

# THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

## Random Modelling Notes

### BOX OF TOOLS

(where do we put the tools we use)

(May 2001)

This month one of my tools has let me down so I haven't completed a model. My compressor has finally decided that compressing air is just asking too much of it and can't be bothered any more. It sits there going chug-chug-chug as usual, but only a little air comes out. I will attend to the problem in due course, but for the moment my model making has come to a halt.

I recall the days when I used to hand paint models and perhaps I could still do that if I were really careful about it. But I don't really need my air brush for that just now, I need it to put on the light grey coat to make sure that all the gaps and other blemishes are fixed before the painting proper begins, and my experience is that only an air brushed coat of light grey (I traditionally use Model master FS36644, mainly because I usually have a few bottles of in on hand) shows up all the little flaws in a way that a hand brushed coat of paint doesn't.

So, instead of writing about my most recently completed model I thought I'd do something different, something that you will hopefully find interesting. It comes out of a thought that occurred to me only the other day when another of my tools, a little engineering scriber that I bought at Model Dockyard back in the days when such a place existed, finally gave up the ghost and fell to bits. I must have bought it back in the second half of the 1960s and it is something I have come to take for granted.

I realized that I have a great many tools in my tool box that I bought years and years ago so that I now have just about all the tools that suit me for making models. I guess that over time we all build up a collection of tools and that, also over time, the ones that we find the most useful sort of rise to the top and get used more often while many others that we've bought but never seemed to do what we hoped sort of sank to the bottom of our modelling experience to be forgotten. Taking a look into my tool box I realized that I have a lot of old friends there that I've had for years, tools that suit me just fine and I would be lost without. If I somehow lost my tool box it would probably take me ten years of more to build up another collection of tools that I feel so comfortable with. So let me talk about some of my old friends and perhaps a few other tools that are still in my box even though they don't get used very much.

#### **The Box**

I can't recall when I started putting my paint brushes, modelling knife and other bits and pieces in one place. I probably used an old kit box or two, no doubt we all did. Around about the time Valma and I moved to Canberra in 1980 I began making boxes to put my models in to protect them when we moved and also discovered that the same technique was good for making all sorts of purpose build boxes with partitions and all kinds of thing to hold a whole range of bits and pieces. By the time we got to Perth in 1988 I had made myself a few little odd looking little boxes that held things like paint brushes, files, knives, pins, tiny drills so they were easy to reach.

However, by about the middle of the 1990s I had discovered that these boxes were an open

invitation to Charlie the Wonder Kat to push things around to suit himself and that dust and other gunge collected in them far too readily: There was also another thing in Perth, in the afternoon the Fremantle Doctor came in and it was much more pleasant to go outside than stay inside and picking up all my boxes of tools became a real hassle. Somebody mentioned that they put all kinds of junk in a fishing box and when we were in K-Mart one day I had a look at one to see what it would be like. I wasn't sure if a box like that was such a good idea so I bought a cheap one and tried it, within a week I was convinced.

For the first time all my tools were in one place and with three trays folding out at the top most of them were easy to reach - perhaps not as easy to reach as they had been in purpose made boxes but good enough. The real advantages were that when I shut the box the cat was kept out and so was the gunge. On the other hand, after a couple of months the box started to fall to bits so I went to K-Mart again and bought a sturdier one that cost about twice as much and has lasted much longer again. If I had thought about it I might have gone to a real fishing shop to look at some 'real' fishing boxes, perhaps I'll do that if and when my current box wears out.

I'd recommend a fishing box to any modeller, especially any who has a kitten move in with them who doesn't know how to keep her paws to herself. When I went looking at boxes the mid price ones (\$30-\$50) came with three trays at the top that folded out, each one with some partitioning moulded in and a few blank partitions to put in to suit individual tastes. It took me a while to find out what suited me best and it is now organized so the tools I use most often are easiest to reach. The bottom of the box is usually a large empty area where you can put all kinds of things that are too big to fit into the trays.

For a long time I let all the stuff just rattle around in there but eventually I got sick of not being able to find what I wanted when I needed it so I spent some time and superglue making up partitions to keep things organized in there. Again it was a matter of figuring out what I used more often and making sure it was the easiest to reach.

### **Toothpicks**

If you are right handed like me and reach into my toolbox the first thing you will naturally find under your fingers is two (not one but two) partitioned areas of toothpicks. I don't know how anyone can make models without these handy, multi-purpose disposable tools. I use them for all kinds of things; applying filler, applying glue, applying masking agent, stirring paint, and so on and so on. The ones I use are the cheap ones that you buy in the supermarket, not the smooth round ones that look like they've come out of a lathe (though I can see how they might be useful when it comes to painting wheels) but the really cheap ones that are like little splints of wood. That's because they are so cheap that I don't mind tossing them out after using them for a second or two but also because being thinner at one end than the other they arc easier to hold and the flat end acts like a blade when applying filler so they become a little spatula.

I don't know about you, but when I look back on my modelling I realize that I've gradually developed techniques that suit the way I like to work and the tools that I have. These days I use toothpicks to hold all the little loose bits that will go onto a completed model but can't be attached until the painting and decalling is finished, things like undercarriage wheels and doors, propellers, and underwing armaments. With a little dab of superglue I lightly glue the part to the toothpick in a place where it will not be visible on the completed model (where the undercarriage door will be stuck to the completed model for example) and then each little part has a handle that I can hold while I'm painting and which will make it easier to see when the part jumps onto the floor as so many of them like to do (they do that to you too?).

Being disposable, toothpicks are very useful for doing things like putting a little dab of superglue exactly where it is supposed to go and then disappearing into the bin. They are good for mixing up a little batch of two-part epoxy glue and then disappearing when the glue has set. For years I used a paint brush to put Maskol on my cockpit canopies until one day it occurred to me that the stuff is so thick that it would be just as easy to apply it with something like a toothpick, and then I wouldn't have to spend aeons trying to get the brush cleaned properly. It works like a charm.

Hmmmm... I don't seem to have got very far, do I? Perhaps I'll continue this voyage through my tool box the next time I don't get a model finished by the time of the club meeting.

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