

The Merit 1:48 scale Late War 80 ft. Elco PT Boat
-By-
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Earlier this year, I heard that a company, Merit International, was going to be releasing two 1:48 scale kits of the eighty-foot Elco PT boat. One kit is of the eighty-foot Elco as a new-built boat would look in 1945. The other kit is of the first production series (*PT-103* to *PT-196*), or simply put, the series of which *PT-109* was an unit.

I saw comments on some of the internet scale modeling sites which stated that these two kits were nothing more than scale-downed “re-pops” of the now out-of-production 1:35 scale Italeri *PT-596* and the newer 1:35 scale *PT-109* kits. I did not put much stock in those comments, nor did I particularly think they had any validity.

That was because I did not think that a “giant” such as Italeri would stand for someone doing something like that, especially since the *PT-109* is still in production and is still, for some reason, popular.

Those comments were the last words I saw about these kits until this past week. Last Wednesday evening, I received an email from Tony Chin of Merit International. The email stated this:

Dear Mr Connelly

My name is Tony Chin and our company, Merit International is about to release 1/48 scale series of Torpedo Boats from different countries.

I came up with the idea a few years back because PT Boats models are either too small in 1/72 scale or in my opinion, too big in 1/35 scale granted they are great model kits. I must admit that I had been using your great web site as reference during our research. While our first model kit will definitely have mistakes, we hope that we have minimized the mistakes to an acceptable level. Like Italeri, we have chosen the Elao 80', late type as our first release because it is laden with so much weapons and lots of conversion possibilities. The 1/48 scale model still measures 20 inches and has more than 500 parts

I have attached a copy of our paint guide for your reference. Advance review sample without box is available if you are interested. If interested, kindly provide a shipping address.

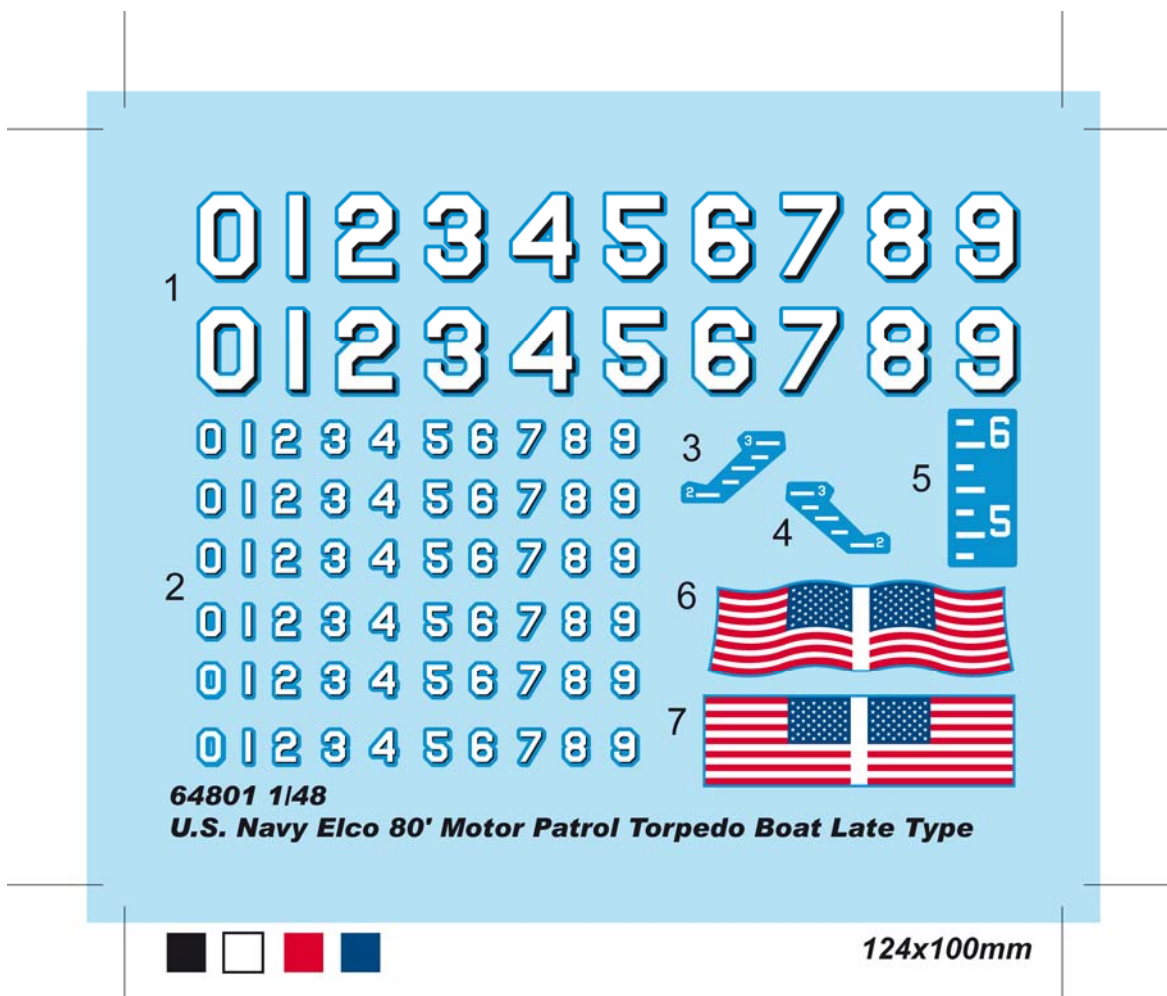
We look forward for your reply.

All the best

Tony

I have to say, I was shocked and honored to receive that email. I have never had a model manufacturer reach out to me and ask for my assistance. I responded that I would be glad to help them, as much as I could. True to his word, Mr. Chin sent me a review sample of the kit. It was just the deck, hull and the sprue-trees without the decals and a small fret of photo-etched parts.

Mr. Chin did send me an email with a 'proto-type' of the decal sheet and here it is:



A modeler can easily finish the kit as any of the *PT-565* to *PT-624* production series of the Elco eighty-foot PT boat design. Of course, only the boats of Squadron 40 (*PT-589* to *PT-600*) in 1945 was placed into service and sent to the Philippines. However, the war ended before this squadron saw action against the Japanese. The rest of the production series were not completed, placed in commission and were doing a shake-down cruise when the war ended or cancelled.

The kit arrived and I poured over the sprue trees, one by one and I have to say that impressed does not begin to describe my opinion of this kit. There is absolutely no flash on any of the trees, no injection marks or anything of the kind.

What impressed me the most about what I saw was the amount of detail incorporated into the kit's parts. I realize that this is the 21-st century and anything is possible and doable, and OK, I am in my mid-fifties and I tend to be amazed by technological advancements that remind me of what I saw on Star Trek, but still....

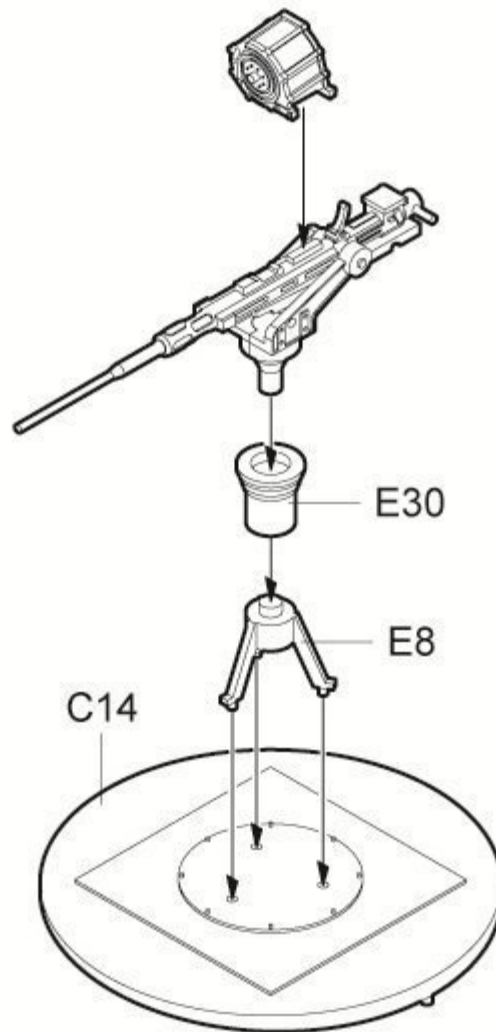
The detail is incredible!

I can debunk the claim that this kit is just a scaled down re-pop of the 1:35 scale *PT-596* kit. How can I make such a statement? Simple. The Italeri kit had the after, port machine gun turret molded as part of the dayroom kit. This kit does not. The turret is a separate piece which is meant to be attached to the dayroom cabin.

Another thing which impressed me was the way how the .50-caliber machine guns and the Bofors 40mm M3 would go together. The same thing can be said about the 20mm would go together. I was a little skeptical about that mount because of what I saw in a sample of the proposed box-art. In the painting, the 20mm on the foredeck appears to be on a Mark IV mount instead of the correct Mark X mount.



Mr. Chin sent me the kit instructions and what I saw in them relieved me. The 20mm from the kit is on the correct mount. It is also very accurate as well.



When asked why did Merit International decided to do a late-war Elco PT boat, Mr. Chin said this,

We were choose between the Elco or the Higgins boat as our first release and we have decided to make the Elco 80 first because:

- 1. Influence of JFK, "PT-109" movie and the overall historical fame of the Elco 80, although Elco 80 were not used in the movie.*
- 2. The movie "They were Expandable" used Elco 80, although they should have been different Elco boats.*

This made the Elco 80 a better choice because it will be better received by modelers.

We will make the first 2 releases as the "late type" and "early type" rather than a PT-109. Of course, modelers can easily customize the "early type" to become a "PT-109"

When asked about what resources did they use in the development of the kit, Mr. Chin said this,

We used a lot of materials from available books and web sites and we study work from modelers

perfecting their build on various PT Boats model kits. We actually used a old 1/72 model for a basic scan and then use printed hull shape data to re-pot the correct shape and outline. We hope we will not offend anyone by doing this

The price of the kit, according to Mr. Chin, *The MSRP is \$93.00*

When asked if there would be photo-etched brass details for the kit, Mr. Chin said,

There are some P/E that comes with the model kit but it is our understanding that no matter how well we fair, after market companies will always manage to create fantastic products to super detail the model. We have to consider overall retail price and ease to build vs. making the model kit too expensive and difficult to build.

Finally, Mr. Chin commented,

Our next release is not be a "PT-109", it will be released as a Elco 80 "Early type". I do have one such "Nose Art" in mind for the release,... then again, I think it is better to leave it to the after market manufacturers to help. They are so good in coming up with something of interest and hopefully help expand the interest on the PT boats to the next level. In all, we are hoping to provide an affordable priced kit as the platform and let the aftermarket manufacturers and modelers to run wild with it. We hope the modeling community will support our concept. There will be a 3rd variant to the Elco 80 series of model kits and we will make a release in our "Built and Painted" series of models as well.

In conclusion, I think that ship modelers will embrace this kit and the next one from Merit International. What's more, from what I saw in the instructions and on the spruce trees, the kit(s) will be an enjoyable and stress-free build.

Examples of the spruce trees included in this kit (not shown at actual size):

