



All Guns Blazing!

Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

No. 159 – July 2007

Editorial

Hi Everyone,

A big issue this month, with the formal AGM report and Ark Royal participation game battle report from Simon. As you can see we had a jolly time chasing Ark Royal around the deck of Belfast's Ship Company Dining Hall. Further events on board Belfast are planned (see the final page for news of a refight of Jutland on board), so watch this space!

Yours aye,

DM

david.manley@btinternet.com

Naval Wargames Society AGM Saturday 2nd June 2007

Attendees:

Peter Colbeck.
Jeff Crane.
Nathan Girdler.
Andy Jose.
David Manley.
Simon Stokes (acting chair).

Apologies:

Chris White
Stuart Barnes-Watson
Rob Hutton

Agenda items:

1. Re-election of committee members.

*Treasurer – Simon Stokes
Membership Secretary and Secretary – Peter Colbeck
Chris White - Battlefeet Editor
David Manley - AGB Editor*

Approved unanimously.

2. Stuart Barnes-Watson has resigned as chairman.

Thanks to Stuart for his input during his tenure as Chairman. Jeff Crane was proposed and unanimously accepted as the new NWS chairman with immediate effect. I'm sure you will join us in wishing Jeff all the best in his new role.

3. Presentation of accounts for 2005-2006 and partial accounts for the current membership year 2006-2007.

In Summary:

2005/2006

<u>Income</u>		<u>Expenses</u>	
Membership (96)	£1,175.93	Battlefleet	£828.50
Sales	£25.00	Battlefleet Postage	£309.13
Interest	£0.00	AGB	£0.00
Other	£2.47	AGB Postage	£0.00
		Hall rent	£0.00
		Website	£268.03
		Other	£140.30
	<u>£1,203.40</u>		<u>£1,545.96</u>
Opening Total in Bank	£1,381.02		
Present Total in Bank	£1,049.50		
On Year Delta	-£331.52		

2006/2007

<u>Income</u>		<u>Expenses</u>	
Membership (84)	£1,001.61	Battlefleet	£457.10
Sales	£2.00	Battlefleet Postage	£190.27
Interest	£0.00	AGB	£0.00
Other	£0.00	AGB Postage	£0.00
		Hall rent	£0.00
		Website	£0.00
		Other	£124.85
	<u>£1,003.61</u>		<u>£772.22</u>
Opening Total in Bank	£1,049.50		
Present Total in Bank	£1,288.92		
On Year Delta	£239.42		

Approved unanimously.

4. An increase in annual subs is needed to cover increases in costs of printing and mailing. New subs are to come into effect for the 2007/2008 membership year (i.e. vol 32) and will be as follows: Membership and Battlefleet Cost UK : £14.00, Cost Europe £19.00, Cost Rest of World £22.00.

Approved unanimously

5. Introduction of a new membership category, for the 2007/2008 membership year, of eMember who's rights are the same as standard membership except that Battlefleet is distributed to them via email attachment. Correspondingly an eMember must have a valid email address, though they could be resident anywhere in the world. Subscription cost for eMembership will reflect that portion of the standard membership that goes towards maintaining the NWS website and other sundry expenses not relating to the printing and mailing of Battlefleet.

Membership rate for eMember set at £4. Approved unanimously.

6. AOB

NWS Web Site. David Manley has kindly offered to take over the mantle of web master for the NWS web site from Bill Madison in addition to his responsibilities for AGB. Bill has done a splendid job of setting up and running the web site, which is crucial in this day and age in maintaining the NWS presence, but he has many other commitments besides NWS. We thank Bill for his sterling efforts and wish David all the best in his new extended role. Approved unanimously.

Where is the Ark Royal?

Public Participation Wargame

Staged by the Naval Wargames Society on board HMS Belfast

Introduction

As part of their warship week, HMS *Belfast* invited NWS onboard on 2nd and 3rd June 2007 to run a public participation wargame with a WW2 theme, though the details of the game were down to us. After a little thinking time and a bit of research I opted for something a little different to what we'd done before - an air attack on ships at sea. We had a big space in which to stage the game so needed 1/600th scale ships and aircraft to fully utilise it. This limited somewhat the choice of scenario, but I managed to find one that fitted the bill and allowed us to field two of the most famous ships of the Royal Navy in WW2, use loads of aircraft and as it happened made for a quick but balanced game.

Historical Background

Built by Cammell Laird, and laid down on 16th September 1935, *Ark Royal* was launched on 13th April 1937. She was commissioned on 16th November 1938 as the third HMS *Ark Royal*. She was the most modern carrier in the world and her design formed the blueprint of all British wartime carriers that came after her. At a cost of over 3 million pounds in 1938! She was also the most expensive ship ever ordered by the Navy. Displacing 22,000 tons, with an overhanging flight deck 800 feet long, she was 721.5 feet at the waterline with a beam of 94.8 feet. Powered by 6 Admiralty 3-drum boilers and 3 Parsons geared turbines she could make 31 knots (57 km/h). Crewed by 1,600 officers and men she had an impressive anti-aircraft armament of 16 x 4.5 in guns, 48 two pounder Pom-poms and 32 machine guns. Armoured with 4.5 in belt and 3.5 in deck over boiler rooms and magazines she could carry up to 72 aircraft though never actually had that many embarked. Her motto was "Zeal Does Not Rest".

Though her war career spanned only a brief 27 months, these were so packed with incident that the ship seemed rarely to be out of the headlines. On 25th September 1939, just weeks after World War II broke out, *Ark Royal* participated in the rescue of the submarine HMS *Spearfish*, which was damaged off Horns Reef and was lucky to escape from both a German U boat attack and bombing by the Luftwaffe. It was Joseph Goebbels, Reichsminister for propaganda in Nazi Germany, who set the seal for her celebrity shortly after by starting a long running series of reports under the slogan "*Where is the Ark Royal?*" claiming she had been sunk.



An example of German Propaganda.

In December 1939, she was sent to the South Atlantic to help in the search for the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee*. In the spring of 1940, she participated in the Norwegian campaign with HMS *Glorious* where on 13th June she launched an air attack on Trondheim.

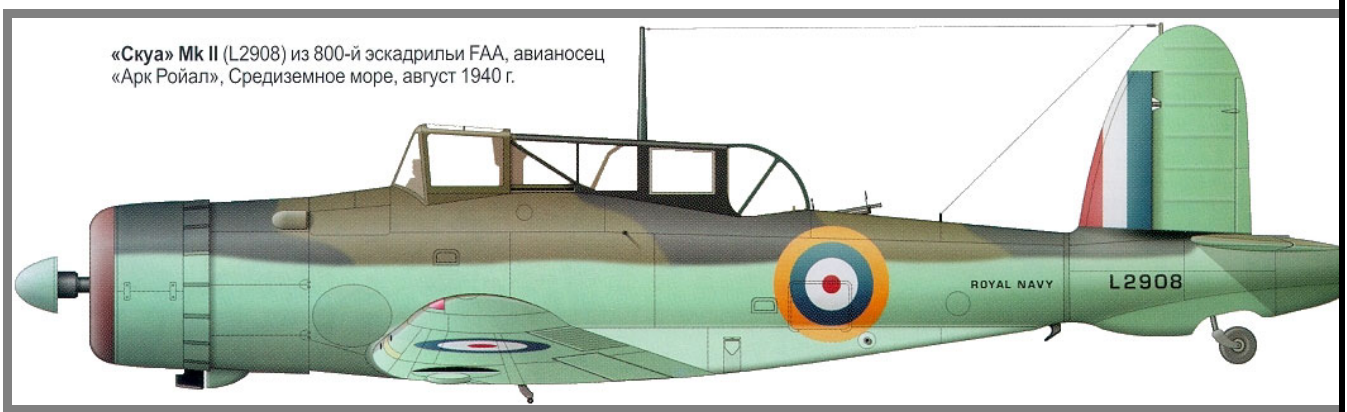
With the fall of France and the withdrawal of the French naval forces controlling the western Mediterranean, *Ark Royal* (with *Hood*, *Valiant*, *Resolution*, *Arethusa*, and *Enterprise*) was a key component of Force H which was dispatched to Gibraltar under Admiral Sir James Somerville. In July she participated in the attack on the Vichy French Naval base at Mers El Kébir in Algeria. Her Swordfish torpedo bombers attacked the escaping French battlecruiser *Strasbourg*, but no hits were scored, and the French ship made it safely to Toulon.

As part of a combined operation with Admiral Cunningham's forces in the eastern Mediterranean, Force H was ordered to make a diversionary attack on Cagliari on the south coast of Sardinia. Matters were proceeding rather too fast for Admiral Somerville's taste. Several of his destroyers were old and lacked range, he was concerned about enemy air superiority, the strike capability of *Ark Royal*'s aircraft and the lack of surprise. It was not long before the expected Italian reconnoitring aircraft found force H. For three hours in the late afternoon of 8th July 1940, Somerville's ships were heavily bombed by forty Italian Savoia Marchetti S.M.79 bombers that dropped over one hundred 551lb bombs from high altitude (10,000+ feet). Force H escaped any direct hits though Somerville observed that the Italians were better at high level bombing than the Luftwaffe had been off Norway. He was however concerned about the concussive damage caused by near-misses. He reported dryly that "it was highly improbable that Their Lordships would wish to have *Ark Royal* put out of action, with the possible loss of ... aircraft, for a minor operation which was intended to act as a diversion". Force H withdrew to Gibraltar at it's highest speed (20 knots).

The Game

Our game was a visitor participation game free to anyone who wished to have a go. Participants took command either of a squadron of Italian bombers whose aim it was to sink both *Hood* and *Ark Royal*, a squadron of *Ark Royal*'s fighters whose job it was to intercept and shoot down the Italians or a squadron of Italian fighters that were tasked with protecting the bombers. The aim was that it should take no more than 30 minutes a go, though in practice this varied between 30 minutes and an hour and half depending on the number of players and the number of aircraft involved.

The only ships we had on the playing area were *Ark Royal*, *Hood* and four escorting destroyers (*Faulknor*, *Foxhound*, *Wishart* and *Watchman*). Somerville had more ships than this in his command, but we did not, so conveniently I decided that under air attack these faster ships would have operated independently of the older slower ships of Force H. *Ark Royal*'s air complement I determined by reference to data from the fleet air arm web site which listed fighter squadrons 800, 803 and 807 as being embarked on *Ark Royal* at this time, there being a total of 24 fighters. 800 and 803 squadrons were equipped with Blackburn Skuas, but 807 squadron was listed as being equipped with Fairey Fulmars. I had my doubts about this last point as I doubted Fulmars were available quite that early in 1940, but again it suited the aircraft models I had available so that's what I went with. The Italians had at their disposal 24 SM79 bombers with fighter escort of 8 Cr42 Falco biplane fighters and 6 Macchi 200 fighters.



«Скуа» Mk II (L2908) из 800-й эскадрильи FAA, авианосец «Арк Ройал», Средиземное море, август 1940 г.

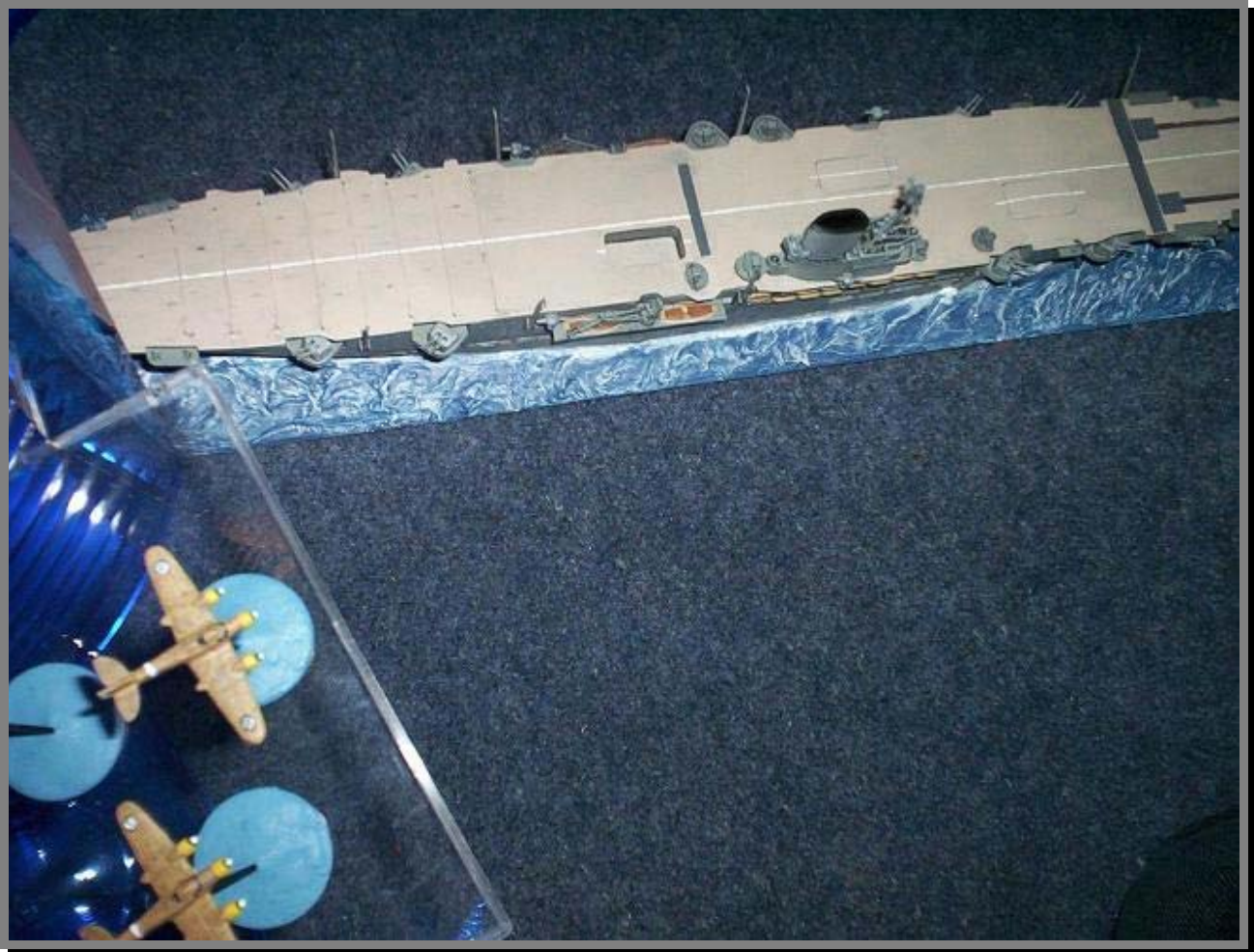
Blackburn Skua

The mechanics of the rules were very simple and worked like this.

Set Up

The planes in each squadron were placed on a clear plastic tray which had a label on it that displayed a picture of the plane, the squadron designation, the aircraft type and basic statistics. The tray was slotted into a blue plastic stand at the desired height. Squadrons in the highest three possible slots were at high altitude, those in the lowest three slots at low altitude. Everything else was medium altitude. The FAA fighter squadrons always started at low altitude having just been scrambled from *Ark Royal*. The Italians always started off at high altitude

but at the opposite end of the playing area. Ark Royal had always to be sailing into the wind to launch it's fighters, so this meant the Italians always had a tail wind and the FAA a head wind. It was therefore always a struggle for the FAA fighters to gain altitude fast enough to engage the Italians before they were over their target.



Aircraft stands in action, SM79s at high altitude make their bombing run on Ark Royal below.

Movement

Squadrons were moved alternately. Bomber squadrons and reconnaissance aircraft moved first in ascending order of top speed i.e. slowest first. Fighters moved last, again in ascending order of top speed.

For a one minute turn a plane's move distance (in yards) is equivalent to it's top speed, in mph, multiplied by 30. This gave the following base movement distances:

- Blackburn Skua (225mph) = 6750 yards
- Fairey Fulmar (273mph) = 8190 yards
- S.M.79 (267mph) = 8010 yards
- Macchi 200 (312mph) = 9360 yards
- Fiat C.R.42 (267mph) = 8010 yards

This was adjusted as follows:

- flying directly into the wind (-50mph/1500yards if calm, -100mph/3000yards if breezy i.e. swell)
- flying with a tail wind (+50mph/1500yards if calm, +100mph/3000yards if breezy i.e. swell)
- climbing (-50mph/1500yards per slot)
- diving (+50mph/1500yards)

All aircraft had a nominal stall speed of 50mph (before any head/tail wind adjustment) so had to move at least this distance. This also limited the maximum rate at which they could climb as they lost 50mph (1500yards) for every slot of altitude gained.

Diving aircraft could drop a maximum of 5 slots in a single turn. The speed bonus was just 50mph (1500yards) irrespective of the number of slots of altitude lost.

Air-to-Air Combat

Air-to-air combat was resolved after all movement was complete but before anti-aircraft fire. To do this planes had to move to within 2000 yards of the enemy aircraft and be at roughly the same altitude i.e. same or adjacent

slots in the stand. When this happened combat took place as follows;

1. Planes attacked in order of their modified top speed, with the highest speed attacking first.
2. A single target was selected and dice rolled (fighters 2D6, bombers 1D6) a six indicated a kill and the target plane removed.

Anti-Aircraft Fire

Before an aircraft could go on to deliver its attack it had first to run the gauntlet of anti-aircraft fire in getting to the release point for it's weapon. Enemy ships could fire at the aircraft at any point along it's flight path during the turn (though the aircraft's position at the end of the turn was normally the closest). Anti Aircraft fire was then resolved using the computerised Microfleet rules we've used on previous occasions, resolving main and secondary anti-aircraft batteries separately. A screen shot of the rules is shown below.



Only once all anti-aircraft fire directed against the aircraft was resolved, could it release it's own weapons.

Torpedo Attacks

To release torpedoes the plane had to slow to 120mph, drop to low level and move to the launch point. When the torpedo was launched it was treated as a normal torpedo spread in the Microfleet rules except that its range was always set at 6,000 yards.

Bomber Attacks

Level bomber attacks could be delivered at medium or high altitude, but always involved the plane travelling within 200 yards of the target ship in the turn that the attack was made. Level bombers had to keep to the same altitude as their previous move and fly straight and level during their bombing run. The effectiveness of a bombing run was again calculated by the rules according to the actions of the target ship, altitude and number of bombs;



If hits were obtained they were dealt with as plunging shell hits from the equivalent sized gun to the bomb size.

The SM79s in our scenario carried five 551lb armour piercing bombs apiece which were equivalent to 11" shells in the rules.

The Action

For day 1 of the event we had a good NWS presence with, beside myself, Jeff Crane, Nathan Girdler, Peter Colbeck and David Manley. Many members of the public looked us up, asked questions and quite a few rolled their sleeves up and had a go. *Ark Royal* faced many bombing runs against her, and up until the sixth and penultimate game she escaped serious damage, suffering only one bomb hit which although it started a fire on the hanger deck, the damage control crews managed to douse the flames and patch her up so she was only slightly the worse for wear. The deficiencies in the underpowered FAA fighters told against the British pilots as they struggled to gain altitude after take off. They were therefore unable to engage the Italian formations sufficiently far out from the *Ark* to break them up in time. Both the Italian fighter types totally outclassed the FAA Skuas which were regularly shot out of the sky in exchange for pitifully few SM79s. Fulmars had more success, though even they were no match for the Macchi 200s. British anti-aircraft fire was almost completely ineffectual against the high altitude bombers, with only a handful of bombers hit and damaged and only two of those were sufficiently damaged so they had to turn for home.

The sixth game however saw squadron commander Manley take charge of 12 SM79s which flew relentlessly into the flak barrage laid down by *Ark Royal* and *Hood*. The other Italian bomber squadron had already made its bombing run with no hits to show for the fifty odd bombs it had dropped. Concentrating on *Ark Royal*, and having lost only three of their number to FAA fighters the formation made their concentrated bombing run at medium level sending 45x551lb AP bombs hurtling down toward *Ark Royal*. Miraculously five bombs hit. A couple penetrated the flight deck and detonated on the hangar deck, starting serious fires. One detonated in the port 4.5" magazine, rocking the *Ark* with the resulting explosion that sent flames and debris high into the air. The two most serious hits however detonated deep inside the ship destroying boiler rooms, engine rooms, jamming her rudder and opening her hull plates and letting in sea water. *Ark* heeled over under the detonations and kept going capsizing to port as sea water poured into her hull.



Ark is hit!

At the end of day one we agreed to hold the AGM after we'd slaked our thirst at the pub and so headed ashore. On day 2, despite a late night session of the "Formula De" board game (*editors note: The Belfast Grand Prix,*

won by Peter Colbeck) we were up and ready for action the next day which proved to be just as busy as the first day. Our own numbers had even been swelled by the addition of Andy Jose and Stephen Welford. An early participant was a young lad named Anthony who'd come along specifically for the game. He first had a crack at commanding an SM79 squadron and then at controlling Force H itself. We had quite a few younger visitors, most notably Max who came back three times, his parents having quite a job to drag him away in the end so they could catch their train – his dice rolling was quite spectacular, his six Macchi's accounting for three Fulmars in a single turn! The local press also turned up to do a piece, though as luck would have it one group of players had just left and a group of scouts who had just turned up for a game were unwilling to have their photographs taken as their parents were not present to give consent – a sign of the times we live in. We therefore set up a few posed shots for the reporter.

Of the second day games themselves we decided to mix it up and allow the occasional squadron of SM79s to carry torpedoes. This was counter factual for our particular action though the Italians did use SM79s in this role, with an 18" torpedo slung under each wing. In those games where we introduced the torpedo bombers the combination of co-ordinated high level bombing and low level torpedo attack proved very effective for the Italians. There were a few instances of miss-timed attacks where the torpedo bombers were unable to drop to a low enough altitude, slow sufficiently or found themselves out of position due to the manoeuvring of force H, but where they did manage to launch they often managed to catch Ark Royal with one or two torpedoes which would bring her to a halt and make her a sitting target for the bombers even if the torpedoes didn't sink her. (*editor's note: Obviously Simon did not have space to describe the brilliantly executed torpedo attack that caught Ark Royal in a maelstrom of twisting and turning escorts, scoring (IIRC) six hits – the memory of the air commander on this occasion escapes me ☺*)



Torpedo passes under Ark Royals Stern



Criss-crossing torpedo tracks leave Ark Royal nowhere left to turn.

The biggest surprise of the weekend however came on virtually the last game of the second day when a very polite German visitor showed interest in what we were doing and after a brief summary and some background info he decided to have a go at commanding one of the Italian bomber squadrons. The player in charge of the other bomber squadron, like every other Italian player over the weekend, went after the *Ark Royal* scoring one hit that did not detonate, but our polite German went after the *Hood*. A concentrated bombing run on the *Hood* was rewarded with just a single hit. I warned him not to expect too much as *Hood* was much more heavily protected than *Ark Royal*, but said we'd check anyway. The luck of the automated dice rolls was not with the *Hood* however as the 551lb AP bomb found a thinner section of *Hood's* deck armour, burst through it and plunged on down through her decks eventually detonating in *Hood's* forward main magazine. It seems that *Hood* does not fare well against German's even when they're flying Italian bombers!

Conclusion

We had a very enjoyable couple of days on board. IWM staff made us very welcome as always. The Wavy Navy re-enactors, as well as staging some very well presented demonstrations (especially their damage Control display which was exceptionally well done), were as convivial as ever. The visit on Saturday of the Swedish square rigged East Indiaman *Götheborg* as she commenced the last leg of her round-the-world tour, was an unexpected treat, especially when she gave us a broadside in salute!



Gottenberg coming alongside.

My thanks to Rob Hutton for his help in building, converting and painting the Hood and to all the NWS crew who came along and made the event one to remember.

References

Rossiter, Mike, Ark Royal (The life, death and rediscovery of the legendary second world war aircraft carrier), Corgi Books, 2007

Conways "All the Worlds Fighting Ships 1922-1946" 1995

FAA website (<http://www.faaa.org.uk/history.php>)

NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2007

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 - Website: 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 3rd Sunday]

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

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

Jutland Refight

August 11/12th 2007



A refight of the battle of Jutland is planned for the weekend of August 11/12th. The battle will be fought out on board HMS BELFAST in the Pool of London. As with previous events on board sleeping facilities are available. If you would like to take part please contact Simon Stokes:

simonjohnstokes@aol.com

Note this is NOT an official Belfast event and thus doesn't appear in the ship's programme or on their website.