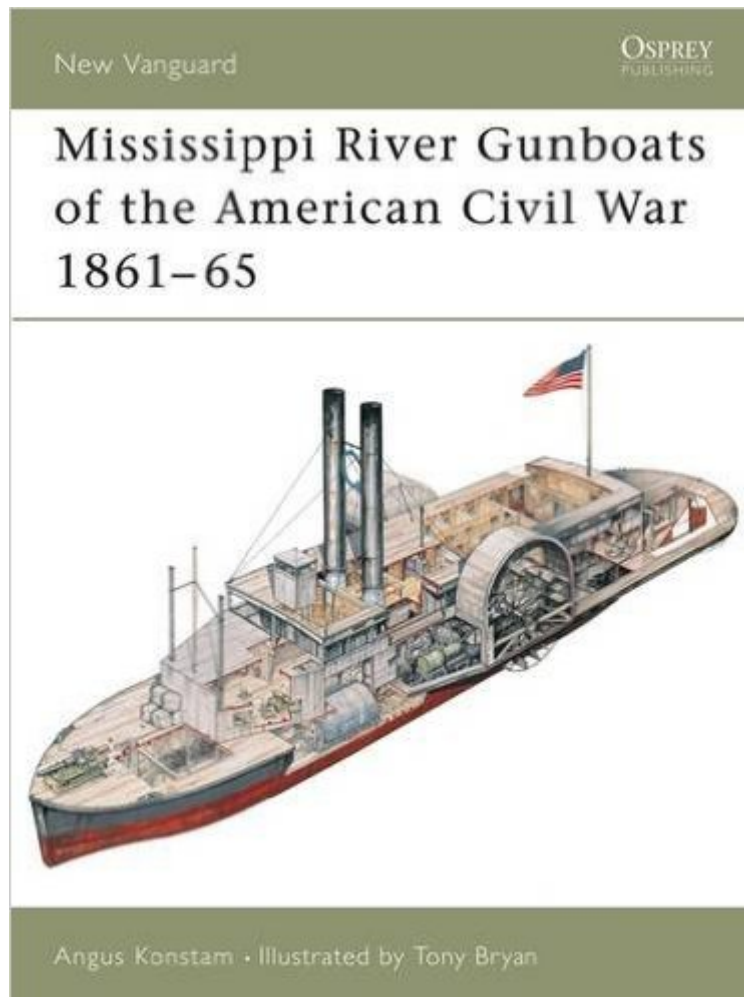


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Mississippi River Gunboats Of The American Civil War 1861-65 (New Vanguard)



Synopsis

At the start of the American Civil War, neither side had warships on the Mississippi River and in the first few months both sides scrambled to gather a flotilla, converting existing riverboats for naval use. These ships were transformed into powerful naval weapons despite a lack of resources, trained manpower and suitable vessels. The creation of a river fleet was a miracle of ingenuity, improvisation and logistics, particularly for the South. This title describes their design, development and operation throughout the American Civil War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Someone wanting a brief survey of the role of the gunboats during the Civil War on western waters will find this book moderately useful. My view is that it spends too much time on the Confederate river forces, given their almost utter lack of success and strategic insignificance after the battle of Memphis. Also I would question the selection of the battle of New Orleans as illustrative of the usage of gunboats on the rivers; the Confederate gunboats in that battle were handled terribly, and they were up against ocean-going warships, hardly typical of western gunboat fighting. Much better instead would have been to treat one of the operations on the White or the Yazoo. But reasonable people might disagree. I was very disappointed, however, to encounter some grave errors. It says on page 46 that "The 'walking beam engine' was the most common type of engine used on the paddleboats that plied the western rivers in peace and in war." That is entirely false. By at least 1830 and probably even earlier, the walking beam transmission (typically associated with

low-pressure engines, and essentially always with vertical cylinders) had been entirely superseded on the western waters by the Evans-type, horizontal-cylinder, high pressure steam engine, with direct drive from the piston rod to an oscillating "pitman," a wooden beam that turned the crank of the paddle wheel. The principal motion of the pitman was fore-and-aft, though it moved up and down just enough to accommodate the rotation of the crank.

If I might be forgiven for adapting that old cliché about buses; I was blissfully unaware of the existence of Osprey Publishing until several books from this particular publisher came along at once. More importantly, I have yet to be disappointed by any title so far studied. My review of their "US Cruisers 1883-1904" attracted several comments in which I was asked about similar titles covering historic US Ships - so I asked for more. Up to last week, I thought the USS Lexington was an aircraft carrier from WW2 and had no idea that name had been used previously. From this book, however, I learned that the first ship of that name was one of three Union river gunboats to see service on the Mississippi during the American Civil War. She displaced 362 tons and carried four 8 inch smoothbore and two 32 pounder guns. Whilst warships have changed considerably since that time, I shall never look at the Natchez or Creole Queen (two similar, albeit unarmed, river boats which still ply the Mississippi) in quite the same way - should I ever see those magnificent vessels again. If anything, this book will teach almost everybody something they did not previously know about the shallow-draught river gunboats which fought the naval battles within the confined spaces of one of the world's greatest rivers at that time. A particularly intriguing incident came about when the Governor Moore rammed the Varuna. Locked together for that short time before the Governor Moore could reverse away, the Varuna's gun crew were confronted by an enemy ship which was so close as to be below the trajectory of their main bow gun. Consequently they depressed the barrel to its absolute maximum and fired a round through their own decks and into the attacking ship causing mortal damage.

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