



All Guns Blazing!

Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

No. 188 –December 2009

EDITORIAL

Well, gentlemen, I've had a reasonably active time of it on the naval wargames front this past month! First off, I played a very enjoyable WWI North Sea action using 'A&A Games Engineering's' *Stations Manned and Ready Part 1* (of which more below) and then towards the end of the month I was able to get to 'Warfare' in Reading for a few hours browsing. Now I'm sure I'm not the only one in this society who isn't puzzled by the lack of naval games at all the various shows around the country, and I don't mean this in a 'why aren't we as the Naval Wargames Society doing more' kind of a way. No, what puzzles me is why the men of a nation that what was once described as one of the 'maritime powers' (in fact *the* maritime power!) are not more interested in a subject that to all intents and purposes *is in their blood*? Perhaps it's the fact that land-based games can be so visually appealing, what with colourful uniforms, woods and farms, etc that lies at the bottom of the conundrum. On the other hand, age of sail games can be *very* visually impressive, so perhaps it's that naval games tend to be perceived as more difficult to play? In short, I suppose we're destined to remain somewhat on the fringe of what is already a fringe hobby. Of course, two hundred years ago we could have pressed more men to our cause! Hmm...now there's a thought. Knock a few gamers on the head, run 'em aboard and keep them below hatches till out of sight of land!

On the fringe, perhaps, but we're still a dedicated and generally sociable bunch. It was nice to meet up with Jeff Crane at 'Warfare' and we were soon chatting away about his plans for some Spanish-American War display games, using his 1/1000 scale models; a project that I really hope comes to fruition. After bidding farewell to Jeff, I spent about twenty minutes chatting to Rod Langton and picked up a model of the *Santa Anna* that will probably languish in my bottom draw 'this age', *but I couldn't resist it!* (You all know *that* feeling I'm sure!) From Rod's I trotted along to 'Tumbling Dice', and after perusing the 1/2400 and 1/4800 age of sail models (which look great, by the way) Mr. 'Tumbling Dice' asked is I was aware they did a range of 1/2400 ensigns. I wasn't, as it turned out, but they appear (I haven't used any just yet) very useful. They are printed on a sticky-back paper, so it's just a question of folding them around some rigging and hey presto! I bought the usual British, French and Spanish, but they also do American, (which may be nice for Jeff's Spanish-American ships, if perhaps a little small) and Russian and Japanese, with which I hope to grace my 1/3000 RJW collection. When I got home and looked in the 'Tumbling Dice' catalogue, I also noticed they do very useful set of Royalist French ensigns, too, just what you need for AWI actions or earlier. Furthermore, being only £1 a sheet, they could be cut away and replaced, should you want to change the nationality of an age of sail fleet, or a 'Red' admiral for a 'Blue' one.

As a self-proclaimed and unabashed *Seekrieg* 'crusader' my final purchase at 'Warfare' may shock you all: I bought a copy of GQ III's *Fleet Action Imminent!* So you see; I'm not so set in my ways as I may appear at times. Indeed, I'm trying to find the time to dig out some old, generally unused rules and give them another try; a change, after all, being as good as a rest. Actually, if anyone has tried *Fleet Action Imminent* I'd be interested to know your views (posted here, perhaps?) and how you think they compare with the highly popular old set.

Anyway, on with the show, as they say. This month is a bit of a North Sea *fest*, with a battle report of a *Seekrieg* V Dogger Bank encounter, a game that I was gutted I had to miss, as well as my afore mentioned *SMR* game. On top of all this there are a couple of submissions from Rob

Morgan, one of which could be a useful stocking-filler for those of use who remember with nostalgia the early days of wargaming. I think top of my list for Santa this year is going to be *some more time!* My days and evenings just seem to vanish at the moment and it's all I can manage to get *AGB* dispatched *roughly* on time.

Well, it only remains for me to wish you all a very Merry Christmas. And may you all receive that devilishly expensive book you've been craving all year; the sort you can curl up with on Christmas afternoon (after HM's speech, of course) before nodding off after some old port and a good cigar.

Yours piping a festive 'up spirits'

Richard Wimpenny

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After Action Report – Dogger Bank (the SK5 way)

October's game round Jeff's place saw a continuation in our mission to come to grips with the Seekrieg 5 rules, this time applying them to the standard reference battle for WW1, Dogger Bank.

The action is basically a stern chase, with the British Battlecruiser squadron under admiral Beatty, trying to chase down the German Battlecruiser squadron under Hipper following a raid by the Germans on the English east coast.

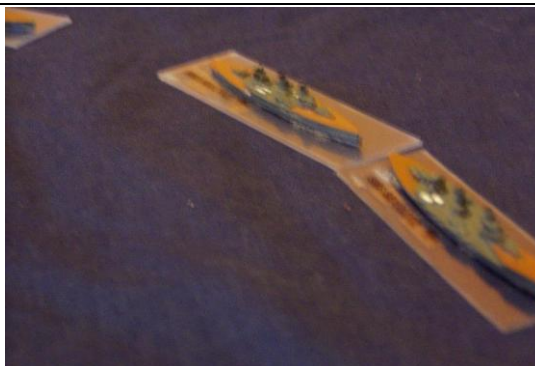
The Game

Battle lines were deployed accordingly with the British line (*Lion*, *Tiger*, *Princess Royal* closely followed by *New Zealand* and *Indefatigable*) deployed 20,000 yard off the starboard quarter of the fleeing German battle line (*Seydlitz*, *Moltke*, *Derfflinger* and *Blucher*). Both the German and British light cruiser squadrons were also deployed on table, though it seemed doubt-full that they would have much bearing on the outcome.

Commands were divided; Andy Jose, Rob Hutton and myself taking the British and Dave Sharp, David Hamp-Adams and Jeff's grandson Rick taking the Germans.

As we often do with stern chases, irrespective of the rules we're using, we picked a notional chase speed, in this case 25 knots, and then moved ships relative to this chase speed, so ships would make their normal move and then be moved back down the table by 25 knots. This just kept everything on the playing area.

Opening shots were at long range, with only *Blucher*, *Lion*, *Tiger* and *Princess Royal* being in range. *Lion*, *Tiger* and *Princess Royal* divided their fire between the leading German battle cruisers *Seydlitz*, *Moltke* and *Derfflinger*, while *Blucher* replied on their behalf against the *Lion*. Initial shots from *Lion*, *Tiger* and *Blucher* all missed but *Princess Royal's* gunnery proved more accurate than her compatriot's and she managed to land a couple of plunging shell hits on the *Derfflinger*, damaging her boilers and slowing her down for the rest of the game.



1. German Battle Cruisers

The German light cruisers now came to the aid of their embattled battle cruisers, laying a smoke screen under cover of which the battle cruisers turned a couple of points to starboard, simultaneously opening up their broadside arcs and closing the range so that their guns were now in range. Immediately the effects were felt by Beatty as first one 11" shell and then another hit *Lion's* B turret, knocking out both guns.

Beatty had little time to recover and make course adjustments however as within seconds a third 11" shell from *Seydlitz* hit *Lion* and penetrated her thin deck armour and detonated the magazine. There was a simultaneous cheer from all the British players as *Lion's* bows disappeared below the waves.



2. Lion blows up as Tiger takes evasive action.

The action continued however as *Tiger* swung round to starboard in an emergency turn to avoid the wreckage from *Lion's* demise, and the remaining British Battlecruisers followed her round. This helped the British gunnery as it opened the gunnery arcs, and they were soon landing hits on the leading German battle cruisers; *Seydlitz* and *Derfflinger*. *Seydlitz* took a direct hit in her boiler room, and *Derfflinger* one in her engine room. Slowing rapidly the Germans now had no choice but to stand and fight, which they did very effectively hitting both *Tiger* and *Princess Royal*, damaging *Tiger's* steering gear and jamming it amidships.

It was not only the big ships that got in on the action as the German cruiser squadron closed in on the British line firing as they went. *Stralsund* hit *Tiger* three times but did little real damage. The British cruisers were out of position and outside effective range so stayed clear of the scrap.

New Zealand was however close enough to engage the slowing *Kolberg*, though without success, and *Tiger's* secondary guns also returned fire on *Stralsund*, but again without success.

That unfortunately is as far as we got with the game.

Conclusions

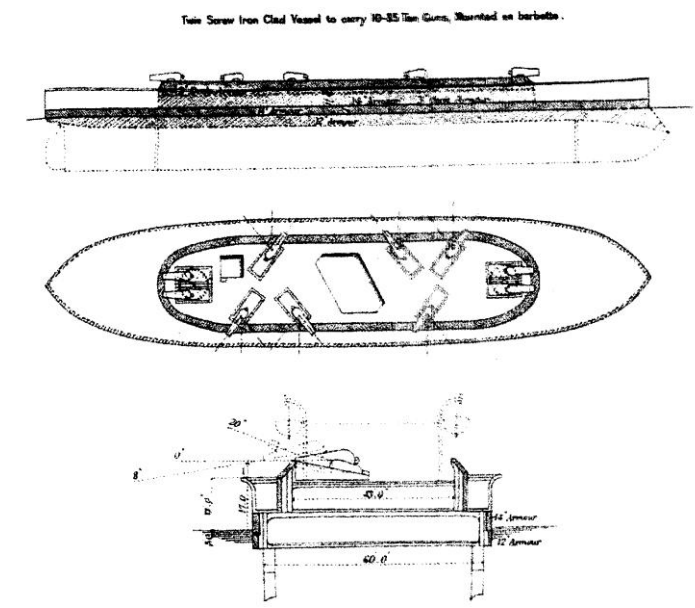
Clearly we demonstrated that the SK5 rules are capable of teasing out the frailties and fighting abilities of the different ships, and that it's perfectly possible to have instances of catastrophic damage resulting from a single shell hit but that the chances of such damage are slim.

We are becoming more familiar with the rule mechanics but yet again slow speed of play meant that we did not fight the game to a conclusion, though the Germans had the best of the encounter during the 8 game turns we played.

Thanks as always to Jeff both for organising the game and for providing the venue and the hospitality.

Simon Stokes

NAPOLEON III AND HIS BRITISH IRONCLAD



This illustration is intriguing. It came to light in a Parliamentary Report of a Royal Navy Committee c. 1880, dealing with the plans for a new ironclad warship eventually to become HMS *Inflexible*, and reference to it crops up in *The Birth of the Battleship* by John Beeler (Caxton Press 2001), a hefty book which I picked up for £1.99 in 'The Works' bookshop.

The date of the design was June 3rd 1873. The sketches and plans, unorthodox in naval terms, were, 'originally prepared for the exiled French Emperor III,' by a Mr. Hounsom of the British Department of the Naval Constructor. What business Hounsom, an architect working under the Chief Constructor Nathaniel Barnaby in a secret British Government Department had in preparing plans for a massive ironclad warship for the former French Emperor is a mystery worthy of Holmes and Watson's consideration. Yet it was done.

The plans came to light, according to Beeler, whose book is a valuable contribution to understanding naval war in the late 1880s, only five years later in 1878. Then a number of designs and plans for a new battleship were being discussed and a lot of variations on armour and guns were put on the table for discussion, and this 'secret' ironclad turned up with them.

An incredible man o' war, and rightly described as, 'a departure from all previous capital ship designs,' it mounted no less than ten 35-ton muzzle-loading guns, contained in an armoured barbette. A pair at bow and stern, mounted on turntables, and three more each side, pivoted. The superstructure would have been limited, in all probability as with the best Italian designs, to funnels, probably in echelon, and a flying bridge, military mast and control tower. According to Beeler, the firepower of the vessel, probably intended to be called *Furie*, would have been immense.

The Committee, as committees always do, rejected the 'French Emperor's' design for one more traditional. What his former Imperial Majesty, a far more radical character in naval matters (if nothing else!) made of the design is not known. It remains an odd footnote in French naval history, even odder than most of their later designs!

Rob Morgan

'STATIONS MANNED AND READY PART 1' NORTH SEA 1916.

A few weeks ago I had a couple of days work in Manchester, and aside from seeing my old 'home town', I was able to link up with my old school friend and wargaming pal, Mike Dowd. As I'd recently been sorting through my Hallmark 1/6000 WWI collection, I thought it would be an idea to get some on the tabletop (actually a blue-sheet-covered double bed, but you know what I mean!). Then I thought 'why not a lot on the tabletop?' The fact that I need to be at work by 4.00pm meant we didn't have long, so we decided to try out 'A and A Games Engineering's' fleet action rule-set *Stations Manned and Ready Part 1*. Now as many of you are aware, I am generally a 'Seekrieg V user'; possibly even an addict! But as Mike and I were pushed for time, and as I really wanted to try *SMR* out, I organized a small-ish fleet action set in the North Sea in the spring of 1916—a sort of 'Son of Jutland'. The reason for the date was so I could field all five of the deliciously-powerful 'Queen Elizabeth' class that formed Rear-Admiral Evan-Thomas' 5th Battle Squadron; however, my streak of megalomania was thwarted when Mike chose the British! I had to be content with the *Friedrich der Grosse* and all eight battleships of the German III Battle Squadron instead! Every cloud... etc, etc!

The full Orders of Battle were:

British

1st Battlecruiser Squadron

Lion (Flag Vice-Admiral Sir David Beatty) *Princess Royal*, *Queen Mary*, *Tiger*.

3rd Battlecruiser Squadron

Invincible (Flag Rear-Admiral Hood) *Inflexible*, *Indomitable*.

5th Battle Squadron

Bahram (Flag Rear-Admiral Hugh Evan-Thomas) *Valiant*, *Warspite*, *Malaya*, *Queen Elizabeth*.

1st Light Cruiser Squadron

Galatea (Commodore Alexander-Sinclair) *Phaeton*. *Inconstant*, *Cordelia*.

1st Destroyer Flotilla

Fearless (light cruiser, Captain Roper), *Comet*, *Minstrel*, *Rifleman*, *Hope*, *Brisk*. (All I Class.)

German

Fleet Flagship *Friedrich der Grosse* (Flag Vizeadmiral Rheinhard Scheer)

III Battle Squadron

V Division: *König*, *Grosser Kurfürst*, *Kronprinz*, *Markgraf*.

VI Division: *Kaiser*, *Kaiserin*, *Prinzregent Luitpold*, *König Albert*.

I Scouting Group

Lützow (Flag Vizeadmiral Franz Hipper), *Derfflinger*, *Seydlitz*, *Moltke*, *Von der Tann*

II Scouting Group

Frankfurt (Flag Konteradmiral Bödicker), *Wiesbaden*, *Pillau*, *Elbing*.

II Torpedo-Boat Flotilla

Regensburg (light cruiser Kommodore Heinrich)

III Half-Flotilla: *B98*, *G101*, *G102*, *B97*.

IV Half-Flotilla: *B110*, *B111*, *G103*, *G104*.

To give the game a feel of 'unfolding events' and also to break us in gently to gunnery and turning, etc, we brought the various formations on-table in a loose, fleet-style cruising order: light cruisers and destroyers sighting each other, battlecruiser supports, and finally the battle squadrons themselves. And while generally I'm a lover of map moves to bring about action on the tabletop, we just didn't have time for it on this occasion, so the above was carried out with a mutual, "Yep, lets bring those on now," kind of agreement, which worked just fine.

Before 'cutting to the chase', as they say, I should point out that we tinkered a little with the 'Critical Hit' section of the rules (only a little, Mr. Finch, honest!). I just felt that it should be possible for a ship's gunnery efficiency to be reduced by damage, even if turrets themselves aren't knocked-out. I can see that for ease of play how the system as it stands works, but for me, a ship whose upper works have suffered perhaps quite severe damage shouldn't still be firing as effectively as if practically un-hit. Briefly, what I proposed to Mike was that Fire Control points

(already a facet of *SMR*) could be lost when critical damage was inflicted to 'Signals' and 'Command' as well as just 'Weapons Officer', so that the 'minus 2' modifier for the loss of all fire control points may kick-in a little earlier. After the game we pondered whether a weapon's 'Impact Power' could be reduced to reflect damage to hoists and mounts, etc reducing rate of fire.

I don't intend to try and give a full-blown battle-report here because, as I stated above, I was pressed for time, and hastily taken notes of the action was all I could manage. However, hopefully it will give you a flavour of the rules.

As part of our 'unfolding' of events, Mike and I plumbed for a gradually increasing visibility. Turn one's visibility was two Range Bands (10,000 yards, in *SMR* speak), and after movement the light cruiser *Cordelia*, heading SE, spotted the German TBD *B98* 9,800 yards off her starboard bow. During turn two *Cordelia* and the rest of the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron chased *B98* and her consorts to the SW. On turn three visibility increased to 15,000 yards (three Range Bands) and fire from *Cordelia* forced *B98* to retire from the action (she failed her moral test on reaching 1/3 structural damage points). However, the improving conditions also meant Beatty and Hipper emerged from the mist and a furious cannonade ensued, with damage inflicted initially in Sir David's favour; nevertheless, fire from the *Wiesbaden*, assisted by *Lützow's* secondary battery, caused *Cordelia* to begin to founder.

Visibility improved again in turn four to a dazzling 20,000 yards (four Range Bands), and this allowed the recently-arrived 3rd Battlecruiser Squadron under Rear-Admiral Hood to force the remainder of the III Half-Flotilla to disperse (more moral tests) and sink the *Wiesbaden*. However, the *Lützow's* 12-inch battery punched a shell through *Lion's* belt and into the engine room, knocking five knots off her speed (Special Hit 7-9) Turn six saw yet another German cruiser turn up its toes, when fire from *Phaeton* caused a magazine explosion on *Elbing*...however all eyes were now turning to the south, as Scheer deployed *Friedrich der Grosse* and the whole of the III Battle Squadron into a line of battle. A wonderful sight on any wargames table!

The III Battle Squadron made its presence felt from the first when *König* hit the *Tiger*, the tale-end ship of Beatty's squadron; however, the other eight German battleships turned their guns on Hood's battlecruisers, and *Invincible* took the first of a series of punishing hits from *Kaiserin*. To the north Evan-Thomas was swinging his five battleships into action, and as they deployed, the British light cruisers and destroyers launched a torpedo attack on Scheer's line. *Kronprinz* was hit by a torpedo from *Galatea* that damaged her steering, while *Attack's* 'fish' hit *Kaiser* and knocked out one of her main armament turrets. Nevertheless, the gunnery duel was starting to head the High Seas Fleet's way. Beatty turned his squadron away to the north, as *Lion* was very close to reaching the all-important 1/3 damage points; and although when the 'Queen Elizabeth' class hit they hit hard, the damage on Hood's battlecruisers was mounting, and in turn ten a 12-inch shell pierced *Invincible's* 'Y' turret and set off a huge explosion...not catastrophic, as it turned out, but enough (only three Structural Points left!) to force Hood's flagship out of the line, as the turret roof flew skywards.



A view of the action near its close. British are to the lower left of the picture. 1/6000 don't photograph too well, but you do get a good impression of distance.

At this point the demands of a late afternoon *matinée* forced your would-be Scheer to pick up his saxophone case and head for the door! However, we had had a small fleet action with lines of battleships, as opposed to the usual battlecruisers, fully in action, and both Mike and I thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and felt that everything played out well, if you know what I mean. There was one other minor adjustment that we implemented regarding funnel smoke. Midway through the engagement the 1st Destroyer Flotilla was steaming in line ahead between the 5th Battle Squadron and the German battleline, and according to the rules in many cases their models and bases (by which is meant funnel smoke) would have blocked the fire of the opposing battleships. We decided, therefore, to use the minus d6 rule to firing, as listed on the 'Gunnery on Target Table' instead of a total block of fire; a system that we thought reflected the vagaries of smoke and wind rather well. One particular aspect of the rules that I expected to find myself at issue with actually worked equally well: the 'Initiative' system for movement and firing. While at first glance overly stylized, it worked, and nothing 'odd' happened at all. From a gunnery and torpedo point of view, the game *rationale* that 'everything happens when it happens' makes the application of damage much quicker and easier to correlate. This necessarily gives a major advantage to the winner of initiative, but in game terms this is very much the point.

All in all, if you haven't got *SMR Part 1* yet I'd definitely recommend you get a copy and have a game. It's opened up the North Sea to all my battle squadrons; now I think I'll dust off *SMR Part 3* and try a carrier action!

Richard Wimpenny

Achtung Schweinhund!!!

Ok...yes, this is NOT a naval book, I'm reviewing here, but it's an incredible wargaming read! In fact the great tragedy of Harry Pearson's life, as far as I'm concerned at least, is that he doesn't discover the delights of cutting an Airfix 1/600th an HMS *Campbeltown* down to the waterline with a hot knife, or making 1/1200th Viking longships from *Titanic's* lifeboats. It is not impossible that Harry Pearson, author of this superbly titled semi-autobiography of a wargamer, model maker and collector has in recent years become a member of this august company of heroes. If not he, he should be.

This splendid 240 page paperback was published first in 2007, and has been reprinted three times in a year. The cost of the book is a mere £9.99; ISBN 978-0-316-86136-6, and with the advent of the Festive Season this is a title to be dropping lightly into the family gatherings in the run-up. My *companero* Mike 'Fulda Gap Freak' Davies says that this is the best book title since C.S Forester wrote *Death to the French* and he's probably right.

If you are a youngster and fairly new to the greatest of all games, then perhaps you won't understand *Achtung Schweinhund!!!* since the author was born in the fifties and has clearly enjoyed every development that wargaming, the polystyrene construction kit and erratic wargames press has suffered and sustained in five decades. It is difficult to overstate the extent to which this book follows mine and so many others own bizarre and wonderful paths through *Commando* comics, and films such as the *Dambusters* and *Longest Day* epics, Airfix model kits and the moment when it was first possible to afford to buy 20mm *metal* model figures. This is more than an autobiographical journey it's the story of our lifestyle. (I was going to say hobby, but that would be a lie, wouldn't it?) and it's all true. Who was it who said 'Print the Legend'? At stages in the text, I was unable to control my laughter, not at jokes mind you, but at the pure reality of what Harry Pearson writes about such vital (to 1970s WWII wargamers) matters as the content of Sven Hassel's books about the punishment battalions of the *Waffen SS*.

Hardly a page is turned without the reader encountering a geek, anorak, nerd, eccentric or well-read and experienced veteran (that one's me) or even the cheats and boasters we've all stumbled upon in the fraternity as the years pass by. I'm sure I was in that North London pub Harry mentions when a group of U-Boat crew re-enactors came in and due to the obvious absence of a Type VII sub in the car park actually had to explain that they only re-enacted shore leave. They did it well too, all six of them pissed as parrots in under two hours.

This book is, as they say, required reading for all wargamers. Yes, he does meander away from the twentieth century, but so do we all. I've got a Klingon Space Fleet somewhere, I admit the charge, but believe me this is paperback you will enjoy, and remember; even if, like me, you keep wanting to go one better than the writer. My uncles told bigger tales than his uncles, and I remain proud to say, on the record, almost forty years on that I had the first pack of Airfix Japanese Infantry on our street. There are no illustrations sadly, but a photo of an 'Alamein' game with Panthers (all you could get for the Germans) against Churchills (ditto for the Brits) would have done wonders for me. Mind you, I am pleased to admit that I'm far too old to have attempted to wargame with 'Action Man' models as Harry did. Apart from that shameful and degrading episode in an otherwise blameless life at the wargame's table, his stories and accounts will amuse and astound all who read them.

Do buy this book. You won't regret it.
Pity about the warships though.

Rob Morgan.

NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2009

NWS Northern Fleet – Falkirk East Central Scotland

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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.
