

THERM

Charles Grant
famous pass
the virtues of

YEARS ago my scenic efforts for use on the wargame table were the customary baseboards with raised plaster hills, ridges and so on—the whole thing covering a framework of odd blocks of wood, etc.—but this system was abandoned for a variety of reasons, chiefly because the ‘pieces’ got a bit out of hand in construction, not always turning out just what they were intended to be, and also because the plaster tended to flake off with use and fly all over the place, with the expected domestic wrath to follow. I subsequently opted for the more functional method of using 1 in. thick contour blocks, which were ideal for a situation where a considerable number of games were played, one after the other, with the inevitable quick changes of terrain.

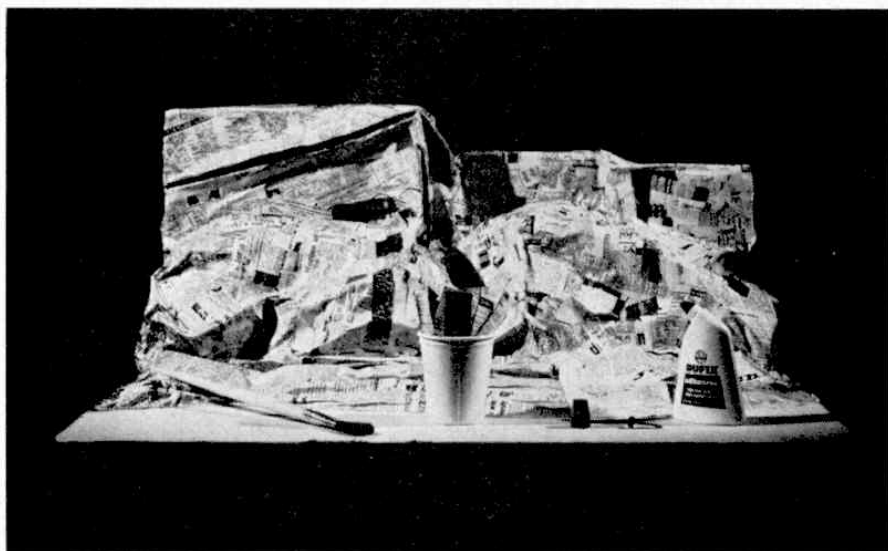
It was apparent, however, when I came to organising a project which, as an ‘ancient’ wargamer, I had long contemplated—i.e. to re-enact the famous stand of Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans at Thermopylae (480 B.C.), that something was lacking. Of course, I have to say at the outset that this battle is not by any means the most satisfying encounter in the Graeco-Persian Wars (Plataea, for example, gives far more scope for manoeuvre) but it is such a classic that it becomes a ‘must’, from the purely pictorial viewpoint, if nothing else. In rather a quandary, then, as although

tactically the use of contour blocks would adequately simulate the effect of fighting in a narrow pass, the ‘look of the thing’ would be totally lost and the drama would be missing. Happily, there came to my rescue a most splendid product, one which I found to have all the virtues and none of the vices of the old plaster method.

This was really not one but two media—both produced by I.C.I.—these being Dufix Adhesive and Dulite Supergrip Filler. Using them a most impressive Thermopylae in miniature was constructed.

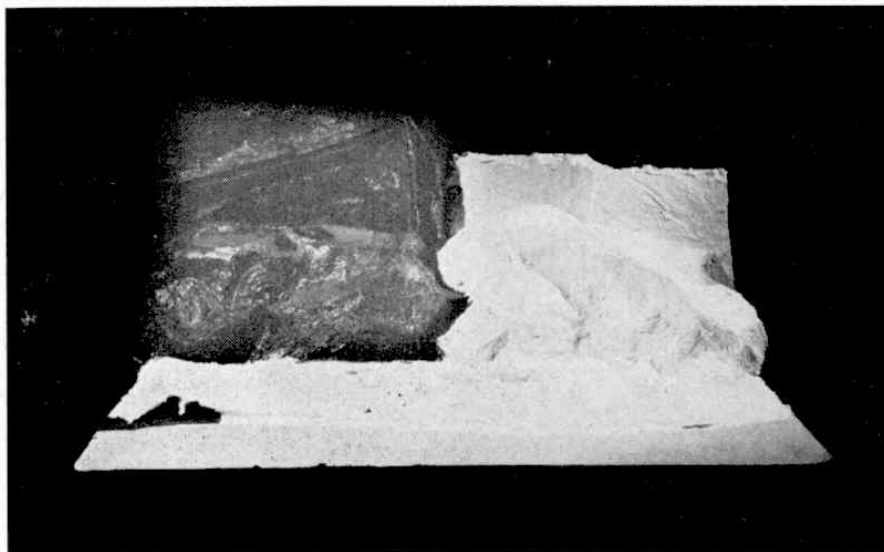
However, before getting down to work with the mixing bowl, a very rewarding bit of research had to be done regarding the actual scene of the action and just what took place. It is the former which concerns us here—the details of the scene of the fighting, in fact. For this, the most exhaustive study by Peter Green in ‘The Year of Salamis’ was the main source (a splendid book, this) and from this the basic facts emerged in this wise. Between the sea and the cliffs at the point where the fighting took place the level ground was no more than about twenty yards in width—ideal for defence, of course, and the cliffs rose almost sheer and quite unclimbable. Here and there were patches of scrub and similar vegetation. The path by which the Persians ultimately outflanked the stubborn Spartans lay some miles inland and has no part in our present reconstruction.

Now for the actual layout. It seemed that an area about three feet wide (as you look at the photographs) was about right, and the depth of two feet allowed the cliffs to be built up sufficiently spectacularly. The mechanics of construction are not all that difficult. The first step is to create the basic shape of what is desired by using fairly tightly rolled balls of newspaper placed on the base board, plus odd card boxes (no advertisement is intended). It might be found necessary to use smaller balls of paper to fill up crevices—it all gives in-



OPYLAE

reconstructs the
and discovers
new materials



creased strength, as well. Larger sheets of paper—again ordinary newspaper is perfectly O.K.—are now placed over the shape and stuck to the board at the edges with Dufix. The 'surface' sheets will be found to fall quite naturally into the sort of undulation required. 'Neat' Dufix is now brushed over the surface paper quite generously. When this dries—it does so quite 'clear'—the shape is already satisfactorily stiff. This first coat can itself be coloured in the appropriate hue but this was not necessary in this case as further layers were to be added. The next coat can be pigmented and now the mixture as desired—Dufix plus Dulite Filler—can be applied with a knife—an ordinary one from the kitchen—or a spatula. Failing all else fingers may be used. Already—as in Photograph 2—the shape can be seen quite clearly and it is upon this species of terrain skeleton that we begin to build up the more substantial article.

A point which might be made here is that normally the wargamer will require rather more stout terrain pieces than, say, the railway modeller whose aim is simply to make scenic background for his layout. The fact that more often than not the wargamer wants to manoeuvre his troops across his terrain will of course result in their having to be rather stronger. Even so, the Dufix/Dulite combination does not have to be more than an eighth of an inch thick—a quarter of an inch at the most—to take even a substantial weight of miniature soldiery.

To proceed, then. As the 'build-up' goes on, pigments can be added to the mixture before application, various shades of greens and browns, greys where the rocks emerge from the soil. Dufix indeed can be mixed with all the normal dioramic media, sawdust, cork dust, sand and so on, and any surface texture can be reproduced quite perfectly. With the knife or whatever device he is employing, the modeller can reproduce all sorts of surfaces—from a ploughed field to a modern lawn.

And so, from Photograph 3, wherein the scenic effect is just beginning to come through, we go on to Photograph 4, the complete 'Thermopylae'. In the foreground is the sea—or a small stretch of it—then the narrow area of flat land before the cliffs rise steeply and forbiddingly. Over them at various points patches of scrub and the occasional stunted tree have been added, and in the right foreground is the famous 'low wall' which played such a part in the battle. The whole affair does give a most realistic impression, it can be said without undue immodesty, and one can just imagine the Persian hordes surging up from the right in their attempt to sweep aside the gallant Spartans.

The final point to be made is the fact that these two I.C.I. products are a tremendous boon to the modeller. A messy sort of worker myself (you should see the table at which I paint my figures!) I found them quite the cleanest modelling substances I have come across. They wash off clothes perfectly easily while still wet.

You should use them for your battle terrain—how about the Pass of Roncevalles or the Heights of Abraham?

