



All Guns Blazing!

Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

No. 179 – February 2008

Editorial

Apologies for those who were eagerly awaiting their January issue – another victim of real life I'm afraid (and apologies to some readers who will have been waiting for me to action various other bits and pieces – spare time is ridiculously short these days!!) Anyway, to make up for last month's deficiencies we have a monster issue this month to (belatedly) start the year, covering the Christmas 2008 event on board Belfast. As usual it proved to be highly successful, and this time it showcased a new set of rules from Mal Wright which I am sure will go down a storm when they are released commercially.

Contributions to AGB are always welcome. "Soft copy" input via email is the preferred method of submission as it cuts down the time taken to get your piece into the newsletter considerably!

I am still seeking a successor as newsletter editor. The imposition of "real world" issues is starting to bite again and means I will not have time to do the job justice in a few months. The good news at least is that many of those "real world" issues involve being at sea and/or working with real warships!

Yours aye,

DM

david.manley@btinternet.com

NWS at Salute

The NWS is putting on a WW2 convoy game at Salute this year, using Mal Wright's rules that were also used in the Belfast gme. We will also be showcasing a new range of 1/3000 miniatures from North Head in New Zealand. Simon Stokes is running the game and there are places available if you'd like to come along and help . If you do please contact Simon direct (or email me and I'll pass the message on). This year Salute is early, at the end of March

Another Wargaming Event on BELFAST – John Curry

WD and Chestnut Lodge (the wargaming club, not the other Chestnut Lodge) are putting on games on HMS Belfast on Feb 28th for the public between 10.00-5.00. There are also games on Friday night, Saturday evening and Sunday am but these are not for the public.

There are three options: coming for the weekend and staying on board the ship, comming for the weekend and not staying on board the ship or just comming on the Saturday for the show 10.00-5.00 If you are coming to help run games on the Saturday there is no cost (there is a cost for the other two options see link for details).

The programme currently includes three lectures, games by Jim Wallman, John Curry, Tim Price MBE, Bob Cordery and a number of others.

If you are interested, please let John Curry or Jim Wallman know.

johncurryevents.co.uk

Battle of Barents Sea After Action Report

A display game staged by the Naval Wargames Society
on board HMS Belfast on 28th and 29th December 2008

Introduction

Once more this year the NWS were invited back on board HMS *Belfast* as part of their annual North Cape event which took place on Sunday 28th and Monday 29th December. This year the general theme of the event was "the arctic convoys". The question was which game to do? In the end we plumped for a display game based on the battle of Barents Sea which took place on 31st December 1942.

As usual we were posted to the ships company dining hall (or the aft port torpedo flat if you're working to the ships WW2 plans) and played the game out in a roped off area of the deck using 1/600th scale models, though there was room for the visitors to see what we were doing and plenty of seating to encourage them to linger and ask questions.

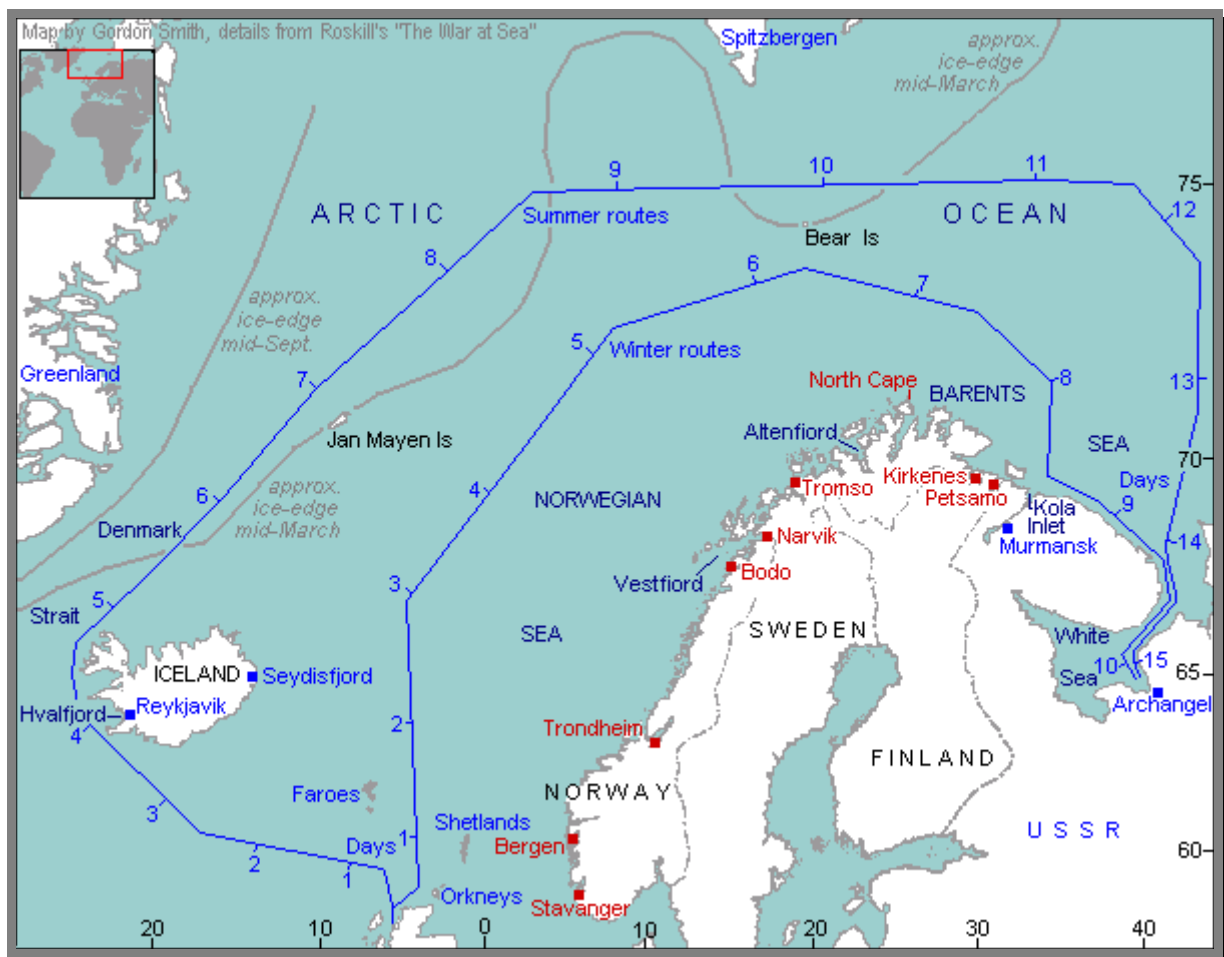
We did manage to work a couple of new features into the game. Firstly we played the action out as a mini campaign using Mal Wright's new "Deadly Waters" rules which Mal kindly let us have an advance copy of (it's currently with the publishers, Clash of Arms, and should go to press in 2009). Secondly we roped in one of the Wavy Navy re-enactors, who were also on board for the event, to deliver a number of pre-prepared Hitlergrams / Admiralty signals to the players at random times during the day - more on this later however.

The NWS team this year comprised David Bennett, Jeff Crane, Rob Hutton and myself (Simon Stokes). Nick Hewitt from IWM and also an NWS member joined us on Monday.

Historical Background

During 1941 the German invasion of Russia led to the introduction of the Russian or Arctic convoys. Conditions on these convoys were dreadful. Both summer and winter routes lay close to German bases in Norway from which U-boats, aircraft and surface ships could operate. In the long winter months there was terrible weather and intense cold, whilst in summer there was continual daylight. Many believed that it would be impossible for any ships to get through.

The first convoy sailed in August 1941. Outward bound convoys were given a number prefixed by the letters PQ and homeward bound convoys the prefix QP. By the end of the year, over 100 merchantmen had set out in both directions with only one lost to a U-boat.



By 27th June 1942 sixteen outbound convoys had already made the passage to Russia so the next to sail was designated PQ17. It left Reykjavik with 36 merchant ships. At the same time a return convoy QP13 also sailed. The British Admiralty believed the Germans were concentrating their heavy ships in northern Norway - the battleship *Tirpitz*, pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer* and heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper*. These reached Altenfiord on 3rd July. At this time PQ17 had just passed to the north of Bear Island, after which it was located by German aircraft which sank three of the merchantmen. However fear of attack by the German surface ships led the First Sea Lord, Admiral Dudley Pound, to order the withdrawal of the escorts and for the convoy to scatter.

The abandoned merchantmen independently tried to make for the Russian ports. Between the 5th and 10th July, 20 of them were sunk, half to German air attack and half to U-boats sent to hunt them down. Eventually 11 survivors and two rescue ships reached Archangel. In fact *the German* ships did not leave Altenfiord until the morning of the 5th, after the convoy was ordered to disperse. They abandoned the sortie that same day.

Following the disaster of PQ17 only one more outbound convoy (PQ18) sailed in September 1942 before the British Admiralty suspended convoy operations to Russia (although a couple of homebound convoys QP14 and QP15 did sail). When, towards the end of December and following pressure from Stalin, the time came to resume the Arctic convoys the British decided on a change of plan. The old large 30+ ship convoys were to be split into two smaller and more manageable convoys but covered by the same pair of detachments from the Home fleet. Designation of the convoys was also changed. Out went the old PQ/QP prefixes and in came the JW and RA prefixes.

JW51A (16 merchant ships) left Loch Ewe, Scotland on the 15th bound for Kola Inlet. Accompanied by the cruisers *Sheffield* and *Jamaica*, it arrived safely on Christmas Day 1942. JW51B (14 merchant ships) sailed on the 22nd December escorted by the destroyers, minesweepers and other smaller escort vessels under the command of Captain Robert St. Vincent. Sherbrooke in the destroyer *Onslow*.

Rear Admiral Bob Burnett with *Sheffield* and *Jamaica* sailed from Murmansk to provide close cover through the Barents Sea while Vice Admiral Bruce Fraser provided distant cover in the battleship *Anson*.



Admiral Hipper



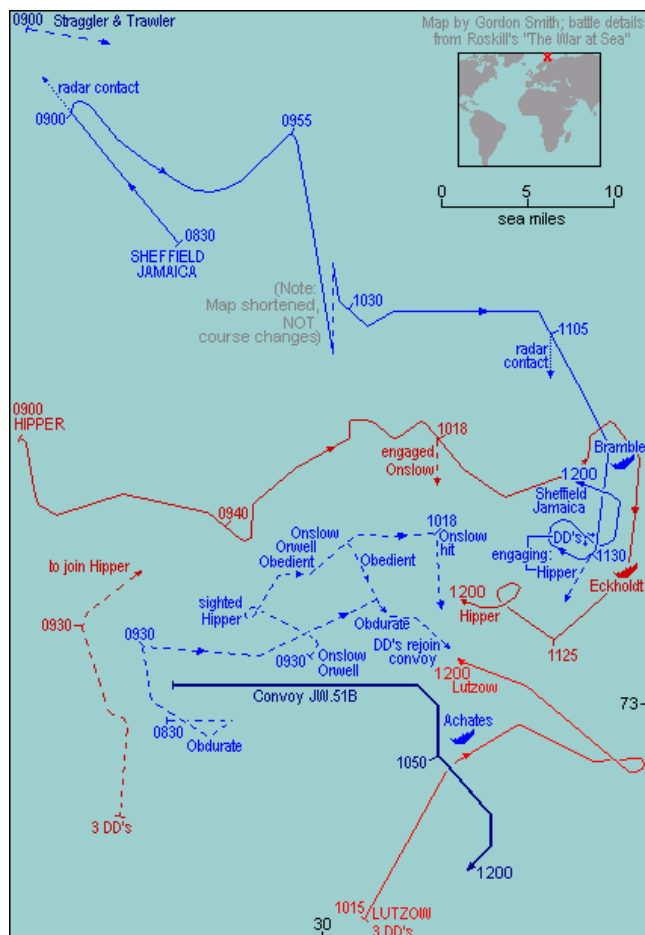
HMS Onslow

By now the German battleship *Tirpitz*, pocket battleship *Lutzow*, heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper*, light cruisers *Köln* and *Nürnberg* and a number of destroyers were in Norwegian waters. Convoy JW51B was located by U-354 and Admiral Kummetz was ordered to put to sea from Altenfiord with *Hipper*, *Lutzow* and six destroyers to intercept the convoy north of North Cape. By 31st December some of the escorts and merchantmen had been scattered by gales and had lost contact with the convoy.

Admiral Kummetz divided his force in two and was searching along the reported track of the convoy and planned to attack from astern from either side - *Hipper* and three destroyers were to attack from the north and drive the merchantmen onto the guns of the *Lutzow* and another three destroyers approaching from the south.

At 08:20 on December 31st, the destroyer *Obdurate*, stationed south of the convoy, spotted three of the German destroyers to the rear (west) of the convoy. Then *Onslow* spotted *Hipper*, also to the rear of the convoy, and steered to intercept with *Orwell*, *Obedient*, and *Obdurate*, while *Achates* was ordered to stay with the convoy and make smoke.

After both sides had opened fire, the British destroyers turned to make a feigned torpedo attack. Heavily outgunned, Sherbrooke knew that in the prevailing poor visibility his torpedoes were his most formidable weapons and once launched, their threat would be gone. The ruse worked: *Hipper* temporarily retired since Kummetz had been ordered not to risk his ships. *Hipper* returned to make a second attack, hitting *Onslow* with three 8" shells and causing heavy damage, although *Onslow* would ultimately survive the action. Sherbrooke was badly injured by a large shell splinter, and command passed to *Obedient*.



Hipper then pulled north of the convoy and stumbled across the minesweeper HMS *Bramble*, which opened fire. *Hipper* returned fire with her much heavier guns and the destroyer *Eckholdt* was ordered to finish *Bramble* off, while the *Hipper* shifted target to *Obedient* and *Achates*.



HMS Bramble

Achates was badly damaged, but she continued to lay down smoke until she too eventually sank, although many of her crew were rescued by the trawler *Northern Gem*.

All this firing attracted the attention of Force R, which was to the north of JW51B. *Sheffield* and *Jamaica* approached, undetected by the Germans, and when they opened fire on *Hipper* at 11:30 it took Kummert completely by surprise. He initially thought that the attack of the two cruisers was coming from another destroyer, but upon realizing his mistake, he ordered his ships to retreat to the west. In another case of mistaken identity, *Eckholdt* and *Richard Beitzen* mistook *Sheffield* for *Hipper*, and after attempting to form up with the British ships they were engaged. *Eckholdt* was completely wrecked by a hail of 6" and 4" shells fired from very close range and subsequently foundered with the loss of all hands.

Meanwhile, *Lützow* approached from the east and fired ineffectively at the convoy (which was still hidden under the smoke from the doomed *Achates*). Heading northwest to join *Hipper*, *Lützow* also found *Sheffield* and *Jamaica*, which opened fire on her.

Both sides decided to break off the action at the same time, each fearing imminent torpedo attacks upon their ships from the other's remaining destroyers. This was shortly after noon. Force R continued to shadow the German ships at a distance until it was evident that they were retiring back to their base, while the ships of the convoy re-formed and continued towards Kola Inlet.



Despite this German attack on convoy JW 51B, all of its merchant ships reached Kola Inlet. More critically for the outcome of the war, Adolf Hitler was infuriated at what he perceived as the uselessness of the Kriegsmarine, as two heavy cruisers were driven off by mere destroyers. Hitler announced that he wanted to scrap the surface fleet, and for the Kriegsmarine to concentrate on U-boat warfare.

Admiral Erich Raeder, supreme commander of the Kriegsmarine, offered his resignation - which Hitler accepted, apparently reluctantly. Raeder was replaced by Admiral Karl Dönitz, the commander of the U-boat fleet who eventually persuaded Hitler to keep most of the surface fleet.

On the British side, Captain Sherbrooke was awarded the Victoria Cross. Although he'd lost his sight in one eye, he returned to active duty and retired from the navy in the 1950s with the rank of Rear Admiral.

The battle was the subject of the book "73 North" by Dudley Pope and this book formed the basis of my reference material for the game.

The Game

The way that Mal's rules work is that you plot the progress of your convoy along a pre-determined route and roll for chance events that happen to the convoy along that route. "Deadly Waters" specifically deals with the Gibraltar convoys though Mal is currently working on an arctic convoys supplement to the rules. This meant that I had to pull together my own map and sequence of event boxes. The map over the page is the one we used for convoy JW51B. You'll notice that the event "balloons" are coded and coloured either black or white. Black represents a night event, white a daylight event. Note that for our game there were twice as many night events as there were day events, there being almost perpetual darkness in these northern waters during winter.

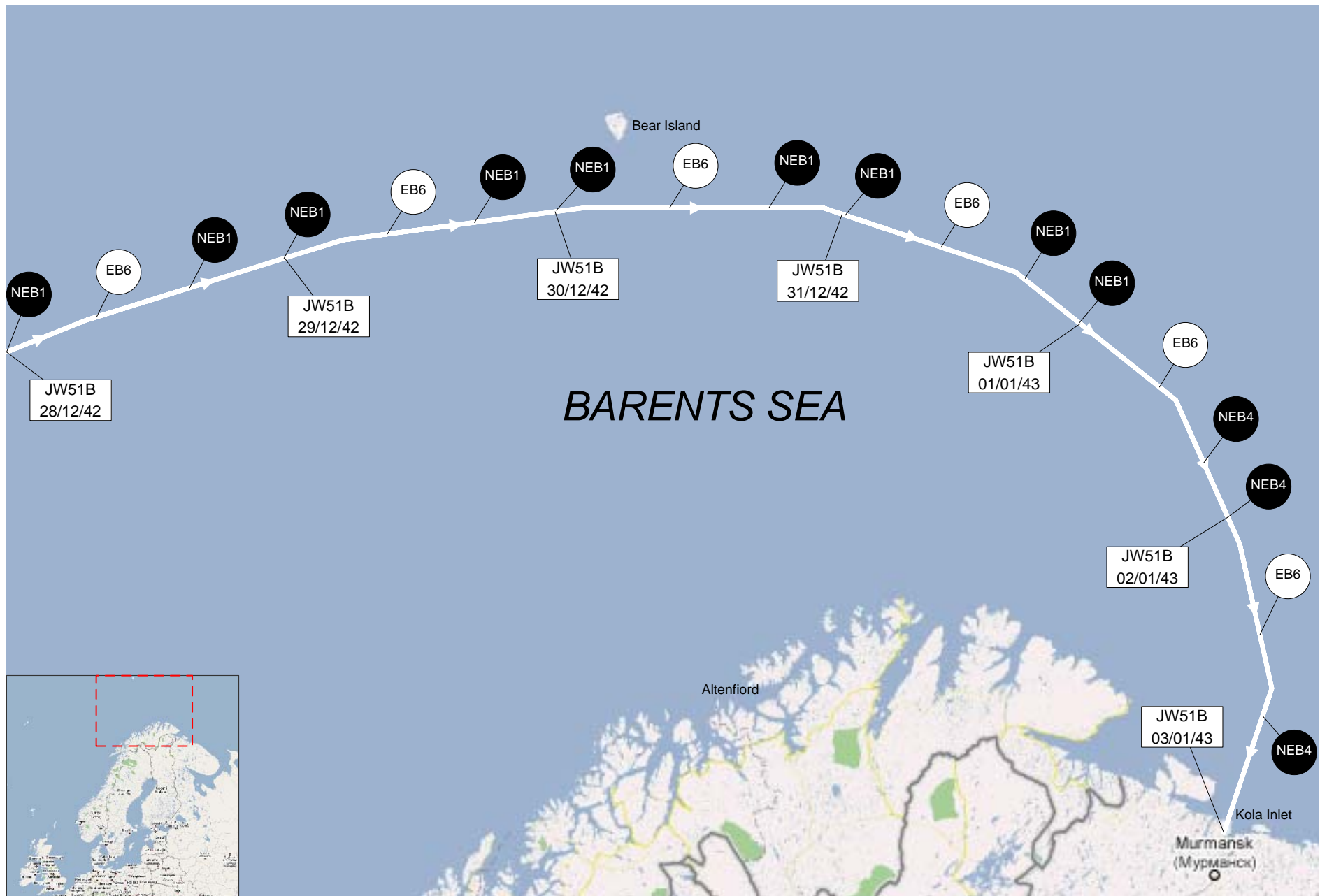
For this game we needed many more ship models of different types than we'd used in previous games. David Manley kindly lent us his models for *Sheffield*, *Jamaica*, *Opportune*, *Matchless*, *Anson* and three of the German destroyers, but the majority of the remainder we had to purchase build and paint on a limited budget. A mixture of Airfix kits and Skytrex models fit the bill, with Skytrex kindly giving us a discount on their list price.

Two models were of particular note. The model used for the Hipper was the Airfix *Prinz Eugen* kit which is particularly difficult to get hold of, and only after scouting round for a while did I eventually manage to obtain a reasonably priced example on eBay which had to be shipped surface mail from Canada (it took 8 anxious weeks). The other model was the O class destroyer that comprised the majority of Sherbrooke's destroyer screen. No-one produces an O class destroyer in 1/600th scale and although David had tackled the problem previously with his model of *Opportune* which I believe he converted from a Skytrex J class, to do 5 such additional conversions would have eaten up too much of the budget so instead I put together a conversion based on the Airfix *Cossack* and *Hotspur* kits. I was particularly helped in the conversion by a Uruguayan modelling site which I found on the web where it showed how to scratch build and paint a truly impressive O class model in 1/200th scale. A link to the site is listed at the end of this report. The result was not as good as David's conversion but seemed a satisfactory representation for our game.



Achates and O class conversions.

Next we needed to allocate commands. David Bennett volunteered to step into the shoes of Captain Sherbrooke in charge of convoy defence, Jeff Crane volunteered for Admiral Klüber's command in overall control of all surface and U boat formations and Rob for Admiral Kummets the admiral at sea with the Kriegsmarine surface forces. Nick could only make it along on the Monday but said that he's like to take command of the *Lützow* group i.e. as captain Stange. That left me with either Admiral Burnett's command (Force R) or Admiral Fraser's command (*Anson* and *Cumberland*), should either force put in an appearance.



The next piece in the jigsaw was a series of external Hitlergrams / Admiralty Signals that I'd prepared using historical events and signals as a basis. There were five Kriegsmarine signals and five Admiralty signals. These are listed below, and were delivered by Jarvis Browning, one of the Wavy Navy re-enactors on board during the event. He appeared at random times during the day wearing the appropriate naval uniform for the signal he bore and handed it to the appropriate player to whom the signal was addressed. To help Jarvis deliver the signal to the correct person we wore lanyards with the name plates for the commanders we were each playing.



KRIEGSMARINE

Signal 1

To Admiral Klüber.
Heil Hitler!
Convoy of 6-10 steamers.
Position square 6394.
Enemy steering 100°.
Convoy weakly escorted.
Escort comprises several destroyers to one light cruiser.

Wargamer's Notes

U354 makes contact with the convoy if it has not already done so. It will continue to shadow it's progress but may not attack until joined by other boats.
Add 1 to all night event box rolls from now until there are no more U-boats in contact with the convoy.

Signal 2

To Admiral Kummetz and Admiral Klüber.
Heil Hitler!

1. Admiral Kummetz with Hipper, Lützow and six destroyers to operate against convoy. Operational command will be exercised by Admiral Klüber.
2. Cover name Regenbogen (Rainbow).
3. Sail as soon as possible in order to intercept convoy at dawn tomorrow.
4. It is desirable to capture single ships. There is to be no time wasted in rescuing enemy crews. It would be of value only to take a few captains and others prisoner with a view to interrogation. The rescue of enemy survivors by enemy forces is not desirable.
5. Operation is forbidden south of 70° north.
6. Contact with the Luftwaffe should be maintained by Admiral Klüber.

Wargamer's Notes

You must decide the following:

1. Do you split your force into multiple search groups, if so what are the groups and what formation does each search group adopt?
2. From which direction is each group to approach the convoy?

Once decided upon and when the daylight turn begins on the following day you must roll for each group to determine if they make contact with the convoy. If no contact is made then roll again 30 minutes later. Note however that there's only one daylight turn per day and that turn is only 4 hours long. Visibility is poor so all contacts occur at maximum visibility i.e. 16,000 yards. Night time visibility is 4,000 yards.

D10	East	North	South	West
1	Snow squall, no contact this half hour or next			
2	Contact close cover force if on station		Contact distant cover force if on station	
3	Contact Romper	Contact straggler		
4	No Contact	No Contact		No Contact
5				Contact main convoy
6				
7				
8	Contact main convoy	Contact main convoy		
9				
10				

Signal 3

To Admiral Kummetz.
Cruiser and destroyer in sight bearing 300°. Is it you?
On what bearing are you in relation to the convoy?
You are firing on me!

Wargamer's Notes

Target identification problems. No German vessels may fire this turn.
Ignore this event if no surface action currently in progress.

Signal 4

To Admiral Kummetz and Admiral Klüber.
Heil Hitler!
Führer directive : use caution even against enemy of equal strength
because it is undesirable for the cruisers to take any great risks

Wargamer's Notes

If either *Hipper* or *Lützow* are in action against anything larger than a destroyer they must seek to break off the contact and withdraw.

Signal 5

TORPEDO GREEN 90 RANGE 500 METRES!

Wargamer's Notes

A previously unsighted 21" torpedo has been fired at one of the Kriegsmarine surface vessels (determined randomly).
If the vessel is in action the torpedo will have been fired by a British destroyer or light cruiser. If not in action the torpedo will have been fired by the British submarine HMS *Graph* (formerly U-570).



ROYAL NAVY

- Signal 1** Most Immediate.
TO Captain Sherbrooke. FROM RA Force R.
-
- Force R on station 30 minutes to the North of your estimated position.
Wargamer's Notes
In the event of enemy surface contact with the convoy, or any detached parts of it, Force R will steam to the sound of the guns arriving from the North after 30 minutes. If there are multiple surface contacts then roll for each contact, the highest roll being the contact that force R heads towards. If the surface contact is resolved before Force R arrives then there will be a further 30 minute delay before they arrive at any other surface contact.
- Signal 2** Most Immediate.
TO Captain Sherbrooke. FROM RA Force R.
-
- Destroyers Matchless and Opportune have been detached from Force R to cover RA51A.
- Signal 3** Most Immediate.
TO Captain Sherbrooke. FROM VA2.
-
- Close Escorts Blankney, Circe, Chiddingfold and Ledbury have reached the limit of their endurance and must be detached immediately.
Wargamer's Notes
Disregard if main convoy is in contact with enemy surface forces.
- Signal 4** Most Immediate.
TO Captain Sherbrooke. FROM VA2.
-
- Distant covering force returning to base. Good luck and God's speed.
Wargamer's Notes
Disregard if main convoy is in contact with enemy surface forces.
- Signal 5** Most Immediate.
TO Captain Sherbrooke. FROM RA Force R.
-
- Minesweepers Harrier and Seagull have sailed from Murmansk and will rendezvous with you at first light to augment your close escort.

Kriegsmarine signals 1 & 2 and Royal Navy signals 1, 2 & 3 were delivered during the first day and the remainder during the second day.



Jarvis delivering a Kriegsmarine signal to Jeff aka Admiral Klüber.

The composition of the forces at the disposal of the players was as follows, the details being gleaned from the excellent [convoyweb](#) web site:

JW51B – Commodore Melhuish

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Tons</i>	<i>Built</i>	<i>Cargo</i>
BALLOT (Pan)	6,131	1922	
CALOBRE (Pan)	6,891	1919	
CHESTER VALLEY (US)	5,078	1919	
DALDORCH (Br)	5,571	1930	
EMPIRE ARCHER (Br) (f)	7,031	1941	
EMPIRE EMERALD (Br)	8,032	1941	2000 tons FFO, 1700 tons avgas
EXECUTIVE (US)	4,978	1920	
JEFFERSON MYERS (US)	7,582	1920	
JOHN H B LATROBE (US)	7,191	1942	
PONTFIELD (Br)	8,319	1940	5500 tons FFO, 5300 tons avgas
PUERTO RICAN (US)	6,076	1919	
RALPH WALDO EMERSON (US)	7,176	1942	
VERMONT (US)	5,670	1919	
YORKMAR (US)	5,612	1919	

Close Escort – Captain (D) Robert StVincent Sherbrooke

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Notes</i>
ACHATES	DD	A/B	
BLANKNEY	DE	Hunt II	
BRAMBLE	AM	Halcyon	Cdr H T Rust S.O. M/S Flotilla

CIRCE	<i>AM</i>	<i>Algerine</i>	
CHIDDINGFOLD	<i>DE</i>	<i>Hunt II</i>	
HARRIER	<i>AM</i>	<i>Halcyon</i>	
HYDERABAD	<i>Corvette</i>	<i>Flower</i>	
LEDBURY	<i>DE</i>	<i>Hunt II</i>	
NORTHERN GEM	<i>Trawler</i>		
OBDURATE	<i>DD</i>	<i>O/P</i>	
OBEDIENT	<i>DD</i>	<i>O/P</i>	<i>Lt Cdr Kinloch</i>
ONSLOW (f)	<i>DD</i>	<i>O/P</i>	
ORIBI	<i>DD</i>	<i>O/P</i>	
ORWELL	<i>DD</i>	<i>O/P</i>	
RHODODENDRON	<i>Corvette</i>	<i>Flower</i>	
SEAGULL	<i>AM</i>	<i>Halcyon</i>	
VIZALMA	<i>Trawler</i>		

Close Covering Force R – Rear Admiral Bob Burnett (station 30 minutes away to the North)

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Class</i>
SHEFFIELD (f)	<i>CL</i>	<i>Southampton</i>
JAMAICA	<i>CL</i>	<i>Fiji</i>
MATCHLESS	<i>DD</i>	<i>L/M</i>
OPPORTUNE	<i>DD</i>	<i>O/P</i>

Distant Covering Force VA2 – Vice Admiral Bruce Fraser (station 4 hours away to the West)

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Class</i>
---------------	-------------	--------------

ANSON (f)	<i>BB</i>	<i>KGV</i>
CUMBERLAND	<i>CA</i>	<i>Kent</i>
FORESTER	<i>DD</i>	<i>E/F</i>
ICARUS	<i>DD</i>	<i>G/H/I</i>
IMPULSIVE	<i>DD</i>	<i>G/H/I</i>

Wolfpacks – Admiral Klüber (allocate boats from this list as and when directed by events)

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Class</i>
U-354	<i>VIIC</i>	U-277	<i>VIIC</i>	U-307	<i>VIIC</i>	U-355	<i>VIIC</i>	U-386	<i>VIIC</i>
U-626	<i>VIIC</i>	U-278	<i>VIIC</i>	U-310	<i>VIIC</i>	U-360	<i>VIIC</i>	U-387	<i>VIIC</i>
U-134	<i>VIIC</i>	U-288	<i>VIIC</i>	U-314	<i>VIIC</i>	U-365	<i>VIIC</i>	U-394	<i>VIIC</i>
U-255	<i>VIIC</i>	U-295	<i>VIIC</i>	U-344	<i>VIIC</i>	U-376	<i>VIIC</i>	U-435	<i>VIIC</i>

Surface Force Hipper – Admiral Kummetz

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Class</i>
Hipper (f)	<i>CA</i>	<i>Hipper</i>
Friedrich Eckholdt	<i>DD</i>	<i>1934A</i>
Richard Beitzen	<i>DD</i>	<i>1934</i>
Z29	<i>DD</i>	<i>1936A</i>

Surface Force Lützow – Captain Stange

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Class</i>
Lützow	<i>CA</i>	<i>Deutschland</i>
Z30	<i>DD</i>	<i>1936A</i>
Z31	<i>DD</i>	<i>1936A (Mob)</i>
Theodor Riedel	<i>DD</i>	<i>1934A</i>

The game started with David laying out the convoy in the centre of the playing area, placing the escorts in their allotted positions and issuing standing orders. These were that in the event of daylight attack the escorts were to initiate operation “Artichoke” and in the event of a night time attack to initiate a “Raspberry” tactical manoeuvre. These tactics are described in more detail

inside of Mal's "Deadly Waters" rule book. From there on in the convoy itself was never moved but the escorts around them all moved relative to the convoy's own speed and direction.

The morning night event box rolls for 28/12 proved relatively quite with only a malfunctioning ASDIC set on *Rhododendron* to worry Sherbrooke (a problem which was to come back to haunt the British later). The day time event was similarly unremarkable with no contact. The fun and games really started during the night of 28/12 when the previously undetected U354 surfaced 4,000yds Green 45 from lead ship of column 3. U354 fired a spread of 4 torpedoes at the *Empire Archer* which was the lead ship of column 3 and also happened to be the ship carrying commodore Melhuish, the convoy commodore. U354 dived as soon as she'd fired her torpedoes. One torpedo hit *Empire Archer* on the port side causing engine room damage and severe flooding. She slowed and fell out of line as her damage control teams leapt into action. They soon managed to stem the flooding and had her back underway, though her top speed was now down to 9 knots. This was however sufficient to allow her to stay in contact with the convoy which was progressing at 8 knots.



JW51B with the lead ship of column 3, the Empire Archer, having just been torpedoed. Note that in this large scale we found it handy to place the laminated escort ship data charts next to their corresponding model.

The escorts closest to U354, the Hunt class destroyer *Ledbury* and the Minesweepers *Bramble* and *Circe* soon managed to locate the sub with their ASDIC and they converged on her location dropping patterns of depth charges. These did only minor damage (6 out of 20 hull boxes) to U354 however before she was eventually able to dive deep and evade her pursuers as one by one they lost contact with the U boat. U354 eventually surfaced in the wake of the convoy and trailed it on the surface sending out location reports. It was also about this time that Jarvis delivered the first Kriegsmarine signal which, as it happened, tied in nicely with the events on the playing area.



The hunt for U354.

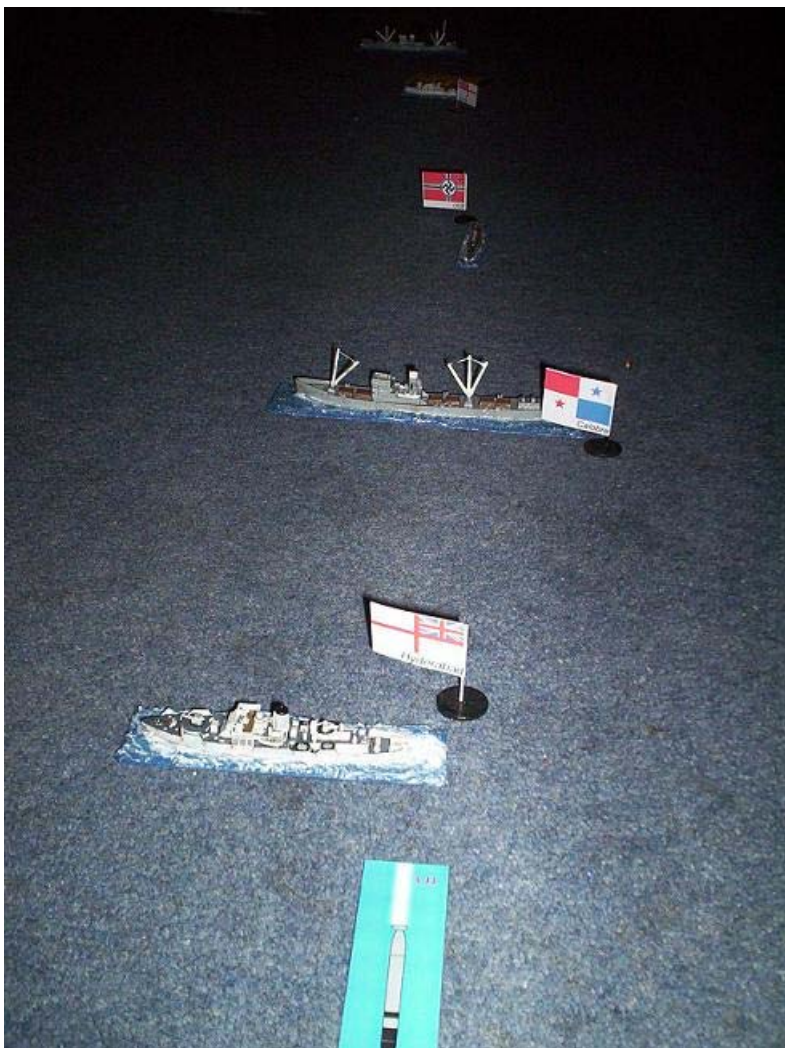
Despite the receipt of his first Admiralty signal informing him that force R was now on station and covering the convoy, the morning night events and daytime event of 29/12 bought more misery for Sherbrooke as yet another ASDIC set packed in, this time on *Vizalma*. The *Calobre* also suffered an engineering problem and lost station straggling 5000 yards astern of her allotted place.

Finally heavy seas caused the deck cargo on the *Vermont* to shift resulting in serious flooding as she heeled over. This forced her to slow to a maximum speed of 5 knots. Sherbrooke decided that he could not afford to drop the speed of the convoy to allow her to maintain station and so left her behind, with the trawler *Northern Gem* as escort, to make her way to Murmansk as best she could. She was destined never to arrive however as now testing for her own separate events, during the evening of 29/12 U626 chanced upon her and fired a spread of four torpedoes at the *Vermont* before *Northern Gem* detected her. Two hit her on the starboard side completely wrecking her engines and causing both critical flooding and a serious fire. U626 dived and made her escape before *Northern Gem* was able even to get a fix on her position. *Northern Gem* could only take off the survivors from the fatally crippled and burning *Vermont* and proceed independently to Murmansk, which she managed to do without further mishap.

During the course of these events Jarvis appeared again bearing in turn Admiralty signal 2 and Kriegsmarine signal 2. As a result we now knew that the German surface forces were at sea and that they would be attempting to intercept the convoy during daylight on 30/12. Klüber and Kummetz had only to decide upon if and how they were going to split their surface force and how they would approach the convoy. In the meantime Sherbrooke still had to steer JW51B safely through the night of 29/12 – 30/12.



The sinking of the Vermont.



U626 misses both Calobre and Hyderabad.

The first morning night event of 30/12 found that U626 had now gained contact with the main convoy, as she surfaced to starboard of the straggler *Calobre* and fired a spread of two torpedoes at her.

These missed both the *Calobre* and the Flower class corvette *Hyderabad* which was steaming to port of her.

U626 yet again evaded detection and joined U354 shadowing the convoy.

The final night event of the morning of 30/12 saw another U boat gain contact with the convoy as U134 surfaced to starboard of the *Ralph W Emerson* and fired a spread of two torpedoes at her. The torpedoes all missed but continued on their course and instead struck the *Puerto Rican*. Only one torpedo hit though causing a minor fire and serious flooding. She slowed to repair the damage and fight the fire which was soon under control. The old Hog Island steamer proved to be a tough ship though and was soon underway again and able to make 8 knots, her top speed only having been diminished by 3 knots. Her central cargo hold of crated aircraft was damaged and partly flooded however ruining the cargo.



U134 misses the Ralph W Emerson but her torpedoes carry on to hit the Puerto Rican beyond.

In the meantime U134 was picked up by *Orwell's* ASDIC, and both she and the corvette *Rhododendron* closed in on U134's position. The British though were hampered by the fact that only *Orwell's* ASDIC set was operational; *Rhododendron's* having gone on the blink the previous day. In the end only one pattern of depth charges was dropped by *Orwell* on U134 causing a minor fuel leak, but in doing so she lost contact with the U boat and there was not another escort with an operational ASDIC set close enough to maintain the contact. U134 twisted and turned and doubled back on herself and disappeared into the night to join the other two shadowing U boats.

During this sequence of play Jarvis delivered the final Admiralty signal of the day; signal 3, and consequently the minesweeper *Circe* and the Hunt class destroyer escorts were removed from the playing area.

The Germans now had enough U boats in contact with JW51B to make a concerted attack on the convoy, but that would have to wait since even as U134 made her escape the dim twilight that passes for daylight in these northern waters during winter was creeping over the scene and out of the dark there loomed the dark shapes of the German surface vessels – they'd found the convoy. That was the position as we left it at the end of the first day's play.

Jeff and Rob had decided upon a strategy of splitting their surface forces into two search groups to maximise their chances of finding the convoy in the four short hours of daylight that were available to them. Kummetz in the *Admiral Hipper* and accompanied by the destroyers *Richard Beitzen* and *Freidrich Eckholdt* approached from the west i.e. in the tracks of the convoy whilst Kapitan Stange with *Lutzow* and the other four destroyers approached from the East i.e. head on to the convoy. The main problem the Germans had was therefore one of co-ordinating their attacks, and it's a problem that they never really solved since it was only the Hipper group which was in contact with JW51B when dawn broke. Although Mal's rules cover surface actions, for this part of the game we reverted to the traditional Microfleet rule set which I've computerised and have used successfully before. This removed math fatigue and record keeping and let us project it on screen for all to see.

The nearest destroyer to the shapes emerging from the gloom to the West was HMS *Orwell*, so Sherbrooke dispatched her to investigate. It wasn't long before she closed with the nearest German destroyer, *Richard Beitzen*, and her signalled challenges were met with a salvo of 5" shells, none of which hit. Sherbrooke now knew that the vessels behind him were hostile so he gave orders for *Vizalma*, *Rhododendron* and *Hyderabad* to make smoke across the rear of the convoy (the prevailing wind blowing from the North West) and for his destroyers to concentrate at the rear of the convoy. He also signalled a request for Admiral Burnett to come to his aid.

Orwell though did not wait for her consorts before pressing home her attack, and although under 5" shell fire from both *Richard Beitzen* and *Freidrich Eckholdt* plus 8" gunfire from the *Admiral Hipper* (a signalling oversight by Kummetz meant that her secondary batteries were not initially given the order to open fire). She ploughed on and was rewarded by a single 4" shell hit on the *Richard Beitzen*. The shell hit below the waterline amidships and exploded in the boiler room causing extensive damage and flooding. Rocked by the sudden violence of this single hit *Richard Beitzen* attempted to turn away to starboard and reduce speed to get her flooding under control, but before she had got very far she was rocked by another explosion as her internal bulkhead gave way flooding the remaining boiler room. The additional inrush of sea water combined with her turn to starboard caused her to capsize to port.



Richard Beitzen is fatally damaged by a single 4" shell from Orwell which explodes in her boiler room.

During this sequence of play the Germans were also plagued by target identification problems initiated by Kriegsmarine signal 3 delivered by the ever patient Jarvis. Despite this *Orwell* did not emerge unscathed however and received an 8" shell hit plus two 5" hits. None of these hit anything so vital on her however, one of the 5" shells even failing to detonate. Therefore she was still able to make 36 knots even as *Richard Beitzen* was capsizing.

This did not last long however and as *Orwell* made her run in towards *Hipper* she came under heavy fire, as the *Hipper's* 4.1" gun crews finally woke to the danger and added their fire to the tirade so that both the main and secondary guns from *Hipper* and 5" guns from *Friedrich Eckholdt* all opened up. *Orwell* was hit below the waterline both fore and aft and repeatedly above the waterline amidships causing serious fires which started to spread. She did however manage to launch a spread of 8 torpedoes in the direction of the *Hipper*, which was still closing the rear of the convoy, and *Friedrich Eckholdt*. Although none struck home they did cause *Hipper* to turn to port to avoid their tracks thus separating her from the *Friedrich Eckholdt*. *Orwell* could not sustain this level of punishment though and four minutes after the *Richard Beitzen* had gone down, *Orwell* came to a complete stop and rolled slowly over to port.

Gung-ho and reckless as *Orwell's* charge had been, it was remarkably successful both in terms of dispatching one of the German destroyers and in tying up Kummetz while Sherbrooke marshalled the rest of his destroyers and attempted to cover the rear of the convoy in a smoke screen. In this later task he was considerably helped by the youngest of the visitors who passed our way, as they were roped in to deliver snow squalls to the battlefield in the form of cotton wool balls which, after explaining how they were helping, they hurled in the general direction of the convoy. We had so many at one stage that the German players were seen lurking by the entrance doing a good impression of the child catcher from Chitty Chitty Bang Bang in order to scare them off – it didn't work and the convoy was regularly obscured by snow squalls!



The rear of the convoy is covered by smoke screens and snow squalls.

Next of Sherbrooke's destroyers to arrive on the scene were *Achates* from the port screen and *Obedient* from the starboard. Both headed for *Hipper* at their utmost speed, *Obedient*, making 36 knots, came into gunnery range first as she opened up on *Friedrich Eckholdt* even as the latter was helping to dispatch *Orwell*. In a sharp exchange of gunfire with *Eckholdt* the Germans gunnery practice proved far superior and *Obedient* was hit repeatedly. She was set on fire amidships and holed in several places below the waterline forward. This later damage proved fatal at the speed she was doing as the flooding rapidly spread aft until finally she capsized to port. Sherbrooke found himself down by another destroyer with very little to show for this second loss as *Obedient* landed not a single hit on the *Eckholdt*. *Achates* by contrast led an almost charmed life. Initially hidden by one of the many snow squalls as she made her approach, when she emerged under the guns of *Hipper*, the German gunners seem to have been taken completely by surprise as salvo after salvo of 8" and 4.1" fell wide of the mark. Only one 8" shell hit her amidships above the waterline and besides wrecking the captain's cutter, did little material damage. Yet on she came.



Achates emerges under the guns of the Hipper.

Achates was not alone on her run in though as *Obdurate* had picked up the baton from *Obedient*. She was not so fortunate as *Achates* however as the ever accurate *Eckholdt* and the newly re-focused 4.1" gun crews on the *Hipper* landed repeated hits. Her gunnery director and B gun were both knocked out plus she was hit and set on fire amidships. None of this slowed her down however and she ran in close astern of *Hipper* before launching her spread of 8 torpedoes at *Hipper's* port quarter. One torpedo found its mark and hit forward flooding the forward sections of the hull.

At the same time as this was going on Jervis delivered Kriegsmarine signal 5 to Kummetz. Other signals had arrived throughout the day but had made little significant impact on the game, but not this one as suddenly a rogue torpedo¹ was spotted 500 metres to starboard of *Hipper*. It hit aft wrecking *Hipper*'s starboard propeller shafts and slowing her significantly.

Finally and quite remarkably *Achates* made it virtually unscathed to within torpedo launch range of the now wounded *Hipper*. Dropped her four fish in the water at close range, one found it's mark and caused extensive damage aft wrecking *Hipper*'s engine and boiler rooms. This bought *Hipper*'s turbines to a grinding halt and as she slowed she began to list to starboard as the flooding spread and quite slowly she rolled over to starboard.



Achates fish strike the *Hipper* to starboard after *Obdurates* have hit to port causing serious damage and many fires.

With *Hipper* done for the *Eckholdt* beat a hasty retreat and had the unpleasant duty of sending the signal of the disastrous news to the German high command.

All this happened in just 30 minutes of game time, and whilst this was already a disaster for the Germans there remained to them one last chance of pulling something out of the fire if only *Stange*

¹ The German players reckoned it must have been from the British submarine *Graph* but this seems unlikely.

could locate the convoy at that precise moment when all of the escorts had been diverted to it's rear leaving the head of the convoy virtually undefended except for the *Bramble*. Nick rolled the dice but the gods weren't with him and yet again Stange failed to appear. Two dice rolls later and the *Lutzow* group finally managed to locate the convoy with only 2 hours of twilight remaining but more importantly Burnett's cruisers were now in company with the convoy and Sherbrooke had managed to reform his destroyer screen. Stange saw that nothing was to be gained by attacking with the odds now against him, and in any case his standing orders forbade it.

We concluded the game at that point, the result being a resounding British victory.

Conclusions

Mal's rules proved a big success with us, with only a few pregnant pauses while I thumbed through my pre-published copy looking for the correct page which had the information I knew was in there but couldn't find because I had no index or page numbers to guide me. I liked the way the game chugged along at a constant pace and presented both British and German players with real world problems to grapple with. The ship data charts were an absolute delight, illustrated as they were with Mal's own individual coloured line drawings of the ship in question. These got almost as many admiring glances from the visiting public as the ship models. If you'd like to give the game a pre release try out yourself we'll be taking it to Salute at the end of March running a participation game based around Gibraltar convoy HG.76, though this time we'll be using 1/3000th scale models.

We devised our own points based system to work out the victor in our game. The algorithm was simple the Germans scored 1 point for every 10 tons of allied shipping sunk plus 1 point per crew member lost (it was ruthless but in Germany's interest to eliminate skilled allied ships crews; civil or naval). The British also scored 1 point for every 10 tons of German vessels sunk but with the proviso that if they sank either *Hipper* or *Lutzow* then it would count as an automatic victory due to the explicit orders which Hitler had issued and the need to preserve a fleet in being. Therefore in the end the points tally wasn't needed, and the German players were left to reflect that maybe Kummets's circumspection and hesitation when approaching the convoy in real battle had been well founded.

We estimated that we had close on 400 visitors over the two days that came and took an interest in our game and took away a flyer with them, so hopefully spurred a bit of interest. We were also pleased to see a few NWS members who came on board and looked us up. As always some of the most rewarding visitors for us were veterans and relations of veterans of the arctic convoys who added their own personal stories to the historical events that we were portraying.

As for extracurricular activities we of course showed "The Cruel Sea" on the big screen whilst we took our lunch breaks, and this itself attracted visitors. The Sunday evening, after a swift pint with the Wavy Navy boys and girls, was spent with a Pizza, a bottle of JD & coke and a game of Junta – El Presidente for life!

My thanks go to the NWS team for all their support, to IWM for making us so welcome, to Jarvis for his help, to Mal for making his new rules available to us and for the extra work he put in to provide us with all the ship data sheets we needed for our game and to David Manley for the loan of many of his ship models.



The NWS & Wavy Navy team for the event. From left to right; Nick, Jarvis, Jeff, Rob and David.

References

73 North by Dudley Pope, Chatham Publishing; New edition (1 Jul 2003), ISBN-10: 1861761287, ISBN-13: 978-1861761286

Arctic Convoys 1941-1945 by Richard Woodman, Pen & Sword Military (17 May 2007), ISBN-10: 1844156117, ISBN-13: 978-1844156115

Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1922-1946 by Roger Chesneau (Editor), Conway Maritime Press Ltd (31 Dec 1997), ISBN-10: 0851771467, ISBN-13: 978-0851771465

<http://www.convoyweb.org.uk/>

<http://uboa.net/index.html>

<http://www.ipmsuruguay.com/foro/viewtopic.php?t=1810>

http://www.admiral-hipper-class.dk/admiral_hipper/paint_schemes/admiral_hipper_paint_schemes_1942.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Barents_Sea

<http://hmsbelfast.iwm.org.uk/>

Simon Stokes, 15th Jan 2009

NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2009

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.
