

Quick 'n' Dirty Guides #2

Making flags

Raw materials

You will need **linen material** which is commonly used for lining curtains (drapes to my American friends). Make sure it is reasonably thin, almost translucent but not quite. I've never spent a penny on this stuff in my whole life as all of it has come from domestic off-cuts when Mrs H has been making something new for the house. This is used for the flag itself.

For the staff/pole use **piano wire** cut with **pliers**. Available in most art/craft/model shops. Pretty cheap.

Bostik or similar **viscous slow curing glue**. This is used to secure the flag material to the staff. Do not use any type of superglue as this reacts with the cloth instantly makes it brittle and with prevent proper joining with the pole and possible cracking of the material.

Paint: I just use the same paints which I apply to my figures. These are largely Vallejo Acrylics from Spain.

Craft Tool: I use a Minicraft modelling tool with drill and grinder attachments. A grinding attachment can be used to achieve a very passable Finial on the pole in less than 20 seconds. Use the flat of the tool to make the point and the edge to 'groove' the reduced neck of the Finial.

The drill can also be used to 'drill out' or enlarge holes in hands which take the flag pole.

If you wish to add cords or ribbons you may use **twisted fuse wire**, thin paper strips, thin cords or thick thread or etched brass pieces such as oak leaves etc.

MAKING THE FLAG

1. Cut the size of flag you want from the linen material. Do this with a very sharp clean scalpel blade. Scissors are not suitable for a totally clean cut. If you want a flag of 40 x 40mm make the dimensions of the linen 40mm in the hoist and 43-45mm in the fly. The reason for this is that you need to leave extra to wrap the flag round the pole.
2. Cut a suitable length of piano wire with pliers and make it much longer than you need to have in the figure's hands when finished. It is better to find you flag pole is too long (you can cut it) than too short.
3. If you wish to, fashion the Finial using either manual or electric modelling tools.
4. Coat the upper length of the pole (between the Finial and the length of the flag in the hoist) with the slow curing glue. Lay the flag material flat and place the pole on the material vertically and 3-5mm from the edge.
5. Gently roll the pole so that the edge of the material is caught underneath the main body of the flag thus sealing it to the pole. Use the flat edge of your scalpel to run along the new join and seal it. Place aside to dry for at least two hours.
6. The flag is now ready to take paint. I usually saturate the whole flag in a coat of the base colour and let it dry. This will add some rigidity.
7. I like to paint the designs free hand and I know this is not everyone's cup of tea. I usually paint the design in flat basic colours at this stage which, depending on the complexity of the design can take between 30 minutes and two hours. Once completed you can begin the shaping and shading.
8. Apply some controlled heat to the flag. I have a metal tray placed permanently over an oil radiator which runs on full power. This gives off considerable heat which will soften the flag at critical moments during production. After the flag has absorbed some heat fold it and pull it gently into the shape you desire. This is trial and error. As you do this the areas which require highlighting become very obvious.
9. In applying the highlights I will often go up to six or seven shades above the base colour but be careful of overdramatic changes in shade which look odd.
10. Be patient, if you make a mistake go back over it. The material is very forgiving.
11. Continue to reapply the heat when necessary to restore the shape you want. If the shape is not 'taking' or springing back, quickly blow on it to cool and thus fix.
12. If you need to put a fringed border on the flag paint a thin dark brown line around the edge and then speckle with a fine brush in your chosen colour. Yellows, Whites and metallic colours are best for this.
13. At this stage add the cords by twisting 'ropes' of fuse wire to the required thickness. If you are really ambitious you may even attempt the knots! Secure these with Superglue and over paint any spoil it creates as it is very runny.

MAKING THE FLAG (continued)

14. Cut the pole to the correct size for the figure. Try and resist painting the pole till you have done this. If you paint it before glue-ing then the join will be a fragile paint to paint or paint to metal one and easily broken. Ideally I leave painting the figure's hand until this stage also. A little awkward I know but it means a metal-metal join with superglue which is usually pretty strong. You then just have a fiddly little paint job to finish.

Now, doesn't that look nice?

Some references on this site

Gallery Sections:

Great Northern War
Wars of the League of Augsburg
Flotsam & Jetsam: Renaissance
Crimea



*Pirate Flag early 18th
century*



*First flag of the Confederate
States of America*



Russian Naval Ensign 1854



*Imperialist Battle Flags of
the Thirty Years War 1618-
1648*



*Standards of the French
Regiment Mestre de Camp
General 1693*



*Battalion Colour, 42nd Foot
the Black Watch 1854 -
Crimea*