

## Introduction

My Dad started me building models around the age of five or six. I remember us (him) building a plastic aircraft carrier and later, we did a Guillow's Bf-109 balsa wood and tissue model.

The first model that I clearly remember building all on my own was the Aurora U-505 kit. I was hooked. I built a lot of models, but the Revell F-102A in 1/48 scale stands out as the best I did while in elementary school. It had working landing gear, opening canopy, flaps, and removable jet engine and I didn't craze the clear plastic with glue.

By junior high school, I was doing plastic ship models including a Flying Cloud clipper ship (which I rigged with my right arm in a cast), military aircraft and the occasional tank. I focused on 1/72 scale aircraft and began researching actual aircraft; I wanted accuracy. I also started using an airbrush around 1969. I quit building plastic models around 1972. I also had a spell of building Estes rockets that petered out around the same time.

I completed two solid wood hulled sailing ships, both from Scientific Models, between 1974 and 1978. And that was that for 39 years, except for Guillow's FW-190 I built from a friend's kid around 1985 and one 1/48 scale F-105G I built with my son, John Paul in 1989. He wasn't really interested in the hobby, so I put things away.

Around 2003, as I was completing a big project at work, I figured it was back to the old position with Southern California Edison (SCE) at the San Onofre Nuclear Generation Station—not a bad thing—and I would have time to get back into the hobby. Things had changed and I was motivated to take a stab at a modern resin warship model with white metal parts and photo-etched brass. I started retooling and built a work bench in the garage in our home in Ramona, California. I actually got started on the 1/350 scale U.S.S. Northampton (CA-26), from Yankee Model works, when life intervened again.

Instead of returning to the old position, SCE offered me a promotion and a move package to the corporate headquarters in the greater Los Angeles area. This change put me into senior management positions that kept me busy until I retired in May 2017.

I still had the bug and having watched my Dad turn out high quality plank on frame sailing ship models after he retired, I decided I wanted to give scale modeling another try. I pulled my stuff out of storage, bought a few new tools and declared myself ready. But what to build? The Northampton kit was clearly above my skill set. I wanted a relatively inexpensive kit that would be challenging but not overwhelming. And if I messed it up, I hadn't made a huge investment. I also wanted to work with photo-etched brass and get in some airbrush time.

After some research—thank you Internet—I purchased the Italeri 1/35 scale Vosper Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB). The kit has a lot of detail and is big enough for my inexperienced hands

to get into some of the tiny places. I definitely did not want to take a stab at a 1/700 ship model.



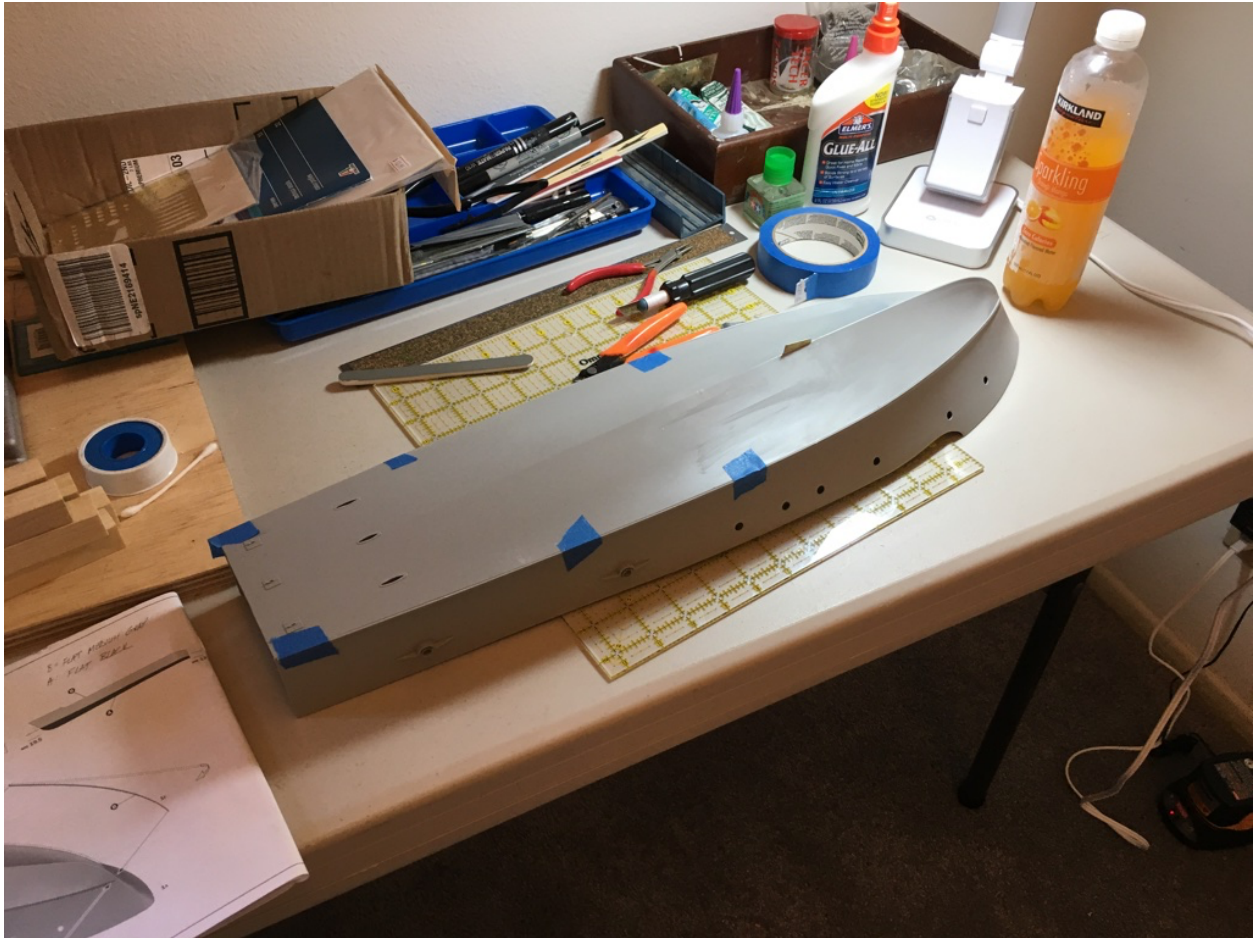
Figure 1. Very Dramatic Box Art

## Getting Started

I finally started in early July 2017 and immediately began making mistakes. First, I proudly completed my first photo-etch bend and then super glued the part to both the MTB hull and to my fingers.

Second, I lost one of the outboard propeller shaft struts and had to make a replacement from Evergreen sheet styrene plastic and aluminum tubing. When installed and painted I hope it isn't very noticeable.

Third, I didn't think through how I want to display the model and glued together some of the wooden "keel blocks" before doing a test fit. While a do over, this mistake didn't impact the actual model.



*Figure 2. Hull with strakes and exhaust ports installed.*

I built the replacement propeller strut and glued it in position. After it was dry, I used green putty to fill in the gaps. After sanding and primer, I think it will be okay.

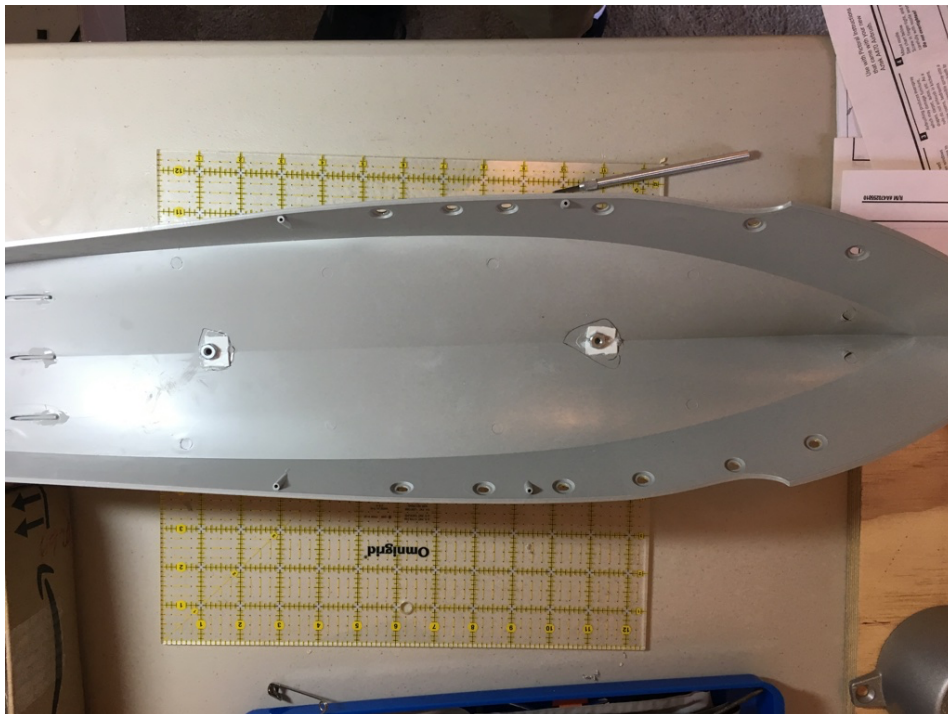
I fixed the keel blocks for the display and finished a nice piece of maple to mount the blocks and model. The next trick is to figure out how I was going to attach the model to the keel blocks.

I decided to drill holes all the way through the keel blocks and then holes into the model. Prior to taking a drill to the model, I reinforced the mounting hole area with sections of evergreen plastic. I then used a drill bit in a pin vise to make a pilot hole. The final holes were drilled, and the nut was threaded on and hand tightened. I then super glued the nuts to the evergreen plastic.

By now, I had enough of the hull done to paint it. Another set of challenges was upon me.



*Figure 3. The replacement strut before sanding and primer.*



*Figure 4. Nuts for the mounting screws.*



## Hull Painting

Before doing anything, I made sure my airbrush and compressor actually worked and I could control the air pressure. Not too difficult with a pressure regulator and air trap attached to the compressor.



*Figure 5. Already to go. Still working after 15 years in storage.*

I wet sanded mold injection marks using flexible sanding strips and filled gaps between the hull and strakes with white glue and thin super glue.

I used AK gray primer at about 40 psi. The primer needed to be slightly thinned and went on easily, but my airbrush technique was atrocious. While not too surprising—I hadn't used an airbrush since 9<sup>th</sup> grade and it was an entry level Badger brush propelled by an old car tire—I need to do better.

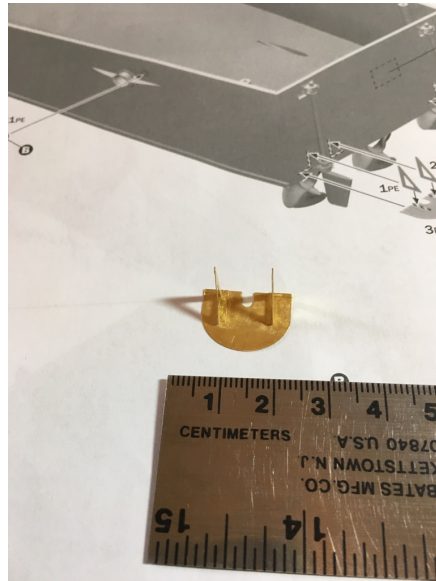
I used Italeri flat medium gray for the hull color and despite the recommendation to thin Italeri acrylics to a paint/thinner ration of 2:1, I had runs due to the paint being too thin. Okay, put more paint in. I did a better job with the color coat, but I still had poor technique. This is going to take a lot of practice. I will probably do the small parts by hand unless I have a lot of them in the same color and will set up an airbrush assembly line.

The next challenge will be to mask the hull so I can spray the flat black under water hull color.

The masking for the underwater hull wasn't too complicated. I used Tamiya acrylic flat black. I think the Tamiya paint is better—it was mixed well and wasn't lumpy. The 2:1 ratio worked fine.

My airbrush technique was better with the flat black, but more masking is required. I had some overspray onto the hull gray—sigh—a step in the wrong direction.

I also built the two anti-cavitation plates. After a bit of experimentation, putting the triangle pieces in a clamp and supergluing them in place with a bead of glue on a brass rod worked well.



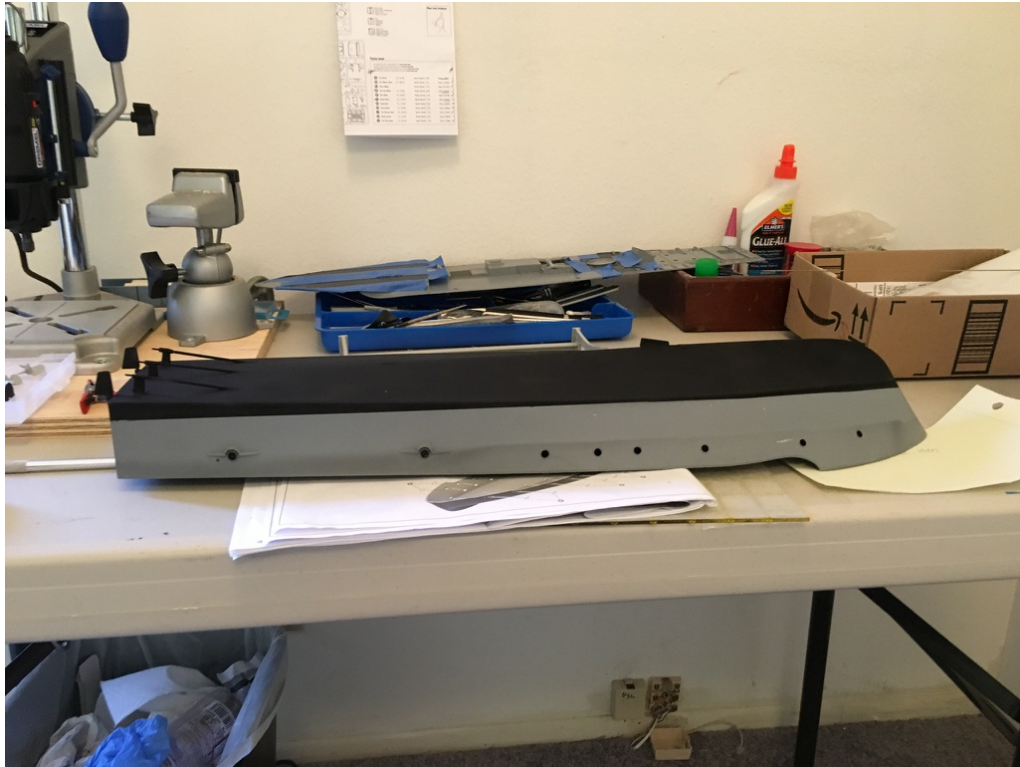
*Figure 6. One of anti-cavitation plates.*

I started working on the main deck in parallel. I sprayed it with the flat medium gray and it went on cleanly. The deck has some flat gunship gray areas which represent nonskid paint. The Italeri flat gunship gray isn't covering very well. I think it is old paint and is very lumpy. No amount of stirring seems to even it out. My original intention was to brush paint the areas, but it doesn't look very good, even after two coats. I think the paint is bad.

I cleaned up the overspray on the hull using a fine airbrush nozzle at about 20 PSI. The hobby store only had gunship gray in an enamel spray can. I did some additional masking and the paint went on well. I had to clean up some leaks, but otherwise we're good to go.

Once I completed hull and deck painting, I installed the clear plastic skylights and portholes. I used a "clear plastic" glue for the skylights and portholes. They were easy to install.

I'm holding off on painting and installing the propellers since they have the same glossy brass finish as the body of the torpedoes; I will paint them at the same time.



*Figure 7. The underwater paint job looks okay, note the overspray.*



*Figure 8. The anti-cavitation plates look cool.*



*Figure 9. The replacement strut looks okay.*

With the hull now complete and deck attached, she's starting to look like a boat. The rest of construction will be detail work starting with the fo'c'sle. In ship building terms, we are now in the fitting out stage.

My biggest headache to this point has been my poor painting technique. I'm slowly getting better, so I hope the sum of all the parts will mask much of my bad painting.

#### Fo'c'sle Detail Work

Since some of the hatches and air intakes are painted gloss white, I decided to assemble them and then airbrush the whole lot. Alas, my airbrush technique wasn't good enough for the air intakes. I pushed the air intakes into florist foam but it didn't hold them in place when hit with the paint. After the fact, I realized if I put an alligator clip on the mounting pin, I could hold it with my left hand and run the airbrush with my right.

I am finding that painting items that don't require a lot of precision are easier and faster to paint with a can of spray paint vs. the airbrush.





*Figure 10. Completed hull. Ready for fitting out.*

Some general observations: 1) small parts are hard to handle with 61-year-old hands, but tweezers really help; 2) Some of the smaller parts have a lot of residual plastic (flash) on them; 3) Many of the small parts, such as cleats and bollards, I am painting on the sprue and touching them up after installation; 4) Not too surprising, housekeeping is important—complete a task, then make sure tools, brushes, paints, glue, etc. are back where they belong before starting the next task.

With the fo’c’sle complete, the deckhouse is next.

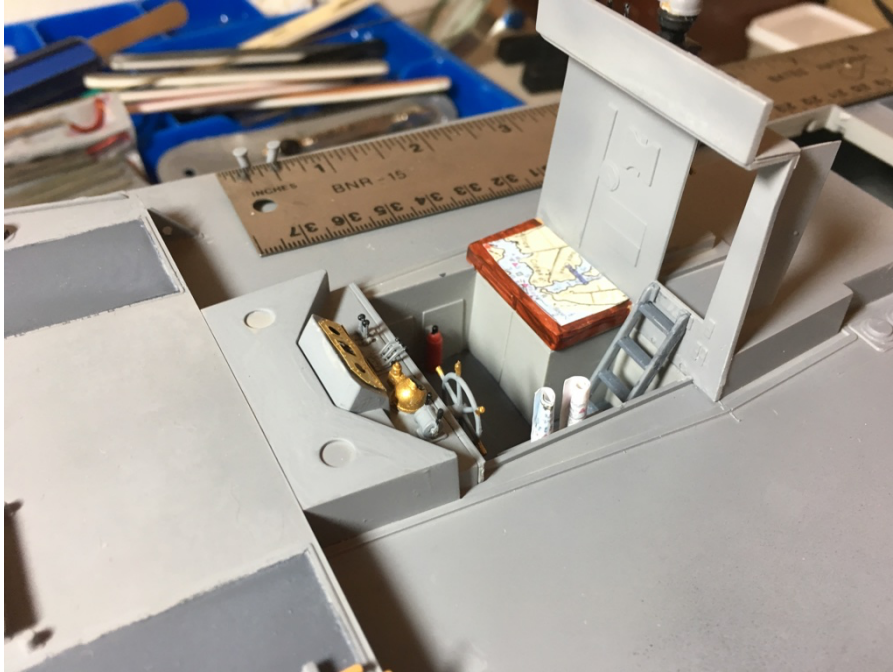


*Figure 11. Fo'c'sle complete, less life lines and antenna wire.*

### Deckhouse Detail Work

The pilot house is fairly straight forward with both photo-etched parts and decals for gauges.

I painted the chart table top with Italeri flat natural wood acrylic and when it was dry, I applied AV Vallejo "wood grain" acrylic to give it a mahogany look. When the wood grain color coat was dry, I added a coat of clear gloss. The charts were cut out from a JPEG photo of a Sicilian harbor chart I found on the Internet. I know the detail won't really be visible to the casual observer, but I enjoyed doing it.



*Figure 12. Pilot house complete.*

The deckhouse consists of four main parts. I decided to add most of the plastic detail parts to the main deckhouse parts and give them their flat medium gray color coat at the same time

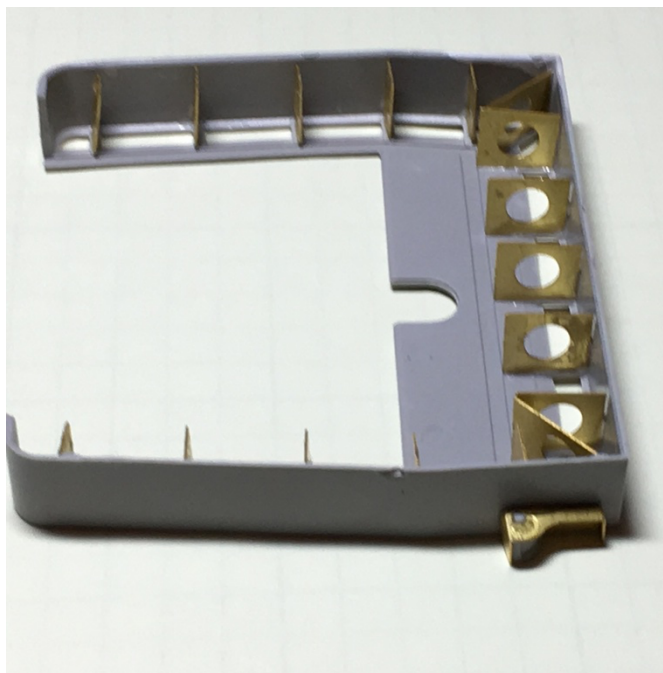
I airbrushed the flat medium gray color coat without any issues using a fine nozzle at about 30 psi. I diluted the Italeri paint using a 3:2 ratio. Keeping the object being painted approximately four inches away and a steady hand movement was key. I sprayed the details first and then the larger flat surfaces. I operated the airbrush with my right hand and used my left hand in a painter's glove to manipulate each part in turn.

After the paint cures over night, I will do the detail painting and install the clear "glass" parts, remaining plastic detail parts and the photo-etched brass pieces. I had shaky hands when installing the two side windows; I will declare them to be salt encrusted!

The overhead and front bulkhead of the pilot house looks pretty good. I discovered the best way to glue the clear "window" parts are to put masking tape on the outside of the piece and maneuver the clear parts into the right position. Once in position, I carefully glued them in place. Some shaky "handitis" contributed to a bit too much glue in a couple of places, but they are much better than the "salt encrusted" side windows.

I glued the port and starboard bulkheads for the pilot house and flying bridge to the hull and found out the starboard bulkhead didn't fit as expected. Some extra sealing and paint touch up was required. My biggest challenge is a seam gap between the starboard bulkhead and the overhead and front bulkhead. I went after the gap with green putty. After sanding and paint it looks better.

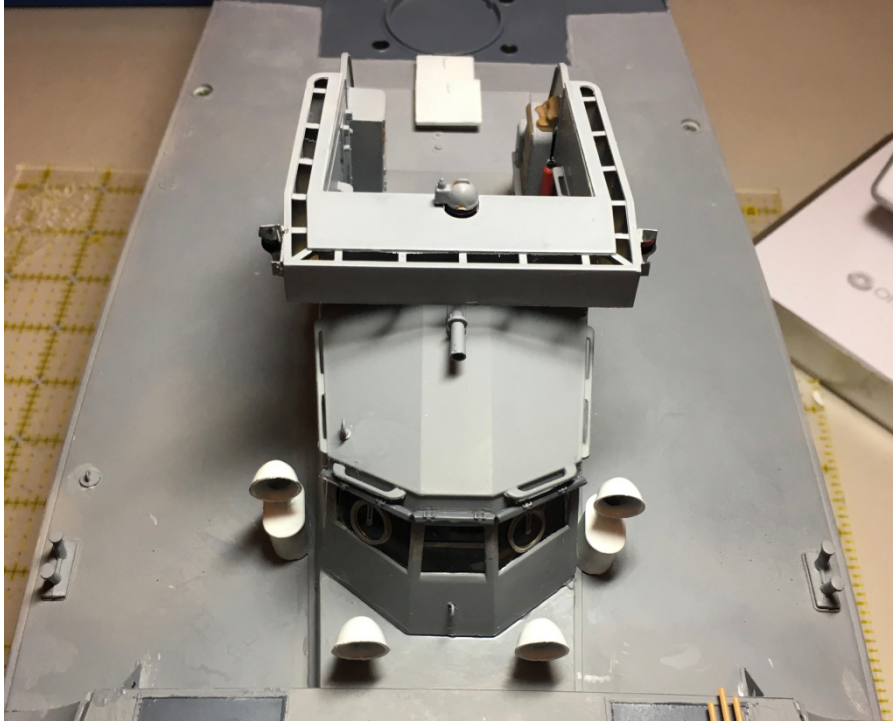
I then built the wind baffle for the flying bridge. It has photo-etched brass pieces for the supports and running lights. The support installation was straight forward, and the running light brass was an easy fold.



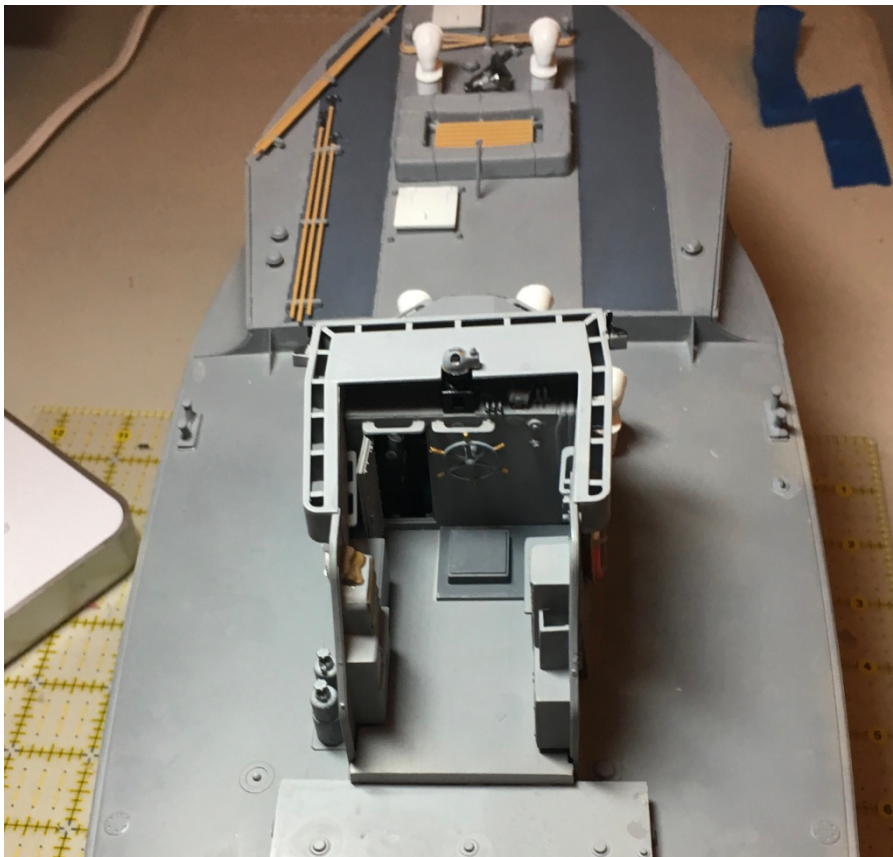
*Figure 13. Wind baffle photo-etched brass.*

Overall, I think the deckhouse came out pretty good. I learned a lot while doing it. I found that the very small photoetched brass “loop” pieces that I’m supposed to use with the rigging and antennae are too small for my hands to manage. I created my own, slightly larger, loops with copper wire twisted around a brass rod. I drilled out the mounting holes and super glued my home-made loops in the holes.



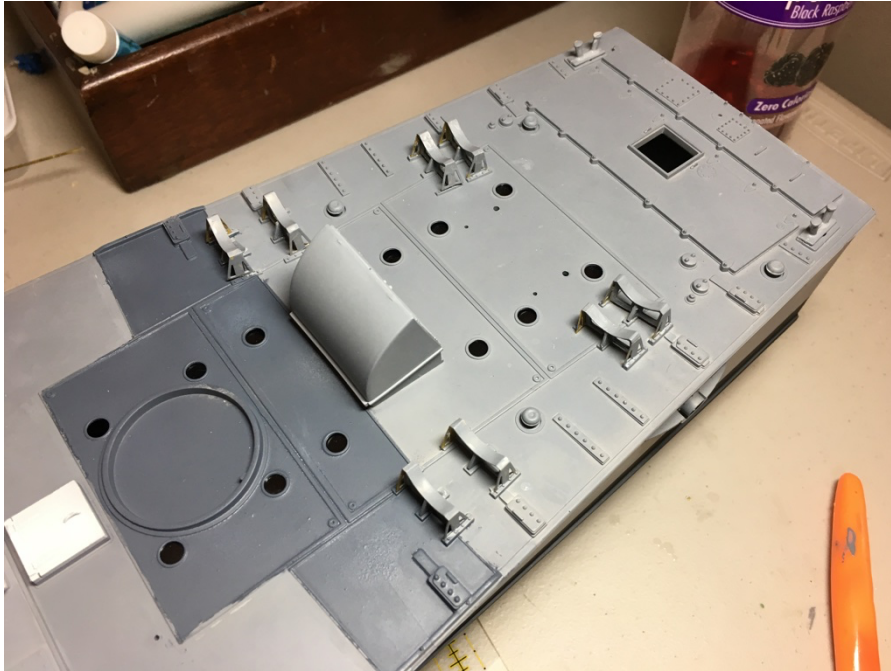


*Figure 14. Deckhouse, looking aft.*



*Figure 15. Flying Bridge, looking forward.*

The next step was to build the eight torpedo tube loading cradles. Once again, the photo-etch bends were straightforward with five bends per piece. More attention to detail was needed when supergluing the brass to the plastic bracket. The completed brackets need to match up with the mounts on the deck—I didn't get some of them right.



*Figure 16. Completed torpedo tube loading cradles.*

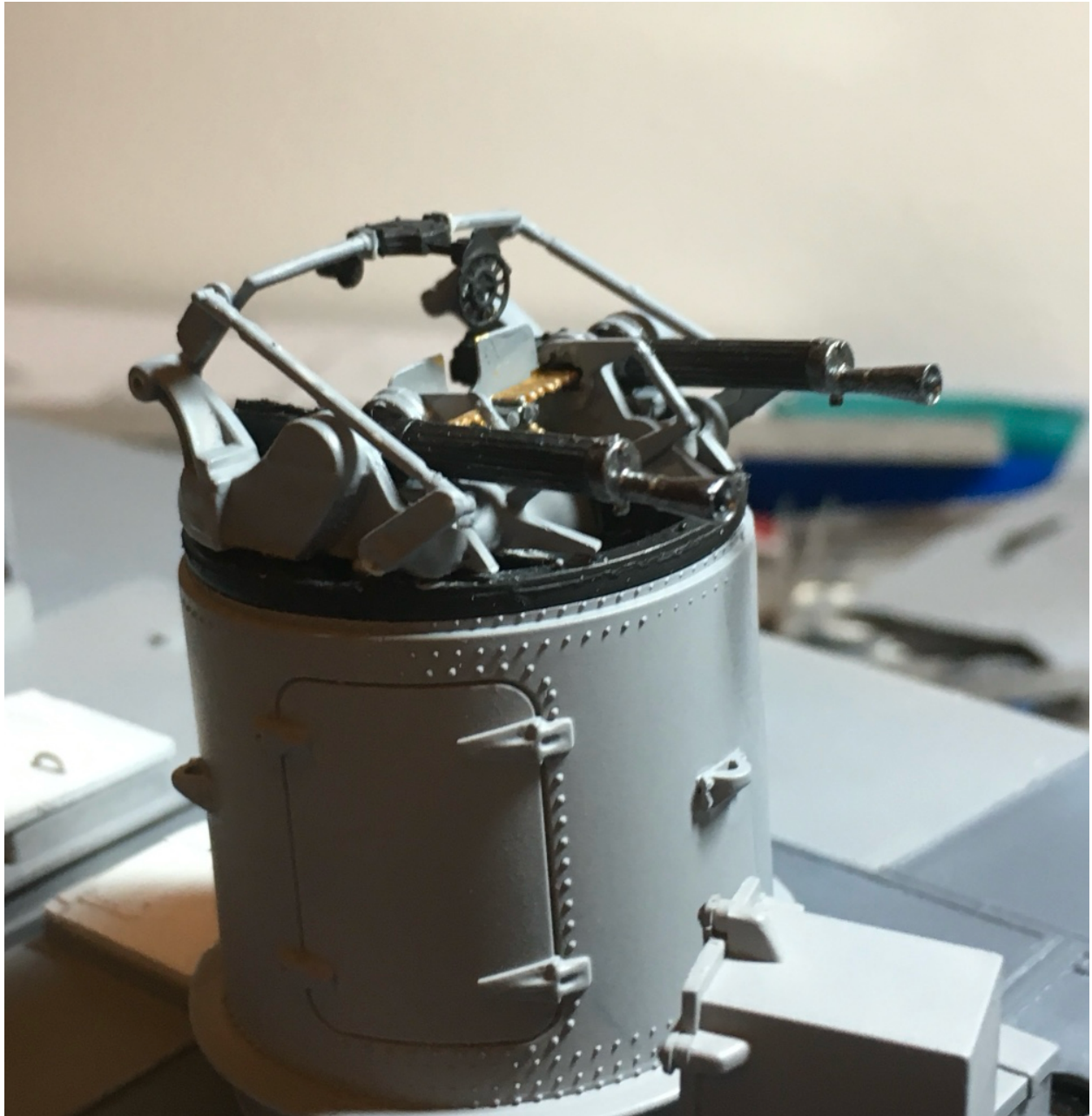
After completing the cradles, I started working on the depth charges and racks. The depth charge parts had a bit of flash and required additional sanding and crack filling.

The depth charge racks really worked me over. The way the parts fit didn't seem to align with the graphics in the instructions or the mounting brackets on the deck. Nor did they look like photos of completed models I found on the Internet. Lots of trimming, gap filling and swearing ensued. They are done but are not my best work on this model. Once again, I learned a lot. Shaky hands and small parts are not a good mix.

Once the depth charges and racks were complete, I started working on the twin 50 caliber machine gun mount. It has a bunch of parts and I really want it to look good.

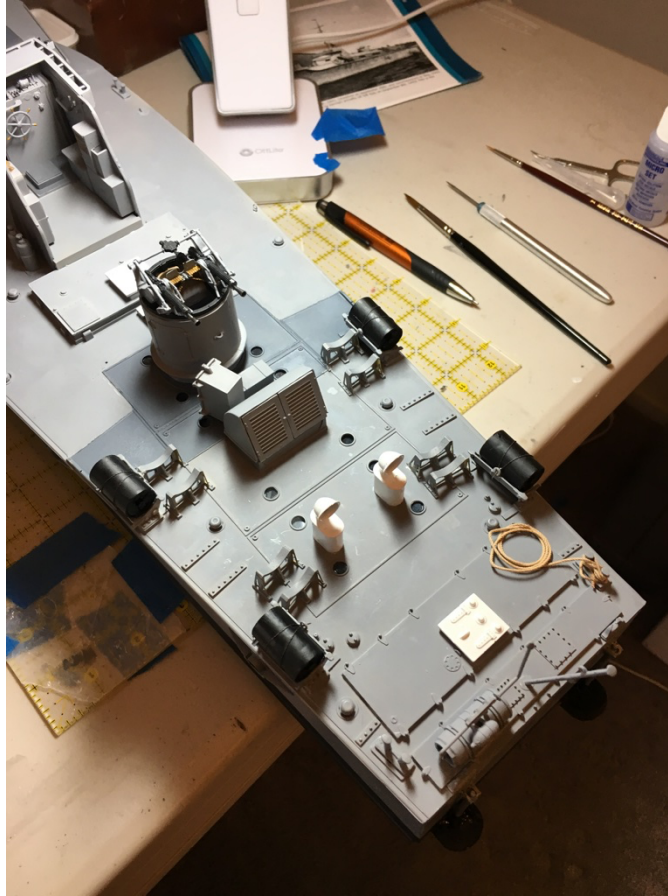
The gun assembly was a bit complicated and I made a couple of mistakes by not dry fitting some of the major parts to better understand the assembly sequence, but the end result looks pretty nice. I need to continue to improve my ability to fill gaps; there are some visible seams.

With the addition of some other small parts, the fantail is complete. I managed to break the support struts for the fantail flag staff as I was snipping it off the sprue; it was repairable.



*Figure 17. Completed Vickers machine gun mount.*





*Figure 18. Completed fantail.*

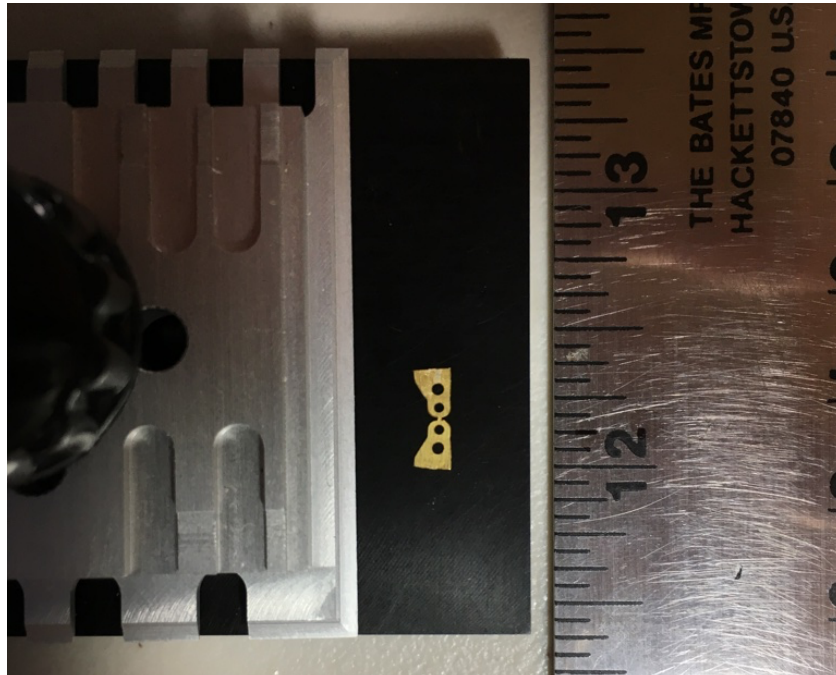
## Torpedo Tubes and Torpedoes

I started with the starboard torpedo tube. The tube, itself, was easy to assemble. I used a technique from a “building ship models” book where I taped the tube halves together and used thin super glue along the seam. Capillary action allows the glue to complete the join and it does a nice job of filling in the seam. There are several very small parts associated with the torpedo tube and I lost one of them when it popped out of my tweezers, but I was able to make a replacement out of stiff wire. One of the parts is bracket made from photo-etched brass and had five bends.

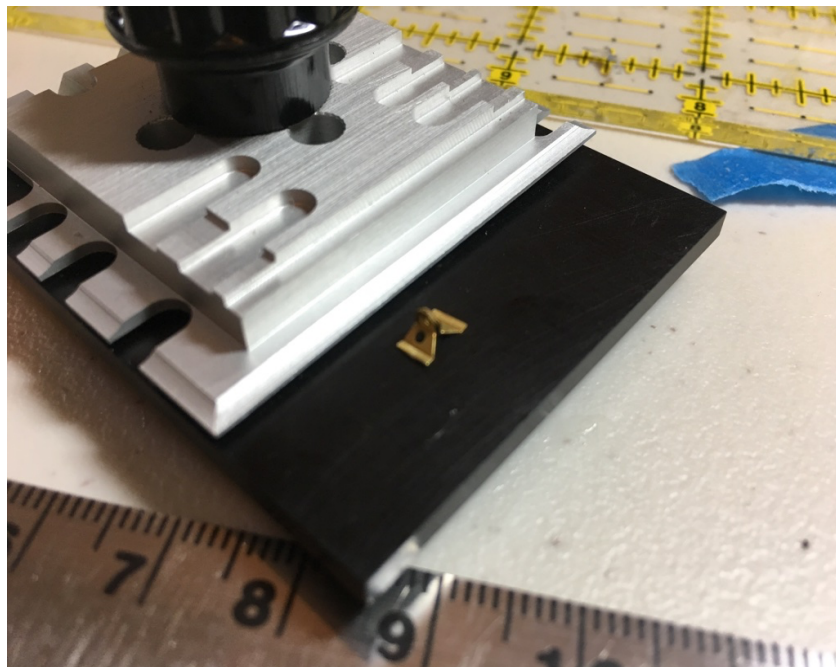
The assembly of the port torpedo tube was straightforward. I got a little sloppy with the super glue and created some additional work. After spraying both tubes with primer, they are now ready for their color coat.

The assembly of the two torpedoes was also straightforward; like the tubes, I used the same “capillary action” technique. After priming, the torpedoes are ready for their color coat.





*Figure 19. Torpedo tube bracket after being cut out of the brass fret.*



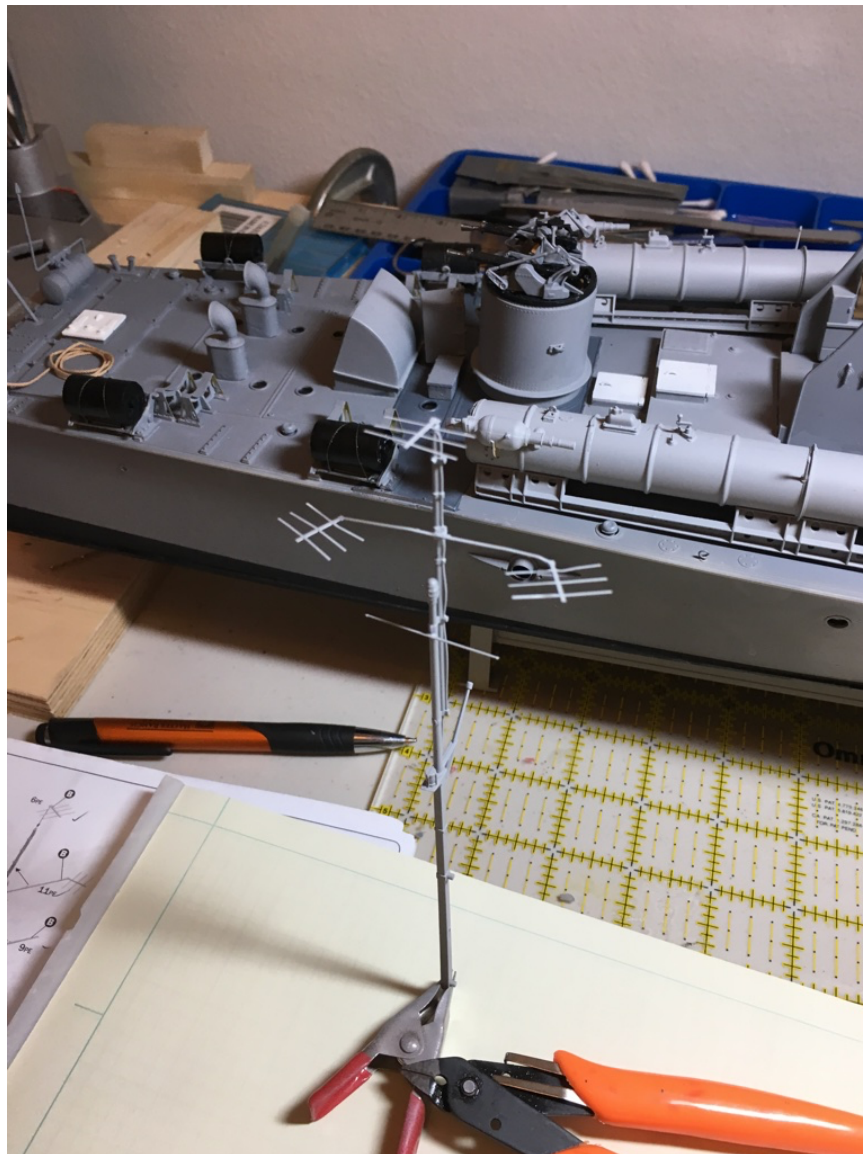
*Figure 20. The completed bracket, ready for installation.*

After the torpedoes, I assembled the main mast. The only challenge was installing the delicate photo-etched brass antennae. With patience, the assembly was fairly straight forward. After priming, the mast is now ready for its color coat and detailing of the masthead lights.

I took the opportunity to dry fit the remaining components to get a good look at what the finished model will look like. I like it.

The torpedo tubes and mast were airbrushed with flat medium gray without any issues. I used Vallejo Model Color acrylic at a 3:1 ratio and 30 psi of pressure.

The warhead section of the torpedoes was masked off from the body and sprayed with gunship gray. The torpedo body and the boat's propellers were sprayed with Italeri gloss brass acrylic.



*Figure 21. Mast after assembly and primer.*

## Rigging

I deliberately waited until virtually the entire model was built to start on the rigging for the antennae and life lines because I didn't want coils of line all over the model as I worked on it.

I started on the bow and worked my way aft. All in all, the rigging came out okay. I had too much tension on the Type 286 radar forward and some unequal tension on the main mast, so they are slightly out of true. In addition, the rigging instructions had some errors in them, but I was able to figure it out.

## Conclusion

After decals, touch up and engine exhaust wash, the kit is complete. The last task is to mount the model on its presentation mount and have the display case built.

The display case was made to my specifications by J&D Hobbies, a fun, old fashioned, model shop. They did a great job on the case.

Over all, I am satisfied with the final product. One major error in the kit instructions is they don't tell you to drill out the mounting holes for the torpedo tubes. I ended up removing the alignment pins and gluing the tubes in the right spot based on the drawings. I didn't get it exactly right, but I think the end product looks pretty good for my first complex effort in 39 years.

My next scale model will greatly benefit from this experience.



Figure 22. MTB-77 model completed!



Figure 23. Another view of completed model.





*Figure 24. A view in the display case.*