

“Malta Convoy” 1942

Last Wednesday evening, Dave G, Paul H and myself re-fought a typical Malta convoy set in 1942, using 1:3000th ships and 1:600th aircraft.

I acted as the “record keeper” so in effect only Dave and Paul were taking part. You will see from the following write-up that both players had considerable forces at their disposal (much more than would be expected on a Wednesday evening) yet we achieved 10 turns in 2 hours (and a result).

Dave commanded the Axis forces which consisted of a large amount of Italian aircraft, 8 x Italian MAS boats and (not forgetting) 2 Italian submarines. He also had some German aircraft (He-111's, Me-110's & Ju-87's) and two German destroyers + two torpedo boats and 8 x S-boats.

The German destroyers were the Z-17 (Diether Von Roeder) and the Z-20 (Karl Galster). Armed with 5 x 5” guns plus 8 x torpedo tubes.

The T-22 Class were the T-22 and the T-27, each armed with 2 x 4.1” guns and 6 x torpedo tubes.

The Italian submarines were the Marcello and the Dandolo. Each was armed with 2 x 3.9” guns and 8 x torpedo tubes.

Paul commanded the British convoy. This consisted of 10 merchant ships (1 tanker, 1 ammo ship, 1 CAM ship – Catapult Armed Merchantman, and 7 various merchant ships). He had quite a heavy escort (it was 1942) consisting of 10 British destroyers (of varying quality).

The escort consisted of 2 x “J/K” class destroyers (HMS Javelin & HMS Kimberley) each with 6 x 4.7” guns and 10 x torpedo tubes.

Two “G/H” class destroyers (HMS Garland and HMS Havock) each with 4 x 4.7” guns and 8 x torpedo tubes.

Two V & W class destroyers (HMS Venomous and HMS Vanity) with 4 x 4.7” guns and 3 torpedo tubes in Venomous and 4 x 4” HA guns (AA) in Vanity.

Three Type 2 Hunt class destroyers (HMS Blankney, HMS Exmoor and HMS Lamerton) each with 6 x 4” guns.

One Hunt Type 3 (HMS Belvoir) with 4 x 4” guns completes the escort.

The Axis commander (Dave) randomised the OOB, bringing on air and naval assets depending upon the throw of a dice. This represented the lack of co-ordination between the Germans and Italians, and even between their own respective Air Forces and Navies.

Turn 1

The first air attack took place on the convoy (as decreed by Dave's die rolling).

26 Macchi 200's (that's 26 models each representing two real aircraft. I shall refer to the number of models) escorting 6 x SM-79 bombers were intercepted by the convoy's CAP (3 x Beaufighters). 1 Beaufighter was shot down and 2 damaged/driven off. The Macchi's lost 2 shot down and 1 damaged/driven off.

The SM-79's attacked the lead merchant ship of the convoy but failed to hit.

Turn 2

Nothing happened. No air attacks appeared. The convoy continued on its course.

Turn 3

A second Axis air attack. This time the Luftwaffe appeared in the shape of 2 x Me-110 fighter-bombers and 3 x He-111 bombers. Again the attack was made on the leading ships of the convoy. HMS Garland damaged/drove off 1 x Me-110. The He-111's failed to hit anything.

Turn 4

MAS and S-boats hide behind an island. These are not picked up by Allied radar.

Torpedoes are fired at HMS Kimberley from the direction of the island. She has taken station on the starboard side of the convoy, between it and the island/s. She is "on her own" providing an outer defence.

Turn 5

HMS Kimberley combs the torpedo tracks and heads towards the submerged Dandolo which fired them. The torpedoes miss HMS Kimberley.

Turn 6

HMS Kimberley acquires the Dandolo on Asdic and depth charges her. Contact is lost. No result known (the Dandolo escapes the depth charging).

Turn 7

The Italian Air Force launches a further attack with 4 x Fiat CR 42 fighters and 3 x SM-79 bombers. The Convoy commander (Paul) decides in the absence of any Allied air support he will launch his solitary Hurricane from the CAM Ship. This intercepts the Italian fighter escort and shoots down 1 x CR 42. The Hurricane is damaged/driven off by the remaining CR 42's (not much of a problem as its going to have to ditch in the water anyway).

An Italian submarine (Marcello) is detected by asdic (HMS Javelin) at the front of the convoy at the same time as the Italian aircraft launch their attack. AA fire from the lead escort shoots down 1 x SM-79 and damages/drives off 2 x SM-79's.

HMS Javelin detects the Marcello and launches a depth charge attack which fails to cause any damage.

HMS Kimberley detects the Dandolo again, and launches depth charges which fail to cause any damage.

The two German destroyers appear to the rear starboard side of the convoy. HMS Belvoir opens fire on the Z-17 but fails to score any hits. In return both German destroyers open fire on HMS Kimberley who is busy hunting the Dandolo. As a result of this fire, the Kimberley's speed is reduced to 3kts, her armament capability is reduced by 50% and she is on fire. A devastating attack. Crippled and out of the fight.

The S-boats launch an attack on the leading merchant ship/s in the convoy. 1 x S-boat is damaged/driven off by the defenders fire.

The Marcello launches torpedoes at the head of the convoy.

HMS Kimberley manages to put out her fires.

TURN 8

The 8 torpedoes fired the previous turn by the Marcello at 3 merchant ships fail to hit anything.

HMS Kimberley manages to damage the Z-20. HMS Belvoir joins in and fires at Z-20 causing hull and boiler room damage reducing her speed.

The convoy escorts fire at the S-boats and MAS boats attacking the convoy. 1 x S-boat is damaged/driven off; 1 x MAS boat is sunk.

TURN 9

Numerous torpedo attacks are resolved from the previous MAS/S-boat attacks.

One of the merchant ships is sunk.

Z-20 torpedoes and sinks the crippled HMS Kimberley.

At this point a CAP arrives, courtesy of the RAF based in North Africa. 13 x P-40 Kittihawks. Unfortunately no Axis air attacks are taking place this turn. They promptly strafe any MAS/S-boats they find, not really causing any damage to the fast moving little ships.

The Axis C.i.C (Dave) informs me that he fired the equivalent of 46 torpedoes at the convoy this turn and sunk 1 merchant ship. Unfortunately Dave, 4's, 5's and 6's on a 6 sided dice are no good in these rules. 1 and 2 is really good and what counts.

Mind you the British C.i.C had his fair share of high die rolls.

TURN 10

3 x Ju-87 Stukas arrive (when the CAP has disappeared) and attack a merchant ship (this happens to be the ammo ship). One Ju-87 is damaged/driven off by AA fire from the convoy escorts. Unfortunately they bomb and sink the ammo ship resulting in all Bonfire Nights coming at once.

The convoy continues on to Malta. A victory for the British (losing 2 merchant ships out of 10 in a convoy is a success).

The British lost one destroyer (HMS Kimberley) and two merchant ships (the loss of the ammo ship will be felt on Malta).

The Axis lost had one destroyer crippled (Z-20 Karl Galster) but lost numerous aircraft shot down/damaged.