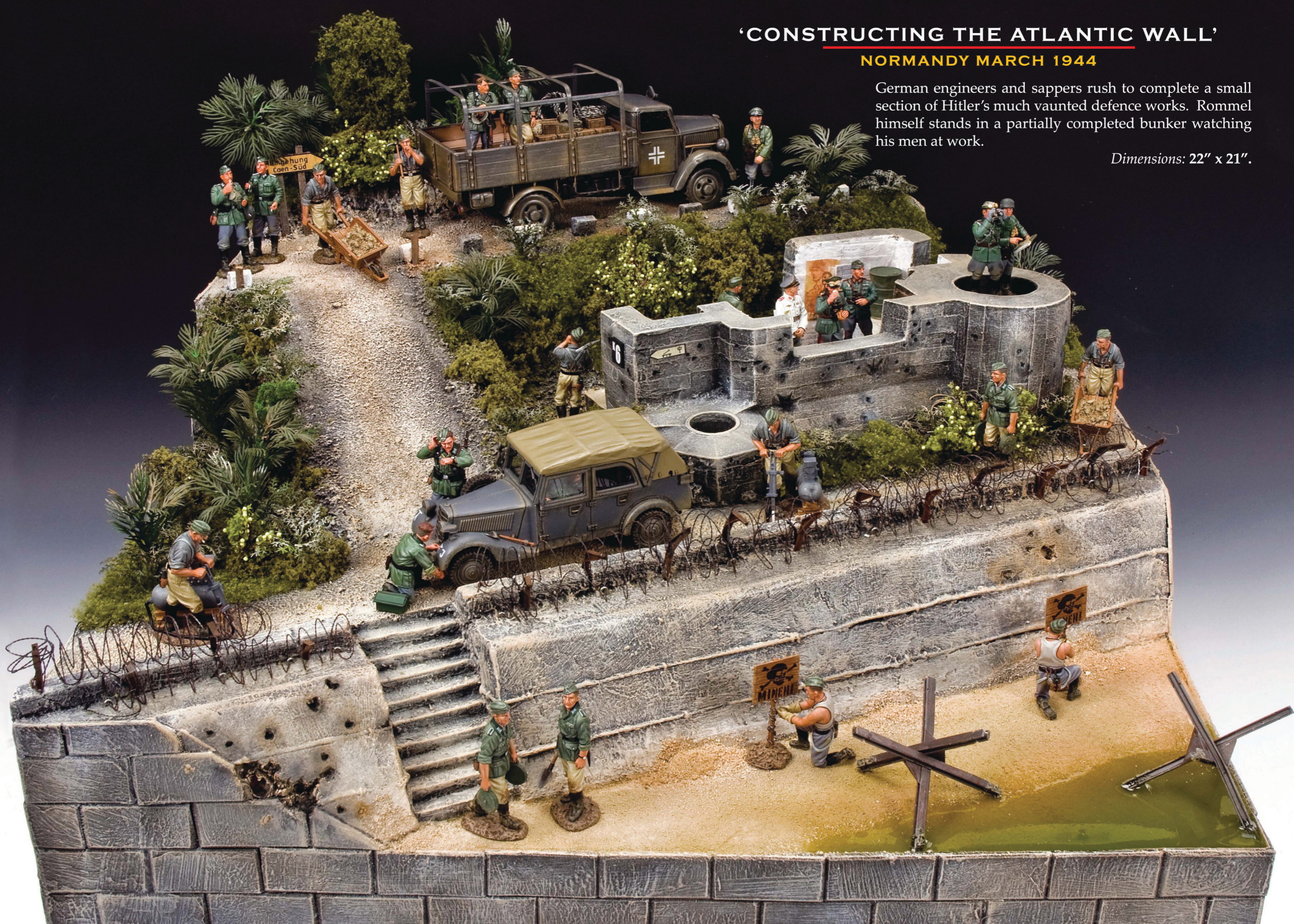
*Dimensions: 24" x 24"*

# 'CONSTRUCTING THE ATLANTIC WALL'

**NORMANDY MARCH 1944**

German engineers and sappers rush to complete a small section of Hitler's much vaunted defence works. Rommel himself stands in a partially completed bunker watching his men at work.

*Dimensions: 22" x 21".*



# 'A BRIDGE TOO FAR'

A STREET IN ARNHEM SEPTEMBER, 1944

'Operation Market Garden' is one of King & Country's longest running and most successful series ever!

Here, British paratroopers and their Polish comrades move past a badly-damaged Dutch house and a knocked-out German halftrack.

Dimensions: 24" x 24"





**'CROSSING THE BRIDGE'**  
SOMEWHERE IN GERMANY 1945

As a troop of British armoured vehicles and infantry cross over a temporary bridge in Northern Germany in Spring 1945 one of the Tommies decides to relieve himself into the canal.

Gordon's ability to pack a lot of details into a small space never failed to impress myself and fellow collectors. The diorama measured just 21" x 21".



# 'THE TRAIN'

SABOTAGE & AMBUSH IN FRANCE  
JUNE 7, 1944

This particular diorama was always one of Gordon's own *personal favourites*... He built it to appear at one of the 'West Coaster Shows' and it was sold on the very first day of the event.

Gordon found an old wooden train model on one of his visits to San Antonio, Texas. He then converted it into a typical WW2 German train complete with flak gun mounting and lots of other great details including armour plating.

Some of K&C's own *French Resistance* fighters attack the German survivors of the train derailment.

*Dimensions: 36" x 18"*



*A closer look at Gordon's train engine conversion along with some of K&C's German Wehrmacht infantry investigating the cause of the derailment.*



# 'THE TRAIN'

SABOTAGE & AMBUSH IN FRANCE  
JUNE 7, 1944

As the French '*Maquis*' fighters continue to attack the derailed train the Germans begin to fight back.



# 'THE USS 'SAND PEBBLES''

THE SHIP MODEL INSPIRED BY THE MOVIE

Here you see the *USS San Pueblo* with a full crew of K&C US Navy sailors preparing to repel all boarders.

A selection of our 'Streets of Old Hong Kong' Chinese junks lie alongside the American gunboat.



# 'THE USS 'SAND PEBBLES'

## THE MOVIE THAT INSPIRED THE MODEL

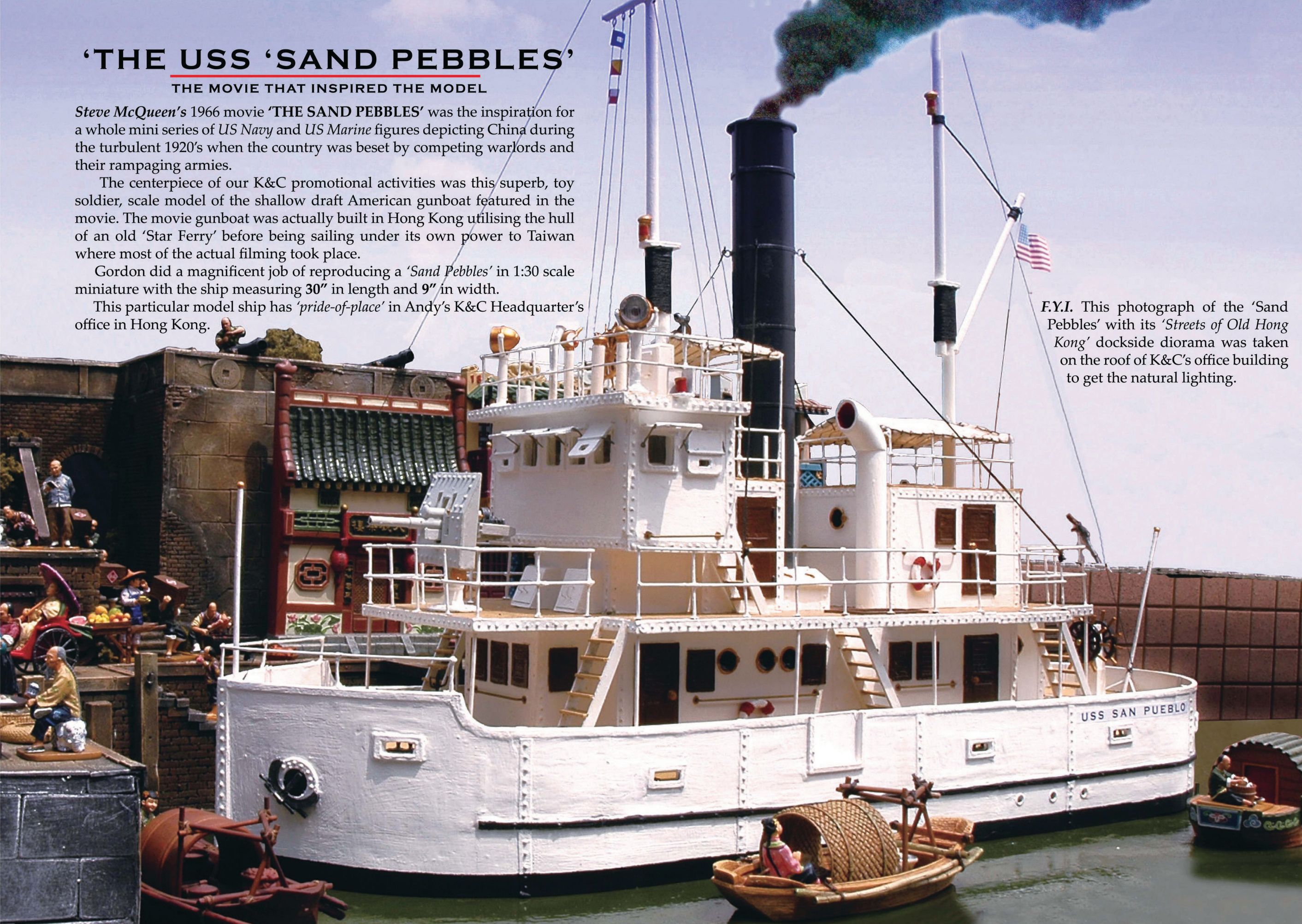
Steve McQueen's 1966 movie 'THE SAND PEBBLES' was the inspiration for a whole mini series of US Navy and US Marine figures depicting China during the turbulent 1920's when the country was beset by competing warlords and their rampaging armies.

The centerpiece of our K&C promotional activities was this superb, toy soldier, scale model of the shallow draft American gunboat featured in the movie. The movie gunboat was actually built in Hong Kong utilising the hull of an old 'Star Ferry' before being sailing under its own power to Taiwan where most of the actual filming took place.

Gordon did a magnificent job of reproducing a 'Sand Pebbles' in 1:30 scale miniature with the ship measuring 30" in length and 9" in width.

This particular model ship has 'pride-of-place' in Andy's K&C Headquarter's office in Hong Kong.

*F.Y.I.* This photograph of the 'Sand Pebbles' with its 'Streets of Old Hong Kong' dockside diorama was taken on the roof of K&C's office building to get the natural lighting.



# 'WINSTON'S VISIT'

THE P.M. PAYS AN UNEXPECTED CALL  
ON THE 'FEW'



At the height of the Battle of Britain *Prime Minister Winston Churchill* visits one of the temporary airfields used by a Royal Air Force Spitfire fighter squadron.

This one is located in a small town on the south east coast of Britain and is protected by a platoon of the local 'Home Guard' led by a certain *Capt. Mainwearing* and *Sergeant Wilson*.

Gordon 'scratch-built' this typical English cricket pavilion from an original design by Andy. K&C liked it so much it was then duplicated in polystone for our collectors.

This section is part of a much larger 36" x 18" airfield display.

# 'BATTLE ON THE BRIDGE'

ON THE ROAD TO SINGAPORE JANUARY 1942

Gen. Yamashita's *Imperial Japanese Army* come face to face and bayonet to bayonet with soldiers from the *11th. Indian Division* somewhere in central Malaya.

Although British and Empire troops actually outnumbered the Japanese invaders the enemy had control of the air and at sea.

On land Yamashita's troops were more aggressive, much more adaptable to the local landscape and had the major advantage of employing more than 200 tanks... *They also had better leadership.*

*Dimensions: 36" x 18"*



# 'THE EMPEROR ON CAMPAIGN'

ON A COUNTRY ROAD SOMEWHERE  
IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Dimensions: 21" x 21"





**'RETAKING THE RUSSIAN FACTORY'**  
**THE BATTLE OF THE T34'S**



A pair of Red Army T34 tanks supported by infantry recapture the ruins of a Soviet factory building. Defending the position is a lone, 'renegade' T34 taken over by the Germans and put back into action against its former owners.

This was the first 'Ruined Russian Factory' diorama Gordon ever built and it was hugely popular. He would go on to make several more adaptations of this same theme for other collectors... *Each one unique!*

*Dimensions: 36" x 18"*

# '1917'

## ALL IS NOT QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT



The success of the recent '1917' movie brought back memories of a compact little WWI diorama that Gordon built a few years ago to coincide with several major centenaries of the 1914 - 1918 War.

As usual Gordon incorporated many significant details in the scene... assorted dead bodies in the shellholes as well as discarded and abandoned rifles and machine guns.

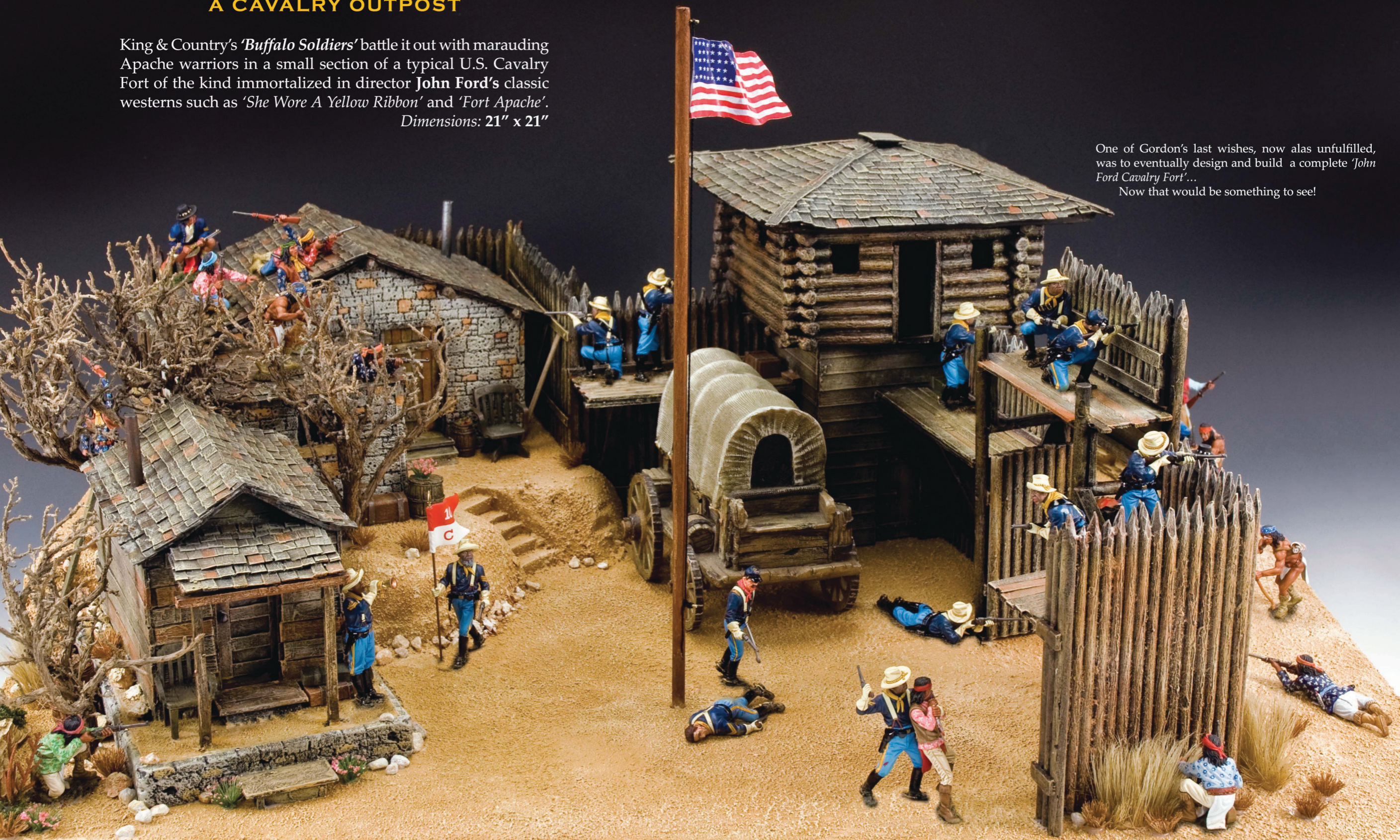
One nice touch is the roadside shrine with Jesus on the cross, a feature Gordon included in several other displays.

*Dimensions: 18"x18"*

# 'FORT APACHE'

## A SURPRISE ATTACK ON A CAVALRY OUTPOST

King & Country's *'Buffalo Soldiers'* battle it out with marauding Apache warriors in a small section of a typical U.S. Cavalry Fort of the kind immortalized in director **John Ford's** classic westerns such as *'She Wore A Yellow Ribbon'* and *'Fort Apache'*.  
*Dimensions: 21" x 21"*



One of Gordon's last wishes, now alas unfulfilled, was to eventually design and build a complete *'John Ford Cavalry Fort'*...  
Now that would be something to see!

# 'RED TAIL REDOUBT'

## AN AIRFIELD IN ITALY 1944

This was part of King & Country's tribute to the famous 'Tuskegee Airmen' of WW2, the first African American fighter pilots to go into action against the Luftwaffe in the air... and racism on the ground.

Gordon designed and built this compact little aircraft re-vestment to house the then-new K&C P51 'Red Tail Mustang'.

Dimensions: 21" x 21".



## 'IKE DROPS IN'

### AN ABANDONED AIRFIELD APRIL 1945

Supreme Allied Commander *Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower*, accompanied by his favourite female driver *Kay Summersby*, join Third Army's *Gen. George S. Patton* to inspect a captured example of one of Hitler's 'Wonder Weapons', the Heinkel 162 better known as 'The Salamander'.

Another of Gordon's smaller gems, a 21" x 21" section of a German airfield hangar.



A major international collector of Gordon's work particularly liked K&C's 'Desert Village' buildings series. He requested that Gordon design and build him a complete North African village in the same style as our mass-produced pieces **BUT** all of the buildings must be new designs and original structures.

As usual Gordon was only too happy to comply and built this huge 'masterpiece'... *It measures 32 square feet!*

The client was not disappointed.

*Dimensions: 96" x 48"*

## 'THE DESERT VILLAGE'

LIBYA, NORTH AFRICA 1942



*British, Empire and Free French units pass rapidly through a recently captured Arab village in pursuit of some retreating Axis forces.*

*Soon Rommel's Afrika Korps will launch a counterattack and these same troops will be reversing 180° and advancing in a different direction.*

# COLLECTOR

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**BROTHERS IN ARMS**