

Jack Scruby's Ships

By Rob Morgan

This isn't a review, well perhaps parts of it are, but the rest is pure nostalgia, and for me the first opportunity to examine what must be regarded as an almost legendary set of 1/1200th scale metal ACW warship models.

His, Jack Scruby's, name first appeared, as far as I was concerned, in the pages of Don Featherstone's "NAVAL WAR GAMES" in the mid-1960's. The Don described him as Jack Scruby of Visalia, California, who could supply all the models (all the models!) required for wargaming in the American Civil War period. Here before me sit the complete, or I think the complete range of 10 models then sold. Don Featherstone clearly regarded Scruby as in the forefront of war games development, and the pretty comprehensive' set of rules which the American had produced appear in the book. Only two pages long, they can still provide a decent, and a fast game for the table-top; though I find that they seem to work best with a single monitor and Confederate ram, and one or two 'supporting' vessels. One can certainly war game the encounter at Hampton Roads with them!

By the way, the induction to Scruby's splendid work includes a mention of his magazine presumably a wargames publication (?) called '*Table Top Talk*' of which I'd not heard, well at the time I was a teenager, so where would I encounter a publication from California! This title's not further mentioned, which is a pity, and I wondered when it flourished and what happened to it? There were a few 'journals' around, Don's 'Wargamer's Newsletter' being one, but I'd be very interested in hearing more about the Scruby title if anyone knows it? It must have been a paper publication in those days, possibly with photographs, and even some conversion or modelling notes.

The ship models are of course pure nostalgia. Produced these days by Historifigs of PO Box 744, Portage, WI 53901 in the USA, and sold at only two prices, \$1.25 (A) and \$2.50 (B).....

- SS1. Small Ironclad. A
- SS2.Ironclad Mortar ship. A.
- SS3.Ironclad Ship. A
- SS4.Ironclad Ram. B
- SS5.Ironclad Ship. B.
- SS6.Monitor. B.
- SS7.Double Turret Monitor. A
- SS8.Sternweeler. B.
- SS9.Sidewheeler. B.
- SS10.Sidewheeler. Showboat type. B

You won't, it's true, tell much from these brief descriptions, typical of the early days of war games, and they probably remain unchanged - the list, which is at:

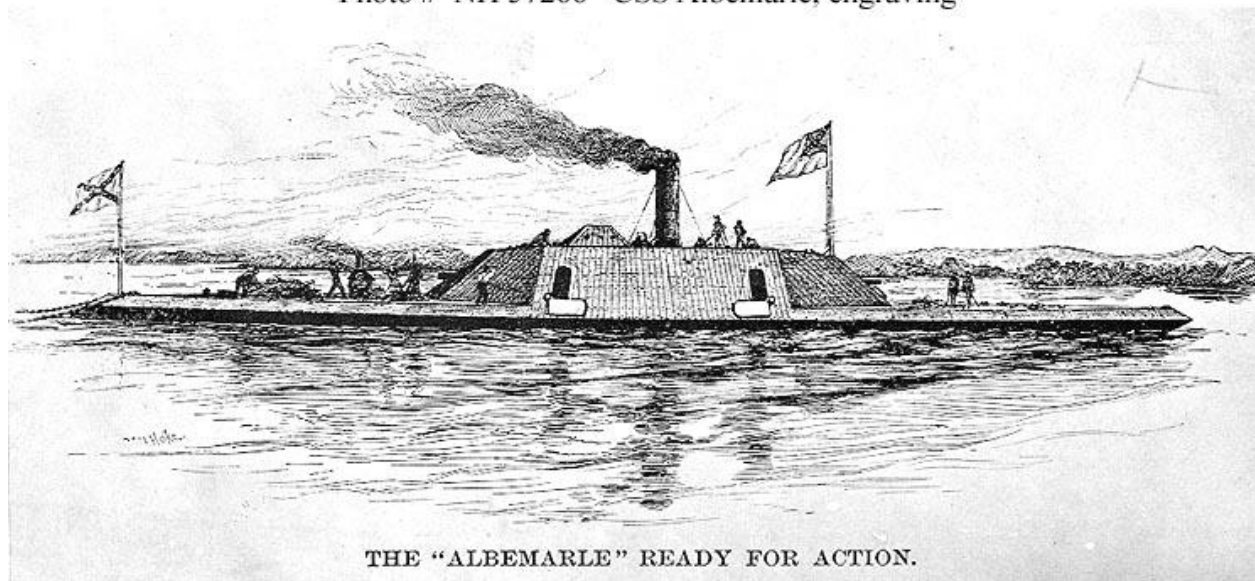
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gives the length of the individual model, but in inches and eighths only. At this point I should mention that without the sterling efforts of George Arnold our intrepid electronic newsletter administrator, I wouldn't have seen the Scruby ships at all. You can't get them in the UK - yet.

The set is a mixture, and far from what I'd expected either from the long ago comments in "*Naval War Games*" or from the simple list on the manufacturer's site. So, let's take a look at each of them and consider their potential on the table top.

SS1, the small ironclad's a Confederate river ram, of the little *CSS Albemarle* or *CSS Neuse* type, and 30m long, 10mm wide and 12mm to the funnel-top. One piece moulding, as they all are, and well detailed and flash-free. There's no equivalent in any of the standard 1/1200th ranges I know of, not in Navwar, Skytrex or Langton. Worth buying to add to an existing fleet in the scale, and easy to add a little detail too, ship's boat, jack staff etc.

Photo # NH 57266 *CSS Albemarle*, engraving



SS2, ironclad mortar ship. Hmm! What this is in effect is SS1 with no funnel and a big mortar protruding from the hull top. No place in the ACW sadly, but, it's a very useful Victorian era science fiction vessel, with its nicely riveted hull and the big weapon poking 3mm over the top of it. I like it; it has the look of a secret weapon, for an unusual wargame or for coastal bombardment perhaps. The mortar reminded me of the huge

'Mallett Mortars' at Fort Nelson in the UK, intended for bombardment of Russian fortresses in the Crimean War - enormous things. In that sort of game SS1 could be her consort, carrying ammunition, towing etc. Take a look at one, and a few lateral naval thoughts will prove rewarding.

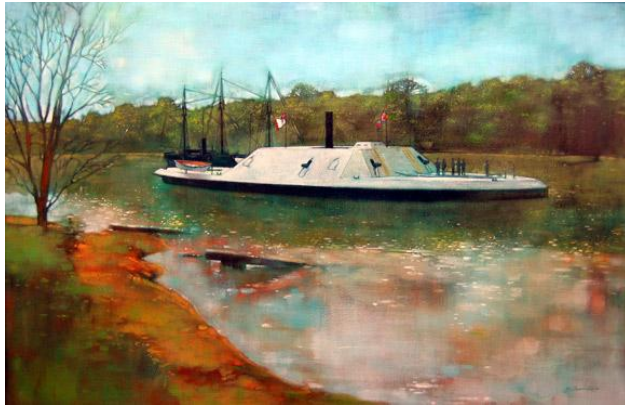


Figure 1 CSS Jackson

SS3, well this Ironclad ship, 40mm long, 10mm wide and 1mm high is a cleanly made casemate ironclad ram like CSS *Akansas* or CSS *Jackson*. Again, she fits in very well with other better known ranges, and could do with a little detailing.

SS4, this is a most unusual warship, a narrow casemate ironclad ram of 50mm length, not unlike *USS DUNDERBERG* perhaps, if given masts, but with the funnel well aft. It also has the look of CSS *Charleston*, little more than a floating battery, but in scale is longer of course. An un-built Confederate maybe? I like her, she's a bit Ruritanian.

SS6, described in the list as an ironclad ship, is 52mm long, 10mm wide and 10mm high. She's the standard generic Confederate casemate, like CSS *Virginia*, CSS *Atlanta* or one of the big rams 'destroyed on the stocks to prevent capture'. Very nicely detailed, little needed to make her fit to take on the Yankees.

SS6, Monitor. Hmm? Well, she's a single turret 'tin can on a shingle' alright! At 35mm long and 8mm wide, I couldn't work out why this model was priced at the higher rate of \$2.50, given the size and frankly the quality. Unless you are rather nostalgic about the 60's style of naval wargaming, this isn't one to invest your money in! However.... although the turret's immense, reaching from side to side, and it doesn't look right at all, it has a little potential for conversion. I'm thinking of the Swedish '*Berserk*' class, or the little Dutch "*Adder*" class of monitor rams. Maybe this model will scale up into 1/600th, converted?

SS7 double turret monitor – this model was the only one of the ten I've seen with any kind of production flaw. The after turret was very poorly finished, and in a UK product I'd have returned it. Mind you given the age of these moulds, if they are originals, the overall quality of the group's to be complimented. The model's chunky and again generic - very. I'd have been pleased with her forty years ago. The ship's 50mm by 12mm wide, and 10mm tall at the funnel by the way.

There's a charm about her, but she's not *USS Miantonomoh* or *USS Kalamazoo*. I toyed with the idea of *Keokuk*, but that won't work either. Perhaps one of the post-war US designs or rebuilds of the 1870's?

SS8, the sternwheeler is an incredible model! It's a sort of gunboat, 45mm long, narrow and looks fast with a single raked funnel and a big stern wheel. I like her very much, and thought she'd fit in with a Turkish or Italian fleet as a fast despatch boat, and as a warship she's got a definite South American look about the lines, or a Russian river or lake gunboat possibly? Worth any naval wargamer's money. With a bit of thought and a little detailing, she will make a decent 1/1200th man o' war, but not I fear for the War between the States!



SS9, the single-funnelled side-wheeler, the longest of all the models at 60mm a narrow fast looking vessel, cleanly manufactured. A blockade runner like *Peterhoff*, she will take an extra funnel or two with ease, to make *Dawn* or *Stag*.

Figure 2 Steamship Louisiana

With rigging and masts from 1/1200th Napoleonic sources, and an extra funnel the model will make *USS Vanderbilt* or *USS Quaker City*. She's another multi-purpose, multi-fleet model. I could find a place for her in most naval conflicts and encounters across the world from 1850-1890.

SS10, described as a 'Showboat' side-wheeler, she is a standard river gunboat, tinclad or cottonclad or a river ram. Only one funnel, and a hefty superstructure, this model's 35m long, 12mm wide and 10mm high. You can use her anywhere on the Mississippi system for both sides. An extra funnel is no problem either - chop the existing funnel down to 2mm for a pilot house and drill two holes forward of this, and cement two 6mm lengths of panel pin, with the head left on top alongside each other and you have a variant. SS10 fits well with all of the other ranges side-wheelers, again for variety. A nice model, and one which might with virtually no extra work see service in Colonial Wars, as a transport on the Yangtse or as an Irrawaddy or Nile gunboat. Or in French service on the Mekong, or on the Amazon.

All in all this is an interesting range, a survivor from the times when we had so very little to play around with in any scale at all. It might be of value as a display game to use the

Scrubby models with their rules as a basic introduction to naval wargaming. In those far-off days a range of ten models was substantial to say the least, and I wondered how much they sold for then? Perhaps they featured from time to time in "*Table Top Talk*"? Naval wargames were rare birds in the 1960's, just take a look at the suggested methods for building ancient galleys, ironclads and galleons which appear in Don Featherstone's book; speaking as someone who actually made a fleet of 'Roman galleys' (Hmm!!!) from clothes pegs, a Scrubby game would have been the height of luxury to young wargamers.

Incidentally, the Featherstone volume sets a second set of 1/1200th ship models alongside Jack Scrubby's, those designed by Joe Morschauser, which included a sloop or brig, a merchantman which could also serve as a small frigate, a hefty three-decker man o' war and a large frigate. Four ships of use from the start of Bonaparte's wars to the ACW, and beyond. It seems that they were also available from Jack Scrubby.

I wonder what happened to them?