



# ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

by Ken Osen

**T**here is something about miniatures that fascinates most people. I think this may have always been the case, as miniatures of various types have been found at many archaeological sites. Often these are assigned some religious significance, but we may never really know – maybe Pharaohs just like miniatures. In modern times many of us get our first miniatures as some sort of toy or trinket. It is common to put toys aside as we grow and take on responsibilities. I am pretty sure that most people out there never gave any thought about where these “small things” really

came from beyond the toy store.

When I meet people at shows or special events one of the most often asked question is “How did you get into this business?” Although I usually sum it up by saying that I always loved models and the interest never went away, it is a bit more complex than that. It was through a chain of events that I’ve been able to make my passion for model miniatures become my profession.

There is a saying “You are where you were, when” (in other words, where and when one grows up shapes what we become). There must be some truth in this because growing up in the 1960s there were a huge number of military toys and scale models of all types that captured my imagination. At that time, all American towns of any size had a hobby shop, and if not, model kits could be found in drug

stores, hardware stores, and even grocery stores.

I suppose it didn’t hurt that my Uncle Harold was a serious toy and model figure collector. By the time I was 12 years old I was painting my own figures and within a few years I was converting and

**TOP LEFT TO RIGHT**  
Charles Stadden and Sheperd Paine in their element

**LEFT**  
Three Napoleonic Stadden produced figures including the Emperor himself. Typical of that time, they are affixed to a thin metal plate, a common practice for early models

**BOTTOM LEFT**  
A lancer sculpt by Shep Paine

**BOTTOM RIGHT**  
Three more Stadden figures from base metal to full paint





scratch building what I wanted. My first real job in the early '70s was in a well-stocked hobby shop in Metro Detroit that introduced me to many adults that were very passionate about scale models of all types. In some cases their very professions required them to create models ranging from stylized representations of something to perfectly rendered models. I knew two different people that sculpted full sized cars for the auto industry. Clearly industry, architecture, and museums had a long



history with various types of models large and small, but as much as I loved the hobby it never occurred to me that I could make a living with it too. At this time I still lived at home and although I always wanted a model railroad layout my parents were never going to let their basement get filled with trains. The good news was that I had always built military models and I could manage to keep my dioramas small and not take over the house. Many of the finished pieces would simply go to the shop and be displayed, which in hindsight may have been a safer place anyway.

We sold a great variety of modeling magazines at the shop, but probably the most interesting one was a U.K. based magazine called *Military Modeling*. It was always filled with new kit reviews and tips on how to build and convert all kinds of models which I found fascinating. The magazine also contained great historical notes on uniforms and equipment from around the world. In the days before the internet and specialty publications, these magazines were a goldmine of information. I took special note of the modeling tips by figure modeler Roy Dilley, often accompanied by clearly drawn instructions. Perhaps the most educational articles were written and illustrated by Don and Bryan Fosten and it was their work that formed my basic knowledge of British uniforms. I was also amazed how many figures seemed to have been sculpted by Charles Stadden. All of these people possessed knowledge and skills that I could only dream of and I referred to various articles whenever I prepared to start a new project. In time I had accumulated so many magazines that my mother badgered me to de-clutter my room, so I reluctantly took a razor blade to them and cut out the best articles and ads to create files of Manila folders labeled for specific subjects – some of which I still have.

Another great resource that seemed hard to find in Detroit was a magazine called *Tradition*. Fortunately, my good friend Walt Keener had a complete collection that we

often studied when planning new figure painting projects. Walt was lucky enough to have started his collection when he was a student teacher in the U.K. and had visited a model soldier shop in Piccadilly run by Roy Belmont-Maitland. The magazine was started around 1964 and was a treasure trove of articles on military uniforms, histories, and firearms. Ironically, Bryan Fosten was also the editor of this magazine. The man behind most of the miniature figures featured in the shop and magazine was Charles Stadden. I just couldn't believe how good and how prolific he was.

Because I couldn't build my own sprawling railroad layout, I worked on my friend's model railroad and built military models for myself. Aircraft kits were the most common when I was a kid, and after the movie *Battle of Britain* was released in 1969, I built so many RAF and Luftwaffe models that my parents gave me "that look" whenever I brought another kit into the house. So 54mm military figures seemed to be the answer and it went hand in hand with the black powder and living history hobby my friend Walt Keener introduced me to in the mid-1970s. The information I learned from both the *Military Modeling* and *Tradition* magazines encouraged me to do my own research at museums and libraries for this parallel interest.

Since I was first aware of plastic model kits (thank you mom and dad) it was common to have an exciting action painting of the aircraft, tank, or ship on the box top. It was an effective form of marketing, and many decisions were made based on the action depicted in the box art. As a matter of fact I recall buying two of the same 1/72nd aircraft models because the box art was so very different. (I have to admit that in most cases my finished models were not as satisfying as the art on the box.)

Around 1972, Chicago area-based Monogram models commissioned a local young modeler named Sheperd (Shep) Paine to build dioramas featuring

#### TOP LEFT

My favorite Stadden figure of all time. Inspired by the original 1730s grenade drill manual from the National Army Museum, Chelsea U.K.

#### MIDDLE LEFT

Current Military Miniatures Society of Illinois President Joe Berton's rendition of Major-General Charles George Gordon on a camel next to Stadden's reference painting from *Tradition* magazine

#### LEFT

Collection of studio figures from Charles Stadden



their 1/32 military vehicle series. These dioramas were featured on the box tops of the new kits rather than the traditional paintings. Although the model in the box did not include all of the components featured in the diorama, a great step-by-step, how-to tip sheet was included. The converted models in the tip sheet were amazing, and often showed various stages in construction that inspired many of us to apply this new knowledge to our own models. The campaign was so successful that about 20 different models were built by Shep for the company. Then in the summer of 1974 a new U.S. based magazine arrived at the shop called *Military Modeler*. Featured on the cover were German Panzergrenadiers jumping over the side of a halftrack in a haze of smoke and it was so real to me that it

could have been a grainy color photograph taken somewhere on the Russian front – but it wasn't. It was another amazing model by Shep Paine, and I was hooked on building dioramas. Not too long after this magazine came out I was hired full time by a local law enforcement agency, but always remained interested in building models. As a matter of fact, a couple of other co-workers there also built models, one of whom is still a good friend. He had an injury at work and left with a disability, but became a professional model builder. In time I changed careers, being hired as an apprentice in a dental laboratory. The connection here was that I had become friends with the owner of the lab while I worked at the hobby shop. He not only was an accomplished dental technician, but owned a small company that manufactured



Grand Master Shep Paine considered the box diorama to be the epitome of the modeling art. These are but a few examples from his 25 box catalogue

#### TOP LEFT TO RIGHT

*A King of Shreds and Patches – The Ghost of Hamlet's Father* 1982, 100mm. The use of a strategically placed mirror achieves the spectral effect  
*In the Turret of the Monitor* 1976, 100mm

#### MIDDLE LEFT TO RIGHT

*The Remnants of an Army* 1980, 54mm  
*The Defense of the Hospital at Rorke's Drift, 1879* 1976, 100mm

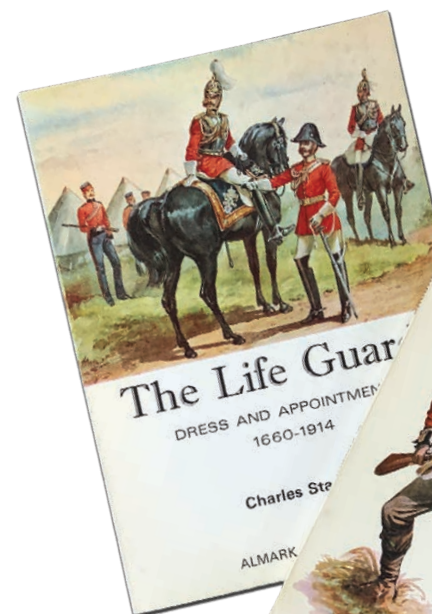
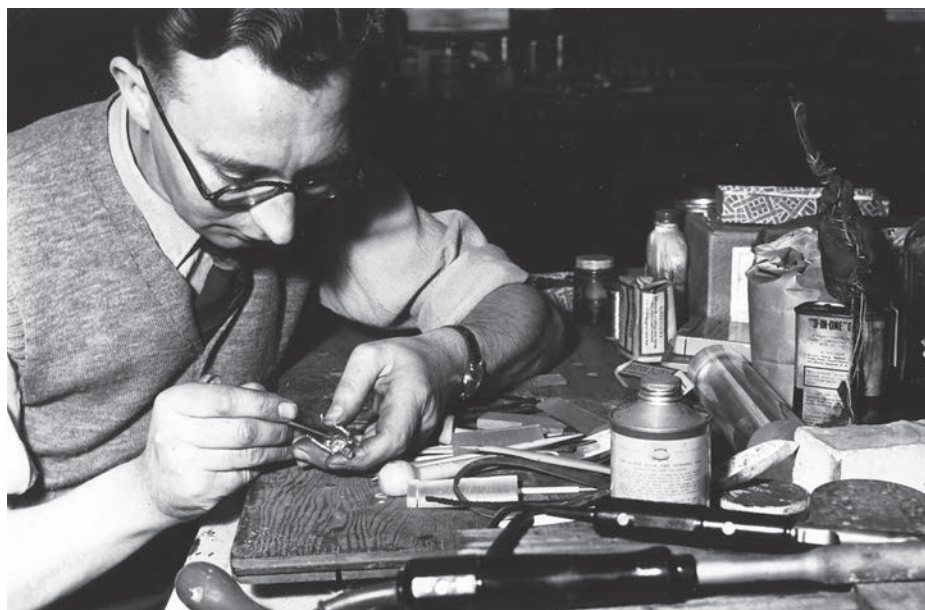
#### BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT

*The Night Watch* 1979, 100mm  
*The Meeting of the Admiralty Board* 1979, 54mm. What could be more meta than a model of models inspecting a model?



high quality model making supplies for aircraft and car modelers. It seemed like I was always given "permission" to remain passionate about miniatures.

Fast forward to 1989. Now fully invested in living history, one of our friends found out that the Belgian government was subsidizing the travel to Belgium for re-enactors to come to Waterloo for the 175th Anniversary of the battle in June of 1990. All we needed to do was to research and reproduce British uniforms and equipment of the 1815 period – and learn the drill, which we did. I suppose this was the real immersion for me, and when I returned home I was convinced that I should try hanging out my shingle making museum models and reproduction uniforms. Immediately I had work, and in a short while I also had requests for miniatures for various toy and collectibles companies. The first customer was a start-up company (Barzso) that wanted to create play sets in the spirit of the MARX play sets I knew as a child. I sculpted well over a hundred figures for him which polished my skills. All along I was building small dioramas, reproducing uniforms and even making life cast mannequins for museums. Then requests came in from others for models of all types, until in 1997 I was contacted to do some contract sculpting for W.Britain. This iconic company had been recently purchased by the Ertl Farm Toy company in Iowa. It is funny that at first I said no to the General Manager and suggested he contact Shep Paine, but he said Shep had told him to call me.



So I asked just what they needed and I was informed that they had just signed a licensing agreement with a well known military artist and they needed figures sculpted to represent the spirit of the paintings. Naturally, I asked who the artist was and the General Manager said "He is a well known Civil War artist named Don Troiani." I replied that I knew Don and we were both 18th century re-enactors and that I had first met him at the Battle of Brandywine in 1977. When he went on to explain that W.Britain wanted to develop two realistic sets in matte finish based on *Clear the Way* and *Lone Star*, I signed on as a contract sculptor. Ertl however did not hold on to W.Britain for very long and in 1999 the entire Ertl company, including W.Britain, was bought by an even larger U.S. toy company called Racing Champions (RC2). It was rumored that all design work was going to move off-shore so I moved on to

work for another start up company (Conte) designing and sculpting figures, buildings, and accessories. Later, several other companies (Old Northwest, Valiant Miniatures and Corgi) hired me for similar work. In mid-2005 I received another call from the same person that had managed the brand under Ertl in 1997. W.Britain was being acquired by another die-cast company located in Iowa called 1st Gear – "Do you want to work for W.Britain again designing new sets? This time I said yes and I have never looked back. By 2014 my wife and I moved to Iowa when I became General Manager.

So it is now over 30 years since I decided to make miniatures my "day job" and I have had plenty of time to consider how and why I have gotten to be so lucky to work at what I love every day. Although there are untold numbers of

knowledgeable and talented people out there I have had the good fortune to know and learn from, two seem to stand out as the foundations to the way I view the philosophy of making miniatures.

The first has to be the work of Charles Stadden. It may be summed up best by a direct quote from his equally talented son Andrew Stadden:

"My Father Charles Stadden was an artist. He could pretty much do it all to the highest standard. Watercolors and oil paintings, pewter figure sculptor, model figure painter, wood carving figure sculptor, and author, all accomplished in his own unique style. In addition his expertise on British military uniforms through the ages was second to none. His artistic talent was the perfect vehicle to record the results of his research into the subject, and left a legacy of work that can surely never be equaled."

Charles' body of work informed and inspired collectors and hobbyists all over the world, and I am sorry I never had a chance to meet and talk to him. His

**OPPOSITE PAGE TOP**  
Charles Stadden at his bench, 1955

**CENTER**  
Some of Mr. Stadden's excellent renderings. He was a master in many mediums including watercolor, gouache, pen and ink, and oil

**BOTTOM**  
More renderings and just two of the many books he both illustrated and wrote. A wordsmith and painter, his talents knew no bounds

**THIS PAGE TOP**  
A few of the Shep Paine dioramas that graced the cover of *Military Modeler* magazine. The Sherman tank diorama was commissioned by Monogram models for one of their box tops

**RIGHT**  
This exceptional pewter piece is a testimony of Paine's eye for composition, detail, and action. No one set a scene and told a story like Shep Paine





attention to historical accuracy has helped set a bar for everyone in the hobby. I still refer to his primary research when doing reconstructions of British military uniforms.

While I never met Charles Stadden, I did become friends with the man that inspired so many of us to think outside the box and redefined the art of miniatures, Shep Paine.

My friend Walt Keener had moved from Detroit to Chicago for work. Walt had been the president of our Detroit figure modeling club, so naturally he joined the Military Miniature Society of Illinois, of which Shep was a leading member. I was always impressed with how much Shep Paine shared his ideas and innovative techniques. Nothing seemed to be a secret, and many hobbyists even took painting classes from him. Walt convinced me to join the MMSI, which I did even though I usually could only attend a meeting once or twice a year at that time. It was really

more of a vote of solidarity to support similar clubs, so I also joined the Ontario Military Miniature Society, which I would attend for their annual show. It was at one of these OMMS shows that I entered a diorama with WWII German Flak 88mm gun in a hedgerow setting. Boy was I proud when I won a 1st place in that category. But it was even more exciting to have the diorama critiqued by the man that built those inspiring models for Monogram and the dramatic dioramas that had appeared on the cover of *Military Modeler* during the Summer of 1974.

He was very kind, perhaps because I was ten yours younger, but he recommended that as good as my model trees were the ground foam rubber that everyone used for the foliage just wasn't a good choice for larger scale models like 1/35th. He said "That is why never do anything but late fall or winter on my dioramas and you should consider the same." I had never thought of that but it seemed like good

advice. As soon as I returned home I began to experiment with everything I could think of to build a decent looking model tree – with some notable failures. But I returned the next year with another WWII diorama featuring a French farmyard. Prominently placed in the center was a large summer tree fabricated from epoxy and preserved natural foliage. Again I was fortunate enough to get a 1st place medal in dioramas and eagerly waited for another critique from Shep. "Well this is a very good model, but you know you really won because it is the best tree model we have ever seen." That was the best I could ever hope to hear from someone that had done so much to elevate the hobby to an art. In the years that followed I was fortunate to chat with him and other members of the MMSI at various events, club meetings. It was always a special treat to visit his home and view his extensive militaria collection. It seemed like uniforms, headdresses, and books were packed in everywhere. I also remember sitting at his small cluttered work station thinking how much it looked like mine at home.

Though he spent several years sculpting 1/32nd scale soldiers for Valiant Miniatures, Shep said he disliked being part of the hobby industry, preferring to follow his muse by working on one-of-a-kind pieces that sprung from his unique imagination and vision. I suppose that might be why he told the folks at Ertl to call me, and again with some irony, I also sculpted figure patterns for Valiant Miniatures too.

So after reflecting, I think it is appropriate for me to share some photos of work that both of these giants did long before we had the benefit of the internet for research, resin model products, photo etched detailing, Computer Aided Designed models, or digital prints. These two hands-on artists probably influenced me, and most of the others in our industry and hobby more than anyone else. I am sure that future generations will still know their names as we carry on their legacy. 🖼️



**TOP RIGHT**  
*Doctor Syn* 1982, 100mm  
Commissioned by Betsy Wyeth as a gift for her husband, Andrew Wyeth based on his painting of the same name. Maybe even more surreal than the actual painting

**BOTTOM LEFT**  
Shep Paine at the height of his powers, mid-'70s. It was my great pleasure to sit in this very spot. Cluttered with paints and supplies; strewn with bits and bobs; a jumble of brushes, knives, and files – messy bench is a happy bench and I was never more pleased as well