



# All Guns Blazing!

## Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

### No. 154 – February 2007

#### Editorial

Hi Everyone,

Once again Simon Stokes steps into the breach and supplies us with more "tales of daring do" on Jeff's dinner table. I'm beginning to get the impression that Jeff and Simon's friends are the only people playing naval wargames at the moment ☺ Seriously though, if I don't get material to publish then there's no newsletter. I'm not just after battle reports. Short articles, news items, reviews of models, books, rules etc. etc. are just as valid. If you see anything that you think may be of interest please send it through to me.

Otherwise its going to get really, really quiet!

Yours aye,

DM

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## Gibraltar Strait Battle Report

By Simon Stokes

### Introduction

January's Game at the North Hampshire regional group saw us fight out another historical "what-if", this time from WW2. The scenario was inspired by the events described in Peter C Smith's book "Action Imminent" which recounts the passage of the Gibraltar Straits by a French cruiser squadron on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1940, and the subsequent dismissal of Admiral Dudley North for not engaging them.

The incident took place after the British raid on Mers-El-Kebir in July, and relations between Britain and Vichy France were somewhat strained, but had not degenerated into a state of open warfare. There still existed a number of French naval units in foreign ports, which the British were keen to see disarmed or even better turned over to the Free French. Most notable of these was the port of Dakar in West Africa, where the still incomplete battleship *Richelieu* escaped to after the fall of the French Atlantic ports. Operation "Menace" was mounted and centred around the Free French leader Charles de Gaulle and two battalions of troops, who without the use of force it was hoped would hoist the Free French flag in West Africa and secure Dakar as a base. Transport and Naval support were provided by the Royal Navy. The force left England at the beginning of September and on the 11<sup>th</sup> was still en-route to Dakar.

The French Admiral Darlan meantime had assembled a naval force to conduct a most delicate operation, to which he issued the following orders.

The 4th cruiser division and *Fantasque*, *Malin* and *Audacieux* will sail from Toulon on a date to be subsequently fixed and strike a direct route for Dakar, stopping at Casablanca, under the command of the Admiral commanding the 4th cruiser division, to place themselves at the disposal of the Governor General of AOF for a policing mission and any other liaison duty that is necessary. In carrying out this mission you are to avoid any hostile actions and gesture of provocation towards British forces, other than when you are menaced by hostile action directly from shore or ships. The route is direct from Toulon to Gibraltar; the passage through the straits of Gibraltar to be taken at daybreak and at high speed. The force you are to command will be designated Force Y.

The force duly sailed and arrived in the eastern approaches to the straits in the early hours of 11<sup>th</sup> where they were spotted by a detachment from 13th destroyer flotilla who were on anti-submarine patrol east of Gibraltar. The French squadron, which was blacked out save for their navigational lights, was moving at 25 knots, so the destroyers took up shadowing positions, and sent off a sighting report

Historically the French squadron was allowed to pass unmolested and even given a "Bon voyage!" by Admiral North, but in our scenario Admiral North was given clearer and more timely guidance from the Admiralty as to what he was expected to do in the case of French naval forces attempting to pass the straits, and the French commander interpreted Admiral Darlan's orders above as allowing him to engage the Royal Navy if fired upon i.e. the conditions necessary for playing the encounter as a wargame.

## The Forces



### **Admiral Sir James Somerville with Force H)**

**Renown**<sup>BC</sup>, **Wrestler**<sup>DD</sup>, **Velox**<sup>DD</sup>, **Vidette**<sup>DD</sup>, **Wishart**<sup>DD</sup>

*NB Force H has been depleted of most of its big ships for operation "Menace", though there are two coastal batteries of four 9.2" guns each at Gibraltar, which cover the entire width of the straits.*



### **Commander H.F.H. Layman detachment from 13th destroyer flotilla**

**Hotspur**<sup>DD</sup>, **Griffin**<sup>DD</sup>, **Encounter**<sup>DD</sup>



### **Rear Admiral Celestin Jean Bourrague**

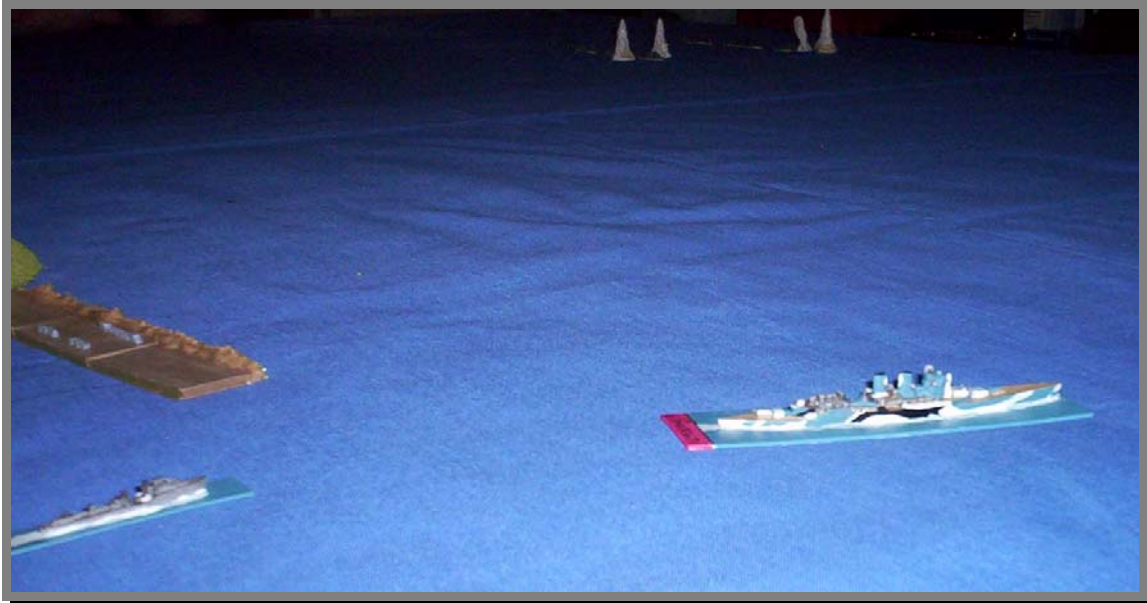
**Montcalm**<sup>CL</sup>, **Georges Leygues**<sup>CL</sup>, **Gloire**<sup>CL</sup>, **Le Fantasque**<sup>DD</sup>,  
**L'Audacieux**<sup>DD</sup>, **Le Malin**<sup>DD</sup>

## The Game

Sea condition was calm, though the visibility was initially poor due to early morning mist which was set to clear after 20 minutes to give good visibility. The game started just before dawn which was set to break after 10 minutes.

Rob Hutton took on the role of Somerville with Force H who started the game in port, but with steam raised. Andy Jose and Jeff Crane took command of the French cruisers and destroyers respectively who started the game on the eastern base line steaming at 25 knots in line ahead, whilst I took command of the 13<sup>th</sup> destroyer division who, unbeknownst to them, were shadowing the French squadron and would not appear until dawn broke 10 minutes into the game.

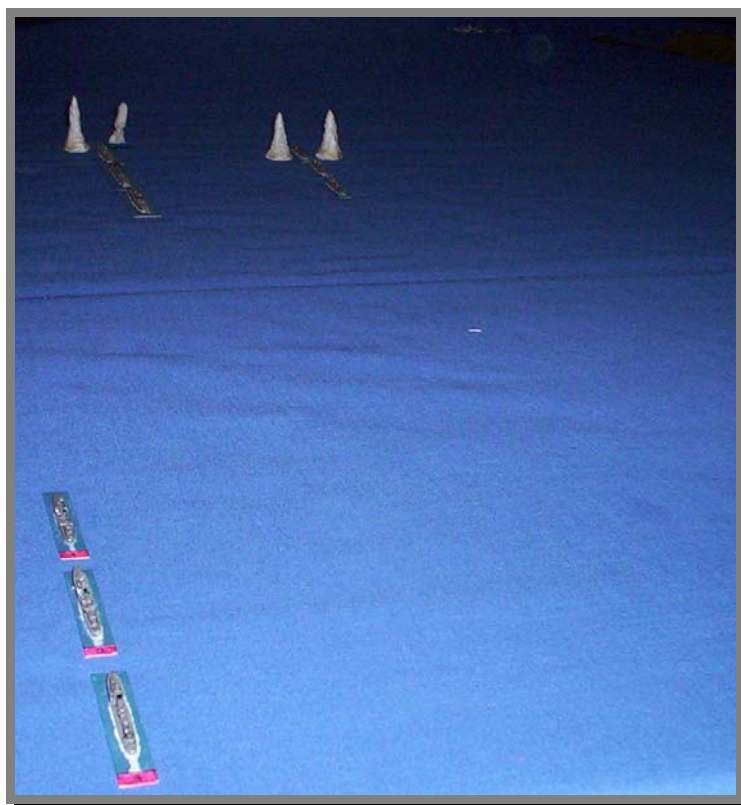
The game opened when the French, ignoring a signal from Somerville to turn back, were brought under fire by the Gibraltar 9.2" shore batteries followed shortly by Renown's 15" guns as she cleared the harbour wall. The firing was slow but deliberate and soon the leading French destroyer *Le Fantasque* and cruiser *Montcalm* were straddled by shell splashes.



*Renown clears the harbour wall.*

For the French, the destroyers opened up on the 9.2" batteries more in an attempt to keep them subdued rather than in any hope of taking them out, the leading cruisers, *Montcalm* and *Gloire*, meanwhile returned fire on the *Renown*. Dawn had now broken and it was an unpleasant surprise to the French to find 13<sup>th</sup> destroyer division on their tail and soon *Hotspur* and *Georges Leygues* were exchanging salvos.

So far there had been little damage on either side, but that changed when *Montcalm* took a 15" shell from *Renown* and *Hotspur* a 6" shell from *Georges Leygues*. The 15" shell that hit *Montcalm* easily pierced her thin belt armour and detonated in a secondary magazine. The explosion took out two of her boiler rooms and her speed dropped off to 19 knots as she dropped out of line to port to let her consorts pass to starboard. The 6" shell that hit *Hotspur* was no less devastating as it hit below the waterline on the starboard side flooding two boiler rooms and giving her a 12° list. She too dropped out of line to starboard, contenting herself with sending full broadsides of 4.7" shells after the fast disappearing *Georges Leygues* as she slowed so as to prevent the flooding from spreading. *Hotspur* managed to score a number of hits on *Georges Leygues*, but the 4.7" shells had difficulty penetrating the cruisers armour and there was very little real damage done to her. *Montcalm* and *Gloire* were also having similar problems with *Renown*. They had no problem in landing hits, but the 6" shells were incapable of penetrating the battlecruisers armour at the range they found themselves firing over.



*Commander Layman's destroyers shadowing the French squadron.*

*Wrestler*, *Velox*, *Vidette* and *Wishart* had now worked up to their top speed and were closing rapidly on the French Line. The French destroyers advanced to meet the threat. Even though it was 4 against 3, the advantage was actually with the French "super" destroyers which were bigger, faster, more modern and more heavily armed than their Great War vintage adversaries. The question was whether they could dispatch the British before they got close enough to launch torpedoes. Consequently the British destroyers were subjected to a hail of 5.5" shells. The lead destroyer *Wrestler*, which had managed to out run her consorts, was hit heavily her below deck spaces were wrecked and she was holed below the water line. She slowed to 27 knots but held on towards the French ships. *Velox* which was much less damaged, but was unable to reach the French line so peeled off to port followed by her consorts. *Vidette's* steering gear and starboard prop shaft were hit at this point and jammed amidships so she ploughed straight on towards the rear of the French destroyers and heading straight past them and losing way, unable to change course. At the rear of the line *Wishart* now altered course and headed straight for the nearest French destroyer, *Le Malin*. The French saw the threat late, but managed to get torpedoes in the water in an attempt to stop *Wishart* in her tracks, but none hit and instead she slammed straight into the starboard side of *Le Malin*. Sea water flooded into the starboard side of the French destroyer as she was brought abruptly to a halt. This, added to the below the water line hits she'd already taken from *Vidette* and *Wishart* caused her to roll over to starboard as the two ships parted. *Wishart's* bows however were completely wrecked by the impact that left her down by the head to such a degree that she was unable to move. A couple of salvo's from *Gloire's* secondary guns soon sent her to the bottom after *Le Malin*.

The British now found themselves completely out of position. *Renown* had been drawn in too close to the French cruisers who's 6" shells were now capable of penetrating the thinner armour of her belt ends and below the belt, and she began to lose speed as she picked up below the water line hits that let a significant amount of water into her hull. The British destroyers that were still operational were now completely out of position to protect the *Renown*. Added to this the water was now alive with criss-crossing torpedo tracks launched from both sides. *L'Audacieux* was hit in the stern and slowed to a halt with her props and screws a mangled wreck. *Georges Leygues* was hit by two torpedoes to starboard and slowed to 18 knots with a 16° list to starboard. *Renown* was hit by two torpedoes, one to port and one to starboard flooding boiler rooms and engine rooms so that she lost all power to her propellers

We ended the game at this point.



Overhead shot after the destroyer clash.



### **Aftermath**

Both sides were losers in this closely fought game. For the British the *Renown* was dead in the water and, even assuming they could have recovered her, she would have been out of the war for at least 6 months; probably longer. The French force on the other hand had been severely mauled with only *Gloire* and *Fantasque* in anything approaching good shape. There were some mistakes made by the British that one suspects that Admiral Sommerville, the wily old dog that he was, would probably not have made. Most notably *Renown* being drawn in too close to the French squadron. Historically none of this took place of course. Operation Menace collapsed into farce all of its own accord, and not because of the French cruiser squadron that played no part in the debacle. This didn't stop Churchill from censuring Admiral North for not engaging the French squadron on 11<sup>th</sup> Sept. He wanted him court-martialed, but resistance from Dudley Pound and other senior admirals prevented this from happening, but even so Admiral North was soon removed from command and never given a command again.

### **Gallipoli Forts To Be Restored**

(perhaps a venue for a future NWS holiday?)

The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism is about to complete the restoration of two historic forts that played key roles during the Gallipoli War. The project carried out by the ministry within the context of the Long Term Development Plan (UDGP) is restoring the forts of Namazgah and Mecidiye for the first time. The forts, which had long been neglected, are now being converted into open-air museums. The cleaning process took nine months while the environmental and restorative planning began on Dec.17, 2006 and is about to be complete. Project Implementation Advisor Ömer Yörükoğlu said that the original construction of the forts, to be used 21 years later during the 1915 Gallipoli War, had begun in the 1840's with the final touches added in 1894.

### **Possible Summer NWS Event**

Plans are afoot for an NWS event in the Summer, which will (if it comes off) include a long-awaited Annual General Meeting! More details in the next issue of AGB!

## **Upcoming Events**

### **Naval Wargaming Weekend, Fort Purbrook, Portsmouth March 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> 2007**

A wargaming conference will be held at based at Fort Purbook in March 2007. The conference is an opportunity for people interested in developing wargames to meet and try out a large number of different types of games. These games may be at any stage of development from prototype to a fully worked wargame.

The conference dinner is on board a submarine on the Friday evening and there are a number of naval games in the programme already (including the Fletcher Pratt Naval Wargame in the Ball Room).

Further details can be found at [www.johncurryevents.co.uk](http://www.johncurryevents.co.uk)

## NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2006

### NWS Northern Fleet – Falkirk East Central Scotland

Kenny Thomson, 1 Excise Lane, Kincardine, Fife, FK10 4LW, Tel: 01259 731091  
e-mail: [kenny.thomson@homecall.co.uk](mailto:kenny.thomson@homecall.co.uk) - Website: [WWW.falkirkwargamesclub.co.uk](http://WWW.falkirkwargamesclub.co.uk)

Falkirk Wargames Club meets each Monday night at 7pm with a variety of games running each evening. Naval games are popular with 2 or 3 run each month. Campaign games sometimes feature in our monthly weekend sessions. Games tend to be organised week to week making a 3-month forecast here a waste of time. Please get in touch if you'd like to come along.

- Popular periods – Modern (Shipwreck), WW1 and 2 (GQ), WW2 Coastal (Action Stations), and Pre-dreadnought (P Dunn's rules)

### NWS North Hants [Every 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday]

Jeff Crane 31 Park Gardens, Black Dam, Basingstoke, Hants, 01256 427906  
e-mail: [gf.crane@ntlworld.com](mailto:gf.crane@ntlworld.com)

Next game on 4th March. Contact Jeff for details.

### NWS Wessex [Bi-Monthly Meetings]

The Wessex Group has gone into (hopefully) temporary abeyance for the moment. If anyone living in the bath / Bristol / Gloucester area (or further afield) would like to take on managing the group please contact myself or any of the other NWS officials.

## Other Events

### “Carronade” Wargames Show

The Falkirk Wargames Club has started a new show in Scotland called Carronade. The show next year will take place on Saturday the 12th of May 2007 at the Forth Valley College Falkirk. If any member of the society would like to put on a game please contact Kenny Thompson on 01259 731091. At this time the club web site is being renewed