Diorama of 1917 army locomotive

This document was written by Dr John Sayer and was originally published by Worthing and District SME in their newsletter in the Summer of 2010.

In April [2010] Dr. John Sayer was awarded the Town Challenge Cup for "The Best Exhibit in the Exhibition". Here are a few details to illustrate the meticulous planning and amazing attention to detail that went into the production of his diorama.

Above and below: Sapper Smith struggles with one of the heavy cast iron re-railing ramps carried on the rear of the bunker. John describes the fabrication of this little item as one of his most difficult tasks!

Dr. John describes his exhibit…

American Locomotive Company's 2-6-2T number 1227, one of a hundred purchased by the British army for service during the First World War, in the charge of Sapper Smith RE and Sapper Jones RE (driver) was pulling three bogie trucks of ammunition and stores up to the rear trenches about four miles behind the Front Line in Autumn 1917.

The 31st. Light Railway Operating Co., RE., have laid this line, with others, radiating from Arras in Northern France during a static phase of the war. These narrow gauge lines were laid to bring up supplies to our troops in an area of poor muddy roads, and before lorries were fully developed. The trains ran at night in total blackout as German air attacks and artillery fire made movement by day unwise.

The engine crew have a problem. A German shell has broken the track and the distortion has caused derailment of the front wheels of the engine. Can she be re-railed using wood packing and re-railing ramps? Sapper Jones is kneeling find out, while Sapper Smith retrieves the re-railing ramp from the tender. They have their rifles and gas masks with them but like all RE's they are very reluctant to wear their steel helmets even when at risk from shelling.

Above and below: Sapper Jones assesses the damage.

(Together with his mate, he had earlier undergone major surgery at the hands of Dr. John in order to make him 'scale' height!)

Below: At left is the water lifting hose and filter…traction engine style. Even a flooded shell-hole can get you out of trouble when you are on the bottom nut! (Gas masks in the knapsack?)

The engine has been propped up with substantial wooden shores because there is a risk of it toppling right over onto its side making recovery much more difficult. Water from the upper tank can transfer to the lower via a balancing pipe and cause a capsize. Clearly the crew need assistance. Someone- (toss for it?) -is going to have to walk two miles to the nearest control point in the rear to telephone the Light Railway Depot to seek assistance from the breakdown gang.

Above and below: Happily, Jones finds no serious damage to the motion work. (However, the real reason for these two photos is for me to show Dr. John's workmanship to better advantage.)