



All Guns Blazing!

Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

No. 181 – April 2009

Editorial

Apologies for the delay in getting this newsletter to you this month, but I was keen to get you the show report from Simon on Mal Wright's Atlantic Convoy game that he and the rest of the team ran at Salute in March. As you can see from the what follows it was worth the wait – a good time was had by all and Mal's rules worked a treat.

Yours aye,

DM

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NWS Wessex Group Meeting Sunday 17th May 2009 in Bristol

The Lincombe Barn Wargaming Society has a table top sale between 10.30- 1.00 and after that the tables will be pushed back and I will be running a Fletcher Pratt Naval game for all comers

So if you are in the area and fancy playing a naval game on that day, let me know or just turn up on the day.

The sale is also worth attending; it resembles a wargaming carboot sale with potentially anything up for sale.

Further details can be found at:

http://www.bristolwargaming.co.uk/table_top_sale.html

John Curry

Editor's Note;

The Lincombe Barn tabletop sale is well worth attending. The way it works is that visitors can rent a table for a small fee and take a long whatever they have in their games rooms that they would like to sell off. Think of it as an enormous bring and buy" sale, but where the sale consists of lots of individual tables run by the people owning the stuff. I've been a long a few times and have often picked up some serious bargains!

The sale takes place at the Lincombe Barn centre. More details on the location and the Bristol Wargames club can be found here (including directions):

<http://www.bristolwargaming.co.uk/>

For those of you looking at the map, the centre is actually on the opposite side of the road shown, in the southern corner of Amberly Road and Overndale Road

If you would like more information on the tabletop sale please drop the organiser a line:

craig@bristolwargaming.co.uk

Salute 2009 After Action Report

By Simon Stokes

Following on from last months introduction and historical background to the HG.76 convoy, in this instalment we find out how the game went on the day.

Game Prep

Preparations for this years game were not as onerous as for past games we've staged at Salute, due simply to the more diminutive size of the models (1/3000th scale) and the "contracting out" of the scenery in the form of the excellent Terrain mat sea-scape. We were at one stage considering staging the game in 1/1200th scale but despite the visual appeal of the larger models eventually dismissed the idea on the grounds of the size of table we'd need to fit all 32 merchant ships and still have room to manoeuvre the escorts, subs and aircraft.

The bulk of the models we used were from David Manley's Davco and Navwar collection, plus a few of my own models, all of which were re-based on clear polyurethane plastic and given a fresh paint job to ensure they matched their representations on the ship data cards that Mal supplied. There were four notable exceptions to this however; the models we used for *Stork*, *Deptford*, *Stanley* and *Audacity* were procured new from North Head Miniatures from their forthcoming WW2 convoy range. North Head had originally planned to be much more closely involved in supplying models for the game but due to unforeseen personal circumstances were unable to do as much as they'd hoped. Still the four models that they did supply were superbly detailed high impact resin castings. *Audacity* for instance including a couple of Martlets arrayed on deck!

Convoy games are not just about surface ships and subs however so we also bought along a selection of 1/1200th scale aircraft; some purchased new from Magister Militum and some borrowed from Jeff's collection.

Preliminary Moves

Historically HG.76 was preceded by a sweeping force of destroyers, drawn from Force H stationed at Gibraltar, which went ahead of the convoy 24 hours before it sailed. Their task was to sweep the seas clean of any U-boats which were waiting off Gibraltar for the convoy's all too obviously imminent departure. We used this preliminary sweep as a warm up for the main game to get everyone accustomed to the rules before the main gates opened. The sweeping group had the dubious good fortune to run into a four boat wolf pack on the first night of the sweep, which they didn't pick up on their radar until it was very close to the two ships in the port wing of the search line. Two well aimed torpedo spreads from the lead German U-boats loosed off before they dived homed in on both *Croome* and *Foxhound* sinking both destroyers before they had chance to respond. The U-boats now scattered. Three of the four dived but U108, the furthest out, made the mistake of thinking that she could get away on the surface. Picked up on *Nestor's* surface search Radar and brought under 4.7" gunnery fire, she was hit and her steering gear damaged before she made good her escape. The other 3 boats were tracked by ASDIC and depth charged, but eventually all three made it down to "very deep" where they were safe from the British depth charges. First blood then went to the Germans.

Main Convoy Action

With the force H destroyers cleared from the table, we quickly laid out the convoy in it's eight columns with four merchant ships in each. The corvettes were stationed close in to the convoy, the sloops and destroyers further out forming an outer ring. *Audacity* was stationed at the rear of the convoy where she had freedom to manoeuvre but was not in an exposed position.

Standing orders for the convoy were that in the event of an attack at night a RASPBERRY was to be initiated. During this manoeuvre all the escorts turn IN toward the convoy and the ships in the convoy fire SNOWFLAKE illuminating rockets. If the U Boat is still on the surface trying to run back out of the convoy the escorts may sight it illuminated against the convoy. If the submarine was not sighted in the snowflake illumination area it could be that the submarine slipped out, or fired from

long range on the flanks, so now all the escorts turn outward away from the convoy. As they do they fire flares and star shell into pre-arranged areas. If the submarine is further away, then it may still be illuminated. Any ship that sights a U Boat opens fire with its guns, turns toward it and tries to force it to dive. Once it's down it is much slower and the escorts can attempt to keep it under while the convoy gets clear.

In the event of a daylight attack operation ARTICHOKE was to be initiated. In a daylight attack it's likely that the U Boat is inside the convoy and has attacked from periscope depth. All ships in the convoy are therefore ordered to increase speed. If the submarine is inside the columns this will make it impossible for it to cross those columns at periscope depth as it will be too slow. It's likely the submarine will dive deep and allow the convoy to pass over it and will therefore emerge astern. On the order to carry out ARTICHOKE the faster escorts all turn about and move down the columns of the convoy seeking the submarine. If necessary the convoy can be ordered to drop smoke floats after the escorts pass them. In case the submarine is looking to get another shot off. The escort commander will then decide which ships will continue to prosecute the contact and for how long. The reason it was normally the faster escorts that carried out such attacks was they could regain contact with the convoy more quickly. The rest of the escorts return to their positions. If a submarine was not located the escorts will most likely be ordered to return to their positions by reversing the ARTICHOKE and steaming back up the columns while searching. This was known as PINEAPPLE.

The game duly got under way and we rolled against the event boxes indicated by the map as the convoy proceeded along its plotted course at a steady 8 knots. First up was heavy seas and low visibility till dusk. Not an unwelcome event for the convoy. Next were more heavy seas and a collision between two of the merchantmen which caused serious damage to the SS *Cisneros* which dropped back from the convoy and proceeded independently. Her departure was unobserved by the Germans however and she eventually arrived safely.

As night fell there was some excitement as one of the merchantmen panicked and let off her Snowflake rockets but otherwise the night passed without incident. As dawn broke on 17th Dec, *Convolvulus* reported a serious case of condenseritis reducing her maximum speed to little more than the convoys. Otherwise the day passed calm, clear and without incident.

The first wolf pack made contact with the convoy on the night of the 17th / 18th Dec. First to appear was U131 which closed on the surface from the East and put two torpedoes into *Stanley* from close range before the British knew she was there. *Stanley* suffered critical flooding forward and a major fire and was dead in the water from the moment the torpedo hit. *Samphire* was detached to take off survivors before resuming her station in the convoy screen and leaving the sinking *Stanley* to her fate. U131 dived deep as soon as she'd fired her torpedoes and aside from a single fleeting ASDIC contact managed to evade the convoy escorts that came looking for her. She was therefore able to surface in the convoy's wake and shadow it, sending out reports to help vector other boats into the convoy's path.



Initial attack on night of the 17th / 18th - Stanley is on fire and sinking bottom right

The second part of the eventful night of the 17th / 18th saw four more boats make contact with the convoy. All five boats came in on the surface on many different bearings in an attempt to overwhelm the hard pressed escorts. U751 from the South, U107 & U131 from the East and U71 & U574 from the West. This was probably the busiest period of the game as we had four players between them controlling five U-boats plus the NWS crew controlling the escorts. First blood in the new encounter went to the U 107 and U131 on the starboard wing of the convoy as both SS *Fylingdale* and SS *Benwood* were struck by torpedoes. The ore carrier *Fylingdale* sank quickly but *Benwood* took longer to go down. Operation Raspberry was again initiated.

Generally all the U-boats were very successful in their attacks with pretty much every one getting at least one torpedo hit on a merchantman, and some more. U751 pushed her luck a little too far however when, after successfully torpedoing and sinking the rearmost merchantman from column three (the Norwegian ore carrier SS *Lago*), she spotted *Audacious* silhouetted against the *Snowflake* from the convoy and attempted to swing round at periscope depth and get into a position to launch a second spread of torpedoes at this No 1 priority target for the Germans. Walker in HMS *Stork* was lurking close by however and immediately picked up U751 on her ASDIC, and closed quickly dropping a full pattern of depth charges while U751 was still at shallow depth. U751 suffered massive damage to her pressure hull from the depth charges and sank with all hands.



Wolf pack attack night of the 17th / 18th – U751 is sunk by HMS Stork as she attempts to close in on HMS Audacious

Elsewhere *Deptford* managed to locate and hold U71 in her ASDIC long enough to drop a pattern of depth charges on her, causing only minor damage, but she never managed to regain the contact and U71 dived deep and made good her escape. These were however the only notable successes that the escorts had against the U-boats that night. Aside from the *SS Lago*, *Fylingdale* and *Benwood* the convoy had lost four other merchantmen – Swedish timber carrier *SS Disa*, British freighter *SS Alresford*, British ammunition ship *SS Switzerland* (which went up in a huge explosion) and the British tramp steamer *SS Algerian*.

Now severely mauled and with numerous gaps in the columns of Merchantmen (there were just 24 merchant ships remaining in the convoy out of the 32 that had set sail from Gibraltar) it was with considerable relief that the British welcomed the dawn of the 18th Dec.

The morning of the 18th dawned clear and fine as a couple of young brothers appeared at our table wanting to give the game a go. Conveniently a couple of Fw 200 Condor's appeared on the horizon to the South East intent on making a low altitude bombing run on the convoy. As they closed they were engaged by the AA guns of the two nearest corvettes (*Marigold* & *Rhododendron*) - each brother rolling the dice to try and shoot the other one down. The first Condor was hit and forced to turn for home but the second managed to complete her bombing run on the rear merchantman of the starboard column, even though none of her bombs hit, before it was chased down and shot out of the sky by a hastily scrambled Martlet from *Audacious* now under the control of the first brother who's Condor had been forced to turn back. Revenge, I believe, was sweet.

Later that afternoon a more welcome arrival appeared in the form of a pair of Coastal command ASW Halifax long range bombers. These proceeded to circle the convoy and forced the four remaining shadowing U boats to dive and loose contact with the convoy. There was therefore hope that the night of 18th / 19th Dec might be a quiet one for the hard pressed escorts.



Coastal Command ASW Halifax long range bombers arrive on the afternoon of 18th Dec

In the event a solitary type IXC U boat U125 made contact, approaching from the rear of the convoy. It approached on the surface as the other boats had before it the previous night, and launched a spread of four torpedoes at the rear merchantman of the third from port column of the convoy, but this night the Germans were out of luck and no torpedoes struck home. U125 did not hang around for a second attempt and dived to escape the attentions of the corvettes *Vetch*, *Gardenia* and *Pentstemon* which were soon bearing down on her position. They were on the scene too late to drop depth charges before U125 went deep but the three corvettes all managed to track and hold her with their ASDIC. Given that this was now the only boat in contact with the convoy Walker was happy to detach the three corvettes to hunt the U boat and catch back up with the convoy later. Although U125 eventually managed to evade the ASDIC sets of her pursuers the convoy was long gone by the time she managed it.



U125 being chased down by corvettes Vetch, Gardenia and Pentstemon

The show was winding down by this time and there were fewer punters wanting to give the game a try. So we drew stumps at this point and took turns to head off and check out the rest of the show ourselves.

Game Conclusions

Our game generated interest from a number of quarters and we certainly didn't have problems getting volunteers to have a go at playing, but that said it didn't flow quite as smoothly as I'd hoped it would. It was probably because of this that some of the tension and urgency that I had expected to be present in the game was missing. I lay the blame for this no further than myself as the sole umpire with any detailed knowledge of Mal's rules I didn't have all elements as "off pat" as I needed to. The torpedo rules, ASDIC, depth charges and air and bombing rules I had no problems with but I stuttered when it came to surface gunnery, collisions, visibility and radar which are important elements of the game that are clear enough in the rules but for which I found myself searching the rule book because I couldn't quite remember a certain point of detail. This said it is no more than I would expect with any new set of rules, it's just a little frustrating when it happens in a public participation game at a show.

In summary the comments I had back from participants and onlookers were:

Positives	Negatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Neat system for handling the convoy.✓ Ship data cards have all the info you need and look great.✓ Terrain Mat sea scape looks really effective.✓ North Head Miniatures models are lovely.✓ A very different type of naval game from the norm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Game was a little slow in places.✗ Need a cheat sheet for common rule elements and tables.✗ Font size too small on ship data cards for us older folks.✗ Would have looked better with larger scale models and a smaller convoy.

We were glad to see a good number of NWS members on the day who came and looked us up. For those of you that missed us at Salute, we plan to take the game to Colours later in the year.

Thanks are due to Mal for his help and support in pulling the game together, also to David for the loan of many of his ship models, to Dave from North Head Miniatures for the speedy casting and dispatch of the key models that arrived just in time so they were ready for the show and to the NWS crew on the day for their help in setting up and running the game.

The Rest of the Show

Salute this year seemed to all of us rather more subdued than in previous years. Fewer visitors and fewer traders. Now I'm not sure of the reason for this – coincidence with G20 summit and the credit crunch are both possibilities that spring to mind. There was however still more to see than any one person can cram into a single day. The photo's below are of some of the games that took my eye at least.



Our next door neighbours at the show who deservedly won a couple of gongs for this Band of Brothers themed WW2 game.



Another WW2 game, this time between Russians and Japanese, featured this fantastically effective river bank.



Yet more WW2, this time the assault on the Reichstag.



There was a clutch of different WW1 air combat games at Salute this year. This was my favourite, an eastern front game. Note that the "tail gunners" literally stood on the tail of the aircraft!

NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2009

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:* <http://falkirkwargamesclub.org.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)
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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.
