Making custom Mercs decals using GIMP

Making custom decals to be displayed in the sever on your mech using GIMP 2.6
(You can get GIMP here: http://www.gimp.org/ - it's free). Note – this is not a primer on using
GIMP, this document only tells how to make decal files for Mechwarrior Mercenaries.

Step 1) – Find a picture or create a new one
You may need to adjust an existing picture down to a square to make life easy on the software, if
it's not square, you will have to reformat it (see Step 6). In this example, I used a picture of the
Tasmanian devil character of Warner Brothers cartoon fame - Taz.

Step 2) - Creating the new image using Windows Cut and Paste

Select and cut an existing picture – in other words, put it into your Windows clipboard.
In GIMP; Select **Edit** > **Paste**
The new image will appear in your GIMP workspace.

Step 3) - Save the image as a TarGA (.tga suffix) file
In GIMP; Select **File** > **Save As…**

A) Select the folder you want to save your new file in (in this example, I used the desktop),
B) Select a file name (you just need the name, the .tga suffix will be added automatically in the
next operation (in this example I used Taz), go to the lower left hand corner of the C) Save Image
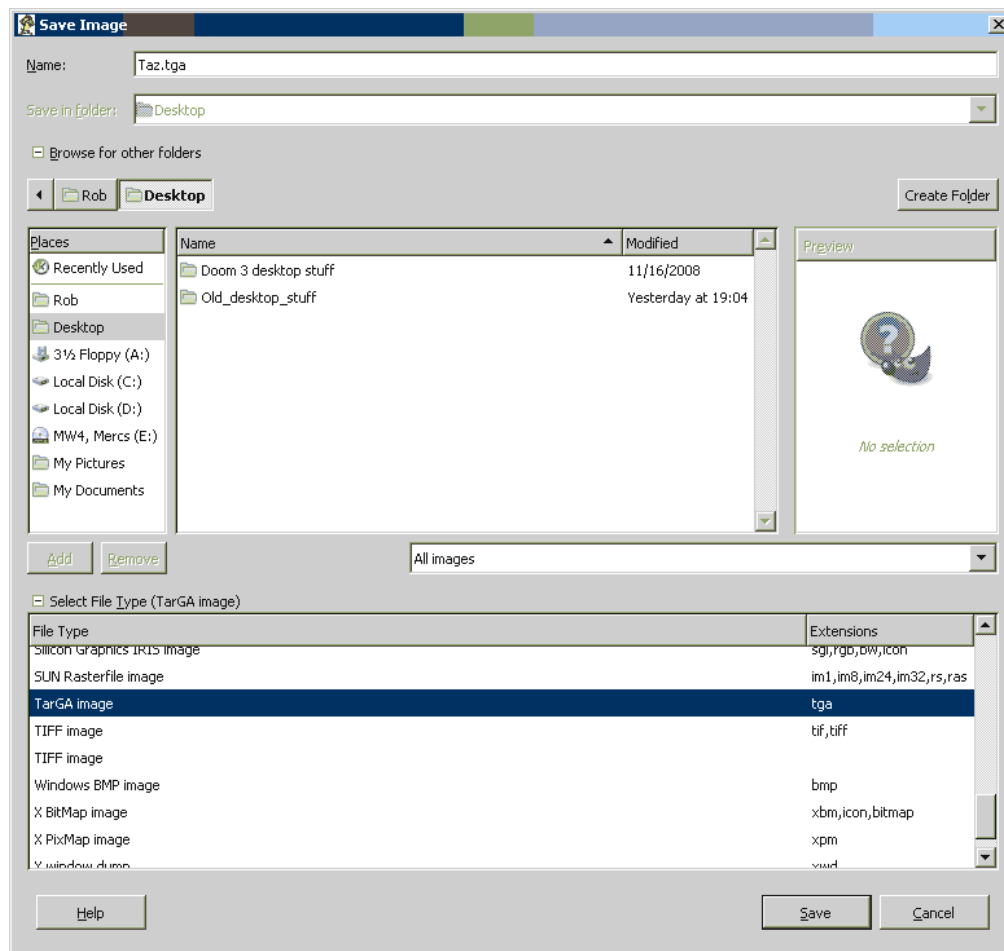window and select **File Type (TarGA Image)** as shown:

Figure 1 – Save file settings used in Step 3.

Save the file as a TGA, using RLE compression, with the origin in the bottom left. Use thse setting for all Mercs decals
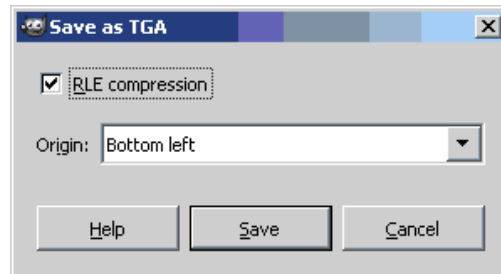

Figure 2 – The Save as TGA window which opens when saving a TarGA file.

Step 4) – Removing the stuff you don't want

There are usually some artifacts around most existing pictures you may not want. GIMP will let you edit pictures and drawings. Personally I prefer my decals to look slightly messy, but it's all down to personal taste. Clean the picture up if you wish by deleting/changing the various bits you don't want in there (do NOT animate files). Now save the file with a new name! I've lost count of the number of times I've messed up at this point by resizing the file, and then saving it. At this point you have a "working" picture to go back to if you need it.

When you get the picture looking the way you want it to, you may have to reduce the number of colors used in the picture (color depth) to make the file small enough for Mercs, because the maximum file size for decals is 5k (yes, that's right, 5k). You can do this by converting the image to indexed colors as follows:

In GIMP, select **Image** > **Indexed**

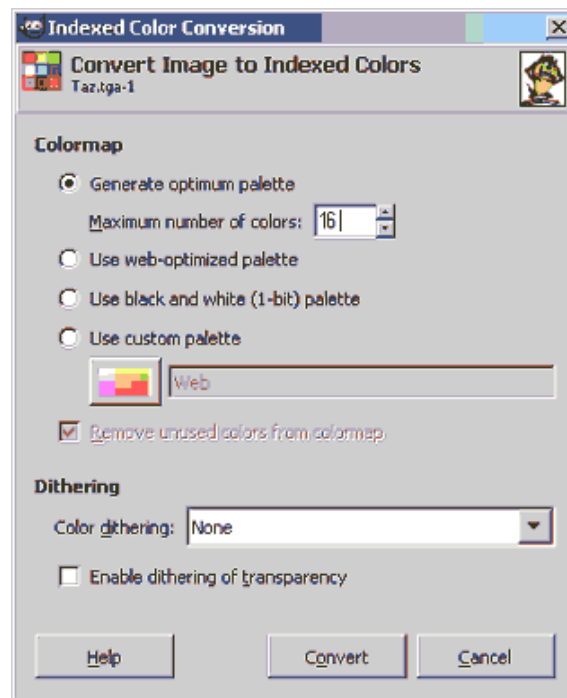A little window called "Indexed Color Conversion" will open"

Figure 3 – Indexed Color Conversion window.

In this window, in the box next to the text "Maximum number of colors:", make the value **16**, and then select the "Convert" button. The Indexed Color Conversion window will now close.

Step 4.1) – Save the image as you proceed

This way, if you make a mistake, you will not loose all. We'll save the modified article with a different file name. Just do this using the "**Save As**" option again (in this example I used the name "Taz2.tga").
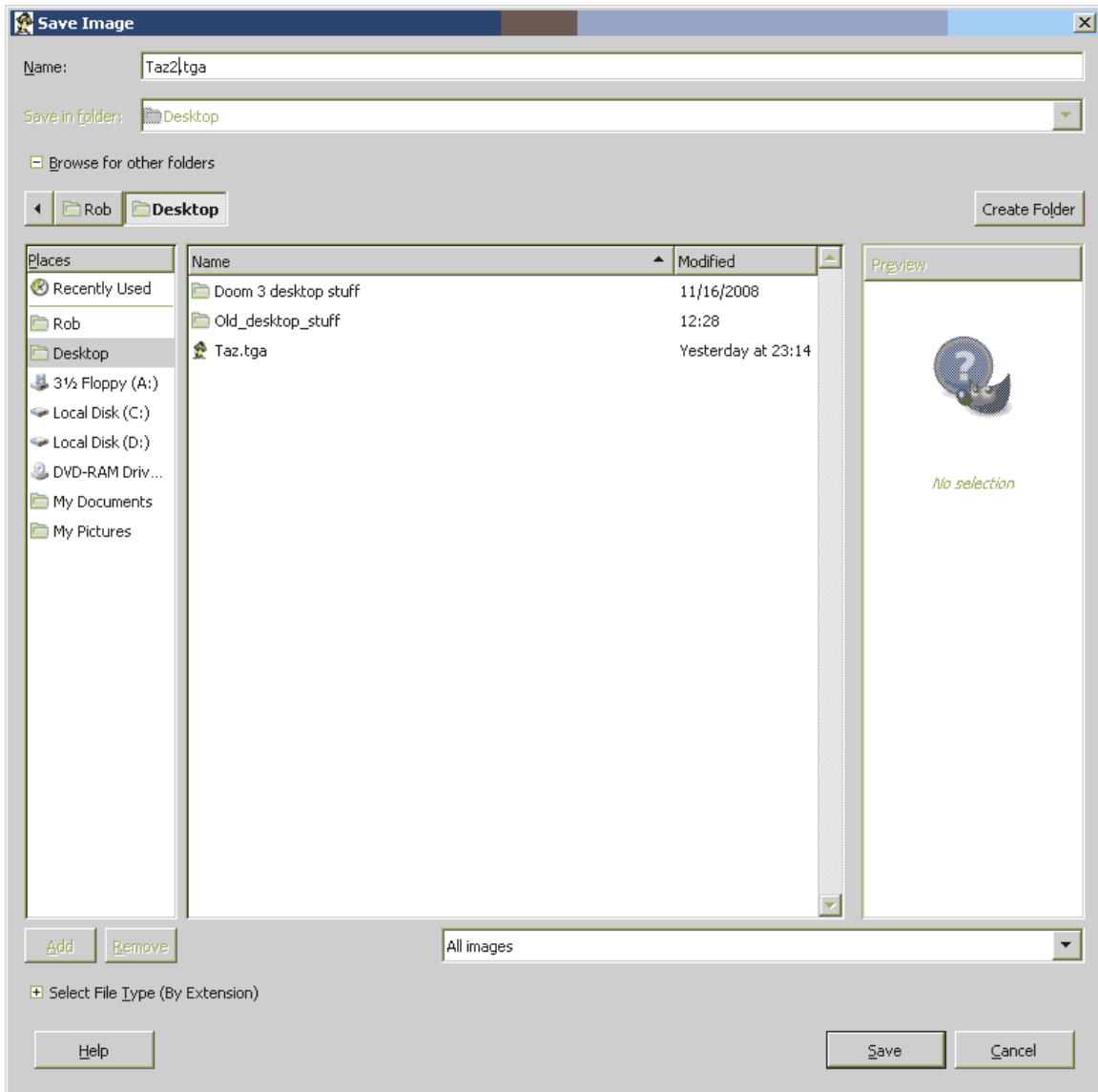

Figure 4 – Save file settings used in Step 4.1.

Step 6) - Turning the picture into something that Mercs will recognize.
MW Mercs only will display decal files of 32x32 or 64x64 pixels in size (if you can, use 32x32 – it's a better bet that they will work). You're going to have to make a judgment call here, because the maximum file size for decals is 5k. As this picture is a photograph I'm not going to be able to save it as 64x64 due to the color levels, and the transparency. So it's 32x32, more basic pictures, or not bothering with the transparency would likely allow me a 64x64 (not guaranteed however). After you do make changes, don't forget to save your work. You may have to play around with the resizing and image color depth until you get something that works in Mercs.

Step 6.1) - Do an image resize (if necessary).
In GIMP; Select **Image** > **Scale Image** a window called "Scale Image" will open. This image size was converted to 64 x 64 pixels (Note how the chain picture to the right of the Image Size boxes is broken – this will allows me to change the image size ratio).
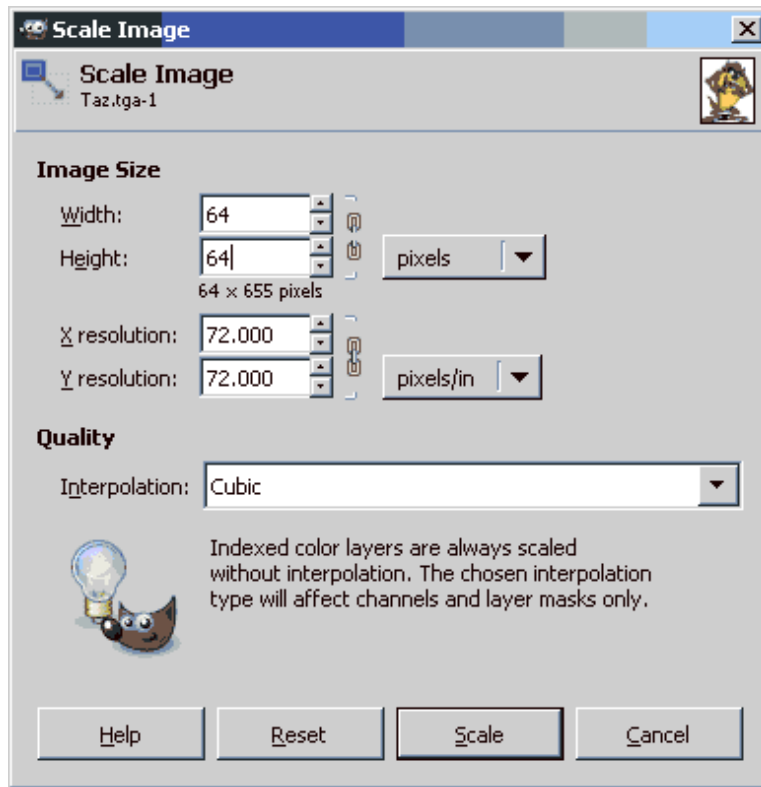

Figure 5 – Scale Image window.

Step 7) – Save the final version of your decal for use.
As in Step 4.10, you will need to save your finished file. Again, just do this using the "**Save As**"
option again (in this example I used the name "TazFinal.tga").
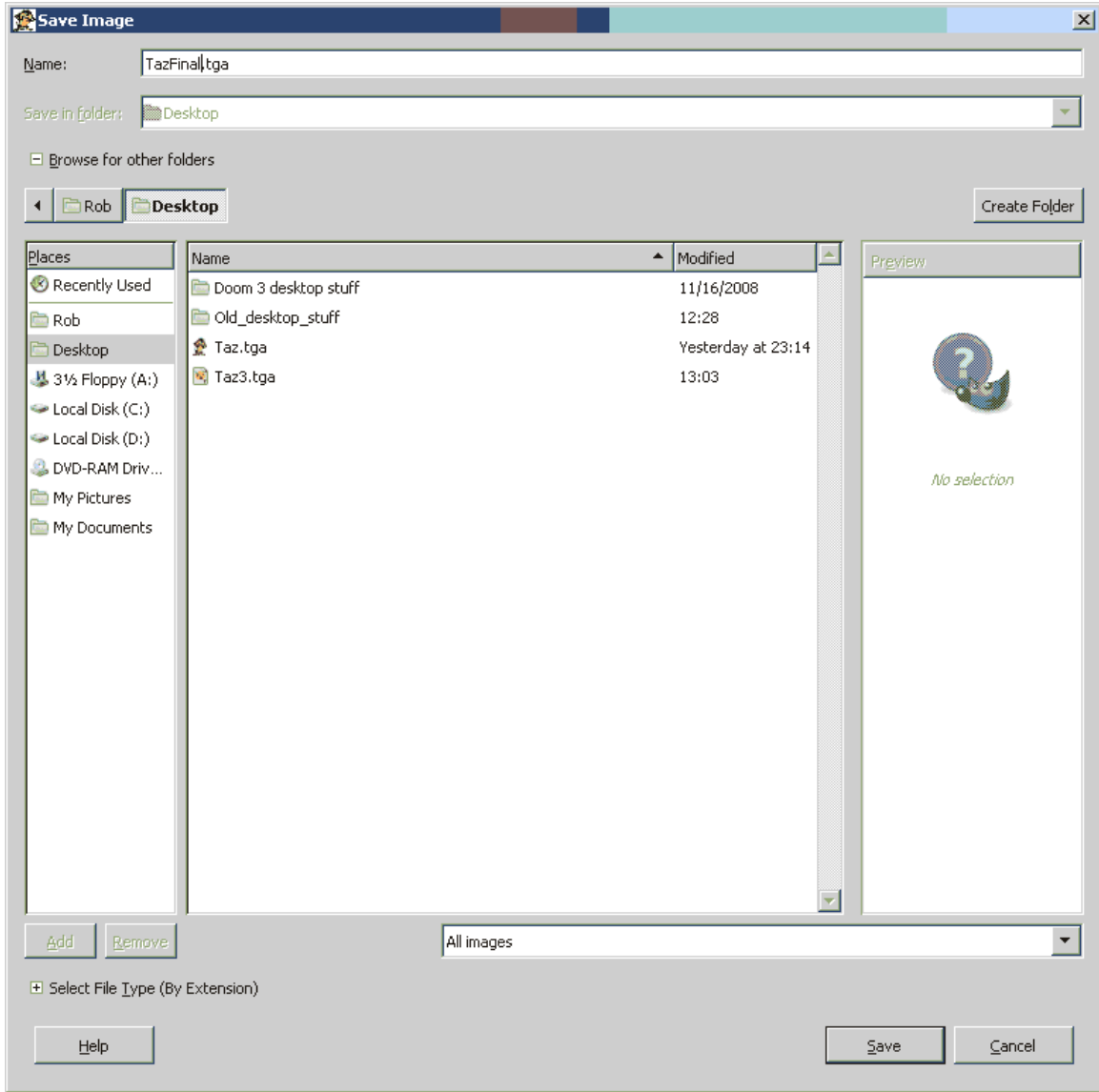

Figure 6 – Save file settings used in Step 7.

Step 8) - Adding your custom decal to the right directory.

Place the file in C:\Program Files\mektek.net\Mechwarrior Mercenaries - Mektek
Mekpak\Content\Textures\customdecals, if you're using the default install path.
Or just find your mercs folder and put the file in \mektek.net\Mechwarrior Mercenaries - Mektek
Mekpak\Content\Textures\customdecals

Step 9) - Using the decal.
Open the Mechwarrior Mercenaries game, and then go to "**options**"
Select the "**Multiplayer**", tab and pick your decal by hitting the arrows until it appears. Click "**Ok**"
at the bottom of the page, and then enter your game. The Decal should show up if the server
admin has allowed Custom Decals in their options (Sunder II allows only G-rated custom decals).