

# **Biber, Molch and Seehund**

## **WWII Kriegsmarine submarine boats**

### **15mm Coastal Warfare releases**

#### **Review by Rob Morgan**

These releases from MY Miniatures add significantly to the 15mm naval and “special forces” models currently around in this scale. Each is a simple semi-submerged model, the “con” as Americans might say, on a small sea base, and with a range of potential options. Added to a pack of the 15mm MY Frogmen or with larger scale coastal forces boats, landing craft, etc., they will “beef up” a late-war NW Europe scenario, or a solo Mediterranean raid.

They (allegedly) had some slight capacity for mine-laying too, which offers a different option to attacking a larger warship. They are 15mm scale, but of course, will easily fit into a 20mm or 25mm scenario, if used against say Airfix Landing Craft or MTB's.

#### **Biber**

This is pack GERM 7, priced at around £2 for two. The model of the German mini-sub is 35mm long and 15mm wide. The control tower, with hatch, periscope, exhaust pipe and vision block detail pokes 15mm above the surface of the water. Detail is accurate, though minimal in a model which necessarily shows little beyond the “con.” It's easily painted, and if desired, by filing the hatch flat and replacing it with an “open” version, a pilot half-figure can be slipped into place for variation in a group of Bibers.

Interestingly, the Biber (Beaver) was remarkably similar to the Molch' (Salamander), differing mainly in the fact that the pilot structure was placed centrally along the hull in the first, but well aft in the latter vessel. The Molch, if you'd wish to model one, lacks the small fitting aft of the tower, and you'll need to file the edges to make a slightly sharper rear. The periscope fit also differed. So, cut away the sternmost pipe, and trim down the forward pair to 3mm, which is just below the “bulbs.” Over the top, slip a 12mm length of narrow biro tube. Cement this in place and then use the trimming from the bulbs to make a top to the new scope. Mick Yarrow tells me that a 15mm Molch may well be on the stocks before too long, so you might choose to wait for that issue rather than convert!

There were around 360 Molch submarines built, but they seem not to have achieved much success in operational terms.

## Seehund

The *Kriegsmarine's* most successful, and safest mini-sub, the XXVII B, comes as Pack GERM 8, priced again at a little over £2 for two. Check prices on the website as recent postal increases might well affect cost. The model and sea-base are 40mm long and 14mm wide. The control tower of the 2-man sub is raked back a little and has the appearance of submerging, or getting up a little speed. The boat was able to submerge in 3-5 seconds, and this enhanced the survival rate of what must be regarded as the best mini-sub of WWII. The tower of the Seehund is much plainer than the Biber's, though the hatch, periscope and basic details are all visible and, when painted, add to the overall appearance of the boat. As to modelling detail, Seehund craft carried U-boat designations, and two known numbers were *U 5001* and *U 6252*, so adding small numbers on each side of the tower is possible. I sprayed all of my boats dark sea grey, with black 'feature' detail.



Figure 1 Seehund

A simple idea from Mick Yarrow, and two, no three, delightful models.

Each of the above types can be enhanced by adding thin plasticard to create a submerged hull shape, and to give some “sea area” to the model, but it isn't necessary, unless you're a purist.

The Seehund, incidentally, may not be as well known to some readers as the Biber, and so a few background details are probably necessary at this stage. Successful? Well, only 10% of the 285 boats completed were lost, and most of these went down in one huge storm on 31st December 1944. The boats carried two slung 21" torpedoes on dropping gear along the lower hull, and the 39' long (11.9m) Seehund displaced only 14.75 tons, being capable with its Bussing diesel engine of 7.75 knots. Small enough to be difficult to spot by radar or sight, quick to submerge.

The drawbacks to the Seehund were its low submerged speed, only 6 knots and the endurance of the boat was only some 63 nautical miles, better than the Biber or Molch but not sufficient to attack the main shipping lanes off the south coast of England from the main base at Ijmuiden in Holland. Drawbacks aside, the Free French frigate *La Combattante* was a confirmed Seehund kill in late February 1945, and the German flotilla historian claims as much as 120,000 tons of shipping sunk by the 285 operational craft, a very high figure!

The Molch one-man boat, if you decide to convert one, had an electric motor capable of only 4.3 knots surfaced, and 5 knots submerged, with a range of 50 nautical miles compared to the Biber's 130! The Molch was a safer bet for pilots than the Biber and a little larger at 11 tons and 35 ft long (10.8m). The same two 21" torpedoes carried slung along the lower hull, or again two mines. Some 363 Molch were built, against 324 Biber's, but while the latter ranged farther out to sea, the Molchs were very much limited to coastal actions because of their range.

If wargaming with either of these craft, then the possibility of carbon-monoxide poisoning of the pilot, rather common at first in the Biber but significantly reduced, arguably down to virtually nil, in the Molch, must be remembered. When these models are combined with the 8 figures in the 15mm MY Pack GB3 Frogmen/Divers, a very different NW Europe post D-Day scenario presents itself to the WWII solo wargamer, but I'll return to that later perhaps.

There you have basic, useful models of three of the main German submarine warship types used against the Allies from June 1944.

As far as the Seehund is concerned, about a hundred were captured incomplete at the war's end, and formed the basis of significant Allied research into what makes a successful mini-submarine. The French, as many will know, actually captured a small number of active craft and entered them into the French naval lists. Allied efforts, the X-Craft and Wellman being typical examples, fell well below the standard of the two-man Type XXVII B U-boat, and many of those captured were evaluated for future use. A Seehund cropping up in clandestine early Cold War operations would not, possibly, fall far short of the actual events of the late 1940s east of Stettin or Trieste.



Figure 2 Seehund

The photographs were taken at the Brest Naval Fortress in Brittany, one of the key Nazi U-boat bases in 1940-45, and are displayed within the French Navy Museum complex. This particular Seehund has the later Perspex dome for the commander, and is, I suspect, in French colours and with a French pennant number **5622** in red. The torpedoes are post-war mock-ups.

One report I've encountered detailing the internal construction of the *Bundesamt für Wehrtechnik und Beschaffung MS 14 Klein- u-boot* states categorically that it had no toilet aboard, which seems less than typically Teutonically efficient. I'd be willing to bet the French fitted one!

Mick Yarrow is at ....

[www.spanglefish.com/mickyarrowminiatures/](http://www.spanglefish.com/mickyarrowminiatures/)