

TAC NEWS

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Modeling Excellence Since 1967

FIREBASE "DELTA"

Vietnam - 1967

Admit it! Ever since you saw that less-than-awesome movie *"The Green Berets,"* you've wanted to game the assault on a Vietnam era firebase. GHQ has been working to make that dream a reality. Over the past couple of years, most of the important components have become available.

Research

There are many sources on Special Forces camps. A quick search of the internet will offer many options. Check the bibliography for some that we used. The handiest book to get, and a "must-read" for this project, is the Osprey 'Fortress' book *Special Forces Camps in Vietnam 1961-70* by: Gordon Rottman, and illustrated by Chris Taylor.

Special Forces camps were initially planned as a means to interdict shipments of arms and supplies flowing south on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and to diminish Viet Cong (VC) activity in the border area. The camps were designed as bases for Special Forces A-teams, working in conjunction with local Montagnard villages. Ideally, each A-team, augmented by local Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) would operate within a 6 mile radius, so bases were built approximately 12 miles apart along much of the border with Cambodia and Laos. They were normally constructed near a village. The first camps, set up in the Central Highlands in 1961 and 1962, were very lightly fortified when compared to those that followed. By 1964, a central interior fortress became mandatory. By 1970, there were 70 camps, some large enough to base battalion-sized operations.

Many of these camps were designed in geometric shapes. The camps at Thien Ngon and Gia Vuc were pentagonal.

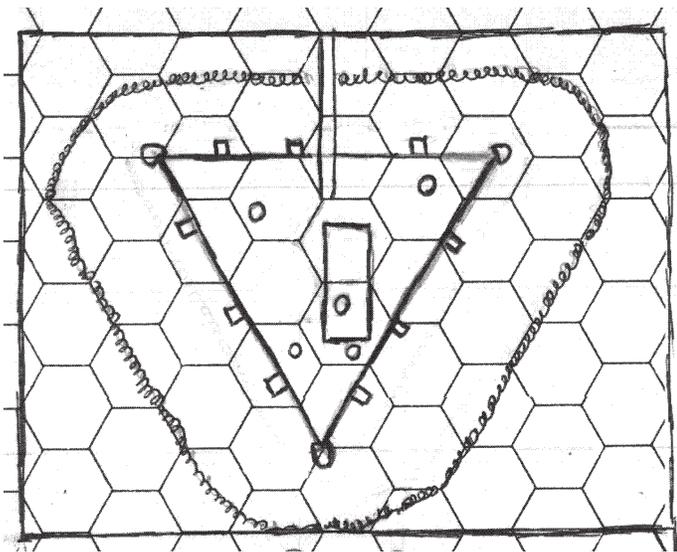


Prior to the battles in the Ia Drang valley in 1965, the camp at Plei Me was besieged by the VC. That camp was an equilateral triangle.



Make a sketch of the camp you want to model. Base this on the ground scale of the rules system you plan to use. For this project, we will be using GHQ's Terrain Maker® system. This makes it possible to utilize the hex system wherever possible. Though triangular and hexagonal camps may appear the most logical at first glance, a few specialty corner hexes can offer a set of standardized "building blocks" that can be rearranged into a wide array of layouts.

Here's the planning sketch of the triangular fort seen on the front cover of the current GHQ Wargaming Sourcebook:



To increase the portability of "FB Delta," it was designed to fit onto one of GHQ's new Skirmish Boards. Don't let the 6 hex x 9 hex size of the Skirmish board limit your project, though! Two or more skirmish boards can be laid side-by-side. Also consider only modeling one side of a larger camp. This would leave plenty of room for the NVA/VC player to develop his attack.

Examine the photos carefully. Note that the wall sections run from one corner of a hex to another. By making the primary wall sections this way, many different base camps can be modeled. Many of the corner blockhouses are situated on the corner of an adjacent hex. Other blockhouses are mounted at or near the center of a longer wall section. You needn't stick to pure geometric forms. Study of the photographs of prototype camps will show that the walls were generally to some degree irregular.

Throughout the history of fortification, terrain has been utilized to strengthen the defenses. The simplest models, however, will be made on flat terrain. To illustrate the systems you may want to use, our "Firebase Delta" project will be flat. If you want to make a hilltop camp, use the same techniques in all three dimensions to achieve the results you want.

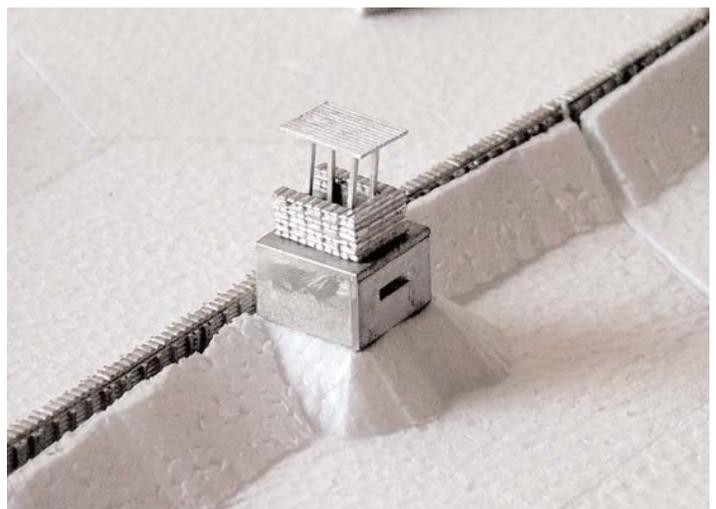
Materials:

Terrain Maker® Hexes
White Glue
Green and tan interior latex wall paint
Durham Water Putty
GHQ Terrain Maker® Accessory kits (block houses, revetments, mortar pits, etc.)

Snowstorm in Vietnam!

Well, not really! Rough out the basic shapes in unpainted Terrain Maker® hexes. Sketch the layout the camp, gently drawing the wall locations using a #2 pencil. (Don't use a pen! The ink will be easier to see, but when you paint it the ink will dissolve and be clearly visible in the finished terrain model!) Don't worry that the roughed-in model will look like a snow fort - it will get painted when the parts are glued and puttied.

We started with the two interior fort hexes. Choose the revetment walls you prefer. We used GHQ's TMA50 soil bin walls w/ steel revetments for this smaller fort. Some wall sections had to be trimmed to length - use a pair of stout wire cutters or a razor saw. Once the pewter pieces are roughed in, grab a TM2 hex - one that is 1/4" thick. With a sharp hobby knife, slice the hex into strips approx. 1/4" wide. A metal ruler will help with this, but the pieces do not have to



be perfectly uniform. Next, use the hobby knife to slice these diagonally, making small triangular stripes. Set these strips in place next to the walls.

On the main walls of the triangle, we choose to use the soil bin walls w/ log revetments (TMB54). Work along one side of the fort, trimming the walls to length and adding the 1/4" foam strips.

The bunkers and sandbag guard huts were normally mounted on raised blocks of the parapet. To simulate these, set the pewter model on top of a piece of TM2 1/4" hex material, and gently trace the outline. Use the hobby knife to create the sloped walls of the emplacement. Miter the edges of the wall to more-or-less abut with the emplacements. Continue around until the walls are all roughed in.

Paint now - or Paint Later

At this point we pre-painted one side and the top of the wall sections. The other side is "buried" under the foam and putty of the dirt walls, so there is no need to paint that area. You can also paint the other Terrain Maker® Buildings at this time. The potential problem is that you will have to avoid getting Durham water Putty on the painted surfaces. You can experiment with what makes the most sense to you: gluing everything down and THEN painting it all would have been another option. Since the individual hexes can be easily handled, this would be another good option. If you are making a firebase but not mounting the parts on Terrain Maker®, pre-paint the pewter castings now!

Assembly

Use White Glue to glue the wall sections and the 1/4" thick strips in place. After you have finished a pair of hexes, gingerly pull them apart so that they do not glue themselves together! You can also glue down other details, like mortar positions, ammo bunkers, and artillery platforms and sandbag walls.

After the glue has dried, mix up a small batch of Durham Water Putty. Use a spoon to fill in the gaps in the 1/4" strips, and between those strips and the metal walls.

Finish the hexes as you would regular Terrain Maker® hexes. Start by painting the edges of the hexes with green interior latex paint. Then paint any dirt roads



and paths with the tan latex paint, and allow it to dry thoroughly. Add 'grass' flocking to the areas where you want it: paint these areas with the tan and immediately flock with GHQ's TMA3 Grass. Avoid too many extra bushes close-in to the walls - these areas were kept clean to provide a good field of fire and to diminish cover for enemy sappers.



Concertina Wire

Barbed wire was omni-present at firebases. In the beginning, the loosely organized bases were sometimes surrounded with cattle fences! But it didn't take long for rolls of concertina wire to surround the camp and crest the walls. Again, consult photos of firebases for the most appropriate placement.

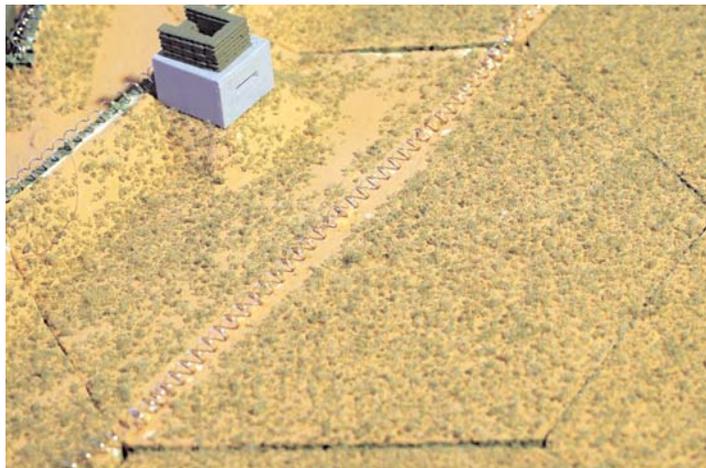


In 1:285 scale, these are pretty small! Here's how to make a fine sanitary substitute, albeit without the barbs! You'll need a fine dowel (like the shaft of a small paint brush) and a spool of "bead wire." This

stuff is available at specialty bead shops, or at most craft departments or stores. Hold one end of the wire against the dowel, and tightly wind the wire around the paint brush handle. Remove the column of wire from the dowel, and gently stretch it out. To glue it unobtrusively to the walls, we used dots of clear 5 minute epoxy. (Do NOT use super glue! It will melt the foam underlying the water putty!) For adding wire to flat hexes, white glue will work.



model. These offer many modeling opportunities, all of which will really set the stage for your model of the Vietnam War.



Beyond the Wire

These camps were normally built near a vietnamese village, from which the CIDG forces were recruited. Indeed, the VC/NVA attacks on basecamps frequently came through the village, knowing full well that the Americans would be loath to fire in that direction. Seriously consider adding a village on an adjacent board.

Non-essential military items were also frequently located near a camp. Artillery platforms, air strips, storage units are a few of the items that you could

For more information, here are a few of our sources:

- http://www.thespecialforce.com/maps/map_room.htm
- http://www.lzxrax.com/Pleime_o.htm
- <http://members.aol.com/veterans/warlib6v.htm>
- <http://www.flyarmy.org/panel/battle/66031000.HTM>
- <http://home.sprintmail.com/~blueis/>

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