



Newsletter of the Midwest Model Shipwrights ♦

www.midwestmodelshipwrights.com ♦

May, 2022

● Scuttlebutt ●

With the usual small talk and pre-meeting roundtable discussions, the April session started out in a pretty routine fashion. Members and guests were logging on and the attendance numbers were steadily climbing. It looked like it was going to be a good meeting.

Then, near disaster almost struck. Bob Filipowski received a call from Gus Agustin. No matter what he tried, Gus could not log on to the Zoom meeting. Normally, this is unfortunate but the member always has the option of viewing the meeting videos later in the week. However, in this case, Gus was the featured speaker, and many were looking forward to hearing his presentation on making flags. He also had photos of his completed *Speedwell* appearing in "Ships on Deck."



Bob immediately made vice-president, Bob Frysztak, host and left the meeting. Filipowski and Agustin tried every trick they knew, which, admittedly, wasn't much, but nothing worked. Well, desperate situations require desperate measures, and it was decided that Gus would jump in his car, and drive the several miles to Bob's house and make his presentation. Hopefully, he would make it in time.

The meeting started promptly at 7:00 PM, and attendees started listening to "Ships on Deck" presentations. We don't know if Gus obeyed all the traffic laws getting to Bob's house, but when *Speedwell* came up for SOD, Gus was ready and waiting. Thankfully, the rest of the meeting went as planned.

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May Meeting Notice

The 2022 Midwestern Model Ships and Boats Contest

For those of you who couldn't attend the 2022 Midwestern Model Ships and Boats Contest at Manitowoc, you are going to get a second chance. Sam Parent enjoys photographically recording these shows, and has agreed to let us see his handy work. This is a special meeting since we haven't featured one of these presentations since 2017. This is your chance to see some very special models!



Proceedings will begin on Wednesday, May 18th, at 7:00 PM CST, but you will be able to log on as early as 6:30 PM, and join us for a round table discussion.

● An NRG Special ●

Thin Strip Saw Jig

The Thin Strip Saw Jig is an NRG exclusive, designed specifically for creating thin strips accurately and safely. A must-have for any modeler who wants to cut their own wood strips for hull planking, decking, or any other use.

How it Works

Easily cut thin wood strips with identical widths without any additional measuring after the first strip. After setting the jig for the first strip's width, just move your saw's fence for each additional strip and the jig will keep each strip's thickness the same. The NRG's Thin Strip Saw Jig is also designed to cut strips to the outside of the blade. This removes the risk of trapping strips between the blade and the fence, improving safety and accuracy during cutting. It is compatible with the Byrnes and Preac table saws, or any other unit with a 1/2-inch-wide miter slot that is at least 1/8-inch deep.

At \$15.00 plus shipping, this is a true bargain!. Current members of the Nautical Research Guild can save 20% on most products offered by the NRG. Use the code **NRG20off** at checkout to receive the discount.



● Making Flags ●

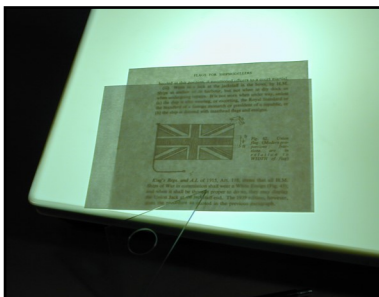
By Gus Agustin

Gus Agustin opened his presentation on making flags by outlining the various supplies that he uses. The nice thing about his technique is that not very many items are needed. Nevertheless, all of them are important. They include #2 sable brushes, Liquitex acrylic paints, bond paper, a straight edge, a cutting mat, and a light box. This last item isn't a must, since a window on a bright sunny day will also work.

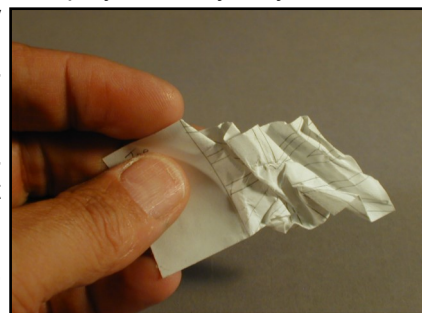


In order to make his flags as accurate as possible, Gus uses a number of important references. In addition to various books on the subject, he often uses a highly rated website, *Flags of the World*, www.fotw.net/flags/. Contemporary paintings can also provide a lot of information. They can help determine the right flags for the period, how flags might look under various weather conditions, and in some cases, which banners were flown on special occasions such as launchings. Agustin also cautioned everyone to remember that kits, plans, and authors aren't always correct! If possible, check multiple sources.

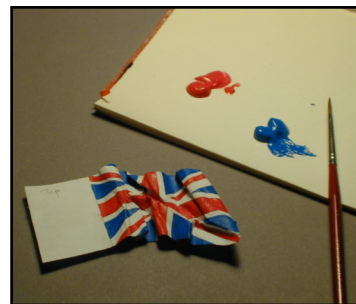
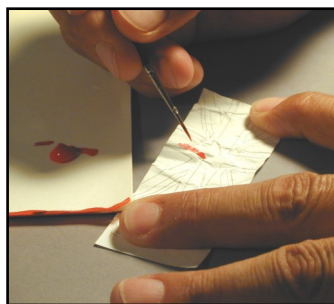
Once you have chosen your flag, the next step is to copy it to the desired scale. This is where the light box or window on a sunny day come into play. When tracing your flag it's important to mark a reference point in the upper left hand corner. The English Union Jack in particular is commonly portrayed with the incorrect orientation. The design should be drawn on both sides of the paper.



One of the most common errors made by novices involves how the flags are displayed. They may be correct for the period, but they are as flat as a board. Gus stated that a realistic appearance is achieved by folding, crunching, and crinkling the paper until it looks right. It is then soaked in water. When dry, it will have a new memory!



Both sides of the flag should be painted one color at a time, starting out with the lightest color. Using white is not recommended. It is important to try to return the flag to its crinkled state while the acrylic paint is still wet.



Stars can be especially problematic on small flags. With a fine brush, Gus feels that it is possible to create them. If all else fails, a small drop of white paint will work. As you can see on the right, Agustin leaves small tabs on the flag to facilitate their being mounted.



Sometimes, a more pronounced sag or limp appearance is needed in the flag. This can be achieved by configuring the initial sketch in the shape of a parallelogram. The more extreme the shape, the more sag the flag will have.

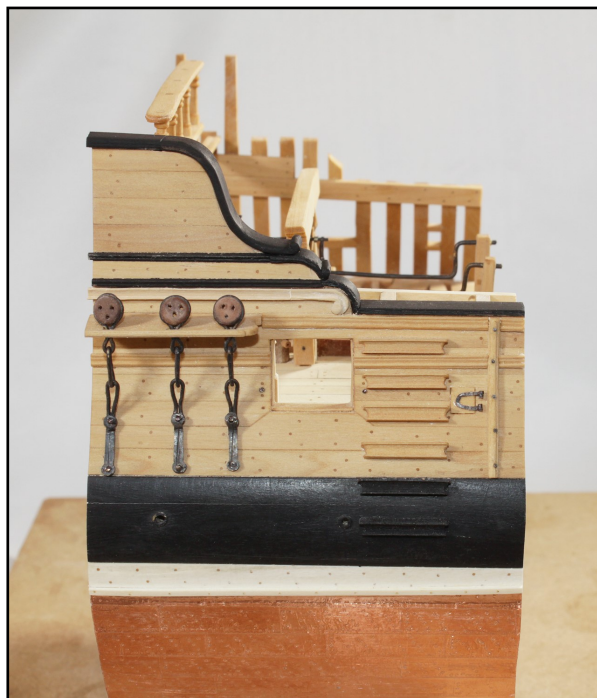
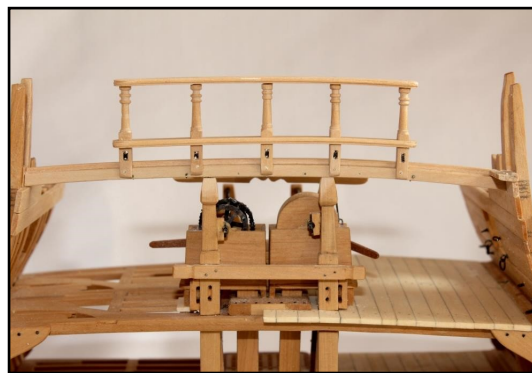
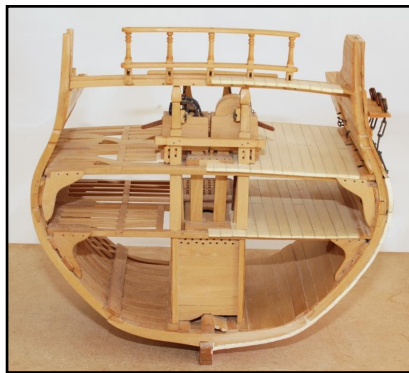
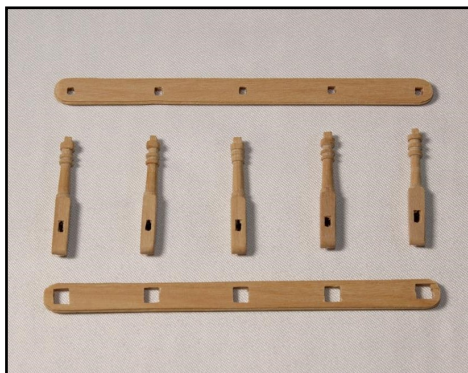
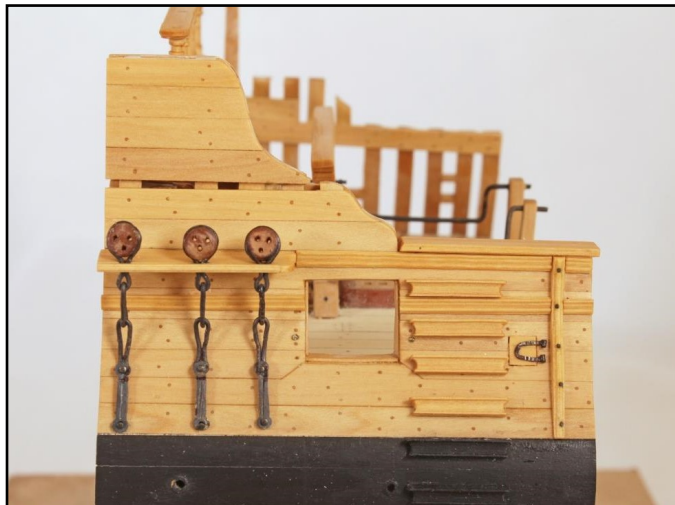
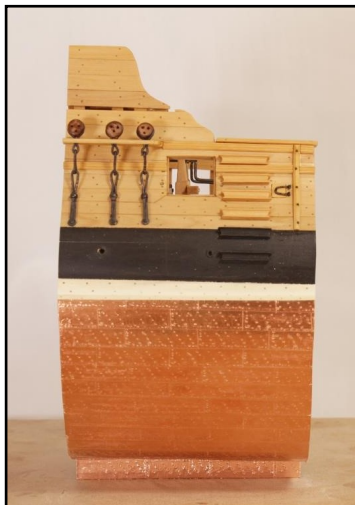
A final touch before mounting the flag involves giving the entire piece a thin grey wash, which mutes the colors. Gus feels that this gives the flags a more realistic appearance. Although not necessary, an airbrush works well for this.



• Ships on Deck •

Echo Cross Section by Toni Levine

Photos by Toni Levine

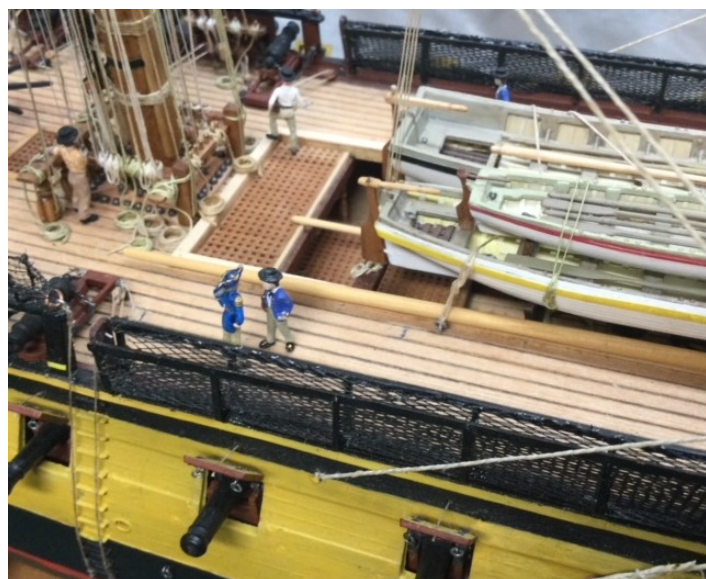


● Ships on Deck ●

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USS Constitution Circa 1804 by Richard Romaniak

Photos by Richard Romaniak



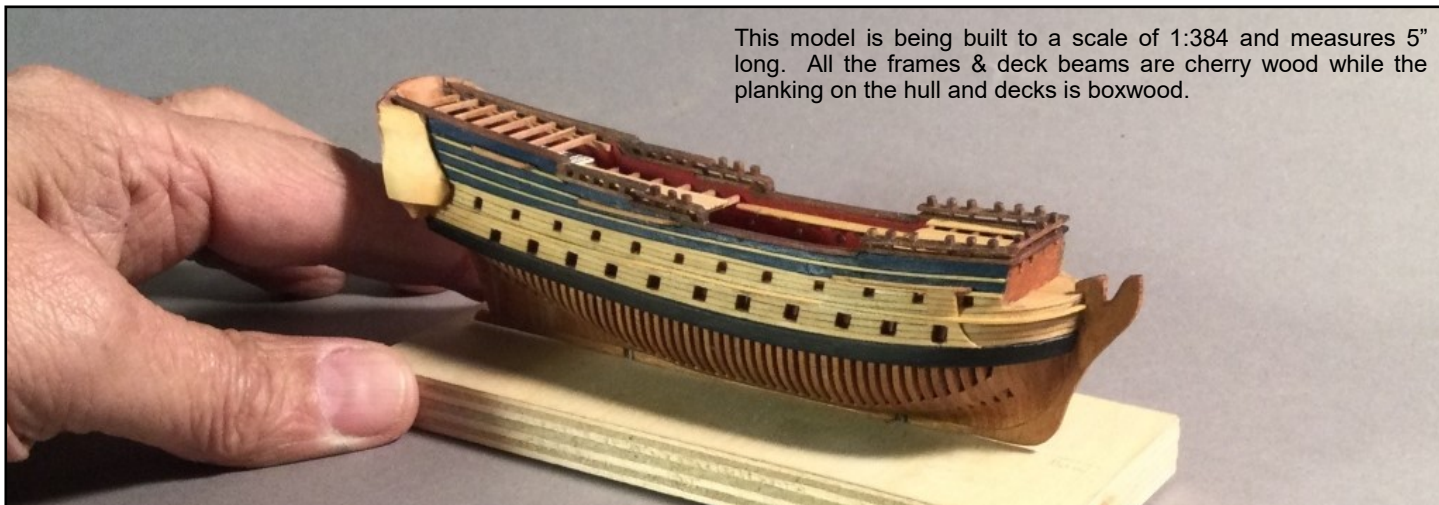
"Ships on Deck", continued on Page 5

● Ships on Deck ●

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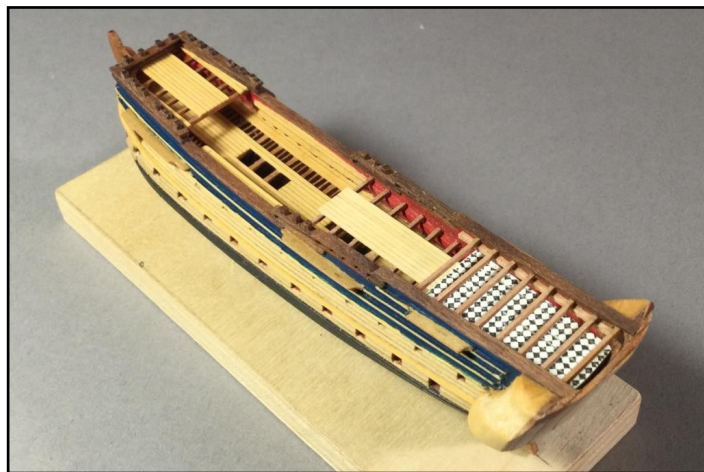
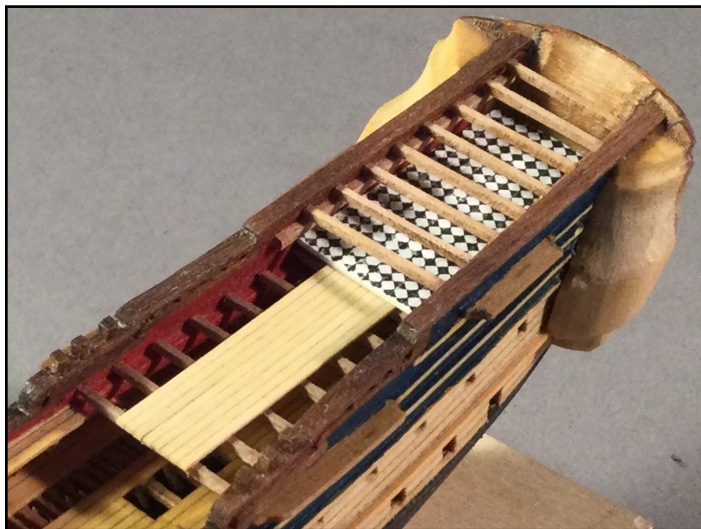
HMS *Leopard* by Gus Agustin

Photos by Gus Agustin



This model is being built to a scale of 1:384 and measures 5" long. All the frames & deck beams are cherry wood while the planking on the hull and decks is boxwood.

HMS *Leopard* was a 50-gun fourth rate of the Royal Navy. She served during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and was notable for the actions of her captain in 1807. In an attempt to recover British deserters, *Leopard* hailed the USS *Chesapeake*, and requested permission to search her. *Chesapeake* refused and *Leopard* opened fire, catching the US ship unprepared. This was emblematic of the tensions that later erupted in the War of 1812 between Britain and America.

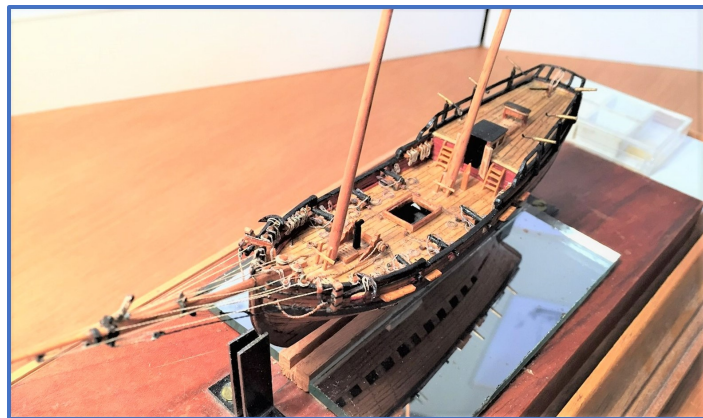
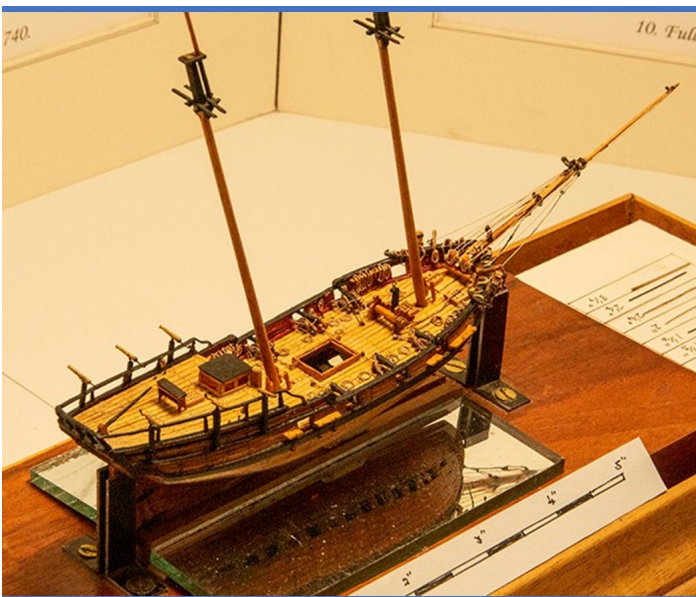
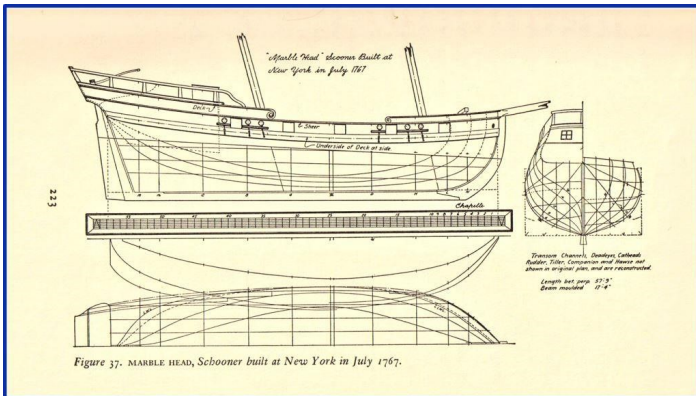


● Ships on Deck ●

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Sir Edward Hawke & The Earl of Egmont by Ian McLaughlan

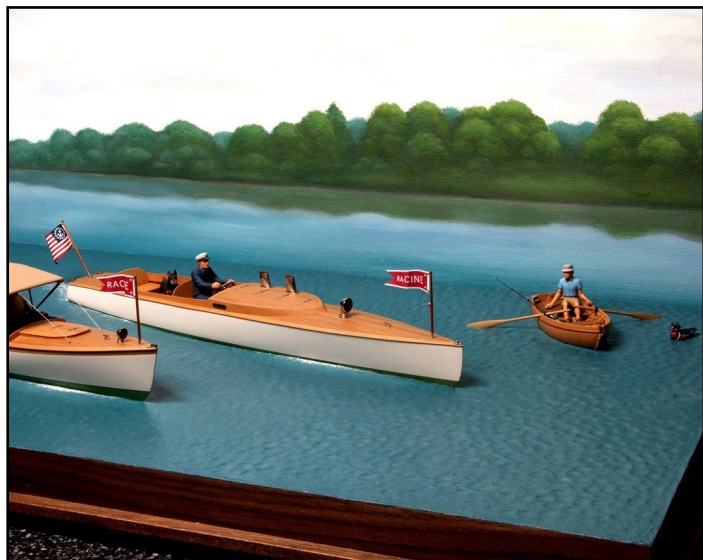
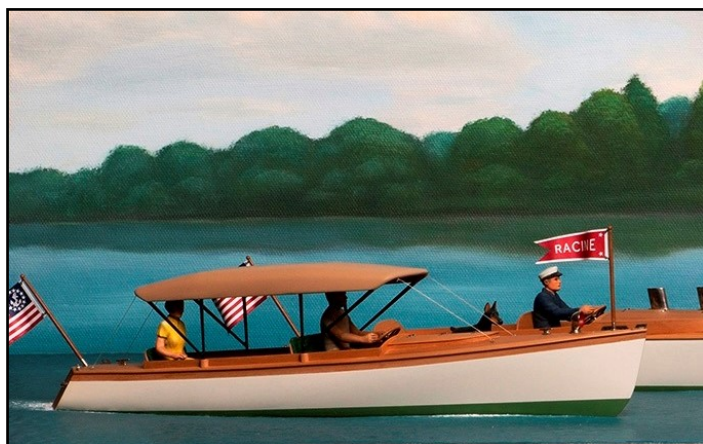
Photos by Ian McLaughlan



● **Ships on Deck** ●
Continued

Wisconsin Boats Diorama by John Pocius

Photos by John Pocius



● Historic Ship Profiles ●

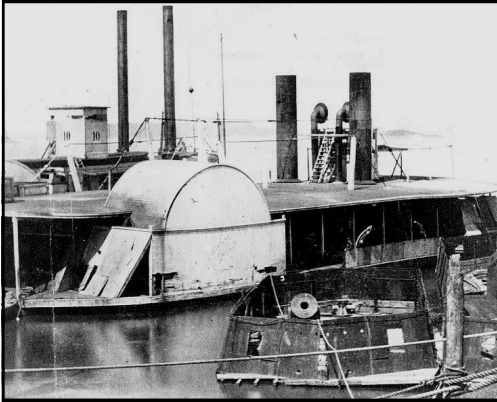
The Unfavorable Mortar Boats

Hampton Roads Naval Museum

In the fall of 1861, Union Captain (later flag officer) Andrew Foote inherited a squadron in the making. The warships under construction and conversion at yards along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers were far from the ocean going vessels Foote was accustomed to. In a private letter to Army Quartermaster-General Montgomery Meigs, dated November 20, 1861, Foote confessed his dislike for some of the vessels, but saved special criticism for the mortar boats being fitted out.

"I have not, fortunately, committed myself in relation to them, although I have a written order from General Fremont to man, arm, and equip them. I never have thought favorably of these boats, either in construction or as an element of power. Still as they were built, and the mortars (12) built, I concluded to move in the matter and kept you informed, or rather asked your authority to go forward." These

river mortar boats, not to be confused with larger schooner mortar boats used by the blue-water navy that Foote wrote of, were little more than rafts. One of these boats appears in a wartime photo, tied up alongside the USS *Tuscumbia*.



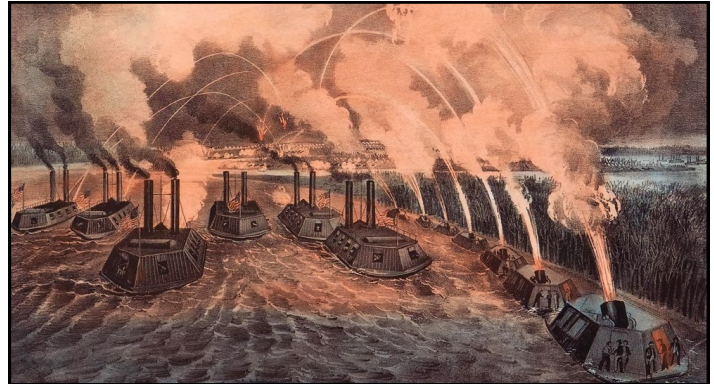
The mortar boats were, as Foote indicated, a project begun by General John C. Fremont in the early days of the war. The mortars themselves came from Fort Pitt Foundry in Pittsburgh. These 13-inch Seacoast Mortars, Model 1861, were the Army's latest and heaviest seacoast mortars. The Army Ordnance Department designed the weapon to arm coastal fortifications. The 13-inch mortar fired a

227 pound shell to a maximum range of 4600 yards. Unlike standard guns, the mortars fired the shells in a high, arching trajectory to fall on top of the intended target. The Army designed these seacoast mortars to drop shells upon an enemy bombardment fleet attacking coastal fortifications. But due to wartime needs along the Mississippi River, Army leaders saw an offensive potential with the mortars. They felt, these pieces could provide a "stand off" bombardment of river fortifications.

The problem was the eight and a half ton mortars were not very mobile. Normally the Army would move such heavy weapons as part of a siege train. But the swampy bottom lands of the Western rivers precluded employing such heavy ordinance. Instead Fremont opted to float the mortars into position.

Using a typical flat bottomed barge as a basis, the constructors added a platform of timbers. The platform measured roughly 60

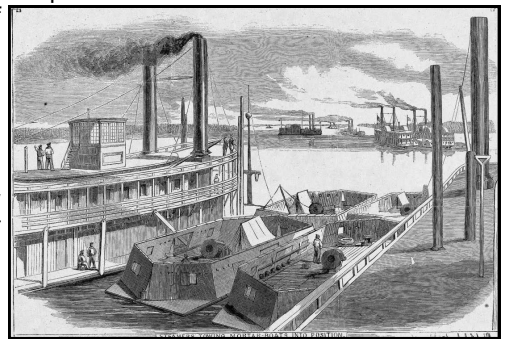
feet by 25 feet. Bulwarks seven feet tall were plated with half inch thick iron plate to protect against small arms fire. The craft had such low freeboard that the first two feet of their sloping sides were caulked to keep out water when the mortars were



fired. In spite of this precaution the boats leaked badly. They were moved about by tugs and proved so unwieldy that false bows and sterns had to be added to make them more maneuverable.

Inside the space formed by the bulwarks there was room for the mortar, its bed, and handling equipment. With so much clutter there was no room for crew accommodations or any propulsion system. Tugs moved the mortar boats into position, and provided transportation for the fifteen man crew. Additional boats served as floating magazines and berthing facilities. When firing, the crews stood at the aft end of the mortar boat, or when possible, walked out onto shore, to avoid the pressure blast when the big weapon was fired.

Construction of the mortar boats received a high priority, and in January, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln requested a daily report on their progress. The mortars themselves, being a new weapon,



were slow arriving in quantity. Mortar beds were also in limited supply. As the material arrived, Foote complained he lacked another key resource - personnel. The Army eventually provided many of the gunners required. By March, Foote had over thirty mortar boats ready for use. They were initially employed at Island No. 10. Later the vessels carried the fight to Fort Pillow further downstream.

In practice the mortars failed to live up to their promise. Long range indirect firing required coordination to adjust the fall of the projectile onto the target. Observation balloons were used at Island No. 10, but the mortar shell trajectory was simply too unpredictable for proper fire control. Although an impressive weapon, the mortars offered little practical impact on Confederate fortifications. Long range, indirect fire support from warships had to wait a few decades for more advanced technology - better guns, projectiles, propellants, and communications.