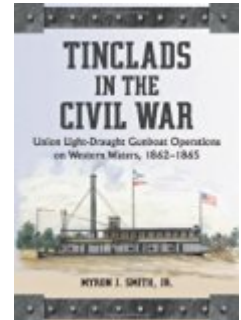
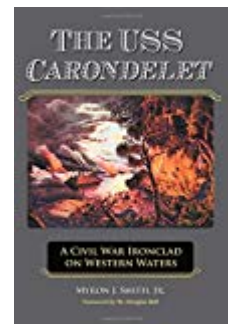


Myron J. Smith. *Tinclads in the Civil War: Union Light-Draught Gunboat Operations on Western Waters, 1862-1865.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2009. 431 pp. \$55.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-7864-3579-1.



Myron J. Smith. *The USS Carondelet: A Civil War Ironclad on Western Waters.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2010. viii + 280 pp. \$55.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-7864-4524-0.



Reviewed by Lawrence Babits

Published on H-CivWar (October, 2010)

Commissioned by Martin P. Johnson (Miami University Hamilton)

Myron Smith has created two good Civil War studies that concentrate on western river operations. Together they provide a wealth of information about how the Union broke into the Southern hinterland and began interdicting, then controlling Confederate territory via its river system. *Tinclads* concentrates on a gunboat class while *The USS Carondelet* is a study of a single armored gunboat of the City Class.

Tinclads is a very useful examination of an understudied, though key, aspect of the Union's success in the western theaters. In addition to traditional warships coming up the Mississippi from the Gulf, there were three general classes of

Union warships operating on western rivers: timberclads, tinclads, and armored gunboats. Tinclads, the focus of this text, were altered river vessels employed by Union forces to move and protect supplies on the western rivers, especially the Red, Tennessee, Cumberland, Mississippi, and Ohio rivers.

Tinclads were lightly armored, with wooden bulwarks and casemates that were largely proof against small arms fire. The wooden structure was reinforced with boiler plate iron ranging up to an inch in thickness. The ships were brought into Union service by capture or purchase. Due to fluctuating river levels, they were to be as shallow

draft as possible and were armed with boat howitzers, then heavier guns. Tinclads, with their light weight, shallow draft, and adequate engines were often utilized to tow the more heavily armored river gunboats. They also reached further up the rivers than the deeper draft, armor-clad gunboats.

Eventually, sixty tinclads served the Union forces, successfully acting as army support vessels that also interdicted Confederate river and land movement. As a class, the tinclads missed fleet actions at New Orleans, Memphis, and the running fight with the Arkansas, but they played a major logistical and communication role, both offensively and defensively. Often the only means of getting supplies to forward outposts and occupied towns, they observed enemy movements and activity, in part reporting attacks on themselves. Some tinclads went to sea and served in the West Gulf Blockading Squadron off New Orleans where they patrolled against blockade runners, and provided escort and transport service. One, the *Stockdale*, participated in the 1864 attack against Mobile Bay.

The tinclad story is a counterinsurgency epic. The vessels drew fire, then either responded on their own or reported the attack, whereupon a force later arrived and burned resources on shore, often as far as seven miles above and below where the attack occurred. Tinclads thus provided the transport key to rapidly moving troops, massing them at key points with supporting firepower to overwhelm resistance or punish areas where attacks occurred.

From the beginning, tinclads provided mobile artillery support for the army, following the celebrated exploits of the "timberclads" *Lexington* and *Tyler* at Shiloh. While not properly tinclads, these two vessels helped develop the tinclad's role as an escort, transport, and fire support vessel. As the western campaigns intensified, the tinclads role expanded as the armies moved deeper into Southern territory. When military action shifted eastward in 1864, the tinclads became a major

factor in continuing the Union presence along the South's river systems.

There is some chronologically confusing material in the first two chapters, in part due to the spatial range, variety of vessels and their attackers, and the sequence in which engagements occurred. Given the wide area in which these vessels operated, the times of acquisition, fitting out, and commissioning, the mixing of chronology is understandable. About mid-1862, tinclads came into general service and the text's chronology flows more smoothly. Campaigns against Confederate raiders, and army support, occupied much of their time. Their efforts against Confederate general John Hunt Morgan's 1863 raid, the storming of Fort Pillow, and the aborted Red River campaign, are documented with emphasis on the tinclads. Tinclads were a key addition to the Union's war effort because they were admirably suited for their duties and because there were enough of them to get those tasks done.

The text is well illustrated and has a very good bibliography. There is a useful appendix listing all tinclads with their numbers to allow identification of vessels in photographs. The linkage between the photographs, participant accounts, and vessel statistics provides an outstanding knowledge base from which to begin to understand Confederate raider, partisan, and bushwhacker activities all over the western theater. This would be a good textbook for a course on the Civil War because it shows the diversity of activity, especially in the western theaters, that is often overlooked by historians focusing on the Virginia and Georgia campaigns.

In contrast to the somewhat makeshift tinclads, the City Class armored river gunboats were designed to engage Confederate warships and fortifications in stand-up fighting. *The USS Carondelet* is a long overdue study on what was probably the most active U.S. Navy ship during the Civil War. The USS *Carondelet* was "everywhere" in the western theater, involved in almost all river en-

gements and many land and water fights. This text covers the ship from its October 12, 1861 launching to its end as a wharf boat five months after the war ended.

The text is well organized with a strategic introduction to the western ironclads. This is followed by an explanation of how the City Class gunboats were created. Discussions of sailor life and the officers follow, in part to introduce the characters who played roles during the vessel's career. Sailor life aboard is presented as a somewhat typical day in the life of the crew; a description of the crew and its composition is also included.

Most readers will be drawn to the ship's fighting history as it participated in most of the major river campaigns, including Forts Henry and Donelson, Island #10, Fort Pillow, Vicksburg, the Red River, and a celebrated running fight against the CSS *Arkansas*. The *Carondelet* was the fighting queen of the City Class casemated ironclads that fought Confederates on the western waters. During the period from January 1862 until June 1865, the *Carondelet* compiled an outstanding fighting record before ending a career as a store ship moored to the bank at Cairo, Illinois.

The text reads very well despite the vast amount of information that is included. Many photographs of the construction process give a sense of the "Pook mud turtles" and their complexity. Newspaper images created by staff artists show the vessel's crew in various activities and in battle. Henry Walke, the vessel's first commander, also created paintings of the *Carondelet*, providing details that must have been important to participants in the ship's historical events.

Taken as a pair, *The USS Carondelet* and *Tin-clads* present a very good, in-depth study of warfare on the South's western rivers. The two vessel classes represent the most numerous river warships utilized during the war and the strategic underpinning of the research helps show why the South lost control of its rivers very early. The

books could be appropriately included as required reading for any graduate level course on the American Civil War.

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Citation: Lawrence Babits. Review of Smith, Myron J. *Tinclads in the Civil War: Union Light-Draught Gunboat Operations on Western Waters, 1862-1865.* ; Smith, Myron J. *The USS Carondelet: A Civil War Ironclad on Western Waters.* H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. October, 2010.

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