RIGGING TUTORIAL

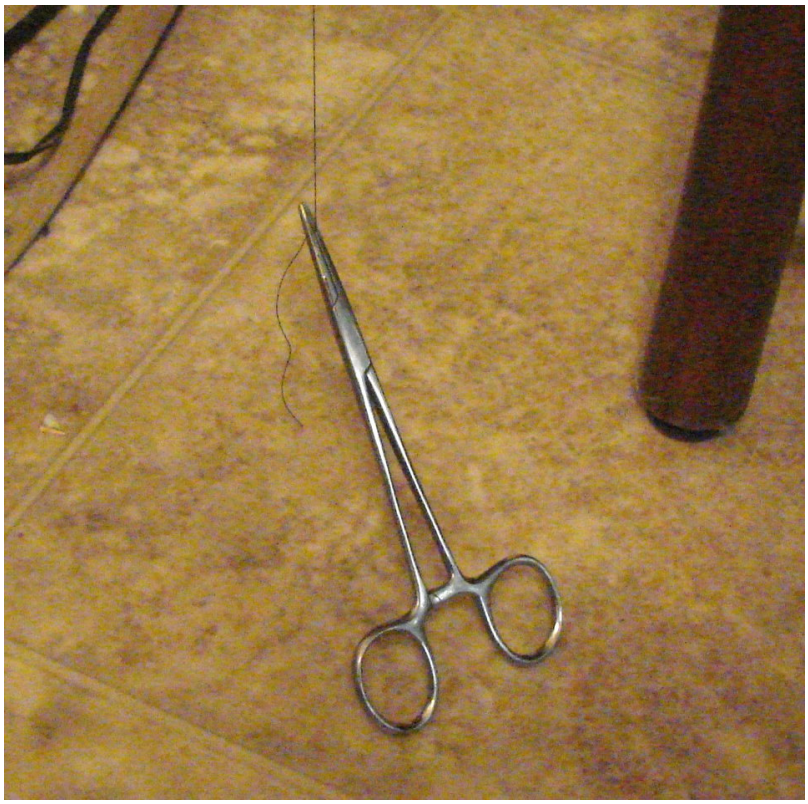
RIGGING YOUR SAILING SHIPS FOR WARGAMING

In miniature wargaming, aesthetics is everything. The time and effort put into the models that go on the wargame table is what creates the visual spectacle that separates the miniature wargamer from the boardgamer. When it comes to the Age of Sail, the ships are a visual treat, but the modeling the complex cloud of sails and rigging that makes them such a joy to behold is daunting to most wargamers. I present here an illustrated guide to my method for rigging these miniature gems, using materials and tools that are inexpensive and easily obtained, and broken down into simple steps that any gamer can use to make their own squadrons give the proper impression of those awe-inspiring wonders of oak and canvas.

The purpose of a wargame miniature is slightly different than that of a display model of a sailing warship. Ship modelers take great pains to reproduce every detail of a vessel as accurately as possible, while the wargamer only needs a model that will give the right impression on the table, making it possible to identify the type and identity of the ship it is supposed to represent in the scenario being recreated. To this end, not every piece of rigging on the original ship need be reproduced on our wargame miniature, but there should be enough attention to detail to render the ship recognizable on the table, and impart some of the grace and nobility of the original.

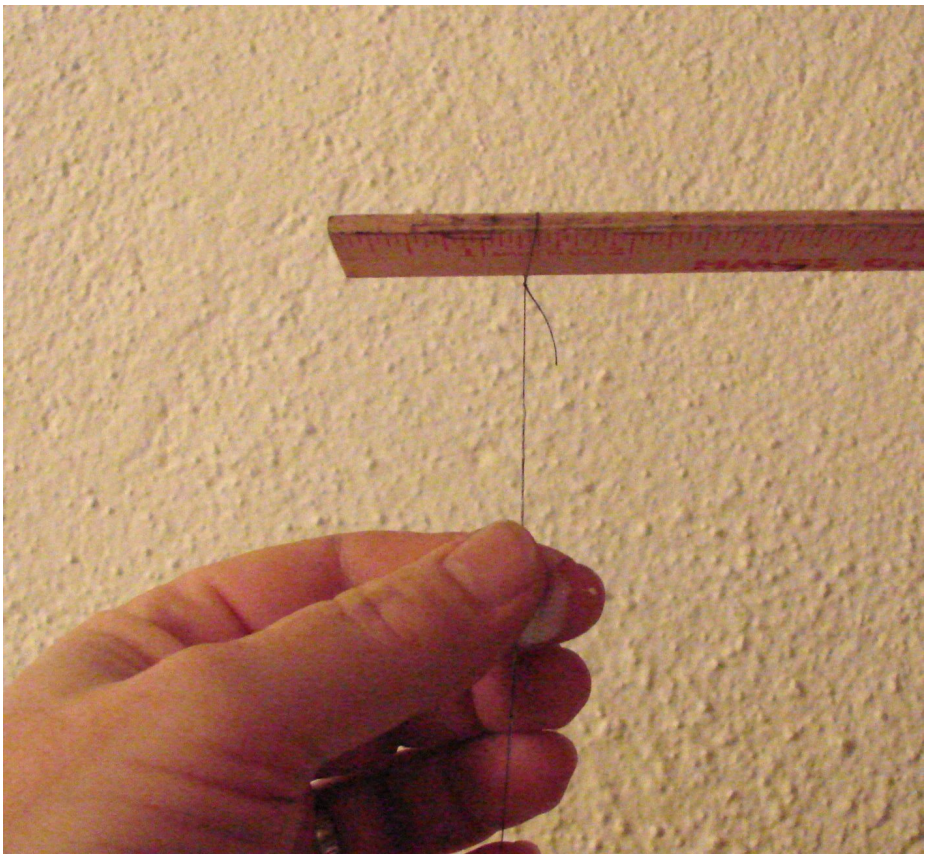
With a little practice, this method can be used to produce a nicely rigged model in under an hour. The same method can be used to rig models in various scales, and of various materials (I have rigged hundreds of resin and metal cast ships this way, in scales from 1:2000 to 1:150). When used with the paper models available from my website at www.warartisan.com, the resulting model is strong enough to be dropped on the floor from table height without damage.

First, it is necessary to make the material from which the rigging will be made. In this case, I am using ordinary black cotton thread. The ship modeler might be inclined to use black for the tarred standing rigging and brown for the running rigging, but since it all looks black from a distance one color will suffice for a wargame miniature. It is thin enough so that it will not visually overwhelm the model with its weight, but strong enough to add real strength to the model, which after all will have to withstand some handling when in use. Thread is quite flexible, making it awkward to deal with unless it is stiffened first. To do this, begin by hanging a length of black thread from a convenient location (I stick a ruler under the books on a top shelf of a bookcase and tie the thread to it) and use something at the bottom end to weight it down so it remains straight. Anything with a little weight to it, tied to the bottom end, will work. I use a hemostat that I picked up at a flea market.

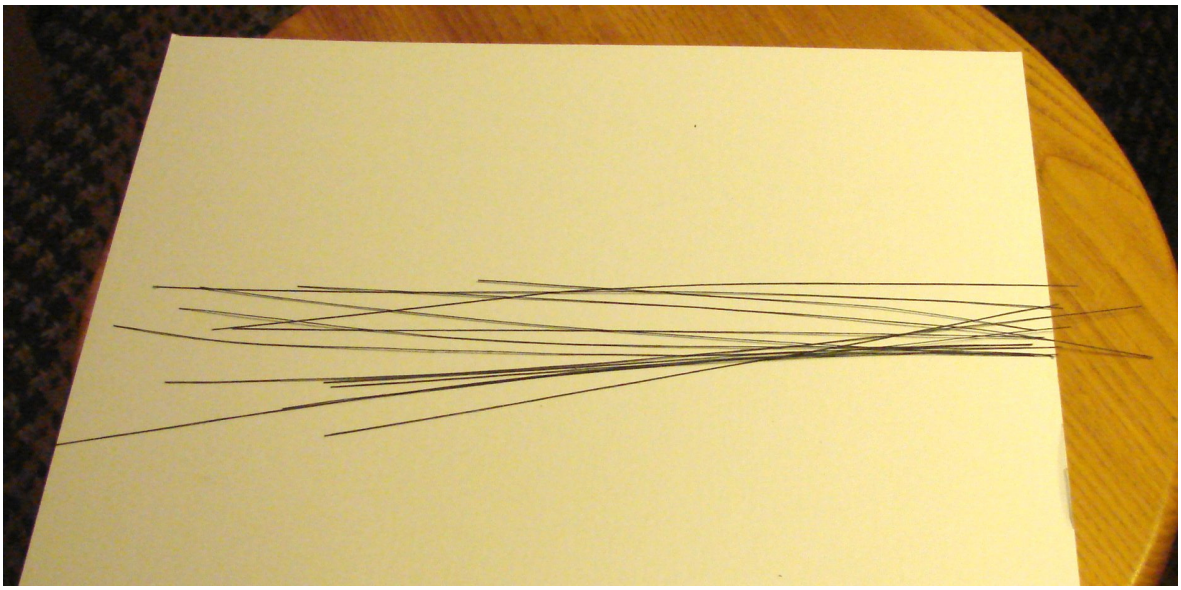


Next, place a glob of white glue on your fingertips and, beginning at the top and working your way down, spread the glue as thinly as possible over the thread. Twist the thread as you spread the glue downwards to make sure it is completely coated in glue. The thread will soak up the glue (which is why I use cotton thread; synthetic fibers will not soak up the glue. It will dry as a thin sheath on the outside of the thread, adding very little stiffness

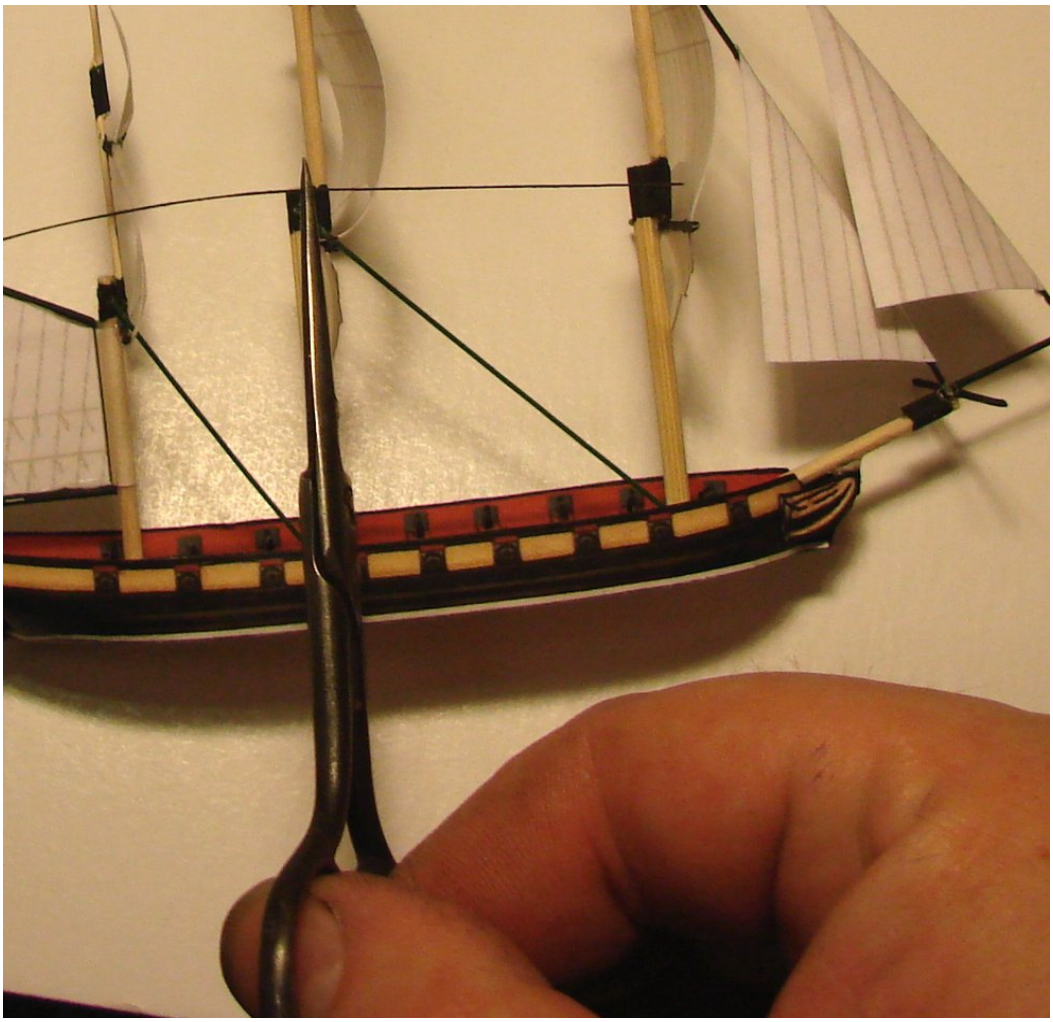
and possibly flaking off when it is handled since it doesn't bond very well to synthetics.) Allow the glue to dry thoroughly.



When the glue is completely dry, cut the thread into manageable lengths, about 10 or 12 inches, and lay them flat until they are needed. This will keep them straight until they are applied to the model. If, in the process of cutting or handling, a piece of rigging should become bent, it can be straightened out again by placing it on a flat surface and rolling it back and forth a bit.

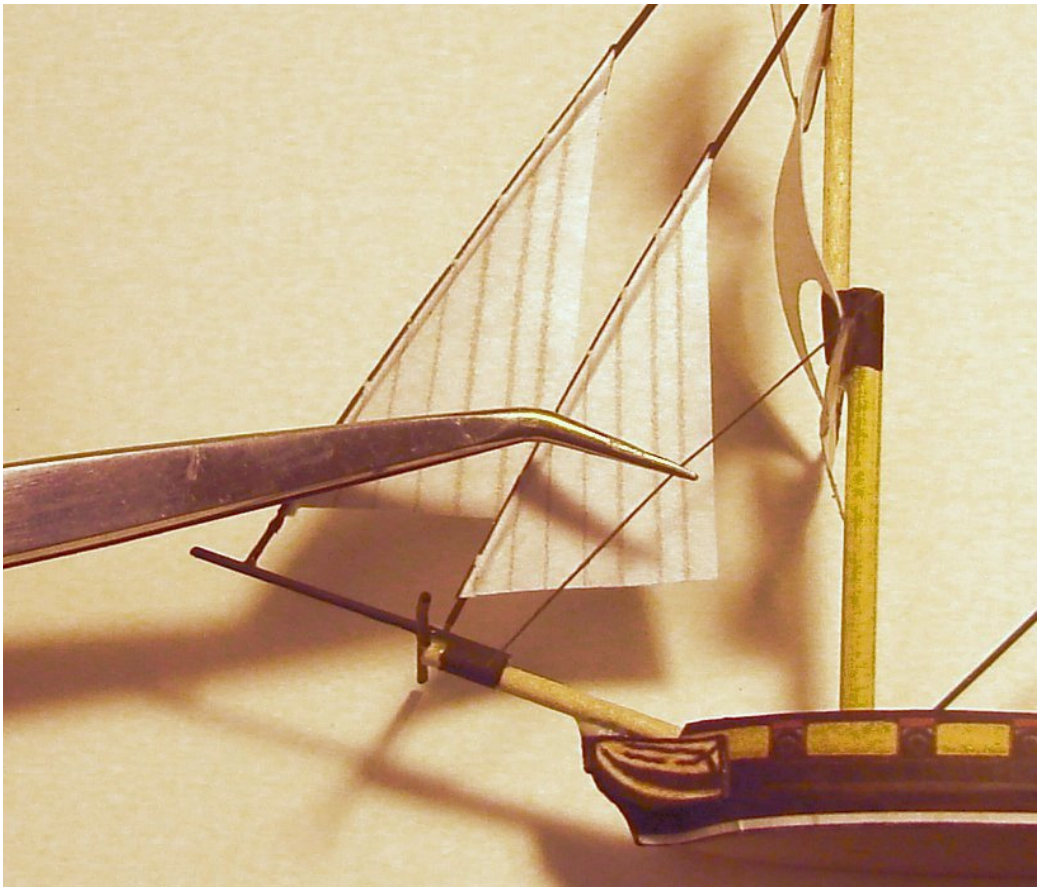


To begin rigging your model, take one of the strands of stiffened thread and hold it up to the place on the model where it will be placed, and cut it to the correct length with a small, sharp scissors. I use a "seam ripper", acquired from a fabric store, which is small and pointed enough to reach into tight spaces, and quite sharp.

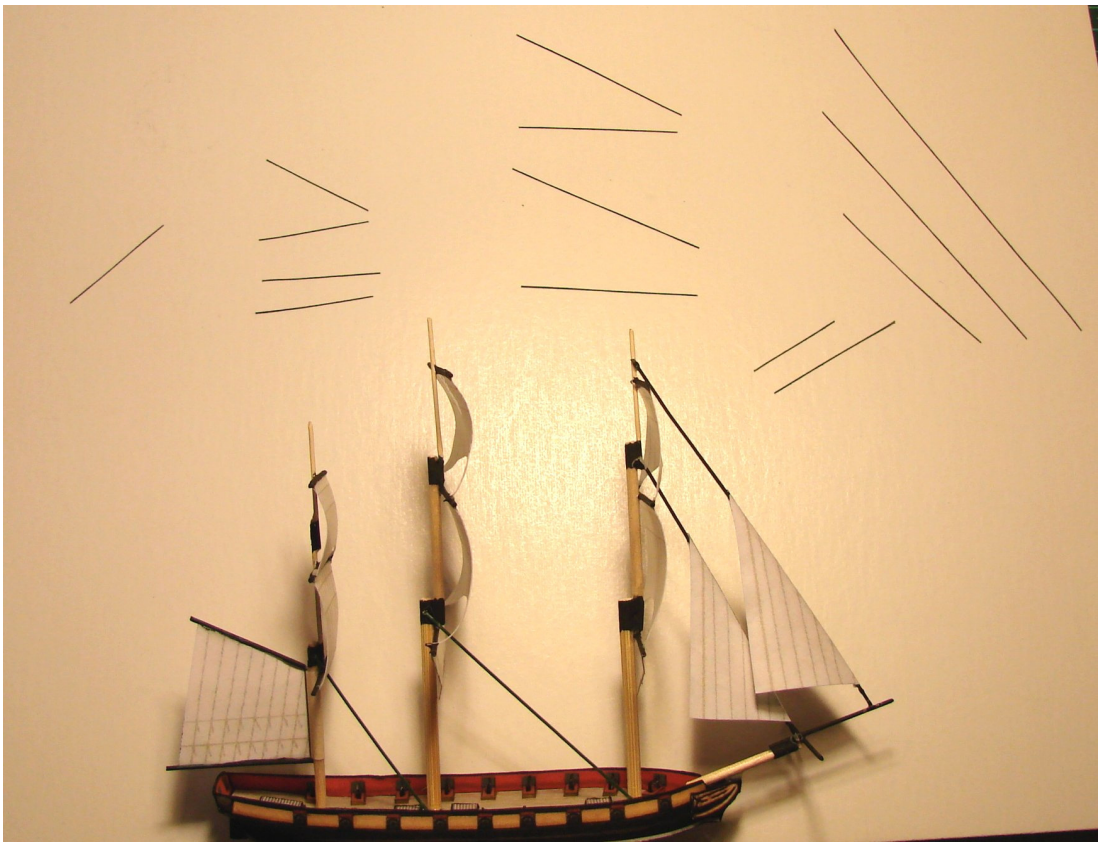


If you're not certain that a cut piece will fit where it is intended to go, it's a good idea to "dry fit" it in place without any glue, to check the length. It is much easier to trim it now than it will be after it is glued in place.

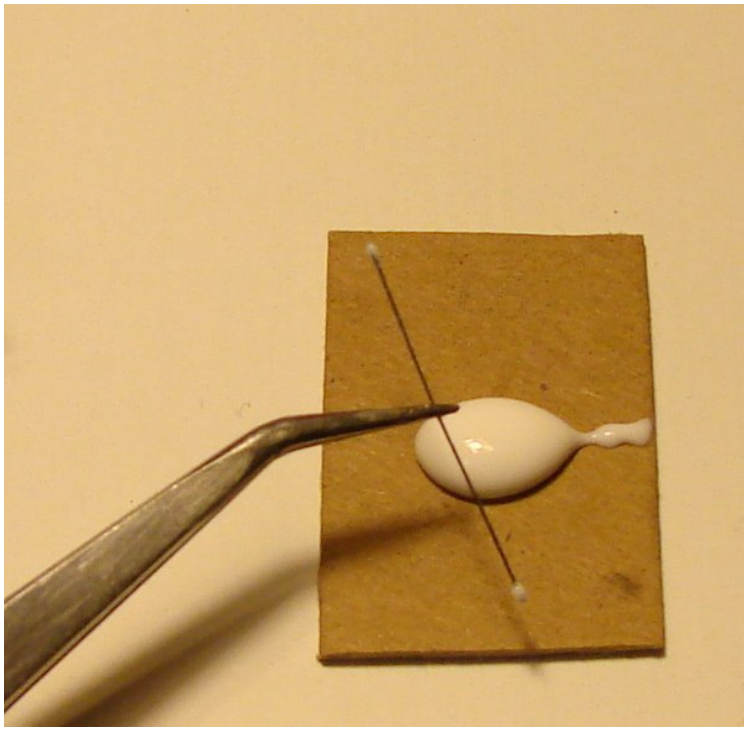
Use tweezers to handle the cut pieces, so the moisture from your fingertips doesn't soften the glue on the thread. (Your fingers will probably be too large to fit in most of the spaces where the rigging must go, anyway). Tweezers with bent tips work very well for reaching into tight spaces on the model.



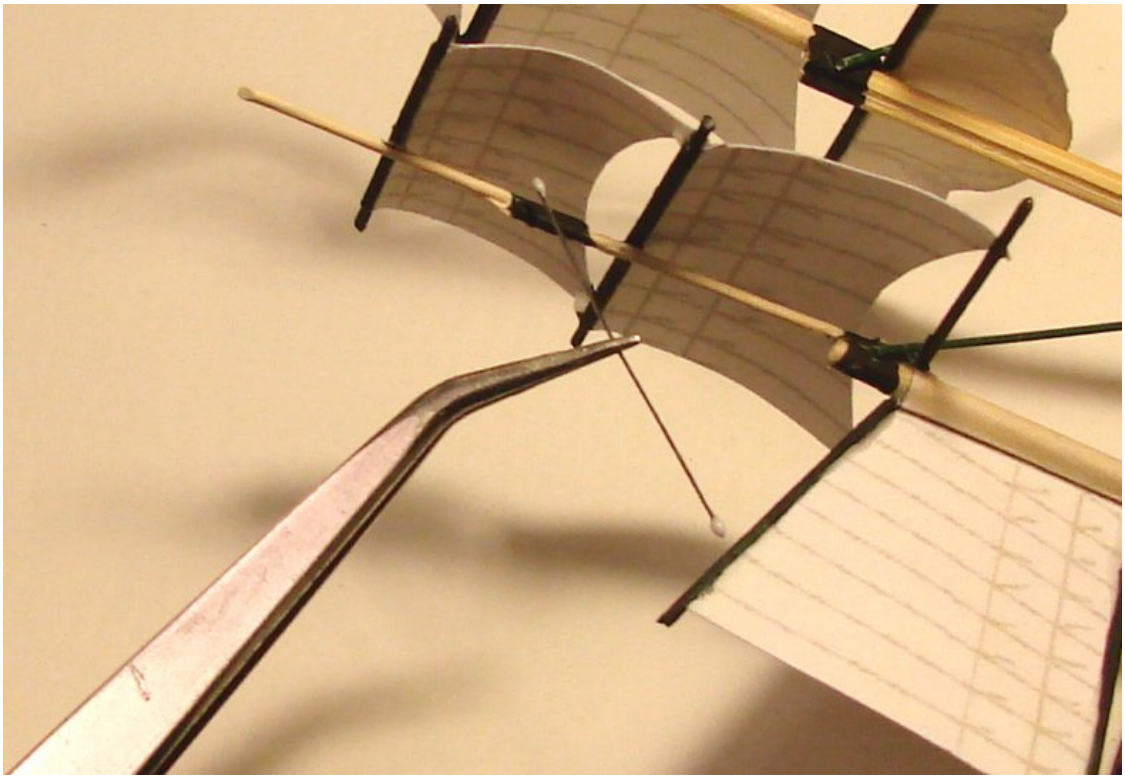
It is easiest to add rigging to the model in groups, working from the inside out so that they interfere as little with the placement of later rigging. Begin with the standing rigging that runs along the centerline of the ship. Looking at a picture of the ship you are modeling will show you where the stays should go, but generally they run from the head of each mast, across and down to the next one forward. In the photo below, I have already added two stays made of wire (painted black) to give the model the strength necessary to withstand handling by gamers, and have mounted two headsails on stays made of wire as well. The rigging for the remaining stays is laid out above the model, in roughly the relative positions they will occupy on the finished model.



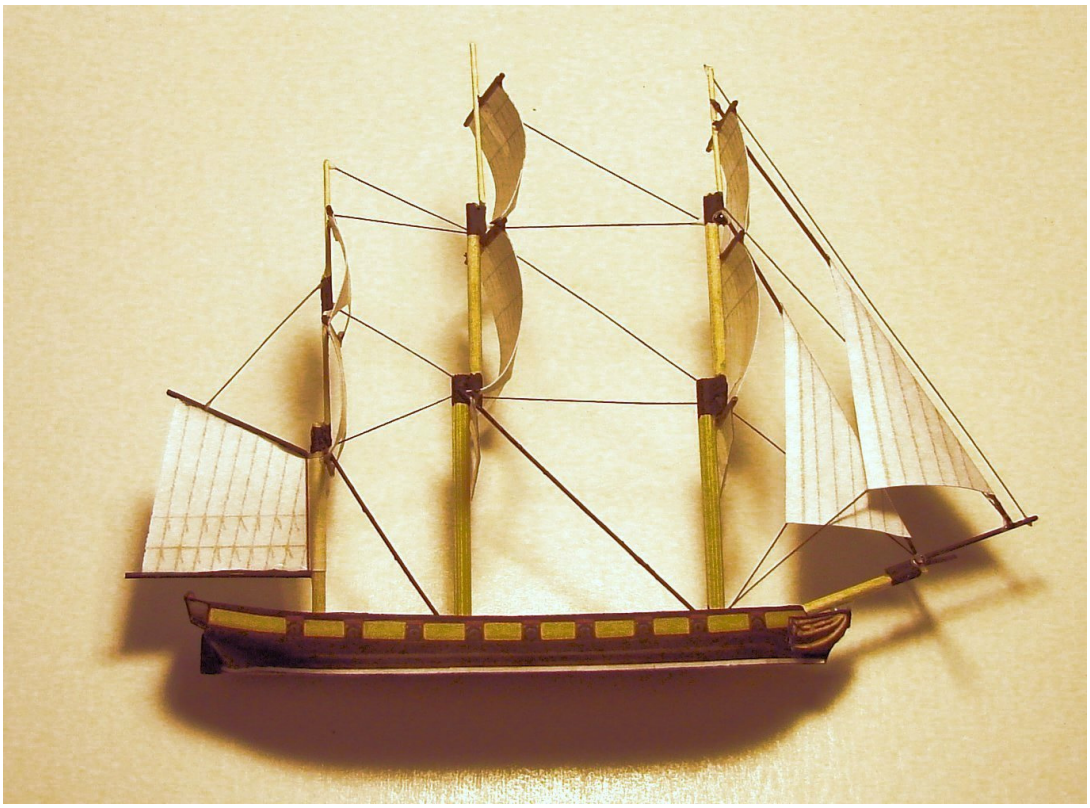
Put a little bit of white glue on a scrap of cardboard. Pick up each piece of rigging with the tweezers and dip the ends into the glue.



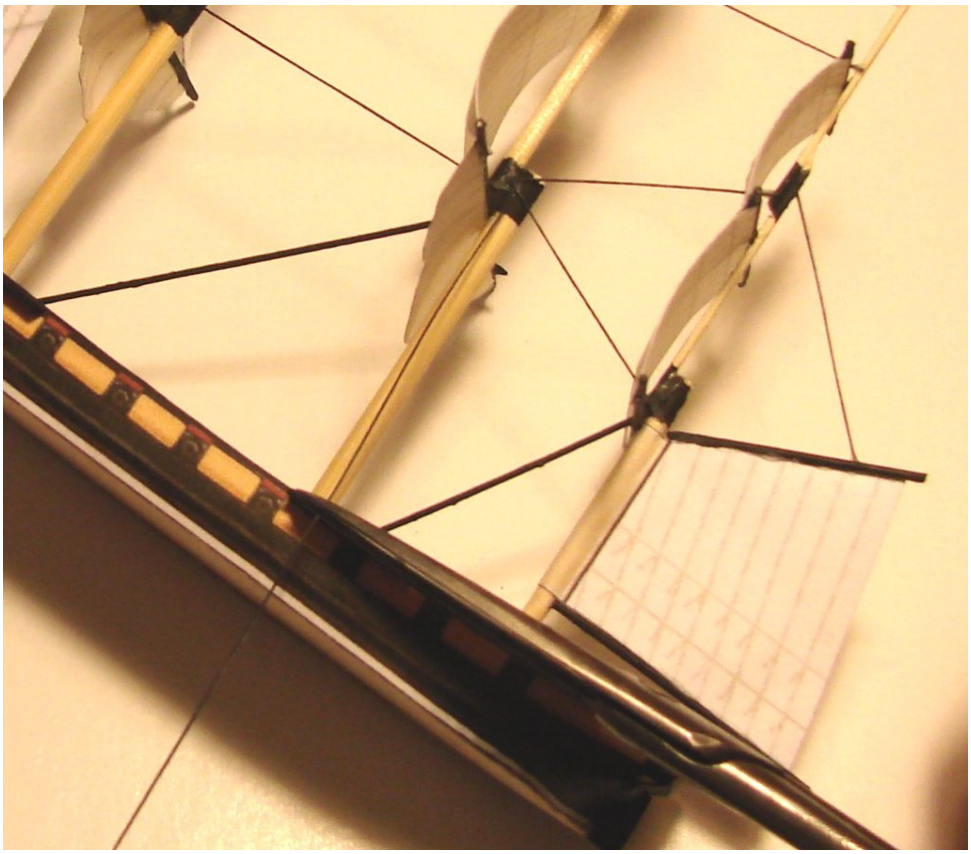
Then place the piece where it belongs on the model, making any adjustments to its position before the glue has a chance to set up.



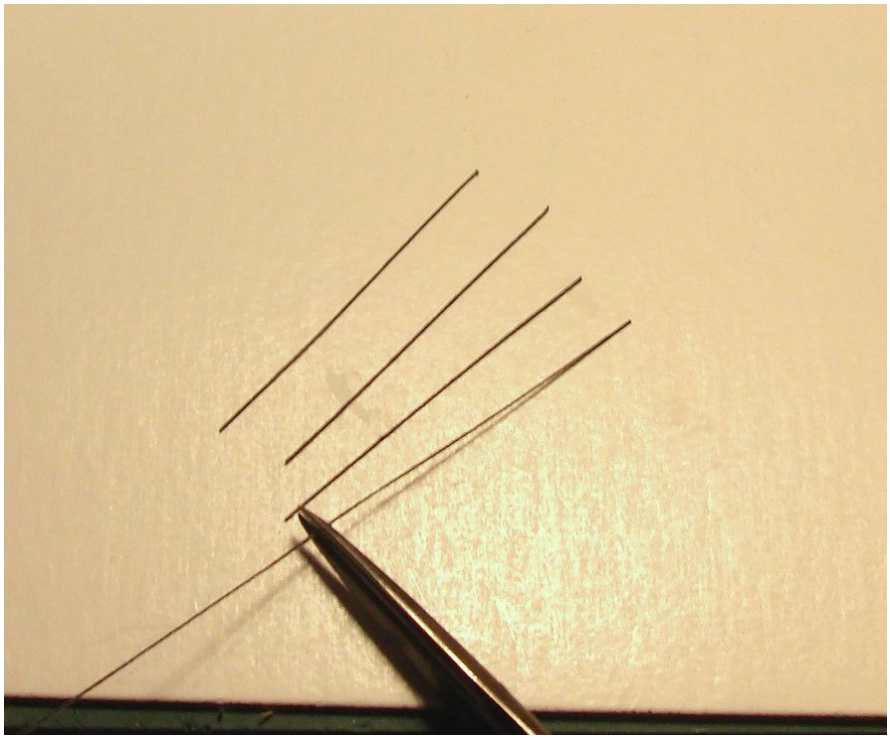
This photo shows the standing rigging in place on the model.



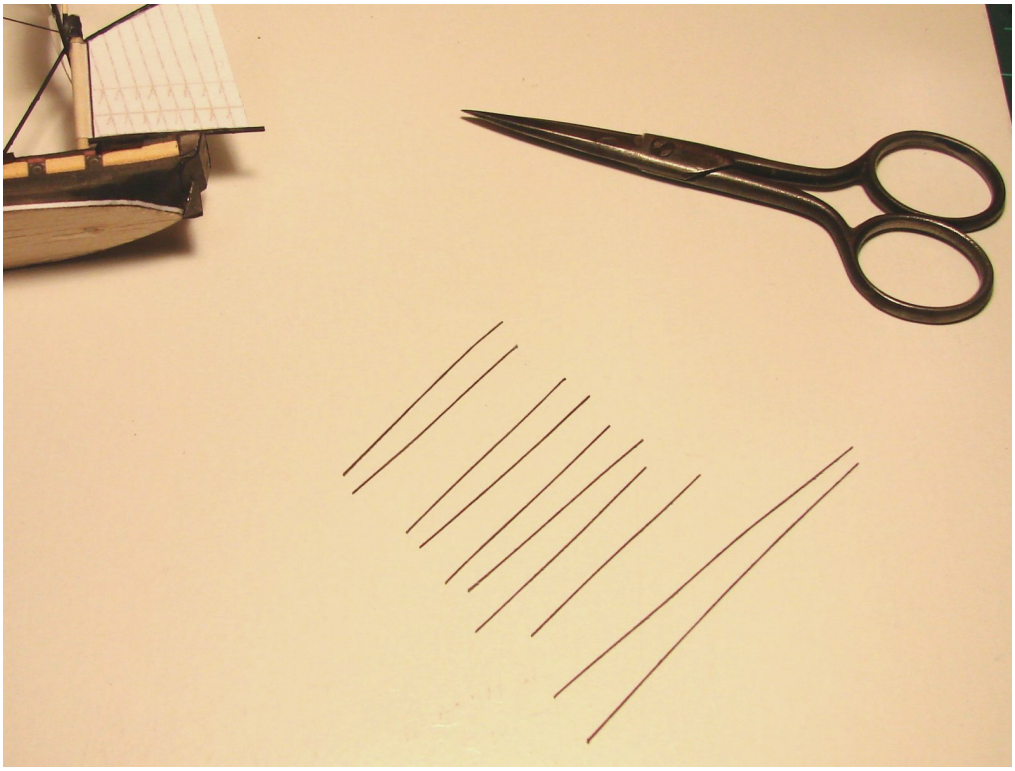
The next group of rigging to add is the shrouds and backstays, which run from the channels along the sides of the ship, up to the mastheads. As before, hold a piece of rigging material up to the model in the place it belongs, and cut it with the scissors.



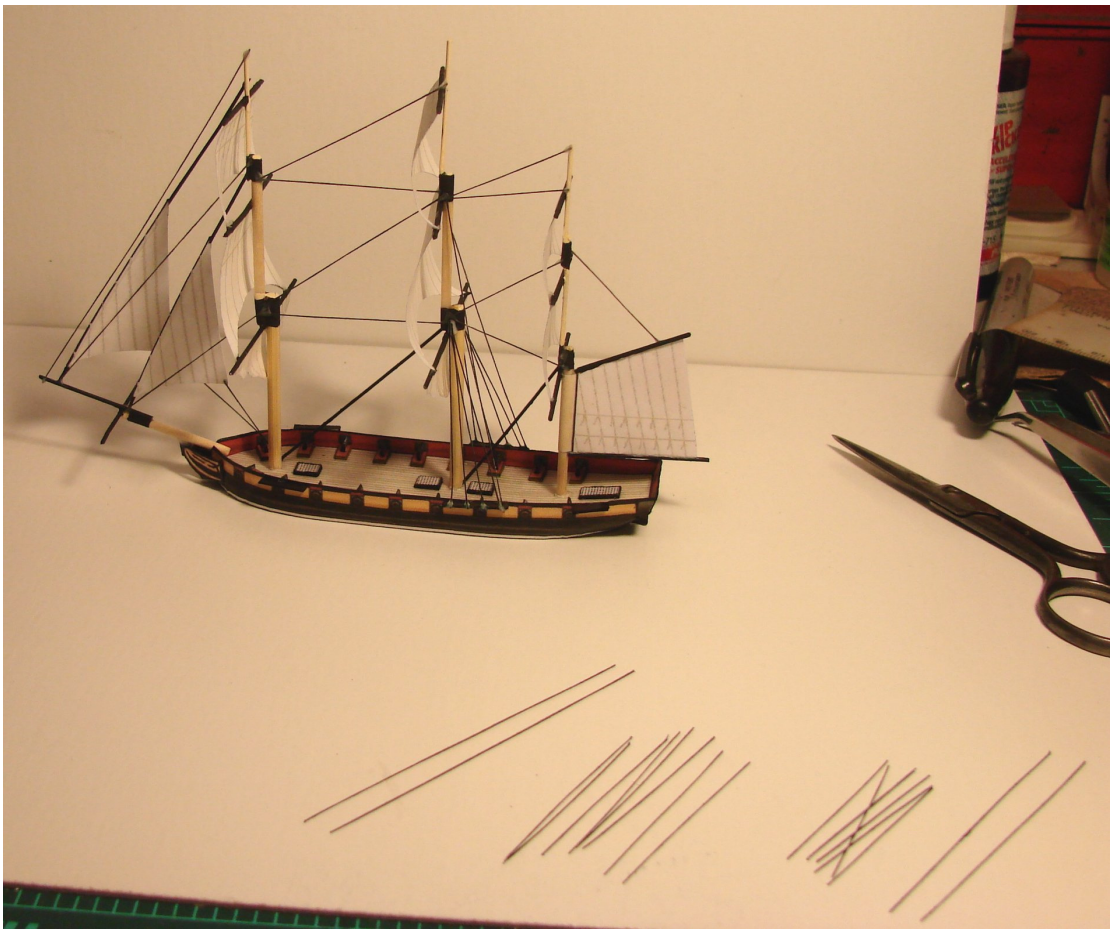
When there are multiple pieces of rigging going in the same place, as with the shrouds, use one of the pieces as a template to measure and cut as many as you will need. In this case, I will be placing four shrouds on each side of the mast, for a total of eight.



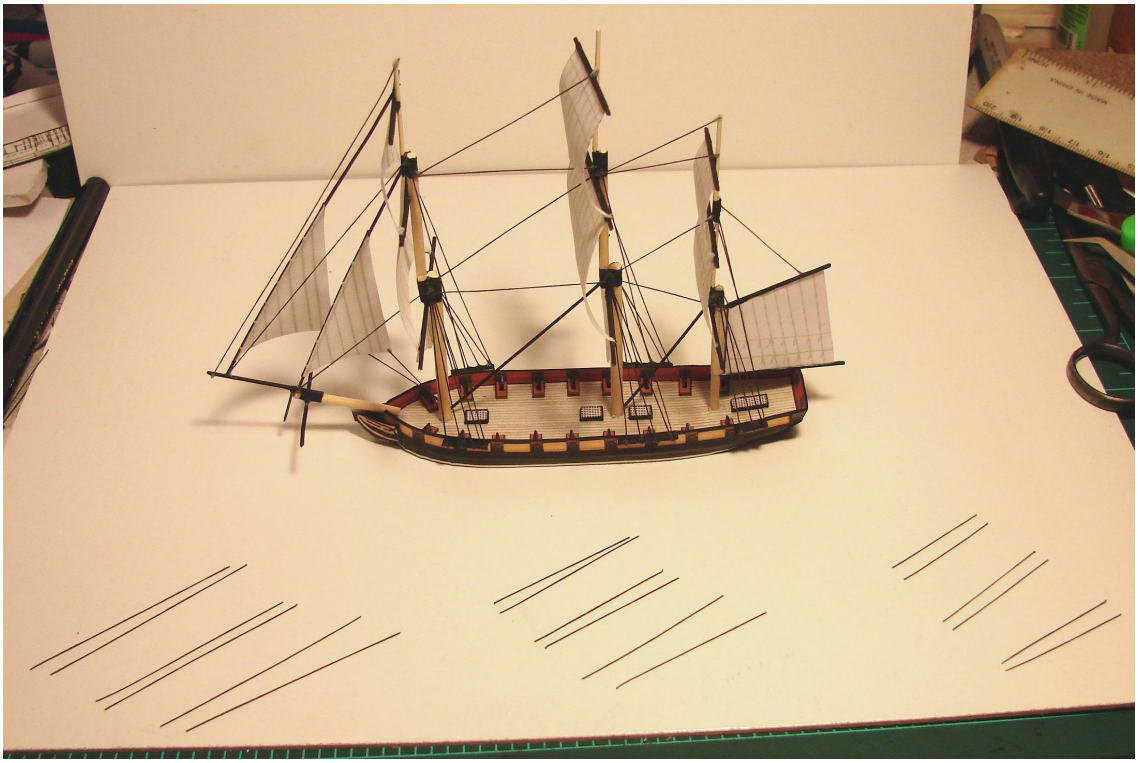
Here are all the shrouds needed for the mainmast, and two longer pieces for the backstays.



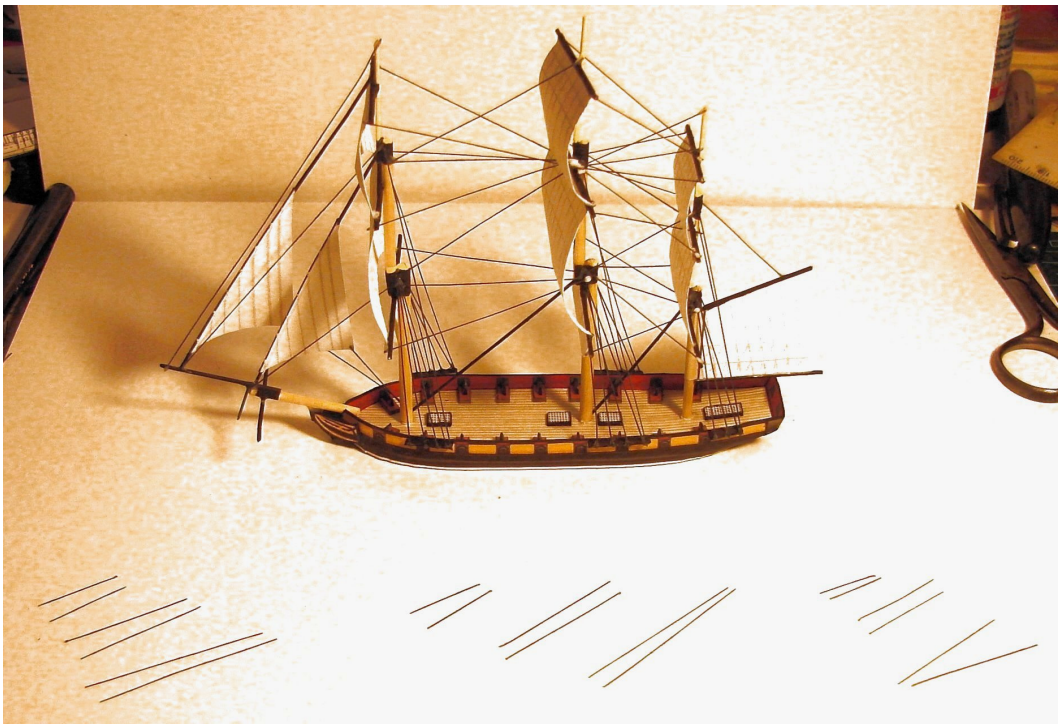
In this photo, the shrouds and backstays are in place on the mainmast, and laying on the board in front are the corresponding pieces for the remaining masts.



Here the model has all of the shrouds and backstays in place. Laid out on the board are the pieces for the next group of rigging to be added; the braces. Braces run from the ends of the yards, usually to the heads of the next mast. A pair will be needed for each yard.



Similarly, each yard will need two lifts, which run from the ends of the yard up to the masthead next up on the same mast. Shown below are the lifts for this model, which is shown with the braces already in position.



Finally, rig the bowsprit and its yards as shown below, and your ship is ready for a fight!