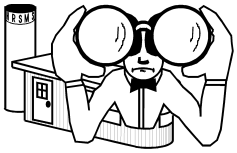
Hampton Roads Ship Model Society

Logbook

No. 268 **WWW.HRSMS.ORG** **OCTOBER, 2008**

From The Bridge



A fresh coat of paint

After many years of stalwart use, the venerable old logo of the HRSMS was retired. Legislation was passed at the September NRSMS meeting allowing for an update of the Society's logo. The new logo was proposed by webmaster Greg Harrington using artwork of the Monitor and Virginia by Richmond artist Joe Hinds. These full color renderings of the famous ironclads are arranged in the same manner as those of the old logo except they are set on a sand colored field and surrounded by an oval of rope and the Society's name. You can see the new logo at the webpage. Also Greg brought back to the home page the sorely missed field of rived plate; it's a fine compliment to the wooden plank deck and surely makes a steel head feel comfortable. His work has greatly dressed up the appearance of our home page. Well done.

Fall is upon us, do you have your winter ship model project picked out? I know some of you do. I even hear that sawdust is flying at a certain Poquoson model shop. Nope, it's not him; it's the other one. Expect to see progress at upcoming meetings.

Finally, a word about quality:

I remember once long, long ago when I proudly displayed my 3rd, I think it was, scratch-built 1:1200 scale waterline recognition model to my dad. I might have been 12 at the time and full of youthful exuberance and blindness. Expecting high praise for my labor and artistic ability, I was crushed when he asked if I had ever heard of sandpaper. Apparently not! I still have that model and look at the hull from time to time just to remind me of how lumpy it really is. No I never sanded it smooth; I decided to keep it as a constant reminder of where I had to go. Today, I think Dad's hard lesson is learned.

(Continued on page 2)

Mystery Photo

Mystery Photo #267: Some Mystery Photos tell a story and others tell a Whopper of a story. Guess which kind we have this month? That's right! This Mystery was difficult; the vessel was so tough to identify that no one responded, no one played, and the one inquiry I made was met with hesitation and doubt. As this story unfolds, I will lead you all over the place. It's a fascinating tale, and I do not apologize for the detours.

We will begin, as we always do, by identifying and cataloging the features we see in the image. The vessel looks like a self-propelled barge. It presents a nice, port broadside view with almost no shadow indicating an image made about midday with the sun slightly behind the ship. While the forward half of the hull is in shadow, the after end reveals horizontal straking made from narrow plating. Except for the straight-knuckle flair at the bow the hull has vertical sides. The stem and stern posts are vertical, again indicating a very simple hull shape. Just below the rounded deck edge spanning the middle 2/3rd of the hull length we find a half round rubbing strake; it's not required at the ends where the hull narrows at the bow and stern. Except for the knuckled foredeck, the main deck is absolutely flat—no sheer. I'm sure camber is present but it's not really evident in the image. The camber is almost certainly of the straight line type in keeping with the flavor of the simple, and simple to build, flat-panel hull form.

Starting at the bow and working our way aft along the deck we see an empty jack staff, a very short length of raised bulwark surrounding deck cleats and rollers, an anchor windlass, and three raised deck hatch coamings. Between the 2nd and 3rd hatches we can see a breakwater—something you don't normally see on a barge shaped hull indicating to me a vessel intended for use in open water. A pipe fitted just above the deck runs from the windlass motor housing to the deck house.

(Continued on page 2)

HAMPTON ROADS SHIP MODEL SOCIETY ANNUAL PICNIC

Saturday, October 11, 2008, 1130 am to 1630 pm
Newport News City Park, Shelter #11

(Continued from page 1)

Sanding a hull smooth is a unique operation. The mechanics of sanding really could be expressed as the mechanics of fairing. To sand a hull fair is to make the surface smooth by knocking off the high spots. (Low spots are another matter.) By changing your sandpaper grit as you go through the process (increase the grit number), you will make smaller scratches from the larger scratches. By the time you get to 150-grit you should have a fair, smooth hull.

If you sand a flat surface or hull section with one-way shape, use a hard sanding block and arrange your sandpaper such that it does not round over any edges. If you sand a doubly curved surface, use a softer spongy type of sanding block that allows for smoothing over convex and concave surfaces. Remember all you want to do is remove the high spots.

Checking for fair is also easy. There are several ways to prove a hull; I'll offer a few. You can use you sense of touch and run your hand over the hull; it'll tell you what is not fair. Or you can use a light to make shadows across the hull. The shadow line will ripple where the hull is not fair. But the best and easiest way is to show it off at a club meeting and ask for honest feedback.

Alan Frazer once said that he rarely sanded wood, preferring to scrape it instead. He didn't think that wood deserved to be reduced to sand dust. I agree and it's a noble sentiment, but sometimes you just have to sand to smooth the wood.

With a crooked eye
John

Mystery Photo

The deck house is small, of simple construction, and only three decks high, and that's a stretch! The third deck is open and is reminiscent of the British Atlantic-style bridge. The forward end of the house is angled to match the breakwater. All port lights are round, railings are light and made from pipe except at the open bridge where it is plate. The second level is the enclosed bridge and seems to be modified and raised a half deck to improve visibility, but I'm not sure if it was raised to improve the helmsman's sight line over the ship's boat or to see past the raised foredeck. There is a forest of exposed vent pipes, exhaust pipes, and other pipes surrounding the deck structure. This clutter, in conjunction with the deck extensions and other things, indicates to me that we are seeing a major revision to the superstructure arrangement. I wonder if the original deck arrangement was limited to the lower level, the area under the life boat with its waist high forward bulwark and turreted second level house. And I wonder if they got more green water over that deck than they planned for. At the after end of the house we see the mast; a United States ensign flies from the small boom.

Continuing aft we see another raised deck hatch coaming, and just aft of it we see a light king post and boom arrangement. Was this derrick intended to serve the boat tucked transversely at the aft end of the deckhouse? Aft of that some features can be discerned amid the background clutter of the shoreline. All I can describe, however, is a raised, open accommodation hatch with its lid open at about a 45-degree angle, and a circular object just aft that this is a large hose or hawser real. At the stern we see either a jack staff or a pole for a running light—it looks like the latter to me.

The rudder is interesting and looks like a throw-back design, but that is deceptive. When you look close, it actually has no curved edges. I don't see a quadrant or a yoke so I'm not sure how it was operated. Just forward of the rudder's pintle and gudgeons we see a vertical run of white blocks which are draft marks. There is a pipe or something exiting the hull near the deck that extends aft past the rudder. It almost looks like the makings of a patent stern; not sure what it's for, it could be an exhaust.

The most interesting feature to me was the American flag painted amidships on her hull. To my knowledge the only time we see that is on American flagged ships that entered contested waters during the two World Wars. The flag was intended to signal to enemy naval ships, usually submarines, that the vessel is neutral and seeking safe passage (see image of *S.S. American Farmer* circa 1939-1940.) Since I can see welded shall seams on our Mystery vessel I will rule out World War One and move to limit our time line for this image to the years between 1939 and 1941.

Cataloged images of merchant men are hard to come by. Identifying specific and rare merchantman is a near impossible task if you remember from pervious Mystery Photos of commercial shipping. The best clue that merchantmen offer is usually the stack livery but, in this case, we don't have a stack. All we have is a black hulled vessel with white superstructure and several men on deck who appear to be wearing naval uniforms and a few who seen to be in civilian garb. Not much to go on.

So I sat back and studied the clues to see what they could tell me. I know from my readings of history that the United States, under President Roosevelt's direction, began to rebuild and enlarge its armed forces and merchant marine in the three years prior to formally entering into hostilities after the Pearl Harbor attack. Part of that expansion included studies on how to best resupply our ally Great Britain and how to best deliver military forces and supplies to Europe using unimproved or non-existent harbors. A principle element of the effort was focused on ways to build large numbers of vessels

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NAUTICAL TERM

Lubber An awkward or not-too-bright sailor or workman. The origin is Anglo-Saxon, *lobbe,* a slow, clumsy person.

Submitted By: Tim Wood

MEETING NOTICE

Date: Saturday October 11, 2008
Place: Newport News Park
Time: 1130 Hours

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Mystery Photo

quickly and cheaply. We are all familiar with the successful Liberty ship and later Victory ship programs but perhaps we are less familiar with the design gestation behind what became our now very familiar military landing craft of almost every description.

And that's when it occurred to me that this vessel was very similar in appearance to the LSM type of landing craft. I wondered if this was the prototype vessel for that craft. Could we be looking at the only image available of one of the losing designs? The accompanying image of LSM-552, the USS *Windlass*, reveals a very similar type of vessel. Was I on to something?

Playing the hunch I reviewed Norman Friedman's book, U.S. Amphibious Ships and Craft, an Illustrated Design History, found on line at Google book search. There I studied the design history and excellent drawings of the LSM as well as the LST, the LCM, the LCT, and others. What I did not find in the book was our Mystery Photo or any image that resembled our Mystery Photo. What I did find was a passage that began on page 136 that mentions a vessel that was being considered as an alternative to the LCT(5). That passage refers to: "…a modified version of the "Sea Otter" offered by a commercial group, Ships Inc. [The group] proposed to solve the shipping crisis by building small freighters powered by car-type gasoline engines grouped around vertical shafts, with right-angled gearing to propellers. Given such an arrangement, any type of engine could be used. The craft could be built of the standard strip mill plating normally used in cars." Hummm…


Photo # NH 105259 S.S. American Farmer circa 1939-1940

What is the Sea Otter? Is it the title of a project, a design study, the name of a ship? Was the Sea Otter related to Roosevelt's expansion of the Navy and Merchant Marine? Would the passage from Friedman's book lead us to identifying the Mystery Photo? A Google search of Sea Otter began to provide the answers.

One of the Google search results provided a reference to *USS Sea Otter I* and *USS Sea Otter II*. Making the assumption that this Clarke-supplied image came from the National Archives, it was logical to assume that the vessel was connected to the US Navy in some way. Since that result referenced the Naval Historical Center and the *Dictionary of Naval fighting Ship* (DANFS), I felt I was getting warm and close to solving the Mystery. The entry for *Sea Otter II,* (IX-53) did not contain an image of the vessel but did make reference to "her 16 unmuffled gasoline engines…"

The particulars for *Sea Otter II*, IX-53 show a displacement of 1,941 tons, a length of 254-feet, a beam of 38-feet, and a draft of 10-foot , 2-inches. Her compliment is listed at 15. These dimensions very closely match what we see and measure in the Mystery Photo. Could this be the ship? It feels right! The DANFS entry also mentions that she "was launched on 23 August 1941 by the Levingston Shipbuilding Co., Orange, Tex.; sponsored by Mrs. Eads Johnson, wife of the designer, acquired by the Navy on 26 September 1941 and placed in service on 26 October 1941. [She] proceeded to the Charleston Navy Yard on 26 October 1941, arriving on 2 November. After completion of voyage repairs, [she] got underway for sea trials on 4 November." Timing seems right!

A footnote from the graduate dissertation of Christopher James Tassava titled Launching a Thousand Ships: Entrepreneurs, War Workers, and the State in American Shipbuilding, 1940-1945 A Dissertation Submitted To The Graduate School In Partial Fulfillment Of The Requirements for the degree Doctor Of Philosophy, June 2003, page 123, offers incite to the political climate that created our Mystery vessel. The note is credited to the Baltimore Evening Sun and dated 23 February 1942, it states: "Just after Pearl Harbor, prominent interests, including apparently President Roosevelt, advocated the adoption of a prototype cargo ship called the Sea Otter (obviously the product of a moment when shipbuilders paid less attention to a name's patriotic possibilities), which sailed low in the water to avoid submarine detection and which, backers claimed, could be mass produced owing to its use of off-the-shelf equipment like gasoline-powered car engines for propulsion." This calls to attention the pressure that American businessmen placed on the United States Maritime Commission to, not only generate the volume of shipping needed to fight the new war, but to do it in a way that protected their business interests.

A search for Levingston Shipbuilding produced a site that listed their building record. *Sea Otter II* is listed but, oddly, does not show a building number. It states that the vessel was owned by the U.S. Maritime Commission, is listed as a cargo ship of 1,575 tons, was delivered on 26 Oct, 1941, and is called an "experimental vessel that was hulked in

(Continued on page 4)

THE ANSWER

The answer to Mystery Photo 267:
U.S.S. Sea Otter (IX-53)
#80G-457692

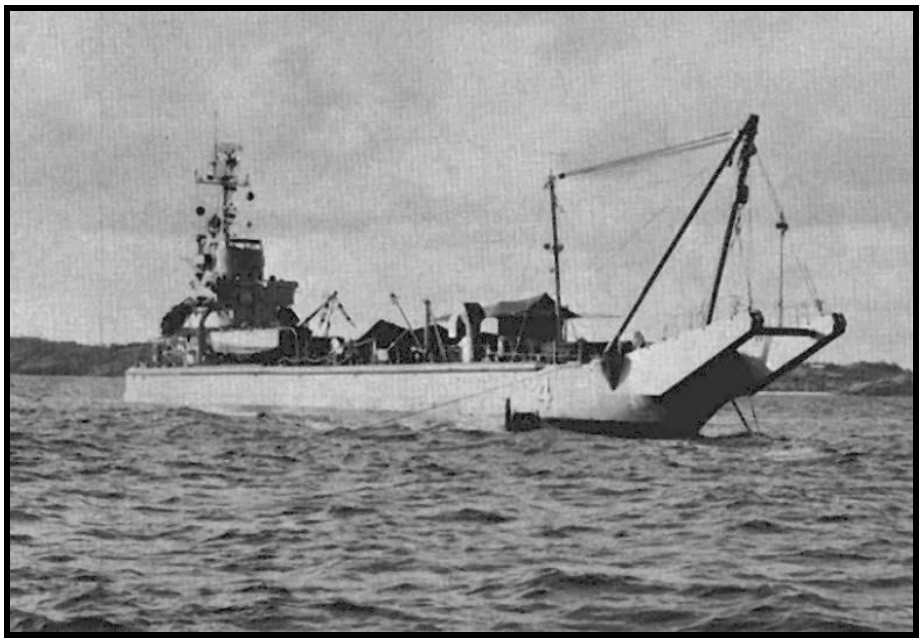
(Continued from page 3)

1942."

Mystery Photo

Detour: Three entries below that is their hull #212, the tug boat *Susan Moran,* built for the Moran towing Company in 1942. That got my attention. It seems this tug was presented upon completion in 1942 to the US Navy and operated as *USS Uncas* (YT 242.) Renamed *Pauline L. Moran* in 1947 she earned a measure of fame as being the tug that towed the submarine *U-505* from Portsmouth, England to Lake Erie in May of 1954. Her subsequent history pales and she is last listed as the tug *Fort McHenry* in 1980. It seems that I now have that Paul Harvey "rest of the story" to go along with the modern *Susan Moran* I have under construction.

Another web site revealed that none other than famed ship designer and naval architect W. Starling Burgess worked on the Sea Otter project. Burgess is perhaps best known as the designer of the 1937 America's cup contender *Ranger*. Built of steel, she was the last of the great "J" boats and handily kept the cup in American hands. In an abstract to the listing for Burgess at the G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport, we find this: "…Of interest also is material on Burgess' development of a unique freighter/tanker craft, known as the SEA OTTER (1941-1942.)"



The four part article about Burgess and his father, Edward Burgess, found in Woodenboat magazine. #74, page 49-50. The Burgess Legacy Part IV, Conclusion calls his work on *Sea Otter* as a "development of tantalizing promise." It further states that *Sea Otter* was "the prototype for a unique recyclable small cargo vessel that was known to have the blessing of FDR." This article called attention to a Time magazine article that called Sea Otter the "edible plate." The idea being that these vessels would make a one-way trip to Britain laden with cargo. Upon arrival, everything down to the last nut and bolt was intended to be converted into material to sustain Britain's war effort. When the ship was gone Britain had cleaned their plate?

Wonder of wonders, I found that Time magazine article, titled "Flivver Ships," on line. It's dated Monday September 29, 1941 and is full of hope and promise:

"Moored to a shipyard dock at Orange, Tex. last week lay a cargo vessel that may break the back of Adolf Hitler. She not only looked crazy—with a high flanged bow, a low stern, only one turret-like house amidships and five low hatches on her flush 270-ft. deck—but she broke most of the accepted rules of ship construction.

She has no keel. She has no ordinary propeller shaft. She has no costly marine engines. Fore & aft she is just a hollow shell for holding cargo. Her power plant consists of sixteen 110-h.p. Chrysler gasoline engines geared in teams of four to four shafts that run straight down through her bottom to four 6-ft. propellers.

In short, she is a ship designed to be built cheap, to be built fast, to be built in quantity out of common materials by men who have learned the elaborate skill of shipbuilding—a flivver of a ship to be turned out en masse to win the Battle of the Atlantic.

This is the Sea Otter, built in little over a month by the U.S. Navy and now awaiting her sea trials.

Her qualities are extraordinary. She displaces 2,240 tons, and has a cargo capacity of 1,600. But she draws only 11 ft. when fully loaded—which means that others like her may be built far from the sea. Instead of a crew of 25-30 men usually needed to run a ship of her size, she requires only eight to twelve. All hands live in the cylindrical turret amidships—live there for the entire voyage, for with a freeboard (when loaded) of only 9 ft., her decks will be awash in all but the calmest weather. Carrying some 37,000 gallons of gas, she has a cruising range of better than 7,000 miles, enough to take her to England and back without refueling. If one of her 6-ft. propellers is fouled, it can be drawn through a well in her bottom to be repaired. If one of her motors burns out, another can quickly be bolted down to replace it (she carries four spares). Split neatly into eight watertight compartments, she is expected to remain afloat even if some of them are damaged.

Only last February two men thought up the Sea Otter over a luncheon table in Washington. One was tall, balding Commander Hamilton V. Bryan (U.S.N., ret.), the other, white-thatched Warren Noble, an automotive engineer. Because automobile production was soon to be cut, they decided that their ship would utilize automobile instead of marine engines, should be constructed of the ½in. and ⅜in. steel ordinarily rolled out in abundance for the auto industry.

Their first designs were no great shakes. Presently

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MINUTES

Minutes of
Hampton Roads Ship Model Society
September 13, 2008

Held at the Mariners' Museum War Room

Meeting Called: 14:13 by Skipper John Cheevers
Meeting Adjourned: 15:37

Guest: Andrew Hales from Portsmouth (1st meeting)

Treasurer's Report: A comprehensive **r**eport was given by Eric Harfst who indicated the amount on hand. Received receipt from webmaster for reimbursement for outlay to cover domain name.

Members: No count was taken.

Additions or Corrections: David Tagg said that the ship he mentioned was American not German. John Cheevers attempted to clear up the statement he made about basswood. He talked of reading about not using basswood on a web site because of chemistry occurring in the wood.

Web Master's Report: None given

Old Business:
Final discussion in preparation for the upcoming October picnic at Newport News Park. The October meeting will be held in conjunction with the picnic on Saturday the 11th. Final sign ups for attendance and what to bring were made.

New Business:
Greg Harrington presented via proxy a call to change the club logo from the current line drawing to a full color presentation of the ironclads Monitor and Virginia surrounded by an oval of rope. The change asked for funding to pay artist Joe Hinds a one-time fee of $50 for the use of his artwork. Henry Clapp made the motion to do so and it was seconded by George Livingston. Motion was voted on and passed.

Thank you notes from Colonial Williamsburg, The American Cancer Society through Bill Altice, and Jeanne Bobbitt were passed around.

Show and Tell:
John Cheevers showed plans for the USCG cutter Tahoe (The August Mystery Photo.) A double edged micro saw bought at the recent IPMS show. Spoke on a half model of an English cutter that he is working on in the Taco Stand, and made a progress report on Susan Moran including showing the finished Z-drives.

Henry Schekulin brought a book of "Le Croiseurs de 7600 tonnes" about French cruisers. And he spoke about his visit to the Musee de la Marine (Paris.)

Bill Clarke presented nothing.

Alan Frazer noted that the cone for the new propeller (a spare for SS United States) was being made and would be installed soon.

Dave Baker showed books: "Altantic Escorts," and "Big Gun Monitors." Both British publications. He also brought and showed ink on mylar drawings of early British destroyers

David Tagg brought his card model of USS Missouri.

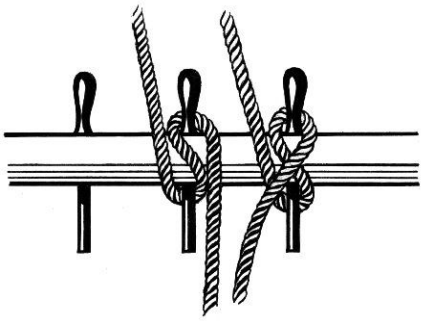
Program: To Build A Ship Model
Dave Tagg gave a presentation on making card models, highlighting the usage of UHU glue! He spoke on tools, construction techniques, complexity, the importance of building in the correct sequence, and the best supplier of card kits PMI (Paper Models Incorporated.) A slide show accompanied his talk. He followed this with a freeform presentation of tall ships entering Boston Harbor during OPSAIL '92.

Thanks

Thanks to Bill Clarke for recording the minutes in the Clerk's absence.

WATCH, QUARTER AND STATION BILL

Skipper: John Cheevers (757) 591-8955
Mate: Ryland Craze (804) 739-8804
Purser: Eric Harfst (757) 221-8181
Clerk: Tom Saunders (757) 850-0580
Historian: Len Wine (757) 566-8597
Editors: John Cheevers (757) 591-8955
Bill Clarke (757) 868-6809
Tom Saunders (757) 850-0580
Webmaster: Greg Harrington (757) 930-4615
Chaplain: Alan Frazer



(Continued from page 4)

Mystery Photo

they were guided to famed yacht-designer William Starling Burgess. Burgess visualized an all-welded ship without a keel that would derive its strength from a series of 22-in. beams running lengthwise along its outer bottom. Going the whole hog in unorthodoxy, Burgess decided to put propellers amidships, plant all the housing in a central cylindrical section. With a workable design on paper, the trio took their idea to Secretary of the Navy Knox. But the experiment might have been a long time ripening had it not been for a Manhattan lawyer, Roland Livingston Redmund. Mr. Redmund, whose wife is a member of the Delano clan and first cousin of the President, was formerly counsel for the New York Stock Exchange. When the Navy could find no money to build an experimental ship, he put up the money out of his own pocket to build an 80-ft. model. The model was launched last spring and did better in speed and performed better in rough seas than even its designers anticipated. Meanwhile the idea had been put up to Franklin Roosevelt, who gave the nod.

What the Sea Otter may mean in the Battle of the Atlantic can only be guessed. It is plenty fast enough for convoys (which run about nine knots). Since it lies almost as low in the water as a sub marine and leaves no telltale ribbon of smoke, it will be hard for U-boats to spot if it travels alone.

When Great Britain was shopping for small cargo ships recently, the cheapest bid she got was $1,000,000 apiece. The first full-size Sea Otter cost about $250,000. Built in quantity, such ships will cost $100,000 less. According to the original idea of the designers, they might be turned out in shoals, sent on one trip to Britain with cargo and promptly scrapped there—their Chrysler engines going into trucks, their steel used in British steel mills. But the British have decided to keep the first 750 sent over for use as trawlers, etc.

Another use has already been found for the flivver ships. Since their hollow bottoms can be used for oil as well as for other cargo, Harold Ickes wants ten to relieve the Atlantic seaboard oil shortage."

The evidence is piling up and literally screaming Mystery Photo to me. But absolute photographic evidence that *Sea Otter II* is our Mystery vessel was lacking. That was about to change.

One last Google listing was for an eBay sale of a World War II boat card titled U.S. ASSAULT CARGO SHIPS USS Sea Otter II. The sale argued that "The Card measures 4 11/16 x 4 7/8 inches (12 x 12.5 cm) and it is in near mint to mint condition. A beautiful card from a large set that was released by Edito-Service S.A. in 1977 (also known as Atlas Editions Cards) and was available through mail subscription only. The card back is filled with a complete write-up about the subject featured on the front and it is in ENGLISH and this is an original 1970s card NOT a reprint." It wouldn't hurt to see it so I checked it out. It was offered for $2.99 and $2.00 shipping, but the listing said that it was sold.

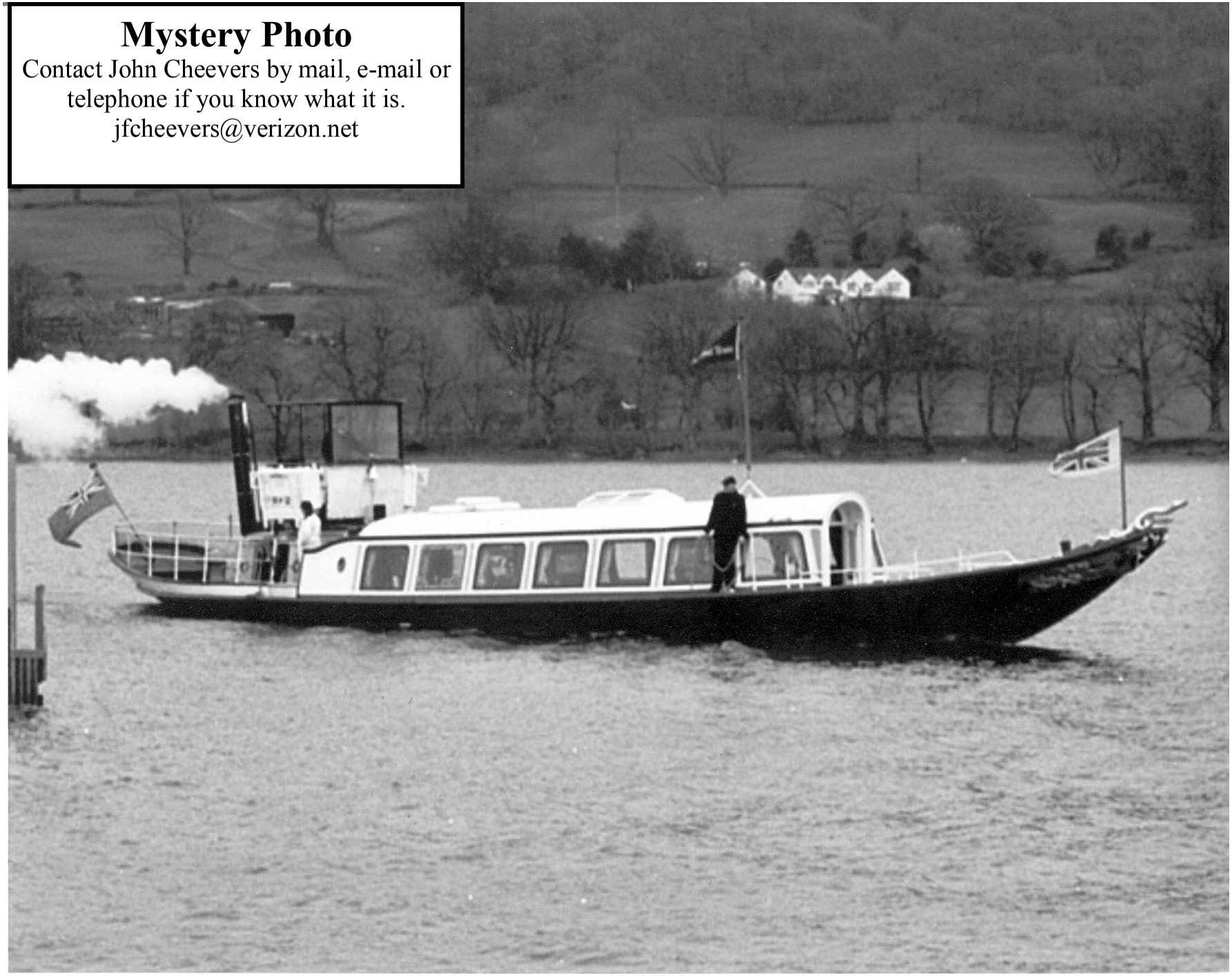
Further research into Edito-Service S.A reveals that "this is card # 107-10 in the set and this card is part of the WEAPONS subset. The story on the back is titled: *Support vessels for amphibious landings.* The caption below is found at the bottom of the card back and explains the picture shown on the card front: *USS Sea Otter II, an Attack Cargo Ship, shows her lines.* The card is shown below.

Sea Otter II was not a success. She made one trip, the voyage from Orange, Texas to Charleston, Naval shipyard, in Charleston, South Carolina. During the 8-day trip she sustained unknown voyage damage as indicated in the DANFS entry. Her 16 unmuffled engines made her "noisy enough to alert any submarine in the area." And she was found to be crank; not an envious trait for a vessel intended to sail the North Atlantic. "She remained at Charleston until being placed out of service on 28 May 1942. On 26 June, she was transferred to the War Shipping Administration, subsequently transferred to Cargoes, Incorporated, and struck from the Navy list on 8 May 1946."

John Cheevers

Mystery Photo

Contact John Cheevers by mail, e-mail or telephone if you know what it is.
jfcheevers@verizon.net



Chesapeake Bay Canoes, 1926

NOTABLE EVENTS

OCTOBER

11 **HRSMS** Monthly Meeting: Picnic, Newport News Park

NOVEMBER

15 **HRSMS** Monthly Meeting: Mariners' Museum Presentation "Photographing Ship Models using Digital Cameras" , by Tim Wood

DECEMBER

13 **HRSMS** Monthly Meeting: Mariners' Museum Presentation by Dave Baker

JANUARY

10 **HRSMS** Monthly Meeting: Mariners" Museum Nomination of officers

16-18 Cabin Fever Expo 2009; York, Pa.

FEBRUARY

14 **HRSMS** Monthly Meeting: Mariners" Museum Election of officers

MARCH

10 **HRSMS** Monthly Meeting: Mariners" Museum

Accession Number: 1984.187.19841F
Title: Chesapeake Bay Canoes, 1926
Category: PHOTOGRAPHS - SOFT NEGATIVES
Overall Size: 5 x 7 x 0 in.
Date Created: 1928
Photographer: Rosenfeld and Sons

Description: 5x7 safety negative photographed by Rosenfeld and Sons in 1928. Image of start of Charles Tarr Chesapeake Bay sailing log canoe MAGIC (built 1894 in St. Michael's, MD) at the St. Michael's Regatta in St. Michael's, Maryland. Visible in image: port bow views of sailing log canoes (2), (3), and MAGIC (1) on starboard close reach under goose-wing or leg o' mutton with sprit and club mainsails, foresails and jibs, spectators and land in background. CREDIT LINE: Mystic Seaport, Rosenfeld Collection. Handwritten on original negative sleeve: "Start of Chespeake Sailing Canoes won by Magie, #1.".

http://www.rosenfeldcollection.com/

"One of the best temporary cures for pride and affection is seasickness". -- Henry Wheeler Show