

# framing a WWII nurse's uniform

by Anne Vazquez

Looking for a way to frame oversized garments and other textiles that customers bring to your shop? There are a number of things to consider—mounting to support the weight of the item, framing to showcase as much of the piece as possible, and protecting the item through any desired preservation measures. And what if, as we see so often today, the customer wants to include memorabilia related to the textile? The piece shown here presented these issues to the design team, which addressed them with several approaches.

The piece being framed was a Red Cross nurse's uniform jacket worn during World War II. The owner also had several pieces of memorabilia to accompany her mother's uniform. These included: three photos (one original and two reproductions); an original Red Cross Chicago chapter membership card; and a certificate of appreciation, also an original. In designing the piece, it was decided to create a separate "frame within a frame" to house these items.

The process began by deciding on the layout of the components. Would the smaller frame rest on the left or right side of the uniform? Would the arms both be extended, or one folded? As you can see from the photo here, the decision was made to mount the inner frame on the right side of the design, in front of where the uniform's arm would be folded up.

It was determined early on that the uniform would be housed in an acrylic box, rather than a deep shadowbox moulding. The fact that the coat would be hanging, rather than mounted to the backing board, caused the designers to focus on maximizing the dimensionality of the design. The acrylic box enables the viewer to see the items from



the sides, as well as the front.

The box, measuring 34"x46½", was constructed at Gemini Moulding/Showcase Acrylics using CYRO Industries' ACRYLITE® acrylic sheet. With preservation in mind, UV-filtering acrylic was used. The face of the box has a thickness of



Photo 1: The design team at Gemini Moulding, which included Barbara Schiller and Nancy Fitzsimmons, first decided upon the layout and frame design.



Photo 2: An acrylic hanger and foamboard were inserted inside the uniform.



Photos 3 and 4: Foamboard inserts were also created to give shape to the arms of the garment.



Photo 5: A smaller, cross-shaped frame was designed to go inside the larger acrylic box. Crescent Jewel Blue Linen and Miller Ultimat All American Red was used.



Photo 6: Photos and certificates belonging to the wearer of the uniform were mounted in the frame.



Photo 7: The items in the smaller frame were float mounted using acrylic blocks. The U-shaped structure that supported the cross-shaped frame was attached to the backing board.

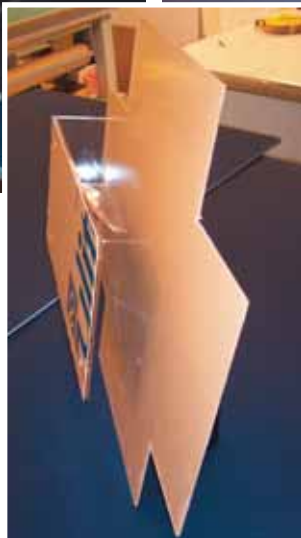


Photo 9: Framer Eric Pertl cleans the acrylic box before inserting the contents.

Photo 8: This acrylic U-shaped construction was used to support the cross-shaped frame, and float it toward the face of the larger acrylic box.

$\frac{3}{16}$ " and the sides utilize sheet measuring  $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. Noting the two thicknesses, Don Berg, vice president, Gemini Moulding, says, "When we bevel the edges of the box, we like to use  $\frac{1}{4}$ " on the sides because you get the full effect of the bevel."

Robert Sullivan, product manager/continuously manufactured sheet at CYRO, also notes, "The thickness of  $\frac{3}{16}$ " for the face was likely used because of the overall size of the front piece. That size in a  $\frac{1}{8}$ " thickness could possibly have some bowing. Acrylic is not as rigid as glass, and larger pieces should be sized to maintain rigidity and structural integrity."

The garment weighs about three pounds, and it was decided that it would be mounted by hanging it onto an acrylic hanger. The hanger was created with  $\frac{3}{8}$ " thick acrylic sheet attached to a clear rod, 1" in diameter (see Photo 2). This was a time-saving alternative to stitching the garment to the backing board, or other mounting methods. It also allowed the garment to remain free-hanging for a more natural look.

To retain the shape of the coat, acid-free foamboard was used to create a "form" for the inside. The form for the body of the coat was attached to the hanger construction with clear, strong tape. Inserts were also created for the arms of the garment (see Photos 3 and 4).

A white shirt and a tie that matched the era of the uniform were included to complete the construction. However, the portion of these two items that would not be visible were cut to avoid unnecessary bulk. The front and shoulder of the shirt were kept

# Making the Acrylic Box

*Shown here are some highlights of the fabrication of the acrylic box, as done by fabricator, Bruce Reed and finisher, Bob Williams. To see a detailed process of how the box was constructed, go to the "Latest Issue" section of the PFM website.*



Photo A: The acrylic sheet is cut to size for the framing project.



Photo B: Each piece is run through an edge finisher. This prepares for gluing.



Photo C: The paper mask on the acrylic is peeled back 1" and the gluing process begins.



Photo D: The face and sides of the acrylic box have been glued and are clamped.



Photo E: The edges are taped next to the glued seams. Then routed with a bevel router bit.



Photo F: The edges of the acrylic box is then sanded with an Orbital air sander.



Photo G: More sanding is done with finer grit sandpaper.



Photo H: The box is then buffed and polished on all the seams.



Photo I: At the bottom of this photo is shown the  $\frac{1}{4}$ "x $\frac{1}{4}$ " strip of acrylic that was glued all around the rear perimeter to fit into the rabbet of the chosen moulding.

intact. (The shirt and tie were not heirlooms; they were purchased for the frame job.)

Since the right cuff of the garment was missing a button, the designers had decided to fold up the arm a bit to detract from its absence. After inserting the hanger and foamboard support inside the uniform, the right arm was folded slightly and stitched in place through the foamboard.

## Focal Points

The task of arranging and displaying the accompanying photos and certificates was a framing project unto itself. After some trial-and-error, it was determined that the items would be arranged within a 12-sided, cross-shaped frame with blue and red matting. The blue mat was the same used for the main background and a primary red mat was chosen as an accent (see Photo 5). The black moulding chosen for this frame measured  $\frac{3}{8}$ " wide and featured some ornamentation. No glazing was used to avoid unnecessary distortions or shadowing.

Once the layout was complete, the piece was constructed by first mounting the centerpiece—the certificate—onto a piece of foamboard, which was then attached to the backing mat (see Photo 6). There was one original photo being used, and two reproductions. The original was hinged to  $\frac{1}{8}$ " foamboard, which was then attached to a solid piece of acrylic with four small acrylic blocks adhered to its underside (see Photo 7). This created spacing between the backing, the certificate, and the other memorabilia.

This component of the project was mounted to the main backing board using an acrylic U-shaped structure which served to both support the

cross-shaped frame and to float it out away from the backing (see Photo 8). (The uniform would be inserted behind the cross-shaped frame.) The structure was attached to the main background by securing it with framer's points from the backside.

Once this was done, framer Eric Pertl turned his attentions to the acrylic box that had been constructed to house the project. The box had been enhanced with a "lip" around its edges (see Sidebar/Photo I) to fit into the rabbet of the outer moulding. This was a black, 2½" wide moulding that was chosen



*Photo 10: Fitzsimmons holds the uniform while Pertl attaches the hanger to the top of the box. This outer frame is Gemini Moulding G-5078.*



*Photos 11 and 12: Inserting the backing board and positioning the uniform behind the smaller frame (Gemini Moulding G-1026).*

*Photo 13: The final step—closing up the back.*

to complete the design.

The box was given a cleaning and the uniform was ready for hanging inside the box (see Photo 9). The hanger construction was then secured into the top edge of the acrylic box with clear acrylic nuts and bolts (see Photo 10). It was positioned about two-thirds toward the front of the case—about 2" back from the face of the glazing (see Photos 11 and 12). With the uniform in place, the backing board, with the cross-shaped frame attached, was then carefully installed. Pertl completed the package by securing the backing to the frame (see Photo 13) with a pneumatic driver. ■