

”There’s Something Wrong With Our Bloody Fish Today”

Wargaming the “Cod Wars”

By David Manley

Mention the phrase “Cod War+“ in a British chippie these days and you’ll probably be met with blank stares, but in the mid 1970s everyone who enjoyed a bit of Cod wrapped in newspaper and served up with a pile of greasy chips was glued to events in the North Atlantic. In 1976 Britain went to “war” for the third time against Iceland over the issue of fishing rights and economic control of the sea. Night after night viewers of the BBC and ITV news programmes saw footage of RN frigates battling it out with the small, stocky and well built gunboats of the Icelandic Coast Guard. Eventually, as in the previous two “wars” a diplomatic solution was found which suited some parties on both sides and upset a few others (mostly in Britain and the rest of Europe). However, this is jumping the gun a little, so let’s begin with an overview of the Cod Wars.

The First Cod War

The first "war" occurred in mid to late 1958. At this time a nation’s territorial waters extended a mere 4 miles. British trawlers routinely fished up to the 4 mile limit. In 1958 Iceland unilaterally extended their limit to 12 miles. Iceland depends on its fishing industry more than just about any other country in the world. Iceland has few natural resources, no timber, no fuel, little agricultural potential, and no mineral deposits. As a result her economy is uniquely dependent on fishing for survival and for exports to fund the imports needed for the other parts of the economy, accounting for about 90% of Iceland's total exports in each year between 1881 and 1976. Therefore, it was argued, Iceland had an overwhelming need to ensure the survival of the fish stocks in its area.

However, the Icelandic government took the view that foreign fishermen, from the Faroe Islands, Belgium, West Germany and Great Britain were causing an over-exploitation of the fish stocks around Iceland. The tonnage of fish catches had been decreasing since a peak in the 1950's, even though improvements in the design and operation of trawlers allowed greater catches. The size and age of the cod caught had also steadily decreased, so there were fewer cod spawning, again reducing the stocks of cod which decreased by a third during the 1970's. Iceland insisted that catches would have to be reduced in order to preserve cod stocks. As Iceland's economic survival depended on fishing, it argued that other nations should bear the reduction of catches. Great Britain and the other fishing nations had different views. While they agreed that the number of cod had been decreasing, they were not convinced excessive fishing was the cause. Nor did they agree that there should be limits on catches. This position remained essentially unchanged through the three “wars”.

The Second Cod War

The second dispute ran from September 1972 to October 1973. This time Iceland extended its fishing limits from 12 to 50 miles. This dispute was concluded with an agreement between the two countries that limited British fishing to certain areas inside the 50-mile limit, and imposed a 130,000 ton limit on the amount of fish that could be caught by British trawlers. This agreement was valid for two years and expired on November 13 1975. The Third “Cod War” started almost immediately and was the most violent of the three.

The Third Cod War

The Third Cod War was fought out between November 1975, and June 1976, and threatened to cause a rift in NATO. With the expiry of the 1973 agreement Iceland once again declared an expansion over its area of economic control, from 50 miles to 200 miles. Britain and the other fishing nations of the EEC argued that, whilst the international community was moving towards an agreed 200-mile limit, Iceland had no right to unilaterally enforce the limit. The stage was set for the third, and most “lively” of the three Cod Wars, in which the Royal Navy fought to defend the interests of fishermen from several European nations as well as those of Britain.

During this conflict, British and other European trawlers had their nets cut by Icelandic Coast Guard vessels and there were numerous ramming attacks between Icelandic ships, trawlers and British frigates. The conflict led Iceland to threaten to close the NATO base at Keflavik, which would have threatened NATO’s ability to defend the Atlantic from Soviet attack.

The conflict lasted for seven months. Iceland employed six Coast Guard ships and two Polish-built stern trawlers, converted for Coast Guard work, to enforce her control over fishing rights. In response, the Royal Navy deployed over 20 frigates, although only between six and nine were deployed at any one time. Britain also employed seven auxiliaries, nine support tugs and three fishery support ships to protect the trawlers.

Few shots were fired, and those that were served mainly as “warning shots” to persuade trawlers to heave to for inspection and probable arrest, or to deter the British escort tugs from interfering with the business of the Coastguard. Several ships were rammed during the conflict and damage was inflicted, some of it quite serious (*HMS Diomedé* was rammed several times by the *ICGV Baldur*, whilst the Icelandic gunboat *Arvakur* was cornered and “beaten up” by trawlers and ocean going tugs operating in support of the British trawler fleets). However, very few injuries were sustained and there was only one accidental death, on the Coast Guard vessel *Aegir*, when an Icelandic engineer, holding a welding torch which he had just been using for repairs, was electrocuted when a wave came inboard; despite medical assistance he died of his injuries. Despite the accidental nature of the incident the Icelandic government blamed the British for causing the wave that killed the engineer (despite no British ships being close to the *Aegir* at the time).

After a particularly violent period in 1976, the conflict came to the attention of the UN Security Council, but no action was taken. The Nordic Council issued a statement of support for Iceland. NATO, and the USA, became involved, due to the threatened closure of the NATO base at Keflavik. The US offered to mediate, but it was NATO intercession coupled with Britain’s eventual acceptance of the 200-mile limit (which incidentally served to set the scene for Britain’s oil boom of the 1980s) that helped to end the conflict.

With mediation by the Secretary-General of NATO, Dr. Joseph Luns, Iceland and Great Britain came to an agreement on June 2 1976. This agreement limited the British to 24 trawlers allowed inside the 200-mile limit at any one time. The amount of cod that Great Britain could legally catch was limited to 50,000 tons per year. There were four conservation areas that were completely closed to all British fishing. In addition, Icelandic patrol vessels were allowed to halt and inspect trawlers suspected of violating the agreement. The duration of the agreement was 6 months, after which Britain’s rights to fish inside the 200-mile limit ceased completely. The agreement with Iceland caused about 1,500 British fishermen to become unemployed, along with an estimated 7,500 people on shore in supporting industries.

Wargaming the Cod War

At first sight the Cod Wars seem to be a rather uninteresting subject for an avid wargamer to pursue. After all, no ships were sunk and no-one was killed in action. However, the wars of the 1970s were something of a defining moment and for a while held the appeal of the world – after all, the plucky Icelandic trawlers were up against the might of the Royal Navy and to the casual viewer it was amazing that the ICGVs were “defeating” the RN in the perpetual battle of “dodgems” that took place on the fishing grounds!

Despite the fallacious nature of this view the idea of wargaming a period where the aim is NOT to get anyone hurt whilst achieving one’s objectives was one that appealed to me. The project languished until 2000 when Mark Barker ran a naval wargaming day at the Royal Navy Museum. I helped out by encouraging NWS members to put on games from different periods, but drew the “short straw” in that I opted to contribute a modern game. This seemed like the ideal opportunity and, after a series of playtests with the MOD club at Abbey Wood I had developed a set of fast play rules suitable for a participation game. The rest of the article covers the rules and data for the ships concerned. The rules as presented here are pretty much the same as the original rules that first saw the light of day 16 years ago (I’m writing this in 2016) with only a very few changes and clarifications made in the intervening years as a result of playing at clubs and in participation games at shows. I hope you enjoy them

Cod War - Tactical Rules

The rules were written with 1/1200 scale models in mind. Double all distances if 1/600 scale models are used. 1/3000 scale miniatures could be used, but the visual appeal of the larger models will be lost and, after all, the key feature of the events of the Cod Wars was VERY close manoeuvring!

The rules work best if one player controls only a single ship. If the appeal of driving a trawler for the game is limited it is suggested that the RN players control no more than one warship and one trawler. A typical scenario would include 1 or 2 warships, 2 to 4 trawlers and one or two Icelandic gunboats. There are both opportunities for scenarios – see the end of the rules.

The rules suit a table at least 6 feet by 4 feet. If a smaller table is used then I suggest using centimetres instead of inches. All die rolls use one or two 6-sided dice (referred to as d6).

Ships

Ships are essentially grouped into 4 classes; Warships, Tugs, Icelandic Coast Guard Vessels (referred to hereafter as ICGV) and Trawlers (which can be side trawlers or the less common stern trawlers).

Communications

If two or more players on a side are attempting to co-ordinate their activities they must speak clearly to each other, giving the opposition a chance to hear them (communication between ships in these close situations tended to be via VHF in the clear, which anyone with a receiver could hear). Pre-game “team talks” to agree tactics are OK – but not once the action has started.

Players may also declare their intentions to the opposition, in terms of the following signals:

- Turning to Port (two blasts on a siren)
- Turning to Starboard (one blast)
- Going astern (three blasts)

These signals were typically given using the ship’s siren (e.g. 3 blasts means “I am going astern”). If a player declares an intention in this manner their vessel **MUST** comply with that intention in the movement for that turn (to do otherwise would be a serious contravention of the maritime “rules of the road” and was definitely bad form!)

Movement

Ships move at 1" per knot of speed. Ships may increase or decrease speed as follows:

Propulsion	Ship Types	Acceleration	Deceleration
Diesels	Trawlers, ICGVs, Warships	3 knots	3 knots
Steam Turbines	Warships	2 knots	3 knots
Gas Turbines	Small Warships	5 knots	5 knots

Speed changes come into effect at the END of a turn, so a vessel moving at 10 knots and decelerating by 3 moves 10" in this turn, 7" in the following turn.

Ships may move astern at up to 5 knots, but must decelerate to a stop and spend one turn stationary when changing from ahead to astern or vice versa. Trawlers must continue to make headway at all times whilst nets are deployed.

Orders for movement must be written in advance using a recognisable notation. For example, a ship travelling 10 knots might be ordered thus:

5, P(4)3, 2

meaning ahead 5", turn to Port using turning circle 4, turning 3" around the circle, then go ahead 2". Orders are written in secret and are written individually – no collusion between players is allowed during order writing (see above).

Turning

Ships turn by moving around turning circles. Different turning circles are used depending on the manoeuvrability of the vessel:

Ship	Turn Circle Radius	
	≤12 knots	>12 knots
Trawler (also ICGVs Baldur and Ver)	3"	5"
Trawler whilst trawling	7"	-
ICGV, Small Warship (HMS Exmouth)	4"	5"
Warship	5"	7"

Trawling

Trawlers will be scoring points all the time they have their nets deployed. On the arrival of an ICGV trawler skippers will decide whether to continue trawling, or to pull up their nets. Recovering nets takes 10 turns for side trawlers, 7 turns for stern trawlers. Deploying nets takes the same number of turns. The nets are vulnerable throughout recovery, and stop scoring points after 5 turns. Trawlers are limited to 4 knots whilst nets are deployed.

Cutting a Trawl

If an ICGV moves within a box 2" wide and 3" deep centred on the stern of a stern trawler, or within 1" of the side of a side trawler, there is a chance the trawl will be cut. Roll a d6 for success:

Distance	0-1"	1-1½"	1½-2"	2-2½"	2½-3"
Stern Trawl	2-6	3-6	4-6	5-6	6
Side Trawl	3-6	-	-	-	-

Warships, other trawlers and tugs may also cut trawls if they move too close - If they move within the same limits for ICGVs roll on the above table, but subtract 2 for warships, 4 for other vessels.

Damage to Anti Net Devices

The ICGV's anti-net devices were simple improvisations and were not immune to accidental damage. If an ICGV attempts to cut a trawler's nets roll another 2d6 after the net cutting attempt has been resolved. On a roll is 12 the net cutter has been snagged and lost.

Collisions

If the bow of a ship model (or the stern if moving astern) makes contact with any part of another vessel a collision has taken place. Collisions can cause anything from minor damage (scratches to paintwork) and deflecting the other ship from its course right up to major damage and even sinking.

Roll a d6 for each ship on the tables below depending on what ship is causing the ram and the ship they have hit. If the angle between the ramming ship and the target is within 45° of perpendicular add 2 to the die roll. If the ramming ship is travelling at more than 20 knots add 2 to the die roll.

Table 1. ICGV Rams Warship Trawler Rams ICGV Trawler Rams Warship		
Die Roll	Rammed Vessel	Ramming Vessel
1	NE	NE
2	NE	-1d6
3	Turn	Turn
4	Turn	-1d6, Turn
5	Lt	-2d6, Turn
6	Lt, Turn	-1d6, Turn, Lt
7	Med, Turn	-2d6, Turn, Med
8+	Heavy, Turn	Heavy, Stop

Table 2. Warship Rams ICGV or Trawler ICGV Rams Trawler		
Die Roll	Rammed Vessel	Ramming Vessel
1	Turn	NE
2	Turn, Light	-1d6
3	Turn, Light	-1d6, Turn
4	Turn, Med	-1d6, Turn
5	Turn, Med	-1d6, Turn, Light
6	Turn, Heavy	-2d6, Med, Turn
7	Turn, Heavy, Withdraw	-2d6, Med, Turn
8+	Sinking	Med, Stop

Table 3. ICGV Rams Tug Tug Rams ICGV Warship Rams Warship ICGV Rams ICGV		
Die Roll	Rammed Vessel	Ramming Vessel
1	NE	NE
2	Turn	-1d6
3	Turn	Turn
4	Lt	-1d6, Turn
5	Lt, Turn	-2d6, Turn
6	Med, Turn	-1d6, Turn, Lt
7	Heavy, Turn	-2d6, Turn, Med
8+	Heavy, Turn, Withdraw	Heavy, Stop

Damage Definitions:

NE	No effect
Light	Reduce maximum speed by 1d6 knots
Medium	Reduce maximum speed by 1d6 knots, increase to next turning circle (max 5")
Heavy	Reduce maximum speed by 2d6 knots, increase to next turning circle (max 5")
Withdraw	Ship must withdraw from the area to make urgent repairs
Sinking	Fatal damage, ship stops and is in a sinking condition.
Turn	Vessel is turned away from the direction of impact, judged by relative position of models (if in doubt position two spare models close by, push the ramming vessel forwards and note in which direction the target vessel turns. Roll a d6: 1-2: - turn 30° 3-4: - turn 45° 5-6: - turn 60°

As well as the mandatory "Withdraw" damage a vessel will withdraw when its accumulated damage reaches the following level:

- a) Three Medium hits
- b) Two heavy hits
- c) One Heavy hits plus two Medium hits

Vessels may also withdraw at the controlling players discretion.

If a trawler is rammed on a face where nets are deployed (i.e. the stern of a stern trawler, or the side of a side trawler over which nets are laid) the nets are cut on a d6 roll of 2+. On a second d6 roll of 4+ the propellers of the ramming vessel are fouled; the ship decelerates to a stop at its maximum rate and then must spend 1d6 turns clearing the propellers before it can move off again.

Evasive Action

If a collision occurs either side may announce that they will try to take evasive action. Both may attempt to evade. Players who are attempting to evade roll a d6 and are successful on a roll of 5 or more. If they are successful the ship is moved back 4" along its course (or to the start of movement if this is less than 4"). The vessel is then moved 4" (or the distance just moved back) turning hard to port or starboard so as to avoid the other vessel. All other movement for the ship is cancelled and any unused movement becomes a move straight ahead. For example, a ship moving at 12 knots risks a serious impact after moving 5". It makes its evasion roll and moves 4" back, then 4" forward again, turning hard to avoid the other ship. Having completed this evasive movement the ship has only moved 5" of its 12" move - the extra 7" is moved straight ahead.

Additional Rules

1) Fire Hoses

Fire hoses have a range of 3". They may only be used by British tugs, and may only be used once in a game (having been used the ICGV skippers take precautions against their use). Select the target vessel and roll a d6:

- 1-3 No effect (other than to hck off the opposition)
- 4 Bridge hit - no change of speed or heading next turn
- 5 Engine room vents hit, engines stall. Roll again -
1-3 reduce speed by 1d6"
4-6 engines stall, vessel decelerates to a halt, roll 5+ on d6 to restart.

2) Side Trawlers (Optional Rule)

Side trawlers must not travel at more than 2 knots when recovering their nets. They may come to a complete stop, at which point the nets drop beneath the trawler. This makes it harder for the ICGVs to cut the trawls – apply a -2 modifier to the die roll when making an attempt.

3) "Morale"

There are no morale rules as such, but the Icelandic player will have to roll to maintain commitment during attempts to cut trawls or interfere with British activities. After each Icelandic attempt to cut nets (whether successful or not) and after each collision roll a d6 (modified as shown below). If the score is 7 or more the ICGV decides to up sticks and withdraw.

Modifiers

- +1 each unsuccessful attempt to cut trawls.
- +1 for each time the ICGV has been rammed by a British tug.
- +1 ICGV has suffered Medium damage or worse.

Points Scoring (Who Wins)

A standard game will see 3 trawlers and two warships pitted against two ICGVs.

Each game lasts for 20 turns. Trawlers score 1 point per turn in which they were trawling (i.e. not recovering nets or after successfully recovering them). Points are calculated when the trawler's nets are successfully recovered, or at the end of the game for those trawlers that still have their nets deployed. Trawlers that lose their nets score no points.

Points are also scored for the following events:

Net cut -10 points

RN vessel forced to withdraw -10 points

ICGV forced to withdraw +10 points

Trawler forced to withdraw -15 points

Ship sunk - if a ship is sunk the opposing side automatically gain the greatest level of victory possible. If an ICGV is sunk all points scored by the British player are lost. If a trawler or other British vessel is sunk the British automatically score points as if all trawlers had achieved the largest possible catch.

The British win if they score 30 points or more, otherwise victory goes to Iceland.

"Mini Campaign"

In the mini campaign there are three operational areas. The British players have 5 warships and 9 trawlers which are assigned as desired to each area (with the only rule being that there must be at least 2 trawlers in each area. One warship may be substituted for two support tugs.

The Icelandic players have 5 ICGVs which again are allocated to the three areas. At least one ICGV must be assigned to each area.

Each area is fought out as a separate game. In order to win the British must score at least 90 points, otherwise overall victory goes to the Icelandic Coast Guard. Additional points and penalties for sinking the opposition's vessels still apply.

The only sure losers in this game are the cod!!

Other Scenarios

There were a few incidents worthy of note that did not include attempts to interfere with trawlers. Two of the most celebrated are covered in the following two scenarios.

“Battle of Seydisfjord”, 11th December 1975

British

Lloydsman (Tug)

Star Aquarius (OSV)

Icelandic

ICGV Thor

Lloydsman had suffered a critical loss of fresh water and it was decided to take on 50 tonnes from the OSV *Star Aquarius*. This needed sheltered waters to complete, so the two ships sneaked in to Seydisfjord to complete the transfer. Unfortunately, they were surprised by the *Thor*, which was determined to make an arrest.

The game is played out on a 6' by 4' table. Both long sides and one short side represent the sides of the fjord. The other short side represents open sea. The British ships start at the closed end of the table, the ICGV enters from open sea. In order to win the Thor has to arrest at least one British ship. This is achieved by forcing it to withdraw (which in this game represents the crew deciding it's a “fair cop” and heaving to). The British win if they get both ships into the open sea.

Note – both British vessels escaped, and Thor suffered considerable damage from *Lloydsman*. *Thor* fired several “warning shots” from her 3” gun, one of which passed through one of *Lloydsman*'s funnels! It was during this encounter that the tactic of using fire hoses against the ICGV's engine intakes was attempted, but failed.

The Arvakur Incident

British

Scylla (Leander class frigate)

Irishman (Tug)

Vivaria (Trawler)

Iceland

ICGV Arvakur

On 1st June 1973 the ICGV *Arvakur* was “set about” by the tug *Irishman* and the trawler *Vivaria*, whose nets the *Arvakur* had attempted to cut. *Irishman* cut off the *Arvakur* from other trawlers and was assisted in “hemming in” the ICGV by *Vivaria*, which had recovered her nets. During this incident the *Arvakur* was rammed five times and was heavily damaged. One such ram occurred when *Irishman* attempted to snag and “capture” the *Arvakur*'s anti net device – the attempt was misjudged and *Irishman* rammed the Icelandic vessel whilst going astern. The Icelandic government believed this was a deliberate attempt to sink the ship, although this is unlikely to say the least.

In this scenario the British have to force the *Arvakur* to withdraw, or have to damage her anti net device within 20 turns. *Arvakur* starts the game in the centre of the table. The British ships set up anywhere on the table, no closer than 12” to the Icelandic vessel. If *Arvakur* has been forced to withdraw or if her anti net device is damaged inside 20 turns the British win, otherwise it is an Icelandic victory. The British automatically lose if *Arvakur* is sunk.

In order to damage the anti net device the British must try to cross *Arvakur*'s stern in the same way that an ICGV would attempt to cut a trawler's nets. Die rolls to snag and damage the anti net device are the same as for attempts to cut nets.

Models

The choice of 1/1200 as the scale for the game was deliberate. The 1/1200 collecting community is so vast that it is possible to buy just about any ship if you look hard enough. The British warships are easy to obtain at reasonable price from Skytrex. The tugs *Lloydman* and *Statesman*, and the ICGV *Thor* and *Tyr* were produced by Fleetline and can be picked up fairly cheaply from 1/1200 dealers. Models of trawlers come in all shapes, sizes and costs but again shouldn't present of much of a problem. Modelling the other ICGVs will almost certainly require some conversion of existing commercial models or scratch building. In larger scales the only model that is easily available is the old Airfix *Leander*, which has been reissued several times. As far as I know, none of the other vessels involved are available as kits, so scratch building and extensive conversion will be the order of the day.

EDIT – since the original article was written a series of 1/1200 models covering many ships of the Cod Wars has been produced by “Decapod” which are available as 3D printed products via Shapeways:

<http://www.shapeways.com/shops/decapod>

Ship Tables

Class	Type	Speed	Acc	Dec	Turn radius
Aegir, Odinn, Tyr	ICGV	20	+3	-3	4
Baldur, Arvakur, Ver	ICGV	18	+3	-3	4
Thor	ICGV	18	+3	-3	4
Generic Small Trawler	Trawler	12	+2	-3	3
Generic Large Trawler	Trawler	11	+2	-3	4
Euroman	Tug	15	+3	-3	4
Lloydsman, Statesman	Tug	16	+3	-3	4
Rollicker	Tug	15	+3	-3	4
Leander, Type 12	Warship	30	+2	-3	5
Type 41, Type 61	Warship	29	+2	-3	5
Type 12	Warship	30	+2	-3	5
Exmouth	Small Warship	28	+5	-5	4

Icelandic Coast Guard Vessel Details, 1975-76

Name	Displacement	Overall Length	Speed	Crew	Armament	Notes
<i>Tyr</i>	1150 tons	213 ft	20 kts	22	1-57 mm forward 1-47 mm aft	
Aegir	1150 tons	213 ft	20 kts	22	1-57 mm forward 1-47 mm aft	
Odinn	1000 tons	210 ft	20 kts	22	1-57 mm forward 1-47 mm aft	
Thor	920 tons	206 ft	18 kts	22	1-57 mm forward 1-47 mm aft	
Albert	200 tons	120 ft	13 kts	15	1-47 mm forward	
Arvakur	380 tons	142 ft	12 kts	15		
Baldur	740 tons	200 ft	18 kts	20	1-47 mm forward	stern trawler hired by coastguard 1975
Ver	740 tons	200 ft	18 kts	20		stern trawler hired by coastguard April 1976

References

“What Price Cod?” Norman Storey
 “Friends in Conflict”,
 “Vanguard to Trident”, Eric Grove

Example Ship Record Sheet for "Cod Wars"

Name: ODINN

Type: ICGV

Max.Speed: 20kts

Acc/Dec: +3/-3

Turn Radius: 3 4 5 6 7



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L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
MEDIUM			MEDIUM			MEDIUM				
HEAVY					HEAVY					

Turn	Starting Speed	Movement	Final Speed
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
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