



“It’s Cutlasses Now Men!”

28mm Pirate Ships and how to make them by Gary Chalk

Thanks to Robert Louis Stevenson, Rafael Sabatini and the celluloid outpourings of Hollywood, the pirates of the eighteenth century enjoy an almost unrivalled reputation for romance and deeds of daring-do. Eye-patches akimbo, they sweep the seas for loot while singing lusty sea shanties.... Of course, the truth may have been a little different, but it still provides opportunities for endless small - scale actions with interesting scenarios. Now, I know that you can use pirates ashore, raiding coastal villages, smuggling, or even attacking Squire Trelawney and Jim Lad in the old stockade, but pirates really only come into their own when striding the deck and battering down the hatches. You can’t be a pirate without a ship, and you can’t have a pirate ship without a prey.

With this in mind, I started to think about finding ships, plural, for my band of desperadoes. Using existing plastic kits, although briefly considered, was never really an option, as I was using Foundry’s 28 mm scale pirates, I couldn’t find anything big enough for them, and plastic kits are generally crammed with too much unnecessary detail to be of use. The detail makes it difficult to move figures and never withstands the frenzy engendered by a really good game. This meant that I was going to have to build them from scratch, using cheap materials and an easy method of construction. I finally settled for card and balsa-wood, and, as I was going to make more than one ship, I drew up templates for all the hull parts. These have been

included, at full size, in the article to allow you to build your own fleet with the minimum of trouble.

The templates do not, and I must stress this, make up into an exact replica of an historical pirate vessel, but provide something that looks rather like a wide version of a small eighteenth century brigantine. There are reasons for this.

Firstly, contrary to popular belief, pirates did not, in general, use large ships. They favoured smaller craft, whose shallow draught permitted them to go where heavier naval vessels could not follow. Brigantines seem to have been the most popular ships used by eighteenth century pirates, although they also sailed in the smaller sloops and schooners. Brigantines varied a little in size, but were generally about 120 to 130 feet in length and were crewed by anything up to a hundred rum - crazed swash-bucklers.

I have widened the vessels to allow models of ships’ guns to be accommodated on both sides of the deck and to provide a good - sized fighting platform for use of the crew. Miniatures always take up more room than their real -life counterparts. I have thought of these ships as “terrain” rather than “models”, like wargame buildings. They should have the feel of the prototypes, without necessarily having all their details and be strong enough to withstand constant handling.



Gary Chalk (Foundry’s voice on the phone en France) contemplates world domination in card



Fig 1. "Don't 'ee get too near that swivel gun Nathaniel!" The swivel guns are 15mm cannon barrels (although you could use very small 25mm) with a hole drilled through them. A dress-making pin is pushed through the hole into the end of a piece of square section balsa. Once cut to length, this is glued to the ship's rail in the desired position.

Fig 2. A shot of the bow which may help with positioning the bow ornament and the angle of the bowsprit. The figurehead is made from the upper half of a 15mm figure dry-brushed in gold.

Fig 3. The detailing of the quarterdeck front and the companionways is done using balsa strip. The companionways have been "stylised" as ladders to save deck space and for ease of construction. The gold balls on the balustrade were originally a pair of small plastic beads.

Fig 4. The fighting tops are each big enough to hold a suitably villainous marksman! I have edged the top with a strip of thin card that provides a slight lip to prevent figures falling off as you move the ship. Sails have been omitted from the lower yards to allow free movement of figures during a boarding action.

Fig 5. This little side window on the Dutch ship has been made from an offcut of 4mm balsa sheet and odd bits of balsa strip. These windows seem to have been different in every ship illustration I've looked at, so don't worry about trying to copy it exactly.

Fig 6. A small piece of balsa block has been glued to the inside of the stern with a hole drilled in the top to accept the flagstaff. If you don't glue the flagstaff into position, you can have a number of different flags and, by swapping them over, change the identity of the ship. You could use the *cut out and stick on flags* that appear elsewhere in this and last issue of WI.

Fig 7. A view of the pirate's stern. After the stern windows piece has been glued to the stern, a strip of thin card can be used, as here, to cover the joint. The windows themselves were edged in balsa strip and the detail of the panes painted in.

Fig 8. A general view of the pirate's deck. The hatch covers are rectangles of mounting card. Kept in low relief like this, they don't get in the way too much when you try to move figures. You can also see the effect of a deck that has been made from balsa sheet, scored to resemble planking with a pencil and ruler.

