ABOVE: Bob Letterman.

INSET RIGHT: ‘Quota’ is a 1:15 scale (120mm) boxed and lit diorama of a Krupp factory scene in Germany where 88mm guns are made.

BELOW: ‘Cocoon’ is a scene in a British dry dock during the Second World War and based on Swann Hunter’s shipyard in the North East of England. This is the Matchbox Flower Class corvette extensively modified and entirely rebuilt in some areas by Bob.
I can’t remember exactly when I first saw Bob Letterman and his models, but it was around the time he came across to England to enter the Model Engineer Exhibition at Wembley the same year I became Editor of Military Modelling magazine, and that was in 1979. The MEE in those days had quite a sizeable military modelling content with displays and a competition.

Since those early days I observed Bob’s progress in the model hobby business from his leaving the St Louis Police Department and setting up and developing the VLS Corporation with François Verlinden.

**Bob’s history**

Bob Letterman has been building models for 64 years – the first model when he was four years old. Bob served in the US Army 1958 – 62 and spent most of that overseas, beginning in Verdun in France. On discharge he became a police officer in Missouri, 1962 – 85, and was a detective in the St Louis Police when he decided he needed to get closer to his first love of model making and the model business. He began ‘Warwinds’ 1983–85 that became Verlinden Letterman & Stok 1985 – 95,

ABOVE: This is Legacies II ‘Twilight’: a scene in an occupied French city with a river running through ... it could be a corner of Paris!

BELOW: ‘Cocoon’ from seaward looking into the dock over the gates.
‘Masquerade’ is Bob’s interpretation of the German ‘Ersatz M10’ disguised Panthers, showing them being fitted out in winter conditions in the grounds of a chateau.

When Jos Stok sold his interest and the company became the VLS Corporation. François Verlinden moved Verlinden Productions to the USA from Belgium in 1996 and Letterman and Verlinden owned the business 50-50. Proceedings began in January 1998 to split the company, which took until April 1999, and Verlinden Productions went with François Verlinden and VLS Corporation went to Bob, who built a new facility to house the new Corporation at Moscow Mills near St Louis.

After the partners went their separate ways, Warriors and Custom Dioramics were acquired and Bob started up an additional 12 companies with the following brand names: Legends & Lore Techstar Trakz Wingz FANTA-Z 4 Star Tools 135º Construction Battalion Letterman Publications Streets of Laredo Lincoln County Line Legacy Distributing – the largest division of VLS Corp VLS Brushes VLS Mail Order

BELOW: Bob’s ‘museum’ has a lot of figures on display, painted by him and other modellers. This little group features actors with busts of Sean Connery, Humphrey Bogart and Bruce Willis as John McLain in ‘Die Hard’, posed with Napoleon and Josephine. Is that a Tartar at the back? Yul Brynner as Taras Bulba? Perhaps not!
‘Nest’ Channel Front 1940 is a busy diorama and illustrates the hectic advance of the Wehrmacht to the Channel ports. A Luftwaffe unit has taken over one of the many big chateaus as a servicing and repair depot for this Me 109, with support vehicles and a searchlight.
‘Lost Cause’ is a scene in Holland around about the time of the Arnhem offensive – Operation Market Garden. Bob has an interest in the latter part stages of the Second World War in Europe, probably stemming from his Army service there, and watching the film A Bridge Too Far more than once, which more than likely inspired this diorama of elements of XXX Corps at rest.
Bob went into partnership with Ralph Koebbeman who owns the largest collection of models in the United States. ‘Winds of War’ – Bob’s first diorama built in 1971 was subsequently sold to Mr Koebbeman in 1991, incidentally the only one ever sold. ‘Winds of War’ had originally been entered into an IPMS National Convention and within three months had featured in magazines in most countries and in the subsequent two years in competitions in Europe and America it won a total of 460 awards, 65 of which were best of show awards. Bob wound down entering competitions with his dioramas and other models in the early 1980s.

Bob entered some of the UK Model Engineer Exhibitions during 1979-86, where he won a Gold, two Silver awards and a...
A single-track railway line runs along the edge of ‘Logistics’ and Bob intends to display a locomotive there with perhaps a rail gun. The right side canopy has been twisted to represent bomb or shell damage and will be depicted collapsed on the locomotive.

Bronze award. He attended the first six Euro Militaires, but by this time he had stopped entering competitions.

In 2006 negotiations began for MMD to acquire VLS and all its subsidiaries – this was finalized in 2007 – while Susan and Bob stayed with the company for six months to oversee a move from St Louis Missouri to Dallas Texas at which time Bob and Susan finally retired.

In addition to vehicles and figures there are a lot of accessories to be built and fitted inside the building. This is the winding motor for the lift (elevator) in the department store, and the cast iron veranda with a canopy for the front aspect of the building.
A lot of water has passed under the bridge since those early days and before and after the sale of the VLS Corporation my wife and I have visited Bob and Susan at his home in Troy, Missouri where they now live with their dogs - *Evening Star* the Doberman and *Cagney* the Yorkshire Terrier, an unlikely and unequally sized, but friendly pair. We have seen a fair bit of the United States on road trips with Bob and Susan in their RV. Bob still makes models and, in fact, has ‘returned’ to his first love, of making big dioramas. The one he’s currently building is called *Logistics*, and he’s been working on that, on and off, for over 10 years, but since retirement he’s got back into the swing of things on a more permanent basis.

Last October we visited Bob and Susan and with the girls off on a shopping trip, I took a day out to photograph the progress on the big diorama, and some of the vehicles he’s building and converting towards the 100-

'Different locomotive kits were tried for the layout, finding some didn’t come up to scratch, Bob settled on the Trumpeter kriegslokotive, to which he’s added quite a bit of detail.'
odd he says he’ll need to fit into the scenario. The streets of the diorama will be clogged with vehicles, depicting a traffic jam of the ‘Red Ball Express’ in a German town in 1945, being sorted out by none other than General Patton stood on the top of a 40 gallon oil drum! Bob reckons he will also need around 300 1:35 scale figures to adequately populate ‘Logistics’, after he’s finished the vehicles!

During the photo session in Bob’s ‘back yard museum’, I took the opportunity to photograph a cross section of what’s on...
The ‘museum’ was built to display some of his earlier work in dioramas and all sorts of different models, in addition to more models and dioramas by other modellers accrued over the years, plus assorted items of militaria. Fortunately, Bob has a good ‘photo-library’ of his works on file, which he let me dip into and gather some extra material that will show his earlier work prior to ‘Logistics’, and also a chance to see some of these big models out of their protective glass museum type display cases.

As work progresses on Bob’s ‘Logistics’, we’ll keep you updated with the news about it here in Mil Mod.