

Improving Your Models

By John Carter

Some of us like to dress up our models beyond what manufacturers supply us. How far do you want to go? What is right? This is a hobby not a job; you decide. My comments here are based on my tastes. Use what you will, but remember, if it isn't fun how can it be a hobby?

First, research: You will find that taking a little time and researching a ship will really pay off in preparing to build the miniature. Knowledge is power. This can become an obsession of its own. The more sources you access, the more likely you are to do a satisfying job. In addition to published books and photographs, there are a plethora of Internet sites. [Http://www.navsource.org](http://www.navsource.org), for example, is very good for the USN. I have found that shifting sites and search engines sometimes yields added results. In the end, you will gain not only detail knowledge but also a "feel" for how it should look.

Cleaning: Although errors do occur, most of the problems with miniatures are attributable to the needs of production casting. These include casting seams and vents, bent hulls (banana boats), overly thick masts to avoid mold tearing and lead slabs (called filets) under gun barrels, torpedo tubes, bridge wings, between mast legs, etc. You can use an *X-Acto* knife and small files to gently clean and sand off the vents and seams. Touch up lightly after with a small piece of number 600 wet-n-dry sandpaper to blend any remaining irregularities. Then, straighten a banana hull by placing the bottom of the model on a file that is ~3/4" wide by ~1/8" thick. Using finger pressure and very slightly bending the file you can level the thing. Be careful not to level the deck details.

I use drills to perforate the filets under guns, etc. until there is so little lead left that the filets lose their strength. Then, I carefully remove the remaining remnant from the model. *X-Acto* blades are actually a little heavy for this, but if you use them, be very, very gentle and cut away from the gun or model. I have had real success with surplus root canal files by inserting them in the perforations and connecting the holes drilled in the filets. [Make friends with your dentist!] Note: Do not force anything; use feather strokes. You are less likely to bend something! After awhile, you will acquire the "touch" for this. Just take it slow. The result will be a greater sense of detail and transparency well worth your time.

Adding masts: Masts especially are a good starting point for detailing your miniatures. It is amazing how, what is really just a little piece of wire, alters the look of the thing. A ship miniature without a mast looks incomplete, as the brain "knows" the mast should be there and expects it. Add even a simple piece of brass wire and the eye sees what it expects to see! Without a mast, the best comparison is to imagine Dolly Parton without her wigs. Yeah the superstructure is all there, but it ain't Dolly.

Locate the appropriate spot in the deck of the miniature for each mast. Eyeball fore, aft and sideways to center as needed.

Use a corsage pin as an awl to place a starter hole for the drill to avoid it slipping. Then, use micro drills in a pin vise (#70 - 79 provides a good range) to drill the hole deep enough to provide a good base support for the mast. Be gentle. If you try to force it you may break off the bit. I think of it as following the bit into the hole. In all cases, the touch of a feather is better than the John Wayne approach. Sometimes masts pass through platforms or overhangs to a lower deck. By carefully drilling through each deck, the final mast will add detail. Use brass wire available at model train stores for the masts. A good side cutter variously called snippers, nips, dikes etc. is handy. Cut the mast wire a little long. It is easier to cut off excess than it is to have to add on later. Get a little dab of glue on the end of the wire and place it in the hole. Adjust as needed for mast rake etc. Have some small pieces of newspaper handy and use an edge to absorb any excess glue. I've found the thicker super glue is easier to handle and gives time for adjustments.

Tripods are just more of the same. Sometimes, carefully drilling a hole in a small piece of plastic and sliding it down the mainmast to where the legs join makes a useful top. It also conceals the join. Glue well. Wait a day and then GENTLY file off the excess. If you cut away the original mast, reserve the tops, etc. for inclusion in your mast.



IJN CHOKAI by John Carter

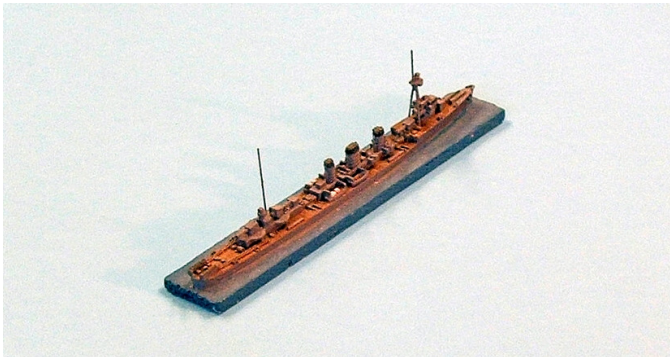
Super detailing: Adding details can really improve a model and add a sense of depth to it. But, do it sensibly. It is possible to overdo it to the point where you obscure the essential look of the ship. Think about it this way. Typically you are 2 - 3 feet from your miniature - in scale about a mile. Decide what detail will enhance the look of the model at this distance. Finally, paint and weather as desired. Camouflage schemes are another area where you can really affect the look of your miniatures. Consult one of the numerous published sources or websites on camouflage to assist you in selecting authentic schemes for different time periods. But, also be mindful that providing some contrast between decks and gun turrets, torpedo mounts and boats will make them easier to make out from a distance and provide some visual depth. I never camo the decks for the '30s, but go with whatever natural color (wood, linoleum etc.) for the appropriate deck covering. This brings out the guns and other details. Too much camouflage will render all your detail invisible.

Basing: For war-gaming purposes, I suggest you mount your miniatures on bases to help preserve them and improve stability. Gamers can then maneuver them by handling the bases to avoid scratching paint schemes and bending delicate details. In the long run, avoiding wear and tear on your miniatures is definitely worth it. You will be glad you did. 1:6000 miniatures come with bases, but you will need to add them for other scales. You can make your own from materials

like thin basswood, balsa or plastic or purchase ready-made bases for your finished miniatures. ODGW offers a handy and inexpensive line of clear acrylic bases in a variety of sizes, complete with etched wakes elsewhere on this website. You can also dress up your bases with waves and wakes.

Use these steps as desired and your ships will soon be ready to steam into action. My basic principle is, having studied the ship in photos and plans to get a sense of how she should appear, I look at the miniature and eliminate the differences until I am satisfied. Please note the mast work on *IJN Chokai* and *Tenryu* and compare it to the photos of the miniatures in GHQ's catalogue and painting guide. This is not in any sense a criticism of the manufacturer. They do the best they can within the limitations of production casting. But you can take it a bit further.

I hope my comments give you some useful starting points. You'll soon develop your own ways to enhance your ships.



IJN Tenryu by John Carter