



# Sabot Away!



Newsletter of the Austin Armor Builders Society

November 2022



## A Siege Gun Challenge

by Bob Bethea

**W**e've all been challenged to build a kit out of our comfort zone. Sometimes it's worth taking, and sometimes it's not. The kit in question was received by a friend of mine in a show raffle. Since he did not build 1/72<sup>nd</sup> scale kits, especially resin ones, he gave it to me to see if I could make it into anything other than a sow's ear.

I took the challenge and brought the kit home and was NOT pleasantly surprised. I love WWI machinery, and I love 1/72<sup>nd</sup> scale. However, I knew nothing of this manufacturer and very little about the history of this howitzer.

It turns out that this B.L. 15" Mk. I Siege Howitzer was basically a scaled-up version of the very successful 9.2" gun made by Coventry Ordnance Works. Only twelve were made, and at least ten were sent to France on the Western Front. Despite being cumbersome to deploy and its short range (approximately 10km), its 1,450lbs shell could cause devastating damages. Over 25,300 shells were fired against the Germans during WWI.

The kit, according to research conducted by our editor, was made by RetroTracks, a UK based outfit that was once part of Retrokit, a Belgium based aftermarket company specialized in sci-fi and 1/144<sup>th</sup>

*(Continued on page 7)*

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- ◆ Nov 2 - AABS Club Meeting
- ◆ Nov 10 to 13 - MillenniumCon 2022, Wingate Hotel & Conference Center, Round Rock
- ◆ Dec 3 - **AABS Xmas Party**
- ◆ Dec 7 - AABS Club Meeting
- ◆ Jan 4 - AABS Club Meeting
- ◆ Jan 21 - WinterBlitz 2023, Museum of the American GI, College Station



### AABS Officers Jan 2021 – Dec 2022

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## Schedule of Upcoming Program Presentations and Newsletter Articles

Month	Program Presentation	Newsletter Article
January 2022	N/A	Dane Sherry
February	N/A	Rick Herrington
March*	White Elephant Contest	Greg Beckman
April	AMPS 2022 Int'l Show	Kevin Hutchison
May	N/A	Eric Choy
June*	Eric Choy	Ian Candler
July	Bob Bethea	Craig Bland
August	Dave Bourland	Bob Bethea
September*	Rick Herrington	Bill Menzie
October	* KIT AUCTION *	Ted Paone
November	Mike Bird	Ted Andreas, Jr.
December*	Mike Maloney	Joe Fisher
January 2023	Officer Election	Mike Maloney

Here is a list of members who are responsible for providing articles for the newsletter and program presentation at our monthly meetings.

Please note any member may contribute as many articles as he wants any time. The purpose of this schedule is to ensure we have at least one article in the newsletter each month.

Prompt submission of your article is much appreciated. The deadline is always **11:59PM on the last Wednesday of the previous month** (e.g. Rick Herrington's article for February is due on the last Wednesday of January).

\* Quarterly contest month



## From the Turret

**G**reetings! I hope all is well with our members and their families. Eric tells me that we have a different location for our November meeting. This one is at the library located on Spicewood Springs Road. Thank goodness for navigation systems for those of us who may not know our way around Austin.

With the Austin IPMS show in the books last month, we are probably about done with shows for 2022. Next year should be a good one as we will have the National IPMS show in August and our AMPS show a little later in the year.

Remember, USMC military vehicles is the theme for our group entry next year. We should be seeing some examples in upcoming show-and-tell sessions. **Ted Paone** has the featured tank for this month. And although the subject is not actually a tank, it is an AFV, and a Marines item at that.

As I look forward to the next year, I have thought about adding tank destroyers in the upcoming line up for **Tank In Focus** of the month. For December, the tank of the month has already been selected. Right now, that is classified information until released.

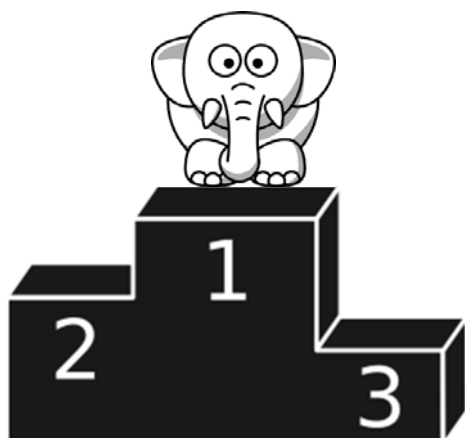
We are on the edge of the holiday season. Remember to add model kits to your wish list and look high and low for some bargains.



As a final remark, I thoroughly enjoyed the article in the current issue of *Bore-sight* that featured the work of our member **Mike Mahoney**, not to mention a great picture of him with a full-scale example of an M5A1. If you are not an AMPS member, you are missing out on a great magazine.

In conclusion, you all make our club one of the best. See you at the next meeting.

**Ted Andreas, Jr.**  
President



## DECEMBER Is Quarterly Contest Month!

**B**ring in your **White Elephant Model** next month to win either a cash prize (\$40 for the first place winner) or a drawing of a “nice and recent” kit (eligible to all contestants except the cash prize winner). There is no limit to how many model you enter as long as your entry wasn’t placed in our previous white elephant contests.

To enter you must be a member in good standing. i.e. You need to pay your 2022 dues!!!





## M50 Ontos

*(Editor: This month we have a guest contributor, Ted Paone, giving us a Tank In-Focus article on the M50 Ontos. Ted Andreas, Jr. will return in December for yet another iconic tank.)*



The Ontos was originally a joint U.S. Army-Marine project for an air transportable and self-propelled anti-tank gun motor carriage. The Korean War made it clear that infantry battalions needed organic mobile fire support to knock out attacking tanks. The highly accurate M40 106mm recoilless rifle (RR), which replaced the M27 105mm recoilless rifle, was an ideal anti-tank weapon. Despite producing tremendous back blast when fired, the M40 was capable of firing a shape-charge high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) round with an effective range of 1480 yards which could penetrate the armor of any existing tank. A high explosive round was provided to take care of soft targets. Now it just needed something to mount it on.

A development contract was granted to Allis Chalmers Farm Machinery Division, and the work was carried out in LaPort, Indiana. A single page

specification sheet was used to guide the design. The Ontos would mount six M40 recoilless rifles on a squat turret that could elevate, traverse, and fire the weapons. The three man crew, gunner/commander, driver, and loader, were in a crowded chassis driven by a six-cylinder, 145 horsepower engine.

The prototype was tested by the Army in March 1954 after delays and changes to the specification. It didn't go well for the Army. When all six guns were fired at Aberdeen Proving Ground, the back blast knocked bricks out of buildings near the test range and broke windows out of several cars.



*Backblast from just two guns.*

The Army was not pleased with the Ontos. It was too small, too tall, not enough room inside for either the three-man crew or the ammunition for the recoilless rifles. The ammo load of 18 rounds, including the six in the guns, was inadequate. The Army also hated that the six recoilless rifles were externally mounted on a very shallow turret and had to be loaded from the outside. The half-inch armor plating on the sides wouldn't protect the crew from anything larger than .50 caliber machine gun rounds. And the floor was even thinner, making it vulnerable to mines.

There was also politics involved: the Army felt the Ontos was not in keeping with its offensive fighting doctrine, and it would cut into the procurement of additional tanks. The project and the original 1,000 vehicle order were cancelled.

The Marines conducted their own field testing which was successfully completed in 1955, and a contract was signed with Allis-Chalmers for 297 vehicles. The first vehicle was accepted by the Marines on

October 31 of the same year, and the contract was fulfilled in 1957.



With the delivery of the Ontos, the Marines formed new anti-tank companies and battalions starting in 1957. The Ontos fit the Marine doctrine well. It was fast, agile, and capable of going places where tanks were too big or heavy to follow. It was not intended to slug it out with enemy tanks. Instead, the Ontos would operate on the flanks of the main tank attack or wait in ambush in defensive situations. As for the lack of armor protection, the Marines shrugged as getting shot at was nothing new!

## M50 and M50A1

The Ontos was designated "Rifle, Multiple, 106mm, Self-Propelled, M50." It had a three man crew, all with the occupational specialty of Ontos Crewman. The driver sat next to the motor to the left of the centerline, the gunner/commander behind him centered under the turret hatch, and the loader who had to sit on the floor by the back door. While the loader was a loafer, the gunner/commander was very busy. He spotted the target, operated the handwheels to traverse and elevate the weapons to get on target. He then fired the spotting rifles, .50 caliber spotting rifles mounted on 4 of the RRs which match the trajectory of the RR rounds out to 1480 yards. He then locked the weapons' breeches,

arming the RRs and could fire the guns individually, in pairs, or all at once. He then had to direct the driver to move to avoid counter-battery fire as the back blast exposed their position "shoot and scoot."

The commander also had a .30 caliber machine gun which could be fired from inside the turret or as a free gun from the turret hatch. He also had to operate the two radios. When the vehicle moved to a pre-identified alternate position, the loader got up, stepped outside, and loaded the guns with rounds stored below the rear doors. It wasn't till the M50A1 that the loader actually got a cushion to sit on. Turret traverse was limited to 40 degrees to each side and elevation to -10/+20 degrees.



The Ontos was upgraded to the M50A1 in 1963-1964 by replacing the engine with a 180 horsepower V-8, an upgraded transmission, and new tracks. A fording kit was developed. Also a viewport was added to the rear door and some night fighting capabilities were added. Oh yes, and that cushion for the loader!

## Ontos Deployments

The Marine Corp Ontos units saw their first action in the 1958 Lebanon crisis. Two platoons totaling 10 Ontos landed with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines on July 15-16, 1958. The units secured the airport and guarded the port, bridges, and the US embassy. They did not fire any shots in anger.





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Another deployment was Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to strengthen the garrison prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1961. The Ontos stationed here continued to operate until April 1980. By then, only one vehicle was operational. Two others were used for parts.

The next deployment was in the Dominican Republic in April 1965. Snipers fired on the Marines, and the Ontos served as direct fire support. The awesome firepower deterred any further incidence. This was also the only time the Ontos preformed its intended anti-tank mission; they encountered and promptly destroyed several enemy tanks, including a French-built AMX-13 and an old Swedish L-60 light tank.

The most significant deployment for the Ontos was in Vietnam. First arriving in 1965, they proved themselves highly capable infantry support weapons, providing excellent frontal fire and flank protection. The light weight and 20-inch tracks gave it excellent floatation, allowing the Ontos to traversing rice paddies to provide fire support the Marine foot soldiers slogging through the paddies. The thin armor made it vulnerable to RPG and mines of which the NVA and the Viet Cong had plenty. With no tanks to fight, the Ontos, now equipped with a "beehive" round, unleashing a whirlwind cloud of steel flechettes, terrified the NVA and VC.

By 1967, the anti-tank battalions were reorganized as the Ontos were becoming worn out. Replacement

parts were difficult to obtain and some were cannibalized to keep others operating.

The Ontos' moment of shining glory was during the Tet Offensive launched by the NVA on January 30, 1968. When the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment reached the Citadel on the north side of the Perfume River, the walls of the buildings resisted the pounding from tanks but the recoilless rifles could knock holes in or completely knock down walls. The enemy would flee in terror when an Ontos' spotting round flew past them. The light weight of the Ontos allowed it to cross lightweight bridges and be airlifted by slung under a CH-54 Sea Stallion helicopter. Commanders praised the fire support capabilities of the vehicle. Ten M50s were incorporated into the defense of Khe Sanh, preforming reconnaissance duties and supplying static perimeter defense.

As an aside, here is a story from Cookie Sewell's review of Academy's 1/35<sup>th</sup> scale M50A1 kit on Cybermodeler.com:

*When I was in college in 1966, there were two Marine sergeants going through the "Bootstrap" program in which they were allowed to attend college on Marine time with the condition they would return to active duty as second lieutenants upon graduation. Both had served in Vietnam the previous year (1965) and had stories to tell.*

*One of the most interesting was coming into a Vietnamese village and coming under sniper fire. The platoon leader called for help, and an Ontos drove up to deal with the sniper. The VC, upon seeing the armored vehicle, jumped down from his tree spot and began to run for his life. The Ontos fired one of the recoilless rifles at him and missed. Again. Miss. Again. Miss. After the sixth shot had missed, the commander popped the hatch, lined up on the now distant VC and fired the .30 caliber Browning, taking him out with one burst. So much for fire support.*

By 1969, the Ontos were worn out. The supply of tracks had depleted, and there was a lack of spare parts. Additionally there were several incidents of accidental firing of the recoilless rifles which cost



some Marine lives. The Marines gave their excess Ontos to the Army which used them till they ran out of spare parts. There are a few preserved vehicles including one at the USMC Museum.

VIETNAM HISTORICAL Foundation ([mcvthf.org/VPATheOntos.htm](http://mcvthf.org/VPATheOntos.htm)).

**Ted**

For a deep dive into the use of the Ontos in Vietnam, see the website at the MARINE CORPS TANKERS

*(Continued from page 1)*

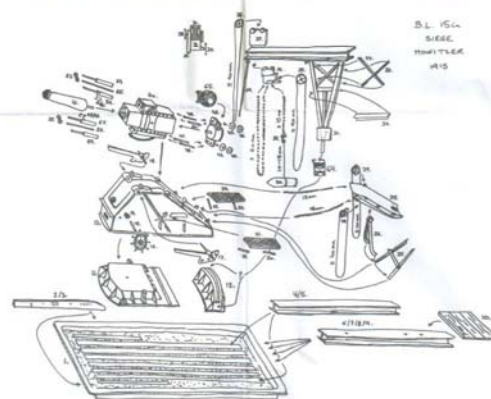
aviation detail sets. Most of RetroTracks products have been discontinued, including said siege howitzer kit, although there are a few still available from RetroKit website ([retrokitonline.net](http://retrokitonline.net)).

Upon opening the box, I found a plethora of resin parts and several sprues with parts still on them. Though the parts were numbered, the numbers were not on the instruction sheet. Yes, the ONE PAGE blowup xeroxed instruction sheet. That's all I had to work with, except the two blurry photos on the other side of the sheet. The first thing to do in that situation is to take inventory. The barrel and the base were easy, but I finally found ALMOST all the other parts after review of the instructions and extrapolation from the photos.

I jumped right in and separated the barrel and the associated pieces from the sprues and cleaned them up with sandpaper. Several were warped and warm water straightened them out. There were virtually no holes drilled for the various rods, so I had to do that myself.

After appropriate cursing, I got the gun all together and was impressed by the cast resin base for it on which I had to glue multiple parallel short train tracks (I-beams) after I got them straightened out. Then I glued the base to a small piece of polished marble taken from an old trophy from the IPMS show at Lake Charles, LA from several years back. Nice and heavy, it supported the tiny cannon well.

Then I went after the shell and the loading davit. I found that the instructions were even less helpful here. Everything was supported by chains, and there were NONE supplied in the kit. This is the time when



being a hording modeler paid off as I scrounged some minute chain from my spares box. I did my best to follow the photos but will never be certain that they are all correctly placed.

After supergluing them to the appropriate spots, I had the problem of them swinging loose. So I applied super glue to them while held taut. They were then painted black and drybrushed with Scale75 Heavy Metal acrylic.

The gun itself and the davit were airbrushed Tamiya Olive Drab with highlights sprayed in Japanese green. Then, I shadowed the low spots and around raised items with burnt umber artist oil paint. After



which, highlights and edges were intensified by a very light green acrylic. More Burnt Umber and Burnt Sienna helped weather the lower portions and simulate rust.

The base was painted in brown acrylics and an oil paint wash of Burnt Umber applied to darken shadows and give a moist tone appropriate to WWI France. The rails were painted as the chain was on the loading davit. I checked the Internet and painted the shell gray with gunmetal.

The howitzer turned out better than expected but is no silk purse or prize winner. I'm glad I took the

challenge but gladder that I can move onto better (and easier) kits again.

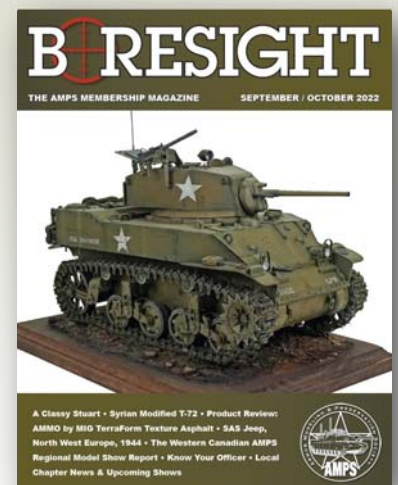
**Bob**



## AMPS Boresight (Volume 30, Issue 5)

The latest issue of *Boresight* is out. Here is a quick look inside:

- ♦ **A Classy Stuart** by Mike Maloney
- ♦ **Syrian Modified T-72** by Eric Reinert
- ♦ **Product Review: AMMO by MIG TerraForm Premium Texture Asphalt** by Chuck Aleshire
- ♦ **SAS Jeep, North West Europe, 1944** by Tim Darrah
- ♦ **The Western Canadian AMPS Regional Model Show** by Anthony Swards
- ♦ **Know Your Officer**
- ♦ **AMPS Local Chapter News & Upcoming Shows**





SECOND ANNUAL  
**WINTERBLITZ**  
★ 2023 ★

JAN  
**21<sup>ST</sup>**

**THEME:  
1943 - THE  
TURNING  
POINT**

**MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN GI  
19124 HWY 6 COLLEGE STATION TX, 77845**

**2023 CATEGORIES**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 100 - Youth (all scales all eras)  | 1200 - Paper Panzer/Fictional (all scales)                                    |
| 200 - Classic Kits – (kits before 1979) basic build  | 1300 - Halftracks (all scales and all eras)                                   |
| 300 - Artillery (all scales and all eras)  | 1400 - Armored Cars (wheeled) (all scales and all eras)                       |
| 400 - 1/48 scale (all eras)  | 1500 - Soft-skins (all scales and all eras)                                   |
| 500 - 1/72 and smaller (all eras)  | 1600 - Motorcycles with or w/o Sidecars (all scales and all eras)             |
| 600 - Fully Tracked Origins to 1934 – (all scales)   | 1700 - Misc. Military Vehicles and Support Vehicles (all scales and all eras) |
| 700 - Fully Tracked Self-Propelled Vehicles 1/32 and 1/35 (Open Top) (all eras)                | 2000 - Fully Tracked Full Interior (all scales and all eras)                  |
| 800 - Fully Tracked WWII Axis 1/32 and 1/35 (Closed top)                                       | 3000 - Larger than 1/32 (all eras)  |
| 900 - Fully Tracked WWII Allied 1/32 and 1/35 (Closed top)                                     | 4000 - Friend or Foe (all scales and all eras)                                |
| 1000 - Fully Tracked Post WWII Thru 1990 (Korea, Vietnam, Cold War) 1/32 and 1/35 (Closed Top) | 5000 - Military figures (all scale scales and all eras)                       |
| 1100 - Fully Tracked Desert Shield to Present. (1991 - 2022) 1/32 and 1/35 (Closed Top)        | 6000 - Dioramas (all scales)  |

**WWW.WINTER-BLITZ.COM**



# Gifts of Christmas Past

Time to get cranking for our last quarterly/White Elephant Contest to be held at our December meeting on Dec 7<sup>th</sup>. In case you have forgotten what you received in our past Christmas parties, here are photos from:

2021:



2020:







# JOIN AMPS TODAY

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Regular Rest of the World	<input type="checkbox"/> (\$40)	<input type="checkbox"/> (\$75)	<input type="checkbox"/> (\$110)
Junior (17 or under)	<input type="checkbox"/> (\$15)	<input type="checkbox"/> (\$30)	<input type="checkbox"/> (\$45)
Family Member*	<input type="checkbox"/> ( \$ 5 )	<input type="checkbox"/> (\$10)	<input type="checkbox"/> (\$15)

\*For anyone living at the same address with a regular active member. Family member DOES NOT receive an individual copy of *Boresight* but enjoy vendor discounts, website access, and can enter in the national competition as long as he/she is accompanied by the regular active member.



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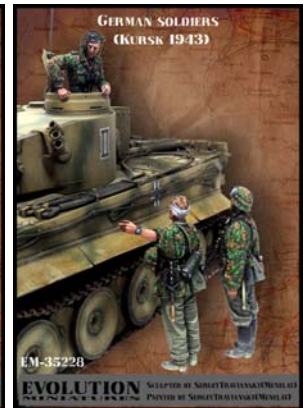
[www.amps-armor.org](http://www.amps-armor.org)



## NEW ON THE BLOCK



Probably the last cruiser tank built by the British, the Comet only saw limited action in WWII. If you like the subject but loathe the Bronco kit, don't miss Tamiya's latest release in 1/35<sup>th</sup> scale.



Not one but **TWO** (!) 1/35<sup>th</sup> IDF Iron Dome kits are here from: Trumpeter (top) and Magic Factory (bottom). Can someone help us with a comparison review?

It's been a while since Evolution Miniatures last releases, and we're glad to see three new 1/35<sup>th</sup> figure sets that depict WWII German soldiers fighting in Kursk.

### About Us

The Austin Armor Builders Society (AABS) started in 1999 when Don Jones, a member of the local IPMS chapter, decided "what a good idea to get out two nights a month, and on least one night talk tanks."



AABS is the first scale model club in Central Texas devoted solely to armor modeling. We don't build planes because they are just plain! Our passion is armored fighting vehicles and military figures. Subject of our interest ranges from WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Middle East, to the most recent Gulf War conflicts.

At each monthly meeting, we talk tanks, swap kits, and share our building techniques. We also hold regular in-house model contests and organize out-of-town trips to museums and modeling events. Every odd-numbered year AABS hosts the biggest armor modeling show that attracts some of the best armor modelers in the Lone Star as well as neighboring states.

Since inception AABS is a local chapter of Armor Modeling and Preservation Society (AMPS), a national organization dedicated to the promotion of scale modeling and armored vehicle preservation.

For more info, please visit [www.austinamps.org](http://www.austinamps.org)