

Vicksburg or Bust III, 15th July 1862/ 5th April 2012



Feb 2011, ships manoeuvre in the Yazoo.

Scenario

In July 1862 the Rebel ram Arkansas was ordered into the besieged city of Vicksburg, the linchpin of the Confederate defence of the Mississippi. Steaming down the Yazoo, she met and beat the US ram Queen of the West and the gunboats Carondelet and Tyler. She steamed into the Mississippi, past a large, tho moored, fleet and made it to Vicksburg. It was an extraordinary achievement.

This action, loosely based on the Arkansas's voyage to Vicksburg differs from our usual scenarios in that the emphasis is very much on the one ship. The Arkansas might be controlled to two players – captain and gunner. Other players command the mobile US vessels. The main aim is to see how far the Arkansas can get. This can be compared with how others do later. When we ran this in Feb 2011, the Ark made two home runs, but I may have exaggerated the navigable width of the river.

Terrain & Deployment

The Mississippi runs from north to south. Near the northern edge of the table the Yazoo runs into it from the east.

The Arkansas starts on the Yazoo nr the NE corner of the table. The Carondelet and Queen are steaming up the Yazoo towards her, with the Tyler considerably ahead.

The main US fleet is moored off the east bank of the Mississippi. Vicksburg itself is just off the southern edge of the table.

The terrain can be concertinared for playability, but the main US fleet must not be able to see into the Yazoo. It must also be out of line of sight of the Vicksburg defences.

The Yazoo flows west. The Mississippi flows south. A vessel starting a bound pointing downstream adds 2 knots to its maximum speed. One starting a bound pointing upstream subtracts 2 knots from its maximum speed.

Except near moorings, all vessels dice for going aground if they get within 1" of the bank. Those needing more than Boat depth to float dice within 3".

Force

Confederate

Arkansas – represented by one or two players.

US Yazoo Squadron

Carondelet (flag), Tyler, Queen of the West.

US Mississippi Squadron

Moored, from north to south – Kineo, Hartford, Winona, Lexington, Cincinnati, St Louis, Mound City, and Benton.

USS Kineo gets up steam two bounds after seeing the Ark. The Benton gets steam up four bounds after the Ark is seen. Other moored vessels roll a D6 as the Ark passes them, needing a 6 to raise steam. They dice once only.

The Arkansas is Able. The Kineo and Benton are Competent. Other US vessels (caught unawares) count Green.

Mobilisation/ Players

Players take, in order, the Arkansas, Carondelet, Tyler, Queen of the West, Kineo and Benton. Captains of lost ships take over moored US warships.

Object

The Ark scores 2 points for reaching the Mississippi, 10 more for getting to safety; also 4 points for each US vessel sunk and 2 points for each damaged. The US get 9 points for sinking the Ark, 4 points for damaging her.

A vessel counts as damaged if at least half its hull has gone; or if it has lost at least half its armament and at least half its speed.

Results

7th Feb 2011, Game 1



Feb 2011, the Arkansas closes on the Carondelet.

Andy F & Brian

Arkansas

Mike R

Carondelet

Richard Price

Queen of the West

Yatincho San

Tyler

Richard Jeffrey

moored US ships

Alan

umpire

By bound 5 the Arkansas had got past the Yazoo squadron after scraping down the side of the Carondelet and losing some guns. The Queen of the West went ashore.

The first ship of the main squadron, the Kineo went into in bound 8, but proved ineffective. The Ark skimmed along the E bank of the Mississippi, keeping the range from the US fleet long.

She reached the safety of Vicksburg's guns having suffered some damage, but not enough to score the Northerners any points. Giving Andy and Brian a 12:0 victory. The game started at 8, finished at 9.15, running for 13 bounds.

7th Feb 2011, Game 2



The Arkansas steams into Vicksburg.

Richard Jeffrey & Mike R

Arkansas

Bryan
Richard Price
Yatincho San
Andy

Carondelet
Queen of the West
Tyler
Moored US fleet

Alan

umpire

With plenty of time, the Ark made a second run. I forgot to take notes from this game, except that it started a 9.30, ran for 16 bounds and finished at 10.45.

It was a second decisive Confederate win. I think it was another 12:0.

5th April 2012 Game

Jerry Jenkins

Arkansas

Alan
Andy F

Carondelet, Queen of the West & Tyler
Moored US fleet

Dan Beattie

observer

In the first game I think we made the navigable section of the Mississippi over 20 inches (nearly 700 yards) wide. The river seems to have been in flood, but having it that wide made it difficult for the moored US ships to inflict much damage to the Ark, if she hugged the E bank – which she did in both games. For this run we introduced kinks into the river, making it difficult for the Arkansas to keep out of this range bracket. It meant that even if the US ships did not get under weigh, she'd be vulnerable to the gunboat's XI inch Dahlgrens and that smaller weapons had a small chance of doing significant damage.

The Ark barrelled down the Yazoo, blasting away as she went. She scored a first hit on bound 3. By bound 4 she had damaged both the Tyler and the Queen of the West. In bound 5, however, the Carondelet knocked-out the Arkansas's front guns.

By this stage, though, the Arkansas had got safely past the leading two US ships. In turning to chase her, they collided, the Queen suffered significant damage in this. They did eventually get round but, over 1,000 yards behind, too late to make any difference.

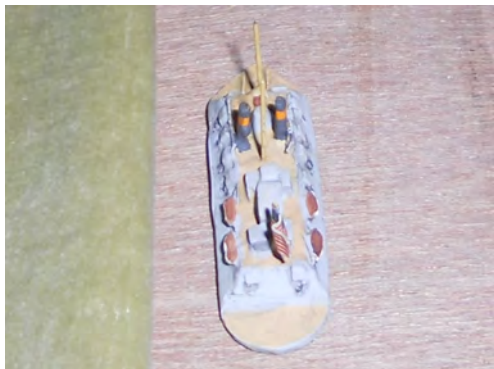
The Arkansas surged past the Carondelet. She too attempted to turn in pursuit, but muddled orders put her ashore on the N bank of the Yazoo.

As the Arkansas swept into the Mississippi she began to force her, rather tender, engines. This and their advanced squadrons failure to wing the Arkansas, gave the main US fleet little time to prepare for action. The Ark skimmed along the far bank of the Mississippi, so that many shots were at long range. A succession of hits on her superstructure put the Arkansas's starboard battery out of action, but no critical hits penetrated her defences.

Though her armament had been reduced, the Arkansas reached the safety of Vicksburg's guns in good condition. This, and crippling the Queen of the West, gave Jerry a 14:0 victory – I think the best winning margin yet. The game ran to 12 bounds and took under two hours.

Jerry's account of the action is here:

<http://miniature-inspiration.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/vicksburg-or-bust.html>



The USS Mound City

Conc

Three wins in a row suggest this scenario might be balanced in favour of the Confederates.

The advanced US squadron is surprised in poor formation – with its flagship in the rear. This, the flow of the river and their Green grading makes them hard to manoeuvre. In two of the games one of them has gone ashore (as the Carondolet did in reality). In none of the games have they done much harm to the Arkansas. This then gives the moored US ships little time to get into action.

However, any damage or delay to the Arkansas has a cumulative effect, especially, any reduction in her speed increases the time she must spend under US guns.

This scenario is rather loosely based on reality. The terrain is simplified and foreshortened. Though I do not think this has much effect on game balance.

While the key advanced US squadron is exactly as it was in 1862, our main US fleet is considerably smaller. However, I wonder whether in reality as many ships in this fleet were as ready for action even as the ships are in our scenario? The main part of the US fleet had forced its way up the Mississippi against significant opposition and against the current. These were sea-going vessels, far from their element. The rest had made it down from beyond Cairo, again after hard fighting. Both had out-run their logistic support. After many false alarms, the US commanders did not believe the Arkansas would come to them.

A further point, made by the historian Dan Beattie, is that the Mississippi at this time of year is an unhealthy place to be. Many of the ships shown were operating with skeleton crews, justifying the Green grade we gave them.

Still, the Arkansas's tactic of keeping close to the US line was intended to stop rams in the US fleet from developing sufficient momentum at impact so it would be good to add at least one to the scenario. The Lancaster, moored somewhat ahead of the fleet seems to have been heavily engaged:

<http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=moawar;cc=moawar;idno=ofre0023;node=ofre0023%3A3;view=image;seq=270;size=100;page=root>

Also, the Kineo seems to have been able to get up steam more quickly than we allow – perhaps she could start to move on seeing the Arkansas.

NB Isaac Brown's account of the actual battle is in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War:

<http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/books/battles/vol3/pageview.cfm?page=572>