



All Guns Blazing!

Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

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Editorial

You could be mistaken for thinking that editing a simple newsletter such as this was a simple task, and that meeting deadlines was pretty simple. Actually the former element is not that far from the truth (apart from eliciting material from the membership!). The latter should be simple, but then the rigours of modern life intervene. Despite a plan to travel less, work has me travelling more and this will get more common rather than less, at least for the next few months. So if the newsletter is a bit late in '08 please bear with me!

News this month – “Fleet Action Imminent” the General Quarters 3 expansion covering WW1 has hit the streets. I downloaded mine on the day of release (hard copy arrived in the post just a few days later) and showed that FAI is as comprehensive and well done as its predecessor. Hopefully a full review will appear in “Battlefleet” shortly.

This month's battle report is the first of three from the NWS Christmas event on board HMS BELFAST. This report features the Battle of the River Plate (part 2). Next month covers the Falklands 1982 games that were also played during the event, with part 3 presenting the rules used in the Falklands game. Well done to Simon Stokes for the effort he has put in to drafting these three pieces.

Yours aye,

DM
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NWS Game at Salute 2008

(April 19th, 2008, ExCel Centre, London)

The Naval Wargames Society will be attending Salute 2008 this year, running a 1/350th scale participation game based on the x-craft midget sub attack on Tirpitz in the Norwegian fjords.

The game is being organised by Simon Stokes. At present Simon has a few spare places in our allotted 8 free entries for anyone that wants to come along and help out with the game. Simon will allocate them on a first come first served basis (but remember, to get a free pass you do actually have to help out with the game as well as enjoying the rest of the show ☺).

If you would like to help out and get a free “in” to this prestigious event please contact Simon direct at:

simonjohnstokes@aol.com

NWS Display on board HMS Belfast

Battle of the River Plate “What If”

By Simon Stokes

Introduction

As part of the ship's annual Christmas North Cape event, the NWS were invited on board HMS *Belfast* on 28th and 29th December 2007, for the fifth year running. Modus operandi for the more recent events has been to run participation games, inviting visitors to the ship to join in. Games are on an historical theme involving the Royal Navy in some way shape or form. This years games were run along these lines but for the first time we departed from the cold arctic waters north of Norway and instead headed to the south Atlantic for both our games.

A merry band of NWS stalwarts (Rob Hutton, Jeff Crane, Dave Sharp and Robert Kirk) helped to run the games and some of us even joined the wavy Navy re-enactors in the sleep over on board, the re-enactors taking part in the excellent North Cape play that's run every year

Background

We ran the first participation game in the morning of both days. It was a hypothetical scenario based on the battle of the river Plate in 1939. The premise was that *Graf Spee* had come out of Montevideo fighting rather than scuttling herself as she did in reality. It's a theme not unfamiliar to most wargamers but it makes a good participation game none the less.

At that time there were only three RN cruisers covering Montevideo, the light cruisers *Ajax* and *Achilles* that had taken part in the original engagement and *Cumberland*, an 8" cruiser that had arrived from the Falklands to re-enforce Harwood's squadron.

Preparations

All the models needed to play the game in 1/600th scale are available as Airfix kits. *Ajax* and *Achilles* are sisters. *Cumberland* is an almost identical sister of *Suffolk*, even down to the hanger and cut down quarter deck. *Graf Spee* is also available as an Airfix kit though was not easy to track down. eBay came to my rescue and after a few failed attempts to procure a kit, a partially built kit that had already been cut down to a waterline model came up. All the model collectors shunned the item but it was just what I needed.



The rules we used were the computerised “Microfleet” set we've used in previous years, with the computer hooked up to a video projector in order to show visitors what's going on and how the rules work.

The Games

We know from past years that the morning sessions are quieter than the afternoons, so we decided to run the River Plate game in the mornings as the game was longer and required fewer players.

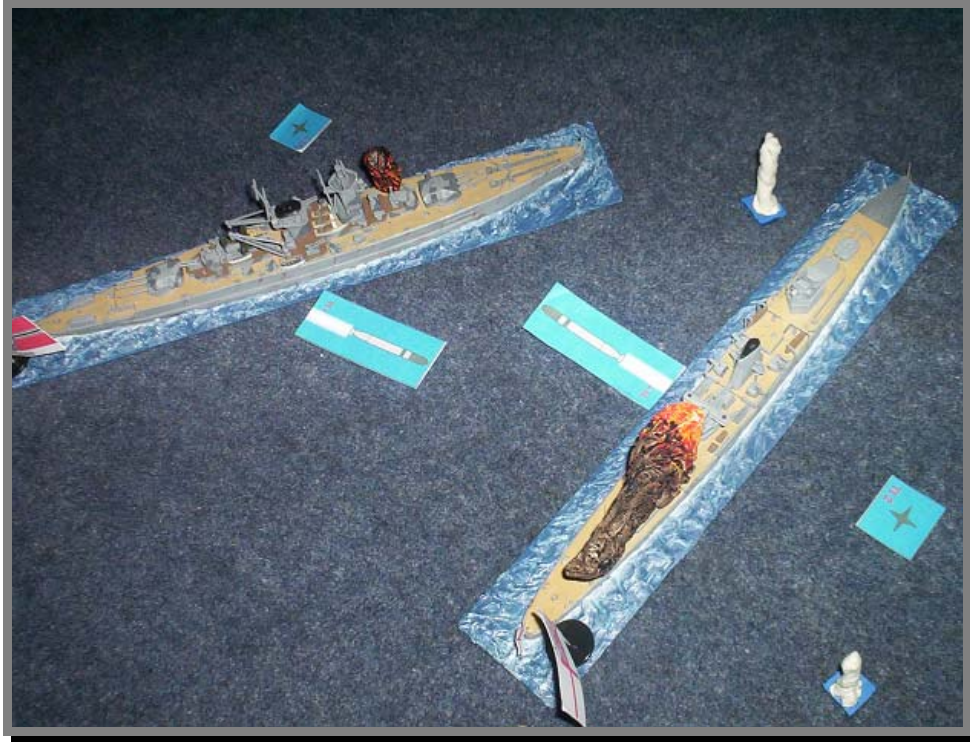
Starting positions saw Harwood's squadron strung out in line of bearing barring *Graf Spee*'s route to the open sea. *Graf Spee* started on the opposite side of the playing area and had as it's objective to make it to the other side of the playing area with a 5 knot speed advantage over Harwood's fastest cruiser.

The day one game saw initial success for *Graf Spee* as it's opening salvoes disabled much of *Cumberland*'s machinery and flooded her forward magazines, reducing her speed to a mere eight knots. She kept in the fight however and swung round to port to bring her rear guns to bear. *Graf Spee*'s AA gunners also had marked success as they dispatched all three spotter aircraft launched by the RN cruisers. *Ajax* and *Achilles* acted more in the role of destroyers as they forged ahead on either beam of *Cumberland* to bar *Graf Spee*'s path to the open sea and close to torpedo launching range. *Achilles* forward gunners were by far and away the most accurate of the British gun crews even without their spotter plane, and scored hits regularly with their forward guns, though the damage they did was more often than not merely superficial.



Cumberland hit forward and on fire, her forward guns out of action

Langsdorff decided to take on *Achilles* in his attempt to bull dose his way to open sea with *Graf Spee*. This proved to be a mistake as we had the luckiest and pluckiest of young participants by the name of James, who held his nerve and closed to within 1000 yards before launching his four starboard 21" torpedoes, which *Graf Spee* turned away from, and then swung round to starboard to launch her port torpedoes at a range of only 600 yards. At any time *Achilles* could have been blown out of the water the number of 11" and 5.9" shells that were slamming into her, but nothing vital was hit and her own torpedoes could barely miss at that range. *Graf Spee* took two 21" torpedoes to starboard, flooding most of her diesel engines and her aft 11" magazine. Her speed dropped off to a mere 2 knots and ensured she could not now escape. She had her revenge however as one of her own torpedoes slammed into *Achilles* flooding her boiler and machinery spaces and bringing her to a grinding halt.



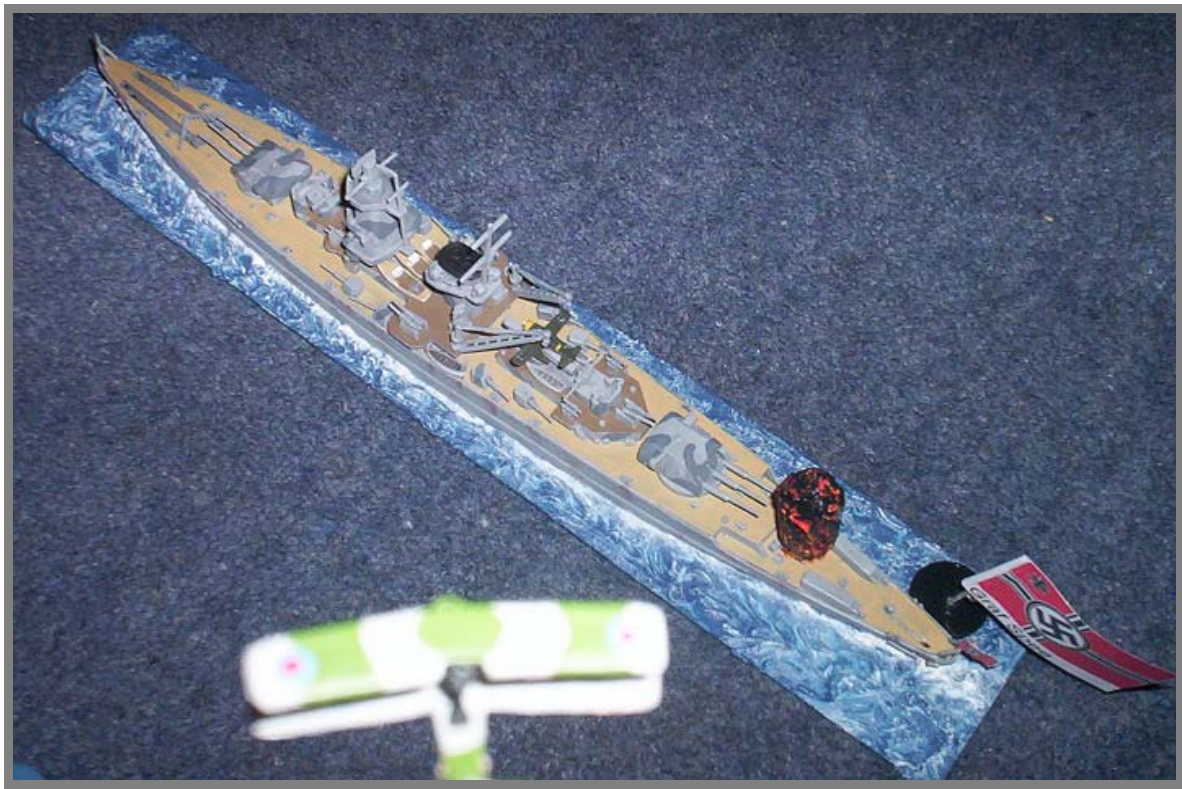
Achilles battered and on fire gets her port 21" torpedoes away at Graf Spee at the unbelievably close range of 600 yards. Graf Spee sends her own retribution back at the same time.

The day two game saw the same starting positions but with a distinctly different outcome. This time *Cumberland* managed to avoid the catastrophic damage of the first game, and reduced the number of hits she was taking through taking evasive action by steering towards the last shell splash. Her aim was to preserve herself as the main target for *Graf Spee* for as long as possible in order to allow *Ajax* and *Achilles* to close with *Graf Spee* at utmost speed and launch their torpedoes. To compensate for the detrimental effect on her own gunnery *Cumberland* adopted the practice of firing full broadsides once she had the range to *Graf Spee*, as did *Ajax* and *Achilles*.



Achilles takes damage to her auxiliary bridge aft as she closes with Graf Spee.

The RN cruisers also had the advantage of their own aircraft spotting fall of shot. This time round *Graf Spee*'s AA gunners failed to live up the previous days accurate fire, only managing to damage *Ajax*'s spotter plane after a full quarter of an hour of firing at her. *Ajax* overcame this adversity however and managed to score the best hit rate of the three cruisers in Harwood's squadron even after the loss of the spotter.



Cumberland's Walrus spotting fall of shot on Graf Spee which is on fire aft.

The tactic worked and *Cumberland* avoided serious damage and the repeated explosions of both 6" and 8" shells on *Graf Spee* managed eventually to find a weak spot in her armour and blew a huge hole in her bows. This reduced her speed to 12 knots and increased the number of hits the British were scoring. A 6" shell eventually landed plumb on *Graf Spee*'s bridge killing Langsdorff and rendering her not under control for a full five minutes. *Achilles* was the closest of the two light cruisers and used the opportunity to close with *Graf Spee* and launch torpedoes. *Graf Spee* took a single torpedo on the port beam that reduced her speed to 4 knots. She was done for and struck her colours to avoid further needless loss of life. Of the British cruisers *Cumberland* was the most seriously damaged having been hit repeatedly and set on fire. Her damage control teams had done sterling work in dousing the flames however and the fires had all been extinguished. At the end of the game she could still make 31 knots and had all eight of her 8" guns in operation, though her secondary guns were all out of action due to hits on the 4" magazines.

Conclusions

The games were both quite tense and close run things and could have gone either way. If our experience is anything to go by Langsdorff's worries about being able to force a passage to the open sea, even given the number of RN ships waiting for him were not anywhere near what was being reported to him, were well founded.

We had a steady stream of visitors taking interest in the game, one gent in particular taking a keen interest as river Plate was one of his favourite actions.

New for this year we decided at the lunch interval on both days to run the DVD of the battle of the river Plate on the projector screen to give visitors something to watch while we ate our pasties. It's such a splendid film that it also added a bit of atmosphere to the game.

Evening entertainment was the board game "The History of the World" courtesy of Jeff, in which quite uncharacteristically I had the luck of the devil and managed to win despite loosing a full eleven Arab armies in an ultimately fruitless attack across the mountains – the passes ran red with rivers of blood and all that....

Thanks are due to all the NWS crew who helped run and play the game, and for the first time to my little lad Jamie who helped me out painting the sea on the bases of the models we used.

Simon Stokes
7th Jan 2008

NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2008

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)

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.