

International Naval Wargames Day Battle Report

By Simon Stokes

In honour of international naval wargames day (6th August 2017 - Fred T Janes birthday in fact), Rob Hutton and I fought out a small historical action from WW2 setting out to prove that naval wargames don't all have to be big complex fleet actions played out over many days to be both entertaining and tactically challenging.

The action we chose took place in the early hours of 13th December 1941. The Sea was calm and visibility was poor (3,000 yards).

British Forces Briefing



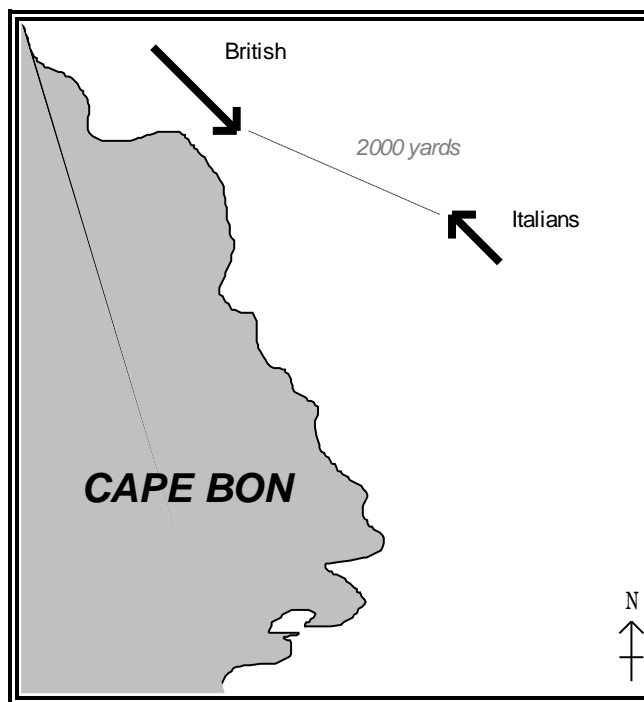
Commander G.H. Stokes - *Sikh*^{DD} *Maori*^{DD} *Legion*^{DD} *Isaac Sweers*^{DD}

On 8 December you received an Ultra decrypt that indicated two Italian light cruisers were to sail from Palermo to Tripoli the next day carrying 100 tons of petrol and 50 tons of other stores. The ships did indeed set sail, but RAF attacks forced them to turn back. You now have information indicating that they will make another attempt on 12 December.

Admiral Cunningham (CinC Eastern Mediterranean) is concerned over the fuel situation at Malta and has diverted Cdr Stokes's destroyer flotilla, already on their way east through the Mediterranean, to intercept these Italian cruisers.

It is now 0320 hours. Sailing in French territorial waters off the Tunisian coast in order to avoid minefields, the British forces are just rounding Cape Bon at 30 knots, steaming in line ahead formation, keeping as close as possible to the shore. They are suddenly confronted with the Italian light cruisers, a mere 2,000 yards dead ahead, heading straight towards them, in the opposite direction to that which was expected...

The relative locations of the forces is shown on the map opposite.



Italian Forces Briefing

Ammiraglio di Divisione Toscano - *Alberico da Barbiano*^{CL}, *Alberto di Giussano*^{CL}, *Cigno*^{DD}

The only way General Rommel's dwindling stocks of petrol have received any replenishment has been through the use of fast light cruisers loaded with cans of petrol. Two such fuel runs have successfully taken place in the first week of December, and your force has been assigned to perform a third run. You originally set sail on the evening of 8 December, laden with 100 tons of petrol in cans on your cruisers decks and 50 tons of other supplies, but were soon subject to air attacks from the RAF, so turned back. The same happened when you tried again the next night, but at the third attempt you seemed to have eluded the RAF. That was until you rounded Cape Bon, when the rumble of aero engines overhead showed that your

mission had been compromised once more, so you turned your ships around and headed back north west around Cape Bon at 23 knots. You were busy signalling your change of orders to the ships in your force, the torpedo boat *Cigno* now being 2000 yards astern of the cruisers, when at 0320 British destroyers appear out of the gloom immediately ahead of you...

Initially your ships have trouble picking out the British against the dark backdrop of the land, the Cape Bon lighthouse making your task more difficult by dazzling your gun layers. This means that none of your ships may fire on the first turn, and on turn two they must make a positive random roll to fire. All of your ships will be able to fire by turn three.

Due to the nature of the cruisers deck cargo, any shell hit on the cruisers decks will automatically result in a fire breaking out.

The Game



Figure 1 Forces were laid out as per the initial sighting at 03:20.



Figure 2 The Italian cruisers sheared away to starboard as HMS Sikh launched torpedoes and opened fire, her first shots holed Di Giussano below the water line.



Figure 3 Cigno came rushing up to protect her charges as the Italian cruisers lit up the two leading British destroyers with their searchlights



Figure 4 Gunfire from the Italian cruisers started a fire on board HMS Sikh whilst Cigno launched her own torpedoes at the leading British destroyers



Figure 5 Cigno laid a smoke screen to cover the withdrawal of the cruisers whilst illuminating Legion which hit back setting Cigno on fire. Sikh & Maori easily dodged Cigno's torpedoes but in doing so found themselves on the wrong side of the smoke screen.

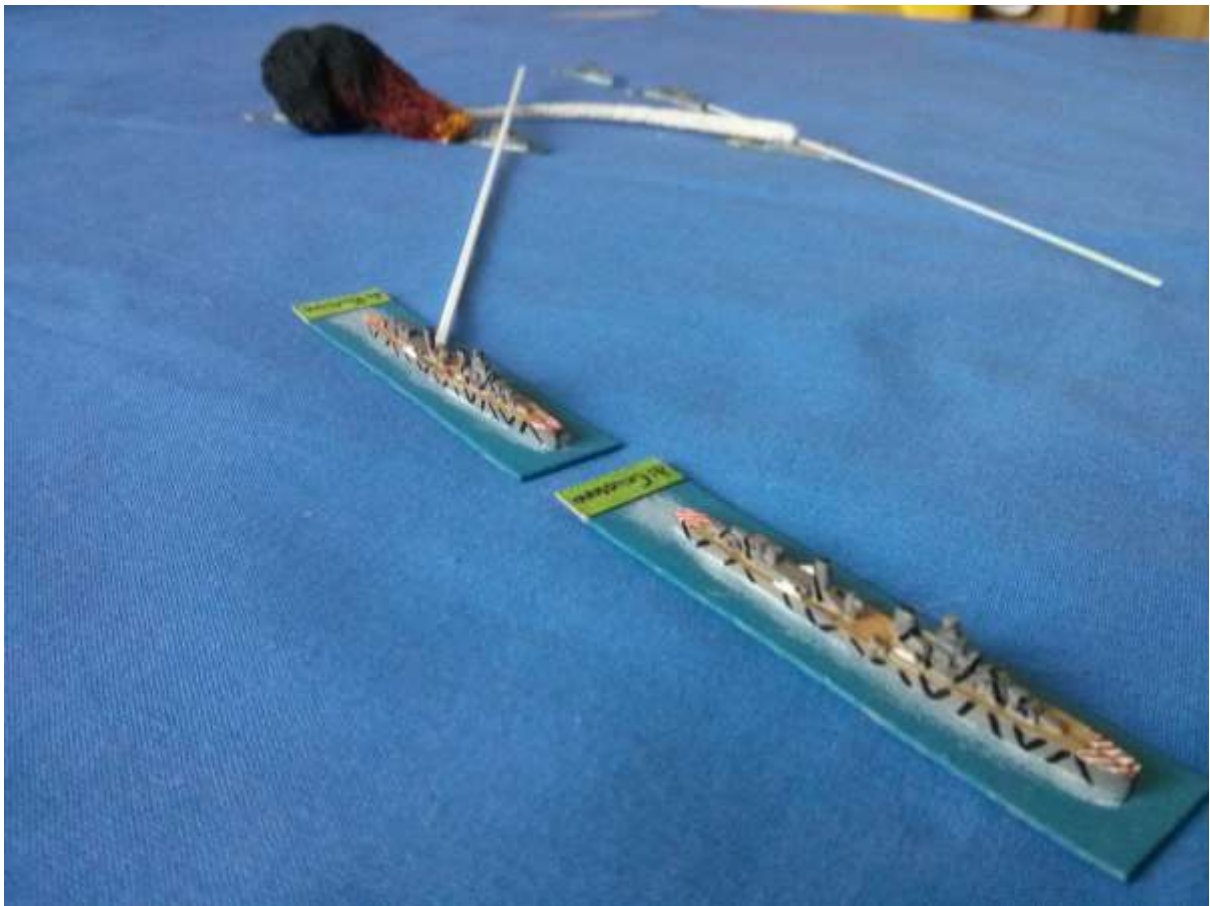


Figure 6 As Sikh & Maori emerged from Cigno's smoke screen Da Barbiano illuminated Sikh with her search light and immediately started to score hits with both her 6" and 3.9" guns, starting a serious fire. Meanwhile Cigno put out her own fire and continued to engage Legion whilst laying down more smoke.



Figure 7 A well placed salvo of 6" shells from Da Barbiano that hit on the waterline did for HMS Sikh as with massive flooding she rolled over and sank. Da Barbiano's searchlights next settled on Maori.



Figure 8 Maori too started to feel the heat of the cruisers gunnery as she was hit and set on fire by shells from Da Barbiano and Di Giussano. Meanwhile Legion and Isaac Sweers also emerged from the Cigno's smoke screen.

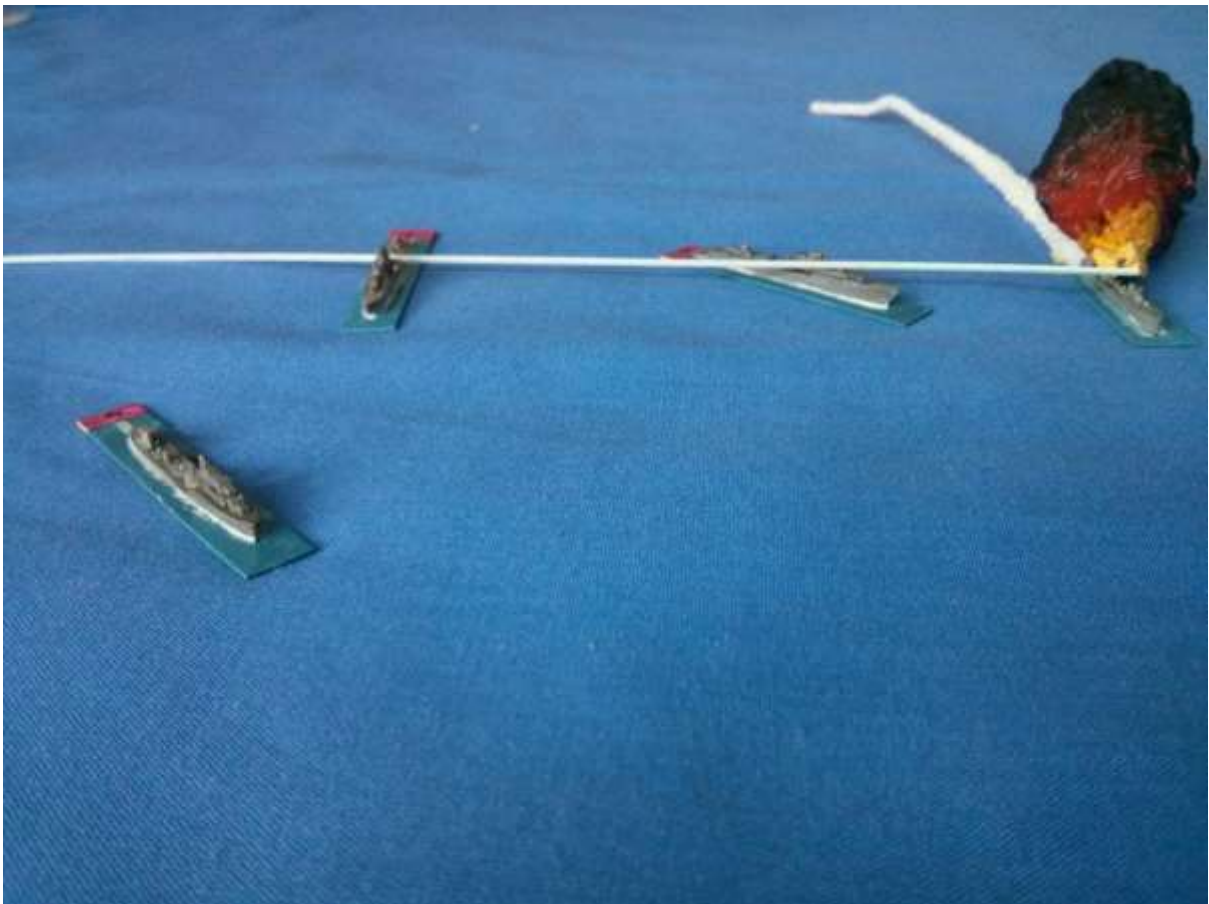


Figure 9 Cigno's luck finally ran out when a salvo of three 4" shells from Legion slammed into her setting her on fire and causing serious flooding forward. Cigno gamely fired back and continued to illuminate the British and lay smoke, crippled though she was.



Figure 10 Compounding the change of fortune for the Italians a salvo of 4.7" shells from Maori hit home on the Da Barbiano one of which landed on deck setting light to the cans of petrol stowed there. This started a fire which was going to be difficult to put out.

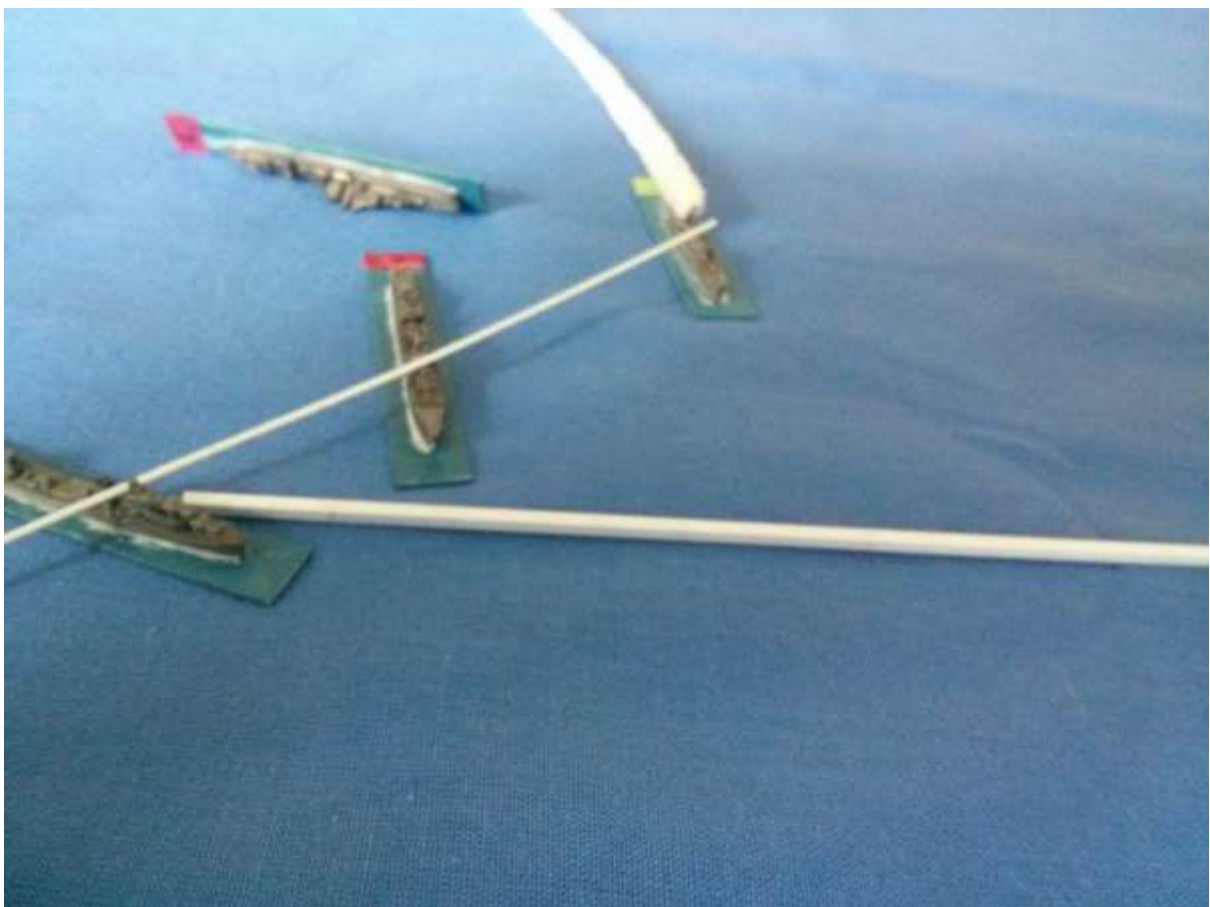


Figure 11 Retribution came swiftly however as yet another well placed salvo of three 6" shells from Da Barbiano slammed into Isaac Sweers on her waterline. The resulting massive inrush of water caused the destroyer to roll over and sink.



Figure 12 This last loss now took the fight out of the British destroyers faced with what was going to be a stern chase of 2 destroyers against 2 cruisers the odds were now against them, so they launched a speculative torpedo in the cruises wake and set about finishing off the Cigno

We drew stumps on the game at this point, leaving unanswered the fate of Da Barbiano ablaze and with her decks crammed with cans of petrol. I wouldn't fancy being part of that damage control party!

So what happened historically? – The British were somewhat more luck with their initial torpedo attacks and managed to hit both cruisers with 21" torpedoes. With both cruisers crippled and ablaze the *Cigno* made her escape and the action was over almost before it had begun. This was in stark contrast with our game.

We did manage to achieve our objective however in fighting the game to a conclusion and completing a full 12 turns in just over 2½ hours for what was quite a balanced and closely fought action. There was much in the way of tactical complexity to keep us engaged despite the relatively small force sizes involved.

Hopefully we did Fred Jane proud with our little game. If you marked the day with a game of your own do share it.