

Military Base Layout

Every 3-rail rollingstock manufacturer has made some sort of military train car or load, and these are actually quite popular collectibles with model railroaders. Rare is the layout that hasn't occasionally featured a long through freight moving a string of military vehicles and other government cargo.

For all this though, hardly anyone has built a modern fixed military base, and only a small portion of those depict the home base in a time of peace. Yet peacetime bases are major destinations for cargo. Soldiers have to eat. Equipment needs repair parts. Tracked vehicles need to be moved to other bases for training exercises. Loads just don't sit parked on flatcars either. Those tanks and trucks need to be expeditiously loaded and unloaded.

This layout attempts to correct this omission. Being extremely compact, this layout is intended to function more as an adjunct to a regular layout, but it could also be incorporated as the core of an entire military layout. Track should be extended from the left of the lead switch to connect with the regular layout. However, you could instead just make this a single thirty inches or longer staging track, to create a fun little micro-layout. To make the layout feel like a military base and not an industry, decorate the layout rear left with suggestive scenery.

The first spur is the warehouse track. Boxcars and reefers of food and repair parts will be delivered here to keep the base running. Warehouses on military bases are quite large and therefore huge space wasters on a layout, so only a small unloading platform is modeled. The warehouse itself is imagined to be immediately off the layout front. As the unloading platform is at boxcar door height, this platform can also be used to carry-in convoy cargo onto boxcars. A magnet track serves to active Lionel-type "action" cars. Bags toss forwards and helium tanks dump rearwards. For flexibility this track was made long enough to accommodate two passenger cars, so it is feasible to temporarily slip troop passenger cars onto this spur during a convoy train assembly.

The next spur, that splits off towards the back of the layout, is the storage track. This is quite literally a track for parking military rollingstock, including already loaded cars awaiting deployment, and weapon platform cars. This track is long enough to accommodate four troop cars. Paralleling the track is a compacted-ground access path, so soldiers can easily inspect and maintain the parked cars.

Next is the heart of the layout. This is where those long convoy trains are assembled and disassembled. Extending forward of the turnout is a track that is normally used to spot cars in preparation for loading or unloading. The switcher will first put all the convoy flatcars here, and then individual cars will be shifted to and from the twin loading tracks. The very end of this track is used for gravity-unloading a fuel tank car into a fuel pipe system. Three troop cars can be loaded here, with soldiers boarding from the storage track's access path.

A turnout at the head of the assembly track leads to a pair of loading tracks. The ramp itself is a concrete monolith spanning the width of the ends of both tracks, and its height is the same as the deck height of a flatcar (the cars coupler slips under the lip of the ramp). Leading from this structure is a slowly descending mound of compacted earth, stable enough to hold the weight of a tank. Each ramp track is very short, being able to accommodate only one flatcar. This is because tracked vehicles such as tanks have to be loaded "circus style", but they can not traverse more than one flatcar. While one track is being used to bring forward, load, and tiedown a vehicle, the switcher will move an empty car to the other track. It will then take away the filled flatcar, and the process will repeat, alternating from track to track. This is a very efficient way to get vehicles on and off in short period of time, especially if the soldiers are amateur dockworkers.

The ramp track closest to the front of the layout has paving along its layout front side, and this is where a forklift or crane truck can load cargo onto the sides of rollingstock. This often includes ammunition, and it is assumed the ammo dumps are somewhere unseen off the front of the layout. In modern times a lot of support gear is pre-packed in large crates for gondola transport, which can also be loaded here. It is assumed that much of the flatcar cargo will be hand loaded/unloaded by the modeler using their real hands. For convenience, this cargo can be stored on a small shelf under the front of the layout.