

FRENCH ARMY



As the German war machine started to threaten the fragile peace of Europe, France began to build up its armed forces. It recruited tens of thousands of new soldiers, and transferred tens of thousands more from its African Army - Senegalese Tirailleurs, Moroccan Goumiers, and French Foreign Legion units to name a few. Their armoured elements consisted of a mix of out-dated WWI relics and the latest in tank technology. As the war in the West started, the French were as well equipped as the Germans, but they were out-smarted by a new form of warfare - the blitzkrieg - and their fighting forces had to spend most of the war outside of France.

This Painting Guide will provide you with a step-by-step guide to painting the basic infantryman of the French Army and arguably the best tank available to any army during the early stages of the war - the Somua S35. These models are painted for the early war period, as the forces still in the fight against Germany after the French surrender were supplied by Britain and later the U.S.

Following the step-by-step painting guides, you'll find a collection of other units from the French forces that display the variety of painting possibilities when collecting these models.



There are many paint ranges available for painting up your miniatures, and it doesn't really matter which paints you use. That's completely up to you. We used a variety of paints in preparing this guide, and named them with abbreviations.

These can be deciphered below:

VMC = Vallejo Model Color

AP = Army Painter



PAINTING YOUR FRENCH INFANTRY

1



The first step is always to prepare your models for painting. After assembling a squad of five models, we applied a layer of fine basing grit and let the glue dry.

Many people undercoat their models with black or white sprays. We chose to spray each model with AP Uniform Grey spray as sometimes a black undercoat can mean you have to apply multiple coats of your other paints, and white can leave the colours a bit too bright for the muted uniform colours of WWII.

2



The next step includes painting the basecoats over the largest areas. We started with VMC Green Brown over the uniform greatcoat, trousers, and puttees. This was followed by VMC Olive Grey for the helmet. We then painted the face and hands with AP Tanned Flesh, a good base colour for Caucasian skin. Then we moved on to the wooden stock of the rifle and painted it with VMC Beige Brown.

3



The next step was to paint the backpack with VMC German Camo Orange Ochre, and the webbing with VMC German Camo Beige. The leather trim and webbing was painted with VMC Red Leather and the shoes with VMC Chocolate Brown.

If you are painting a lot of models at once and are on a tight timeframe, you might also choose to paint the black and silver areas (covered in Steps 7 & 8).

4



We followed up Step 3 by painting a layer of AP Strong Tone Wash over the entire model and let it dry thoroughly.

If you are painting a lot of models at once and chose to paint the black and silver areas before the wash, you could finish your painting here, although your models would look quite dark and not quite as nice as they could if you decided to push on.

5



While the wash adds great shadows to your model, to make it really pop you need to go back and add some highlights. We started by highlighting the uniform greatcoat, trousers, and puttees with VMC Green Brown, then the helmet with VMC Olive Grey. The light webbing was highlighted with VMC German Camo Beige, and the skin was highlighted with a 50/50 mix of AP Tanned Flesh/VMC Basic Skintone.

6



In order to help it stand out a little more from the equipment, the uniform was highlighted again with a 50/50 mix of VMC Green Brown/VMC Dark Sand. The backpack was highlighted with VMC German Camo Orange Ochre, and the leather was highlighted with VMC Red Leather. Finally, the skin was highlighted with VMC Basic Skintone.

7



For the next stage of highlighting, we gave the leather one more layer with a 50/50 mix of VMC Red Leather/VMC Pale Sand. We then painted the metal areas with AP Matt Black, for a well-defined look.

8



The next step was to paint all the metal areas with AP Gun Metal. The rifle stock was given a quick highlight with VMC Beige Brown.

OFFICERS



When painting your French officers, you can start by using the same colours for the uniform jacket. As you can see in the photo above, these officers both wear lighter coloured trousers. You can achieve this by either starting with VMC Dark Sand and highlight by adding VMC White (much like the model on the left) or by adding VMC Pale Sand to the base uniform colour (like the model on the right).

COLONIAL TROOPS



Immediately prior to the outbreak of World War Two, the French bolstered their domestic forces by bringing in units from their African Army - troops from the various French colonies in Africa. The Senegalese Tirailleurs (shown above) wear the same uniforms as the French section we painted. Their skin can be painted with VMC German Camo Black Brown, and the fez with VMC Flat Red.

BASING



Basing is the thing that really helps tie your army together. There are many, many ways you can do your basing, depending on where you want your troops to be fighting, and what your gaming table looks like. For our purposes, we painted the base completely

with VMC German Camo Brown-Black, drybrushed the grit and painted the edge with VMC Beige Brown, drybrushed again with VMC Dark Sand, and then glued down different flocking materials to give a variety of colours and textures.

THE COMPLETED FRENCH INFANTRY SECTION



This completed French Regular Infantry Section (using the squad listing on page 13 of Armies of France and the Allies), has the minimum five men, including an NCO with a rifle.

VARIANTS OF FRENCH UNIFORMS

► The HQ Section is painted in much the same way as the regular infantry, with each member getting some special treatment. The forward observer has a radio to call in targets, while the officer has lighter trousers and a colorful cap to denote his rank and unit. The junior officer with the submachine gun has some additional magazine pouches, and the medic replaces his backpack with a satchel full of medical supplies.



◀ Recruited from France's sub-Saharan territories, these "Senegalese" Tirailleurs were clothed and equipped much as the domestic French infantry units. The exception was the distinctive red fez, the yellow trim on their collars and cuffs and their deadly coup-coup fighting knives.

► For close to four years, the key opposition to the Germans occupying France was the French Resistance. These partisans work very well to represent the rag-tag civilian force that was a thorn in the side of the Third Reich. Everyday clothes combined with scavenged equipment provide a classic look.



◀ These French tankers have been painted up to show off their blue uniform shirt, tan uniform trousers, brown leather coats, and distinctive leather helmets.

PAINING YOUR FRENCH TANKS



1 Much like the infantry, once the tank was assembled we undercoated it with AP Uniform Grey. Once the undercoat was dry, we used a large brush to apply the basecoat - VMC Cruiser Tank Green. We thinned the paint a little to ensure it went on smoothly, and so had to apply two coats for a solid coverage. If you have an airbrush and are painting quite a few vehicles, you could spray on your basecoat.

2 The next step was to add some depth to the base green colour. We gave the Somua a wash of AP Strong Tone and let it dry thoroughly before coming back with a drybrush of VMC Cruiser Tank Green.



3 Our next step was to paint on VMC Flat Earth to serve as the basis for the brown and yellow camouflage patches on the tank. This was applied in two thin coats.



4 Yellows can be difficult to paint over dark colours, so we used some of the lighter brown patches as the base for our VMC Tan Yellow patches. Much like the brown, these patches were applied in two coats for a solid coverage.



5 The brown and yellow patches were looking a little flat, so we decided to hit them with a wash of AP Strong Tone. This gave us a lot of depth, particularly around the details and hatches.





7 For this French tank we chose this stage to affix the decals to ensure that any weathering we applied would be applied to the decals too.

When you are applying decals to complex rounded surfaces - like the top of the turret on this Somua, for example - we recommend you use a decal softener (such as Micro Sol).

6 Once the wash was completely dry, we felt that some of the brown and yellow areas were too dark (a side effect of the wash) so we went back and highlighted them with VMC Flat Earth and VMC Tan Yellow. We then went with an approach used on quite a number of French tanks - we outlined the camo patches with AP Matt Black.



8 The next step was to apply a bit of 'chipping' - areas where the paint has been scratched or worn off and reveals the original primer coat underneath. For this we simply sponged on VMC Hull Red using a folded piece of sponge from a Warlord Games blister pack. Be careful to apply the chipping in areas that would see the most wear and tear. Of course, if you want your tanks to be factory-fresh, you can skip this step.

9 The next step was to paint the tracks with AP Matt Black. We then drybrushed them with VMC Dark Grey. At this point we also decided to pick out the white spade decal with a thin black line, to help it pop against the tank.



THE COMPLETED SOMUA S35

And finally...

To give it the 'slogging around Europe, seeing lots of action' look we drybrushed a mixture of browns onto the tracks and undercarriage of the tank, simulating a coating of mud and dust. We also painted the tank commander to match the crew found in the French Uniforms section.



VARIANTS OF FRENCH ARMOUR



◀Originally developed in the 1920s, the AMC Schneider P16 Half-track was nearing the end of its service life when the war broke out. Used in armoured recon units, this half-track has a simple “green with brown patches” camo scheme, helpful for hiding away on the edge of forested areas.



▶The most numerous tank in French service, the Renault R35 (a two-man tank) carried a low-velocity 37mm gun designed during World War One. The camouflage scheme shown here is a simpler version of the one we painted on our tank -just the green and tan/yellow areas separated with thin black lines.



◀This Lorraine 38 armoured personnel carrier uses a similar camouflage scheme to the Renault R35 above. However, instead of using black lines to separate the patches, it uses off-white lines which give a completely fresh look.

▶Despite being considerably larger, the Char B1 bis used the same small turret as the Somua S35, meaning the commander was overworked. This tank has been painted with a very simple scheme, tan/yellow stripes sprayed over a green basecoat.



▼The mammoth Char 2C was a throwback to the final days of World War One. This tank (the largest to ever see service) was originally conceived as a line breaker and was served by a crew of 12. This particular tank sports no camouflage of any kind, perhaps because it's quite difficult to conceal its massive bulk.

