

## Tops and blocks.

I made the tops for “Ontario”, 1780, some time ago. The photos show the work-worn appearance of the main top which has received much handling as I set up the masts on the model temporarily at several locations for demonstration purposes. I will clean both tops up before finally setting them in place.

There are four buntline blocks to be added on each side of the top, two about midway and two towards the rear.

*“Bunts” are the bottom centre sections of square sails. A bolt rope is sewn round the edges of the sails, and the buntlines are attached at several points along the bolt rope on the bottom of the sail. Each buntline is led up over the front of the sail, first to a block on the yard holding the sail, then to a block (a buntline block) on the underside of the top, through a second block toward the back of the top, and then down to a belaying point on the deck. Hauling on the buntlines at the deck raises the bottom edge of the heavy canvas sail so that it can be furled by crewmen standing on foot ropes suspended under the yard.*

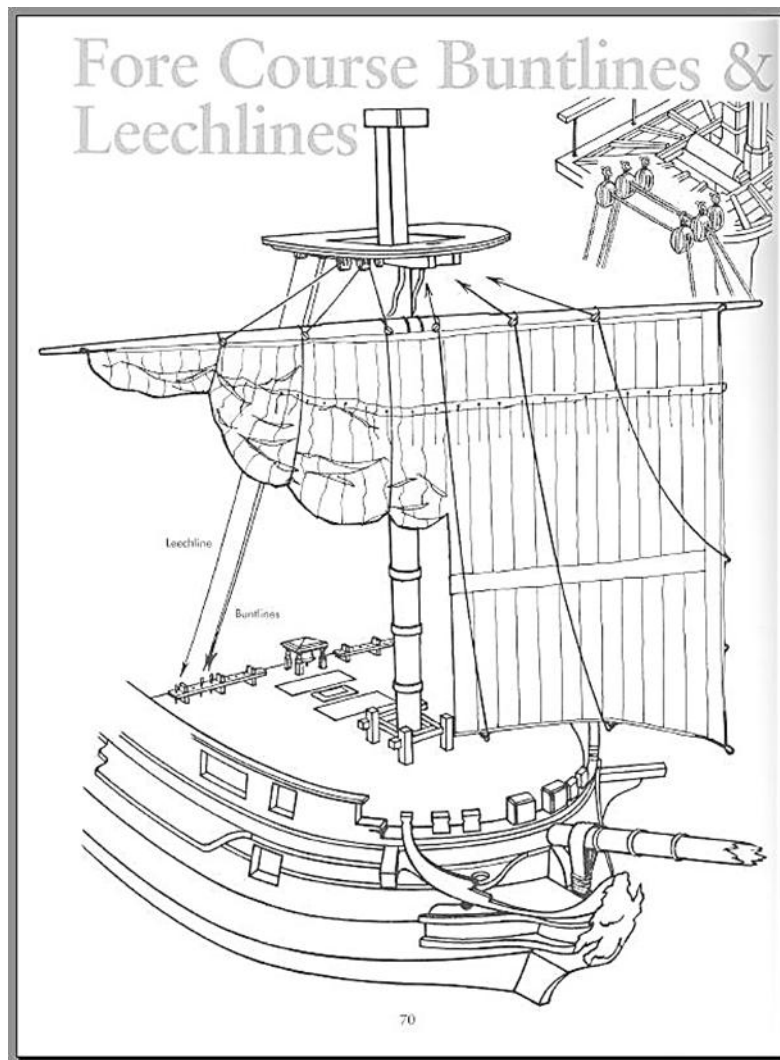
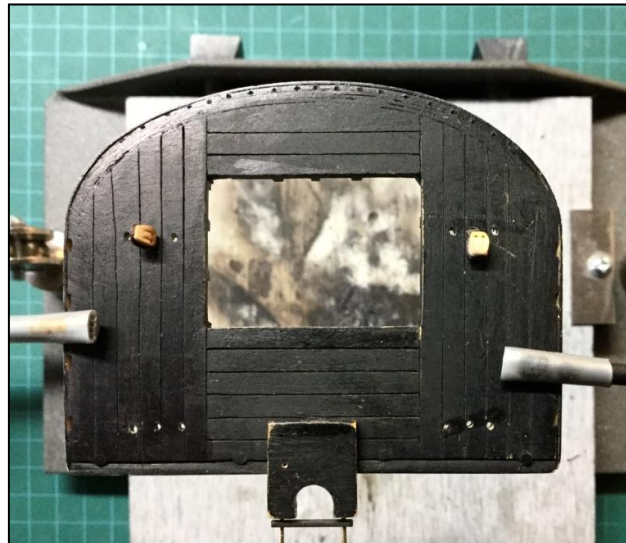


Figure 1 – From– “Rigging Period Ship Models” p.70 Lennarth Petersson

Holding the top in my “third hands” helped considerably in working on both the topside and underside at the same time. Despite this the screened vacuum cleaner hose had a workout more than once to retrieve blocks that decided to “go walkabout” as they developed wheels on their way to the floor.

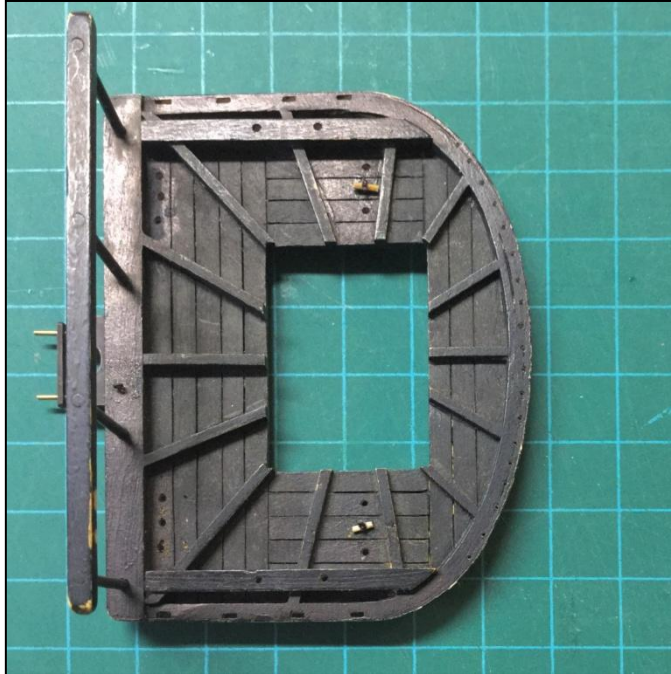
The buntline blocks are doubles (to accommodate two buntlines in each) and 6” – 8” long (0.125” and 0.166”, 3 ½ mm and 4mm. at 1/48 scale). They are suspended closely under the top, held in position by pegs passing through long strops on the upper surface of the tops.

*(I now make blocks, thanks to David A's showing me how, with samples, some time ago. However several years before, I bought several packs of “itsy bitsy” blocks from Warner Woods West - now no longer making them - so I dug into the ditty bag and used them for this job. By the way, excellent blocks and other fittings are available from Syren Ship Model Co. - <https://www.syrenshipmodelcompany.com/>)*



**Photo 1 Underside of Main top** – two buntline blocks in place. More buntline blocks, and blocks for leech lines, will be mounted through the inner and aft sets of three holes. The top of the snow mast is secured in the fitting on the aft edge of the top.

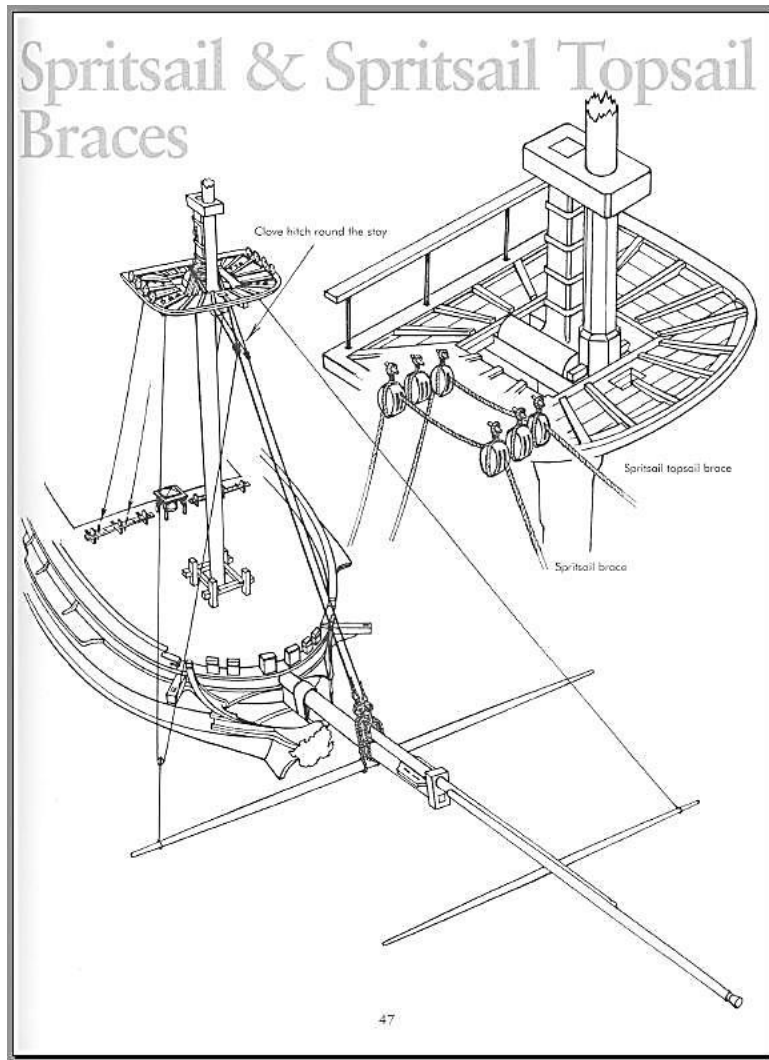
Full-size strops are made as a rope “ring”, but as I found it impossible to reproduce rings of the correct sizes at this scale I fudged it as follows. After stropping the blocks with dark brown cotton thread (using clove hitches) I passed the free ends of the hitch up through the appropriate #63 (0.037”) hole in the top, spread the two “arms” of the hitch and laid a short length (1/8”) of bamboo trunnel material as a peg over where the spread lines cross. I held this peg in place temporarily with a tiny touch of artists’ matte medium and then tied the hitch lines over it to secure it in place, securing the knot with dilute Weldbond (which dries transparent). The peg now holds the block in place under the top.



**Photo 2 – Upper surface of main top** – showing pegs fitted through strops to suspend the buntline blocks. The small holes round the front of the rim are for the crows-feet line. The slots in the port and starboard rim are for the futtock plates which hold the topmast deadeyes.

There are two pairs of two buntline blocks on each side of the main and fore tops. In addition to buntlines each sail is fitted with leech lines which control the side edges of the sails. Leech line blocks are fitted to the outer holes of the three in a similar manner.

The fore top also has blocks located on each side of the top. These are for the (bow)sprit-sail yard braces, and sprit top-sail yard braces. Braces control the fore and aft swing of the yards relative to the ship's centre-line, to make the most of the wind direction. (In this respect it is easier to consider the fact that the bowsprit as a mast which leans forward at an extreme angle.) The spritsail yards are controlled in a similar way to yards on "normal" masts, hauling in on one end and slacking off on the other. \*\*



**Figure 2 – From– “Rigging Period Ship Models” p.47 Lennarth Petersson**

The two holes in the longitudinal fore-and-aft members in **Photo 2** are to seat swivel gun posts. These would actually be square mortices but I will use square section posts with small pegs set into the bottom to fit into these holes.

*“Ontario” is rigged as a “snow”, a large vessel derived from the brig, a vessel with square sails set on both masts. The snow in addition has a small mast, the snow mast or trysail mast, set close abaft the main mast. The fore-and-aft trysail, called the “spanker” or “driver” on a brig, was rigged to the snow mast by hoops.. The main yard could therefore be raised and lowered without interference from the trysail gaff.*

**Photo 3**, below, shows the snow mast on “Ontario”, located temporarily for purposes of illustration. Snow masts generally stand no more than a foot abaft the main mast, but video evidence shows the mast on “Ontario” was set unusually about four feet back. The foot of snow masts step in a mortice in a stout timber on the deck, not through to the keel as on “standard” masts. I have therefore secured the top of the snow mast to the fitting on the aft of the main top seen in Photo 1 for the time being, but I am reviewing how this structure is connected through to the trestletrees.



**Photo 3 - Position of snow mast on "Ontario"**

**\*\***

*"Splice the main brace" is a naval expression for the custom of serving an extra tot of rum for the crew. Hauling on the main brace required maximum effort on the part of the crew, particularly in bad weather, to brace the main yard round to the wind. An extra tot of rum was given as a reward. Rum has no longer been issued in the Royal Navy since 1970, and the expression is now redundant.*