FINISHING TREES
From The Diorama "Very Fortunate Son"

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The trees used are Verlinden 078 palm trees and flexible plastic trees which are used on model railroads. There are other types that can be used, but some are very expensive and do not really resemble the type found in this region of Vietnam. As an alternative you can make your own from scratch. The trunks can be made from epoxy and there are a few different types of palm leaves available that would fit this region. Don't use palm trees that look more like date trees from North Africa.

The soft palm trees are available directly from China through ebay. There are several types. The palm fronds may look the same but the trunks are different. You need to buy a few different types. They come in different heights – try to get the 8 inch high ones. The prices go from 4.99 to about 9.99 for 8 to 10 trees including postage. Verlinden 078 is now discontinued. We are in the process of sculpting our own palm trunks in various heights and types.

Picture number 11 above shows one type of trunk. These stand about 7.5 inches high. The palm fronds are removable by pulling up gently. The palm leaf bunches can be reshaped by holding them under hot water. The trunks can be bent and shaped by holding a hairdryer on them in one spot. After it heats for a minute,bend it slightly pulling away from the heat, hold it in position until it cools, about a minute. These trunks can be cut and extended. Cut it, drill a hole in each cut side the size to fit a paper clip. Glue in the rod the size you want to extend it to, glue the rod ends with instant glue and use two part epoxy putty to make the trunk.

Photo 10 shows the palms separated from the trunks. The trunks usually have a flash seam running down the side, find one and the other will be directly opposite. This can be removed by scraping backwards with a number 11 knife blade and small medium files. Once this is done, prime the TRUNKS ONLY with an acrylic white primer such as Scale 75. DO NOT prime the leaves.
These trees have long pegs at the base and can be left on, so a suitable hole can be drilled in the base.

Once the primer has dried, the trunks can be painted with with a suitable brown color. When painting multiple trees and different types of trunks, use different shades of brown. It's best to use pure polymer acrylics or vinyl based acrylics. Craftsmart, Plaid etc from art stores or Vallejo, Scale 75 or Andrea can also be used. Add your shading and highlights by dry brushing when the brown base coat is dry. If the trunks don't cover evenly with the paint, don't worry about it. Palm tree trunks are not perfect in reality.

Now, the palm leaves. They have a semi-gloss shine to them which you want to dull down as much as possible. Install the leaf bunches on the top post, adjusting them so they look right. Use one or two drops of instant glue to hold them. Let it run in the center of the post up and down. No more then two drops or it will run onto you fingers and the trunk. It will set up in a minute. Use a good glue such as Loctite Professional.

The base coat for the leaves should be a PURE Olive Green. Concentrate on painting the tops and as much as the bottoms as you can. The bottoms will always be darker, since they are away from the sun. Also you won't be able to see that much of them. A few darker semi gloss parts don't matter very much. This is jungle with high heat, 100% humidity and in the middle of monsoon season, everything is wet. Let the base coat of olive green dry hard, overnight.

In photo 7 you can see the darker green, this is the pure olive green. Once dry use a light olive green on the leaves, not in the centers or by the trunk. Uneven dry or semi dry brushing is best. After this has dried take a mid yellow, close to a mustard color, like Japanese Khaki and start applying this to the leaf ends. Don't do this evenly. Wherever it lands, it lands. Do all the palm fronds that are visible or where the sun would hit. Let this dry, then do it again in some spots with a lighter shade of this yellow.

The final step is use a Burnt Sienna color on some of the most exposed leaves. Don't overdue this. Put a drop of whit glue in the center of the top of the tree where all the leaves meet. Put some burned or dead static grass on this drop of glue. Touch up your leaves as necessary and the trunk which probably will have some olive green on it. Dry brush the trunk again with a lighter shade of brown. The picture above shows a pallet of the colors you will use.
DO NOT USE OLIVE DRAB ON THE LEAVES.

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Completed palm trees. Two different types are shown.
Color shading is visible in the leaves and trunks.

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Verlinden palm tree trunks are good for a generic palm tree. Trunks are resin and can be easily bent under hot water or hot air from a dryer.
On the top of the tree are small marking holes that you can follow for drilling holes. Don't use a bit larger then 75. If you use all the leaves you will need to make about 16 of them. Don't drill the holes more then 3/32 deep or the instant glue will run through all of them as they connect. Some should be drilled on a slight upward angle.

The palm leaves are cut from the sprue with wire cutters by hand. Watch your fingers. Don't use a motor tool unless you really know how to do this and have 100% control. If the cutoff wheel, even at low speed, snags in the sprue or another leaf, it will twirl the entire etched brass sheet at thousands of rpm. This will do some serious damage to your fingers. Eye protection must be worn when doing this by hand or machine. Use only approved wrap around impact resistant glasses.

Once the leaves are removed, trim them for excess brass and holding them carefully slightly bend them down over your finger. Slightly bent the palm leaf ends down from front to back. In the photo above # 5, you can see this.

Now take 5 strand copper grounding wire, untwist it into 5 individual pieces. It should be about 6 inches long. Cut 1.5 to 1.75 in lengths. With instant glue, lay these on the center underside spine of the palm leaf.

Use a wooden pointed toothpick to hold them down and keep them straight. Once they have set, trim the wire off to about 3/32 of an inch

Starting at the top holes place a small drop of glue in the first hole. Insert the exposed wire on the leaf, holding the leaf as not to bend or break the wire loose. Start with the top holes and start with the largest leaves. Look at a picture of a palm tree of this type. All the holes will need to have leaves added. The size can be random. You will need extreme patience to do this.

If you have not done so already, drill a paperclip size hole in the bottom of the tree trunk to hold it in the base. The picture below shows what it looks like from underneath. The copper wire looks and feels flimsy, but it is fairly strong once in place. If you look at the diorama "Run", the C heli is supported on a Verlinden tree and sometimes rests on these leaves. Once this is dry, you can spray prime this with something like Model Master White Primer, let it dry for at least 2 days, then paint it like the plastic trees were painted.

Decide where you want your trees in the diorama and drill appropriate holes in the groundwork. Test fit and check the appearance. DO NOT glue them in place at this point. Now you can remove them and start building your jungle from trees, bushes, leaves, vines etc. Many of these will need small holes drilled. Fix these in position. After everything is in place then go back an glue in the trees. If you fix the trees first, you will never be able to drill the other holes without encountering tree damage. When the trees are planted DO NOT PLANT THEM ALL STRAIGHT. Look at the diorama "10 Minutes". The palm tree in the back that is leaning at a 45 degree angle, makes the visual effect of the scene.

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