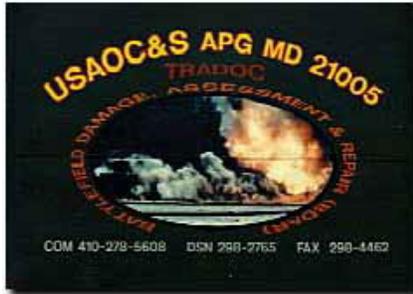




Explosive Graphics at the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum

Product Spotlight:
Gerber EDGE Series

**U.S. Army Ordnance Museum
Aberdeen, MD**



Mr. Tim Tidwell & Ms. Judy Garrett: exhibits specialists at the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum, Aberdeen Proving Grounds, MD., 35 miles north of Baltimore. Their mission? To eliminate hazardous waste from their graphics process. When tools-of-the-trade like thinners and dirty rags came to be handled as hazardous waste, the cost of silk-screening skyrocketed.

What was the solution? Replace silk-screening and all its chemicals with digital color printing on the GERBER EDGE®.

According to Tidwell, "Everything we produce looks much more professional now that we're using the EDGE®. We've had a tenfold increase in speed."

Funded by the Army and donations, the museum represents the ordnance branch of the Army which is responsible for any arms and accoutrements used in warfare. Approximately 200,000 visitors a year come to view displays of small arms, artillery, cannonballs, missiles, rockets, bazookas, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and more.

The museum was begun in WWI. Pieces of foreign weapons captured from battlefields served as a source of information for the U.S. military on how to defeat or duplicate such weapons. These captured pieces now reside in the museum along with some American weaponry.



Tidwell reported that when everyone on the post found out about the EDGE, they gave his tiny group of two employees a lot of work. Before long, more work came in from posts throughout the U.S. Regular clients sometimes transfer funds to the museum or purchase supplies as a method of payment.

"Our clients are always clamoring for more," he said. "Everyone wants to know what system we use. The EDGE has put us at the forefront of exhibit graphics."

However, limits eventually had to be set. Tidwell's group cut back on the amount of work they did for other people because they no longer had enough time for their own work. He recalled, "That's why three other systems popped up on the post to meet the demand that was created once people saw what it could do." The post's sign shop, the Army Training Command sign shop, and the Army Material Command exhibit shop each purchased an EDGE.

The first large-scale EDGE job the museum undertook was creating vehicle graphics for a tractor-trailer which was part of the Battlefield Damage Assessment and Repair Program. The side of the trailer was emblazoned with a dramatic, 3-foot by 6-foot oval-shaped picture of a tank being hit by an explosive round. Some of the lettering was colored using a blend on the EDGE, and the rest was cut vinyl. These graphics covered most of the trailer.

Another much more complex EDGE job began when the Army ran a test through its network of museums. The challenge was to design the brand new 11th Armored Cavalry Museum in Ft. Irwin, Calif. This job was parted out to various existing, fully staffed museums.



Tidwell, ably assisted by Garrett, was tasked with doing all of the graphics and photomurals for that program. There were 91 photographs to be made into photomurals ranging from 16 by 20 inches to 6 by 8 feet. The photomurals were mounted on 3/4-inch GATORFOAM® and hung on the walls as part of the exhibits at the new museum. The original plan to contract this part of the job out would have cost the Army about \$40,000. The final cost? Only \$10,000!

He reflected upon the success of the project. "It was very well received. Of course, it ended up being a rush job, but that was fun. We had about three weeks to complete it. The organizers are discussing implementing this process as a new method of starting museums in the Army system because it was so much cheaper."

The EDGE allows the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum to create almost everything in-house.

Garrett observed, "Because the process is so quick, our artwork can get a lot fancier. Photo murals are becoming a much bigger part of the museum than they once were."

Tidwell continued, "What I like best about Gerber products is their reliability - that's what means the most to me." He regularly counts on the EDGE, with its blends and shadows, in combination with a Gerber Dimension 200® router to produce headline-style lettering that really stands out.

Tidwell described how taking advantage of the EDGE has also saved the museum money. He can make transparencies and photomurals in-house at a lower cost. One hundred dollars in material might be required to complete a 6-foot by 8-foot photomural. A photo lab would have charged eight hundred. This savings allows him to employ what would have been costly techniques more often.

The museum is actually a longtime user of Gerber products. Tidwell remembers starting out with a GATM 3000 and a plotter. "We were able to do so much with that system that as new Gerber products came out, the money was almost always made available to us to upgrade. It has been that way ever since," he noted.

Today, he remains impressed with the performance of this design and production software and praises its printing speed and use of memory. "In many cases, we have to print a color comp on our small color printer. If I were to print the graphic using any of our standard design programs, it might take ten minutes. If I bring it into Gerber's software, it will print in half or even a third of that time," he commented.

Tidwell's group are also loyal users of Gerber aftermarket items. Although they tried other brands of vinyls and cutting blades, the products did not compare favorably to Gerber's.

Tidwell summarized, "The blades don't last as long. They're nice when you first put them in, but they dull quickly. And there's nothing more frustrating to me than not having my vinyl easy to weed. The Gerber vinyls themselves weed easier, adhere better, and last longer - especially on outdoor exhibits. I like the fact that the materials are constantly updated, and I'll be trying Gerber's new UV product on my outdoor applications soon."

The museum purchased the EDGE within the first year it was available. Tidwell explained why it didn't take him long to master the new system. "Learning the EDGE was very intuitive because most of what I needed to know translated well into what I already knew as an illustrator. The idea of preparing something for printing, using layers, etc."

The few times that replacement parts were needed, he called the tech lines, and the parts arrived the next day with instructions that allowed him to install them himself. "I love the entire system," he said. "Paintbrushes, triangles, all of those things...I'm ready to put all of them in a museum now. I don't need them anymore. Automating has been a great step ahead for the graphic arts portion of our museum. Everything about this equipment and software has exceeded my expectations."

Mission complete!

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