Civil War Diorama

There are five basic steps to building a civil war diorama - the plan, the base, the frame, the contour materials, and the finishing materials. All of these should be thought out before hand, and the necessary materials assembled before construction begins.

The planning stage is the most important step, but it is one most often skipped or ignored. Before beginning the plan it's necessary to understand exactly what you want the diorama to include and the story you want to tell. Draw a list of the items needed on the diorama. The plan can be as simple as a pencil sketch on paper. It should show all the major features of the finished diorama.

The best material to use for the diorama base is styrofoam. It is lightweight and easy to cut or carve. Styrofoam is available in a variety of different thicknesses.

The frame's purpose is to provide an attractive edging material for the sides of the diorama. It should be at least 1/4" wider than the base material is thick. It is glued on before the contour material is applied. This is so you have something to butt the contour material against to provide a nice, finished edge. The frame can be wood, metal, or any other suitable material. Balsa works well, as it cuts easily, and adheres to Styrofoam with glue well.

This photo shows a 1/4 inch styrofoam sheet and a framing kit. Use white glue to glue the frame to the styrofoam base. The next step is to draw the plan on the base. Using a pencil or marker, roughly draw in the desired features - hills, water...
ways, etc. If a pond or stream is to be part of the scene, and you are using Styrofoam, the depression can be cut out with a hobby knife. Since this is to be a civil war diorama, the soldiers and cannon are laid out approximately as they are to be in the diorama, a marker is used to draw in the major features. The pieces are then withdrawn and the features labeled.

Now you are ready to form the **contour** of the diorama. You will need newspaper and duct or masking tape. Wad the newspaper up in balls and place in the spots on the base where you want hills. The newspaper can be twisted and roughly formed into shapes to form long, curved hills or embankments. Secure the paper with the tape, using it to form and hold the paper wads in place.

Paper Mache is then laid over the forms. Tear the newspaper into strips -- do not cut it! Be generous when dipping the newspaper strips into the paste -- you want each piece thoroughly saturated! Let each layer dry completely before adding another. Mix one part flour with about 2 parts of water until you get a consistency like thick glue. Add more water or flour as necessary. Mix well to get out all the bumps. Add a few tablespoons of salt to help prevent mold!

You are now ready to paint the terrain. Using any acrylic earth colored craft paint diluting 50% with water; paint the entire terrain of the developing diorama. The paint color doesn't need to be consistent over the whole surface, variations in color intensity will add to the realism.
The next step is to paint the terrain. Several different colors and textures will add more realism to your diorama. Soil colored ones in trenches and other earth works, green types for field areas, burnt grass colors add realism to hillsides and waste areas.

Now for the finishing touches. Lichen moss and trees strategically placed add realism to a diorama. Use lichen to cover flaws, holes, hide cannon, sharpshooters. Add a generous glob of glue where ever you want some lichen. Tear off a hunk and place it in the glue. Continue until the diorama looks the way you want it. The lichen is available in various colors to suit your needs..

Now you can add the civil war soldiers and cannon back in, placing them as desired. as you can see a pretty realistic model of a civil war battle scene can be constructed in a couple of hours time.