

CHAPTER X

HOW TO BUILD A SINKBOX OR SINKBOAT

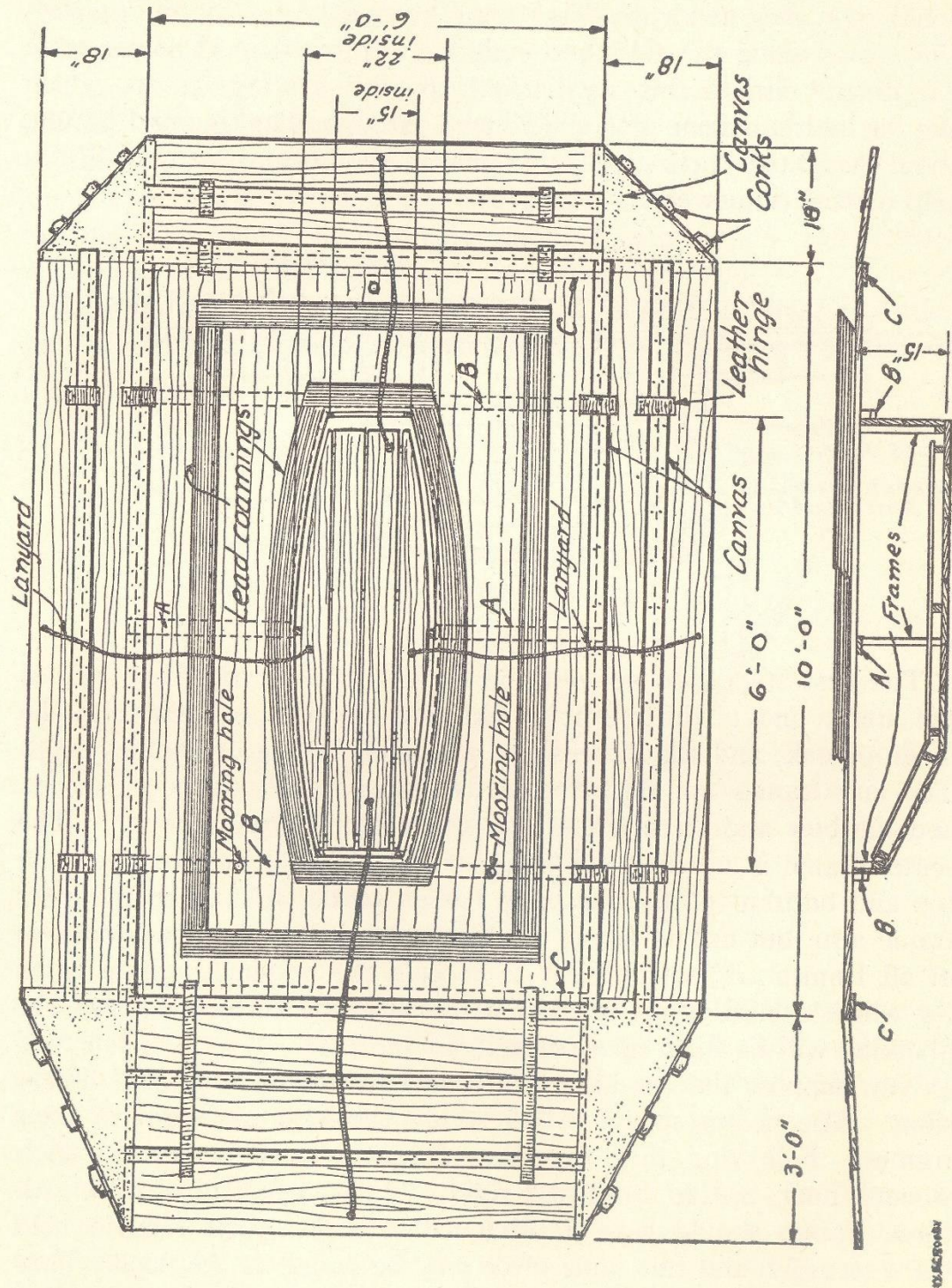
Complete Instructions for Building a Camouflaged Sinkbox

Successful duck shooting from a sinkboat depends upon just one thing—camouflage, and a big stool of decoys. Camouflage so perfectly done that the boat will fit into the surrounding water well enough to fool the wariest old duck afloat or awing. The sinkboat is almost, but not quite, exactly what its name implies, for it is sunk to the point where it will just remain afloat and no more, with the deck and coamings the only protection between the gunner and the deep blue sea. Obviously, such boats cannot be used in rough waters. The boat itself is nothing but a simple scow, made to fit either one or two gunners. The large wooden deck and the side wings serve to steady the scow and are practically awash at all times.

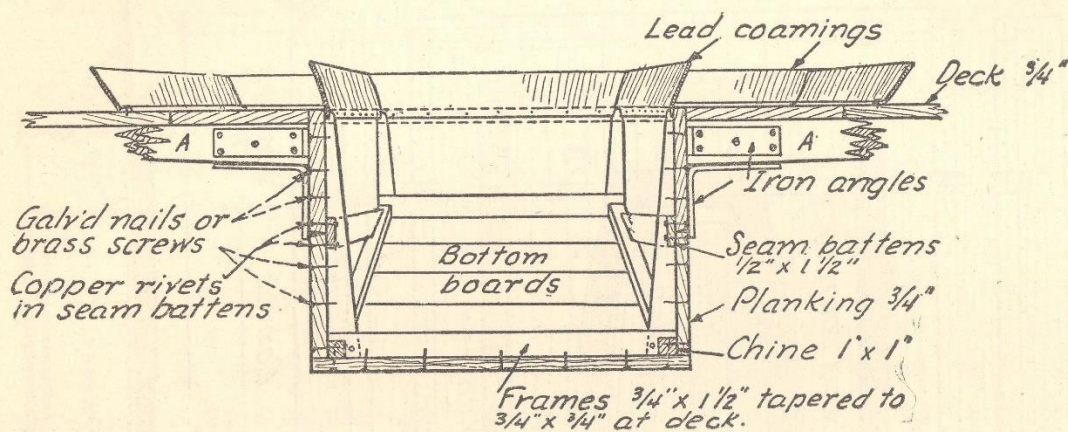
The boat is moored in position with a bridle at the forward or head end in such a way that she will swing easily with the wind. Once in position, a light anchor is dropped astern to hold her there. This anchor is worked through a hole in the deck or platform and should the wind suddenly veer to another direction, this anchor is raised off the bottom and the boat permitted to swing around until she is again head to the wind.

The scow part of the rig should be built first. It is 6 feet long to the outside of the planking, and the inside widths are 22 inches amidships and 15 inches at the bow and stern. She is 15 inches deep at the stern and amidships. The forward end is only 6 inches deep, the bottom slanting down to the 15-inch depth just forward of amidships. This makes it possible for the gunner to lie in the bottom with his head raised just sufficiently for him to see clearly in all directions.

Of course this part of the boat must be absolutely dry and too much care cannot be exercised in making it. The sides and bottom are made up of three-quarters inch material, preferably white cedar. Each seam in the bottom should be cut to a slight V-shape with the



opening on the outside, so that it may be caulked lightly and puttied. The seams along the sides and ends are also made in the same way, but in addition to this are backed up with a seam batten, which may be laid in marine glue and riveted through, planking and batten, about every two inches. Marine glue in the bottom seams will also help matters somewhat.



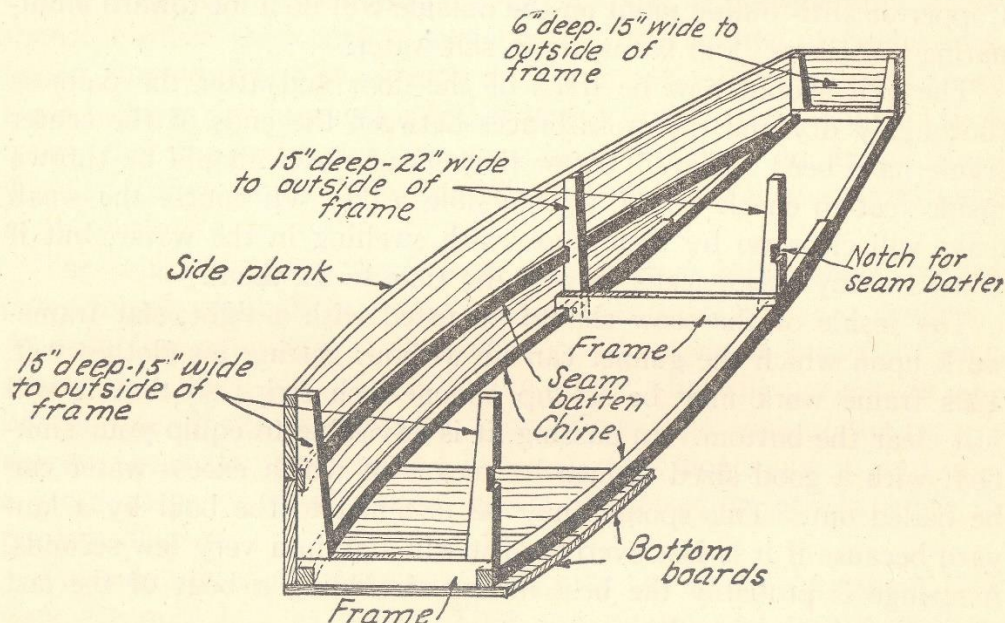
The first step is to get out the frames, one for the bow, one at the stern, and a third exactly halfway between. These may be made of oak, and the dimensions are given in one of the drawings. The end frames are butted directly against each other as shown, and the bow and stern pieces will make them strong enough. The center frame is notched out at a point about halfway between the top and bottom to take the seam batten which will run to the after frame also, but not as far as the forward frame. The lower corners of all frames are notched out to receive the one-inch square chine log which should be set in even with the frame surfaces so that the planking will lie flush up against it.

Now suppose that we have the frames all cut to the proper dimensions. The next step will be to secure the bow and stern to their frames. Following this, the three frames should be set up on a wooden floor, upside down and rigidly braced in all directions. All three frames should have a piece nailed across their tops to hold them securely, and this same piece may be nailed to the floor. Thus we shall have the after frame, center frame and bow frame nailed down at exactly their proper spacing. The next step will be to get the seam battens in place, screwed to each frame and ready for the top plank, which, since the boat is being built upside down, will come down next to the floor. This plank will reach from the floor to the center of the seam batten and will run all the way from bow

to stern. Where the bow end is cut up to form the scow, this plank will have to be trimmed off a little.

The chine logs will come next and by examining the drawings it will be seen that these only go as far as the beginning of the rise at the bow end where another piece is butted up against them at the proper angle to reach the bow frame. Where this butt comes, another piece should be fitted, overlapping each section, and screwed into place so that the two pieces are strong and rigid.

Now the other side plank may be put on, lapping over the other half of the seam battens and coming flush with the chine. It is a



good plan to put marine glue in back of this joint just to make sure. The side planks are copper riveted to the seam batten although brass screws may be used here if necessary. It is not advisable to use iron or steel fastenings unless the boat is to be used in fresh water only.

The bottom planks will be fitted across the bottom, not fore and aft, and will be nailed or screwed to the edges of the side planks and also to the under side of the chine logs. Particular care should be exercised with the seams on all the planking, yet the wood should not be fitted too tightly for the water will make it swell and this may cause the planks to buckle and even come off. The writer remembers one fast runabout that was built in a heated garage during the winter and when she was launched in the spring, the light planking started to buckle within an hour and inside of three hours this

boat was lying on the bottom of the Hudson River. Later on a professional boat builder had to completely rebuild her.

The V-shaped seams should be coated with some old paint and a thread or two of cotton wicking lightly pounded into place with a caulking iron or an old chisel. Some boat builders use a small steel wheel with a wooden handle, the wheel being ground down to a V-edge in such a way that it will run the caulking into a seam in short order. Before this paint is thoroughly dry, putty should be worked into each seam on top of the caulking and then the entire hull, outside and in, should be given a couple of coats of good paint. Copper or anti-fouling paint on the outside will do a lot toward eliminating "whiskers" and barnacles in salt water.

The hull should now be freed of the floor and after the paint is thoroughly dry and the cross braces between the ends of the center frame have been removed, a few buckets of water should be thrown inside just to check up on any possible leaks. Of course the small leaks will close up by themselves with swelling in the water, but if there are any major leaks, now is the time to fix them.

The inside of the scow should be fitted with a light, slat framework upon which the gunner can lie without getting his clothes wet. This frame work may be set up on one-inch strips so that it will just clear the bottom. In passing, it is advisable to equip your sink-boat with a good sized sponge by means of which excess water can be bailed out. This sponge may be fastened to the boat by a lanyard because if it is lost overboard it will sink in a very few seconds. A sponge is probably the best means of ridding a boat of the last remaining drops of water.

The next step will be to get out the deck or platform. This is made up of three-quarters inch material, almost anything will do, nailed to cross pieces which are screwed or bolted to the ends of the scow. These cross pieces will be six feet long by an inch and a quarter wide and two and a half inches deep at the center, tapering off to about an inch and a half at the ends. In the drawing, these pieces are marked B. To add reinforcement, the piece marked A is located amidship where it is secured to the sides of the scow with iron angle pieces. The platform itself is six feet wide and these pieces, marked A, will stick out about an inch beyond the edge in order to give support to the hinged outer sections.

Holes will be bored in the platform, two at the bow and one at the stern, for the mooring lines and the platform will come even with the edge of the scow. In order to give some protection to the

occupant of the boat, two sets of coamings are used, one directly at the edge of the scow and the other about halfway between that point and the edge of the platform. These coamings are made of lead, tacked down as shown and then bent up so that they will shed water. The inner coaming is tacked to the inside of the scow, the top of each frame being notched out to receive the lead. The tacks should be close enough together to make a fairly tight job and, where there is a joint, such as at a corner, there should be a considerable overlap so that the lead may be hammered together giving in effect, a single piece of metal all the way around.

The wing at the bow end of our sinkboat is considerably wider than the other three and is made up of three widths of twelve-inch board, three-quarters of an inch thick and each six feet long. These three sections are fastened together with a sole leather hinge in such a way that the entire structure may be folded back on the platform when it is time to tow home. In fact all the wing sections fold back in this way.

The joints between the boards are covered with canvas tacked down loosely enough to permit the boards to hinge over properly. At each corner another triangular piece of canvas is tacked in such a way that when the boat is in the water, she will present an unbroken line all the way around. Sometimes, the edge of the canvas nearest the water is supported by small cork floats but in any case a stout piece of manila rope should be sewed in at the edge to prevent damage.

The side and stern wings are made like the bow wing except that they are only half as wide. They are hinged and canvas is used over each seam as well as the seam between platform and wings. Each wing is equipped with a lanyard which should be secured to the cockpit where it cannot get adrift. These will serve to pull up the wings when it is time to quit for the day. Of course there is a light batten nailed around the under side of the platform to reënforce it at this point. This is shown at C in the drawings and will be one-half inch thick by three inches wide.

The platform or deck should be a fairly tight job, particularly where it fits around the scow. If there are cracks or holes here, the water, under pressure caused by even a moderate seaway, will shoot up through like young fountains.

The sinkboat as she now stands will require about 200 pounds additional weight to make her float at the right line, just level with the water. This may be made up by having iron decoys, each

92 AMERICAN DUCK, GOOSE AND BRANT SHOOTING

weighing between twenty-five and thirty pounds, arranged about the platform. Lighter wooden decoys should be used on the wings. Remember that these decoys will have to be considerably thinner in the body in order to make them appear as if they were actually in the water and not on deck. The total stool should be about 200.

In operation, the sinkboat is towed out by a small motorboat or outboard motored fishing boat. Once in position, the sinkboat is anchored with the bridle and stern anchor so that the bow is into the wind. The assisting boat places the decoys, all within gunshot, while the pilot of the sinkboat arranges his iron and wooden decoys and then lies down in the bottom to await developments. Of course the sinkboat cannot be handled easily and it is for this reason that the attending boat should hide out and await the signals from the gunner.

The boat should be painted to resemble the water as closely as possible. Since the water is usually quite a different color early in the morning than at full noonday, it might not be a bad plan to get up at dawn just to match the proper colors. Of course the hunter should also be clothed to match the boat or as nearly so as possible.

