



All Guns Blazing!

Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

No. 189 –January 2010

EDITORIAL

Gentlemen,

I've always been more interested in HMS *Resolution* than New Year's resolutions, but this year I'm going to try and have a crack at a few. Top of the list must be to finish an article on a particular aspect of the Russo-Japanese War that I've been kicking around for ages; then I want to find more time to play more naval games, even if only of the solo type; and I suppose (*yet again*) to try to lose a little weight! Best-laid plans, etc, etc...

New Year isn't just about resolutions, of course, there are *the dreaded sales*! However, if you happen to be 'pressed' by your good lady and forced to escort her down the high street, you could do worse than pop in your local *The Works* bookshop. I was in mine a couple of weeks ago and they are selling Andrew Lambert's splendid '*Admirals: Naval Commanders Who Made Britain Great*' for a paltry £2.99! Ok, it's in paperback, but it's still a ridiculous price for book originally going for £9.99. Actually, I feel somewhat 'bad' that Mr. Lambert's work should have been reduced thus. Still, hey-ho, as they say these days. (One of Rob Morgan's submissions this month is on another 'steal' from *The Works*. See below.) On the subject of bargains, most of you probably already know that A&A Games are having a winter sale, but if not, there are lots interesting items to be found at www.aandagames.co.uk. And to bore you all a little more with picking up things for a song, I've just discovered that Amazon have quite substantial reductions on the ever-popular 'Osprey' range. To give you a couple of examples, the new *The Coral Sea 1942*, and *British Destroyers 1892-1918* are both around half the normal price. (The former of which appeared in my Christmas stocking! Well, I have been a good boy!) Anyway, time to address a little New Year business for the Society.

Simon Stokes has sent me some details of up-and-coming events that should take your interest.

'Call to Arms' - we'll be running Atlantic convoy game at 'Call to Arms' on 6th Feb in Theale, Reading (as we didn't manage to take it to 'Colours' this year), so anyone willing to help please get in contact with myself. There will be a limited number of free entry passes for people helping to run the game, so it is first come first served.

'Salute 2010' will be held on 24th April, where we'll be running an ACW participation game. As above there will be a limited number of free entry passes, so it's first come first served again, but this time I'm specifically looking for people who can bring something to the game in the shape of models, terrain (1/600th preferably) or even figures or rules. The difference being here that we're starting from scratch to put this game together.

Please contact Simon for the above at simonjohnstokes@aol.com. Simon also let me know that the January edition of *Wargames Illustrated* has a, "very complimentary," piece on our very own *Battlefleet*. Worth checking out next time you're dragged kicking and screaming round the shops.

Just after Christmas I received an email from a Mr. David Luff, the editor of his (American) wargame club's newsletter, *The Gamers' Closet*. He said that they have several naval players as members and they have told him of AGB. He then asked whether we would be interested in posting AGB in their newsletter. I've replied saying that I would consult with our committee/membership, as the decision isn't mine alone. Their newsletter can be viewed at www.novag.org. My thoughts are that it could mean we are losing potential members who would otherwise join the NWS; although perhaps his members, seeing they know of AGB, are already NWS members! Assuming this is the case, it could prove a good advert for our society. And to expand a little on this a little further, am I right in recalling that AGB is available free via our website? Your thoughts on this will be much appreciated.

Just before New Year David Manley sent me a quick email with an email link to a company called 'Battlefront.Com'. They have a new game available called '*Knights of the Sea*' and it covers PT/MTB actions. There is a free demo version that you can download and try out, so if you're interested have a look at www.battlefront.com. I haven't had time as yet to have much of a look at it, so if you do, let me know what you think; better still write a short review for *AGB*! Anyway, to whet your appetite, here's one of the screen shots. Looks good, eh?



Finally, Friday January 15th at 9 pm is a date to put in your diaries, as BBC 2 is starting a four-part series entitled 'Empire of the Seas'. Although presented by Dan Snow, the accompanying BBC book is by Brian Lavery; an author who I am sure needs no introduction to this membership. The programme is designed to tell the story of how the Royal Navy grew from its humble beginnings to become the greatest industrial organization of the eighteenth century, and the social and administrative benefits that followed in its wake. From what I gather, this all sounds very much like the thrust of Peter Padfield's excellent *Maritime Supremacy and the Opening of the Western Mind* that was published about ten years ago. Anyway, it sounds like capital Friday viewing, and you can get a taster at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/tv/comingup/empire-of-the-seas>>.

Another pretty packed issue for you all this month. A thrilling report from Simon Stokes on a Guadalcanal game held at Jeff Crane's, some additions from Rob Morgan and John Curry and a little ditty from yours truly.

Happy New Year to you all!

'Up Spirits!'

Richard Wimpenny

wimpenny@talktalk.net

'Ancient Egyptian Sea Power and the Origin of Maritime Forces'

(Gregory P. Gilbert. ISBN 978-0-642-29680-1)

I was made aware of this publication recently, in a mailing from the Royal Australian Navy's 'SEA POWER' Centre at Canberra. If members are not aware of the publications list of the RAN, then can I suggest that especially for 20th century naval wargamers a trip into their web-site is a must!

As for this new 164 page book, I've sent for a hard copy for my own use, and like all RAN publications from 'SEA POWER' this is free, not even postage charged at present. The Egyptians are not everyone's cup of tea as a naval wargames force, but the book contains some interesting material for ancient wargamers. The author considers technological developments, and most of the identifying features of a ship can be found in early Egypt, and he also looks at the 'naval' developments of their time, though of course there were no major battles at sea. The book dips into the Red Sea, Mediterranean, and of course the River Nile, and it is certainly a ground breaking attempt to consider how and why control of the sea is crucial. It's also well illustrated.

As my copy hasn't yet arrived, readers may wonder how I come to make these observations. Well, the entire book can be downloaded by visiting the SEA POWER site at

http://www.navy.gov.au/Sea_Power_Centre_Australia

Worth taking a look.

Rob Morgan

The History of Wargaming Project Classic wargaming books

The History of Wargaming Project has had a bit of a naval theme to it so far. I have produced a book on the Fred T Jane Naval Wargames and of course, Donald Featherstone's Naval Wargames.

I am now working on Phil Dunn's *Sea Battles* book. This is a new edition of the original classic, with 50 pages of new material supplied by Phil Dunn.

Future projects include a book on the Fletcher Pratt naval wargame, including much original material from the wife of Pratt's Umpire.

There have been a few other naval wargaming books, e.g. Carter's. Are any of them worth reproducing, does anyone know where to find the authors or their families?

Any thoughts/ comments would be appreciated.

John Curry

The History of Wargaming Project
Classic wargaming books
www.johncurryevents.co.uk

Guadalcanal After Action Report

Introduction

We needed a break from the interesting and worthy pursuit of new rule sets, so November's game at Jeff's saw us revert to a good old set of rules and a close quarters WW2 night action. All stirring stuff and meat and drink to the naval wargamer.

The game chosen was the night action of 12th / 13th November off Guadalcanal, and the rule set the 1970s vintage *Microfleet WW2* set (albeit the computerised version).

Background

Background to the action is that US intelligence sources had obtained advance information of Japanese intentions to make a major effort to resolve the worsening situation on Guadalcanal. They assembled a force of 13,000 troops to be landed at the north west end of Guadalcanal during the night of 12th /13th November.

Japanese Forces

Force Y - Vice Admiral Hiroaki Abe

Hiei, Kirishima & 5 Destroyers - *Yudachi, Harusame, Asagumo, Murasame, Samidare*

Nagara (Rear Admiral Susumu Kimura) & 6 Destroyers - *Yukikaze, Amatsukaze, Terutsuki, Akatsuki, Inadsuma, Ikazuchi*

The Americans however have no heavy ships on hand to meet the attack, only cruisers and destroyers.

US Forces

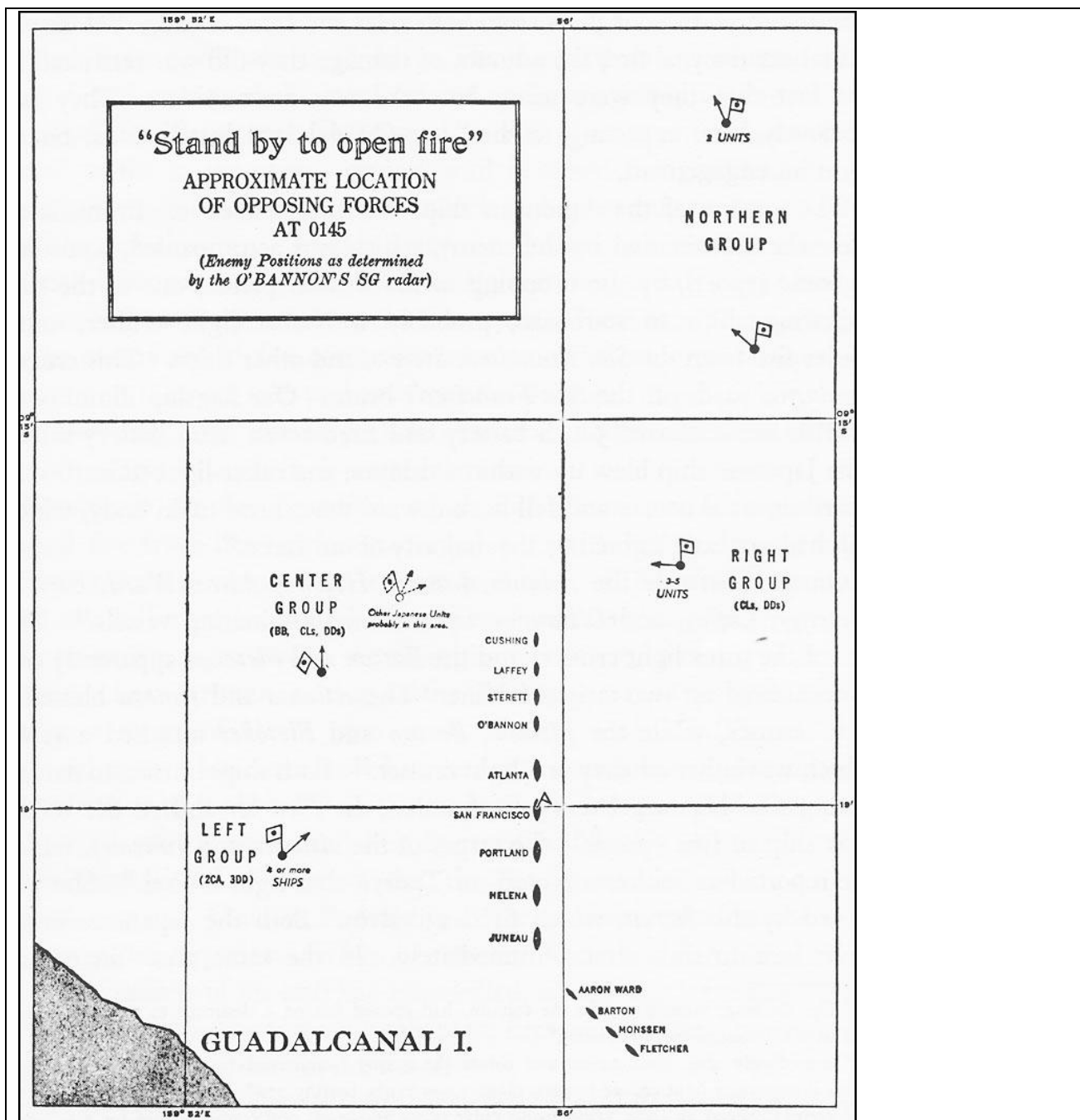
Admiral Scott with his flagship the light AA cruiser USS *Atlanta* & 8 Destroyers - *Cushing, Laffey, Sterett, O'Bannon, Aaron Ward, Barton, Monssen, Fletcher*

Admiral Callaghan with his flagship the heavy cruiser USS *San Francisco* and cruisers USS *Portland*, USS *Helena*, USS *Juneau*

The Japanese ships were steaming at 23 knots in line ahead, Kimura's destroyers scouting in front deployed in an arrow head formation with the *Nagara* at its tip. These were followed by the *Hiei* and *Kirishima*, which were covered by 5 destroyers, 2 to port and 3 to starboard. *Hiei* and *Kirishima* are loaded with HE shells, and would need 8 turns to reload with AP shells. Rear Admiral Tanaka's force was due to appear in thirty game turns time, unless ordered to reverse course.

At 01:30 on a dark and moonless night the US cruiser squadron was steaming at 20 knots on a north westerly course 20 miles east of Henderson Field when radar picked up unidentified ships, heading directly for their position from the west.

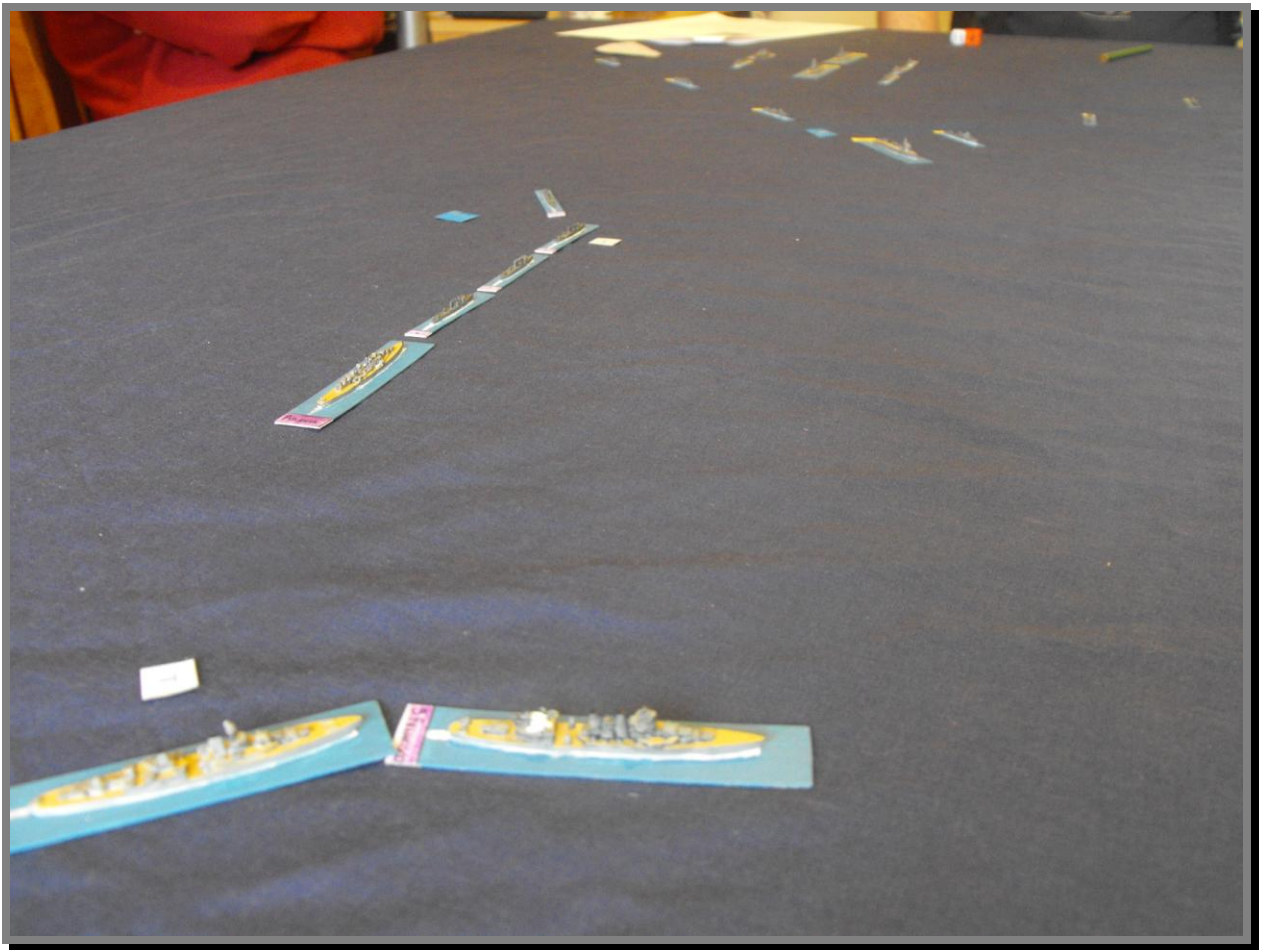
Starting positions are best shown by the following contemporary map, though as will be seen the Japanese dispositions are not necessarily accurately drawn, and illustrates just how confused the action was even at the outset:



Low cloud cover and the absence of moon light meant that visibility was poor, bringing the encounter distance down to 6,000 yards (30cm). It also meant that spotter planes could not be used. Note also that the close proximity to land meant that the US forces were unable to make effective use of their surface radar.

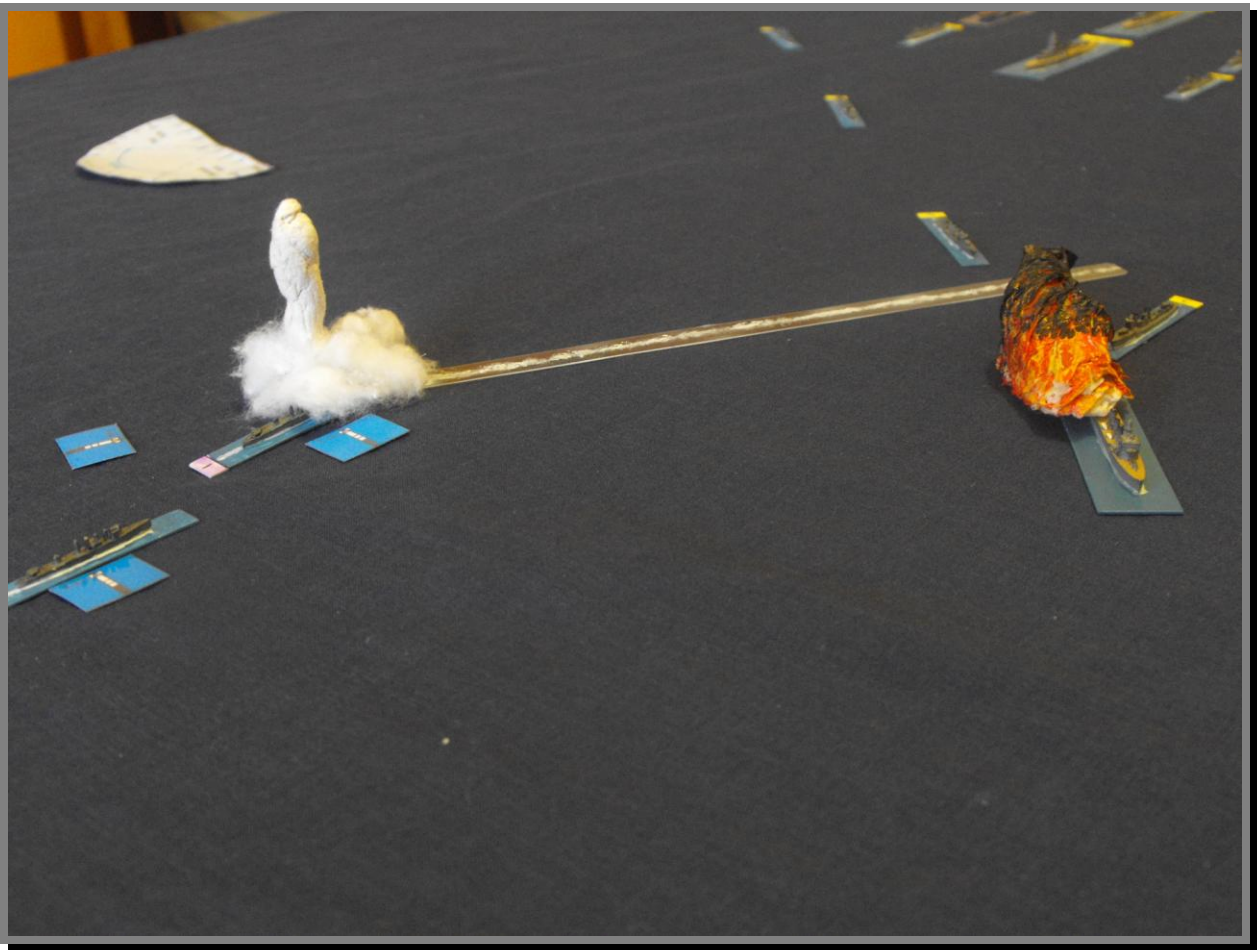
The Game

Dave Sharp and Jeff's grandson, Rick, took command of the US forces whilst Rob Hutton and Jeff became the inscrutable Japanese commanders for the day. The photograph below shows the positions after the first turn of the game, and following the allowance for the random offset rolls we made to give a bit of variability to the starting positions. Dave has already turned Callaghan's leading heavy cruisers to starboard to open their firing arcs and both US and Japanese torpedoes were already in the water from the closest US and Japanese destroyers.



1 Callaghan's cruisers turn to open their firing arcs while ahead the lead Jap destroyers launch torpedoes

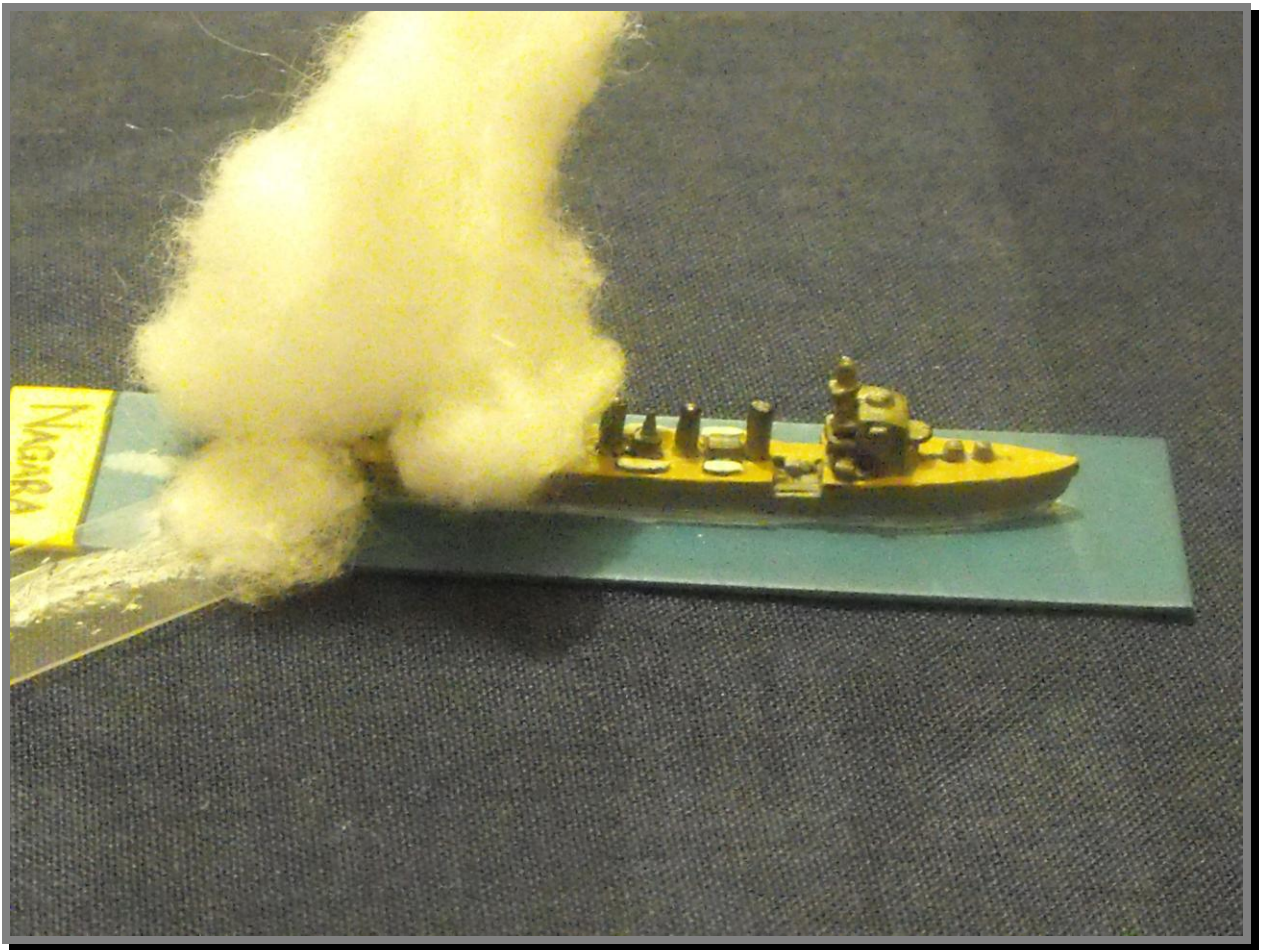
Very soon the leading Japanese and US destroyers became embroiled in a brief but fierce exchange of gunfire and torpedoes, and it was not long before the game saw its first casualty as a single Japanese long lance torpedo struck *Cushing* amidships and the resulting detonation broke her in two. The Japanese did not come away unscathed though as *Nagara*, the main focal point of the US destroyers gunfire, was hit repeatedly and soon ablaze, lighting her up for all to see.



2 Cushing is blown asunder by a long lance while Nagara burns furiously

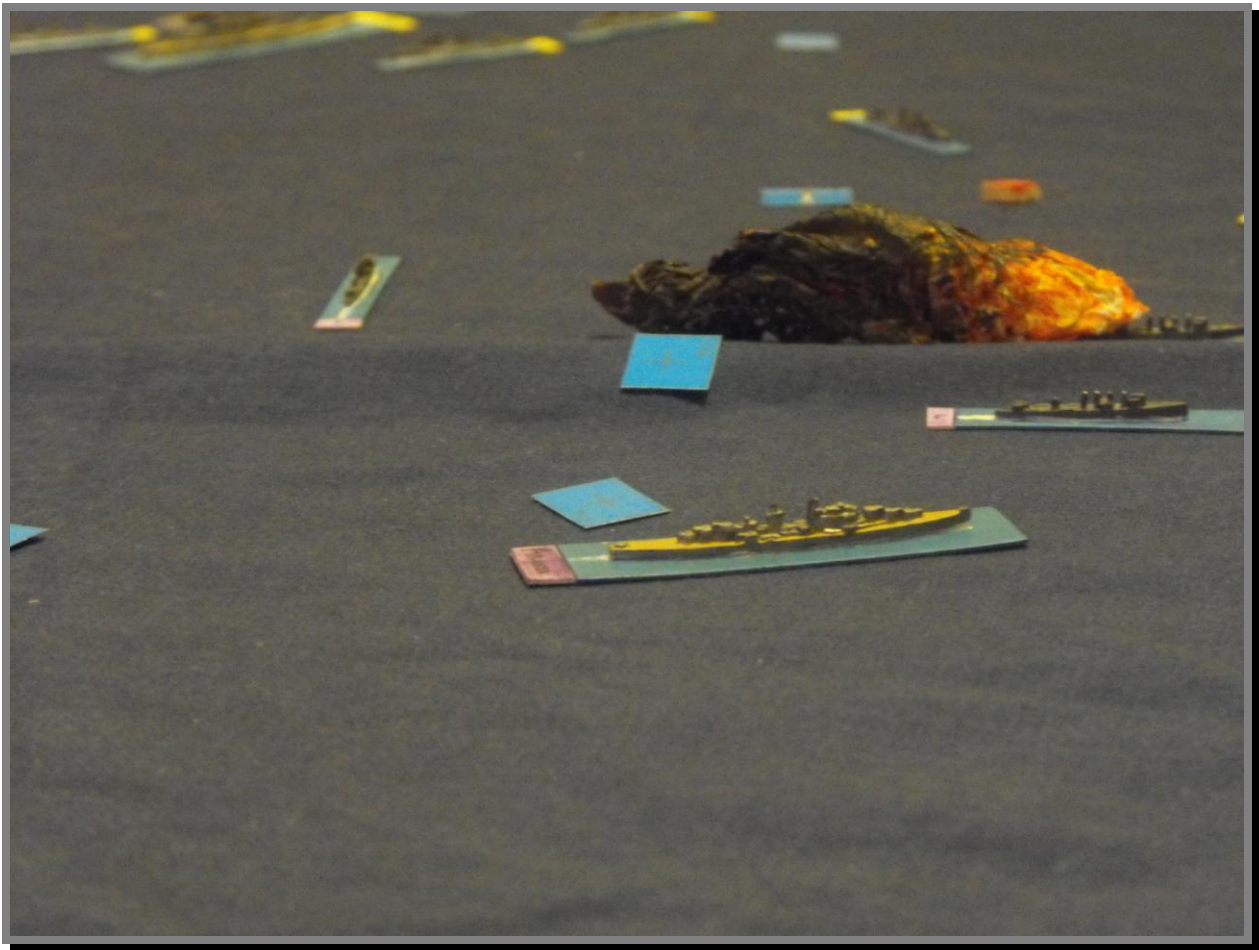
Had *Cushing's* captain not gone down with his ship he would surely have been up in front of a court martial, as in his manoeuvrings to try and avoid the Japanese torpedoes he had put his ship to port of the rest of his fellow destroyers, and when, in his last act before his ship was blown apart, he ordered a torpedo launch to starboard he had not considered that *Laffey* was coming up at high speed on his starboard quarter. Inevitably it was one of *Cushing's* torpedoes which struck *Laffey* to port and although it didn't sink her outright like the long lance had the *Cushing*, *Laffey* was crippled and left in a very exposed position.

A few seconds later, however, one of the remainder of *Cushing's* torpedoes did find its intended target as it crashed into the Jap light cruiser *Nagara*. The 21" torpedo left the *Nagara* dead in the water, down at the bow and listing 12 degrees to starboard having shipped over 4000 tons of water into her forward hull compartments.



3 Nagara is struck by a US 21" torpedo

The destroyer fight continued unabated meanwhile as both sides tried to illuminate targets with star shell and search light. The next US destroyer in line was narrowly missed by a spread of long lance torpedoes that seemed to directly beneath her, though she was hit by several shells from both the *Terutsuki* and *Inadzuma* and was on fire for a time before her damage control teams could put out the flames. Scott's flagship also brought her considerable firepower to bear against the crippled *Nagara*, which was soon in flames once more.



4 Atlanta opens her firing arcs whilst in the background Sterett is ablaze

It was at this point that the Japanese players realised that things were getting a bit too hot for their liking and decided to abort the mission. They ordered Tanaka's landing force to reverse course and turned *Hiei* and *Kirishima* to starboard and headed them away from the maelstrom. They can just be seen in the background of the above photograph. Only the crippled *Laffey* caught sight of them as they swept past and although they exchanged fire, the Jap battlecruisers using their secondary batteries and scoring a couple of hits on the beleaguered US destroyer, they were gone before the US commanders really knew what was happening. The Japanese destroyers continued the fight for a few rounds before they too made their escape leaving the *Nagara* to her fate. As Callaghan's cruiser line closed in on her to deliver the coup de grace with heavy gunfire (though their lamentable shooting up to that point was a little worrying for Callaghan!), we drew stumps on the game and started the post action analysis.



5 Callaghan's cruisers line up to finish off Nagara with gunfire

Conclusions

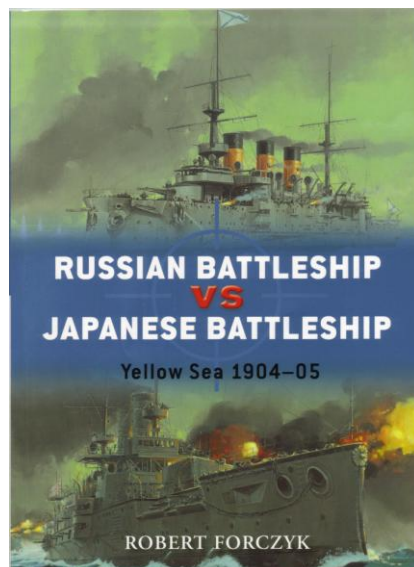
The game delivered just what we wanted, an uncomplicated fast paced torpedo fest, and although our replaying of the historical events was considerably less bloody than the real encounter which saw the demise of much of the US force, the death of Admiral Scott and the loss on the Japanese side of both the *Nagara* and the *Hiei*, the consensus was that the result was still realistic and probably reflected what vice admiral Abe would have done in hindsight as although tactically the action came out as a draw (2xDDs vs 1xCL), the Japanese forces would be intact and available to make a further attempt at getting relief convoy through the following night when conditions might be better suited to the task. This game though could only be viewed as a strategic US victory as Callaghan's cruisers had successfully fended off a nominally superior force and caused the Japanese relief convoy to turn back to boot.

Thanks to Jeff as always for the hospitality and steady supply of drinks.

Simon Stokes

RUSSIAN BATTLESHIP Vs JAPANESE BATTLESHIP YELLOW SEA 1904-05

OSPREY DUEL 15
BY Dr ROBERT FORCZYK



When the great Edwardian naval historian Sir Julian Corbett wrote the British Admiralty's official history of the Russo-Japanese War, he considered it to have been a somewhat old-fashioned conflict; as much a war of the nineteenth century as one at the dawn of the twentieth. It was a war that saw the Japanese prosecuting a close blockade of Port Arthur in a style that wouldn't have surprised Jervis or Nelson, while at the same time embracing wireless technology, carrying out torpedo-boat raids and laying minefields. Yet despite the twin humiliations of the torpedo and mine, the battleship remained the queen of the seas, the final arbiter of naval power. The Russo-Japanese War was fought at the high tide of the so-called pre-dreadnought era, and Dr. Forczyk's account does credit to these most majestic of battleships.

Nevertheless, I have to admit that I nearly didn't buy this book at all! The subject is a particular favourite of mine, and while at first excited at the prospect of another book to devour, a quick appraisal made me think I had 'got it all already'. Now while it's true that I do have plenty of relevant books that I could tease all the information out of, here it is all under one 'deck-head', as it were. Furthermore, the author, a lieutenant-colonel in the US Army Reserves, has pitched his writing perfectly for the naval wargamer. In eight punchy chapters he ranges from the development of the battleship, discusses advances in gunnery and fire-control, through the training of crews, command and, of course, the engagements between his subject material—the battleships themselves. Here Dr. Forczyk is totally unbiased. The Japanese had a certain 'edge', to be sure, but often this was not as pronounced as is commonly believed. Whilst it is true that the Russian Baltic reinforcements, led by the ill-starred Admiral Rozhdestvensky, laboured under the twin yokes of poor training and Slavic fatalism, the Pacific Squadron at Port Arthur was generally confident, efficient at long-range gunnery, and was sometimes (as when under Admiral Makaroff) well led.

The 'look' of the volume follows the well-trodden *Osprey* path of original artwork interspersed with black and white photographs, along with theatre and battle maps. Here I have a minor quibble. When numbering ships deployed in line-ahead for the key on a map the leading ship should, it seems to me, be numbered '1'—no matter its heading, but in the map of the Battle of the Yellow Sea the ships are numbered from *left to right*. For instance, as Togo is leading his squadron roughly east, his rearmost ship is '1', while the leading flagship is '6'. This just doesn't feel right to me, and as it is not used on the Tsushima map, I assume it's just a form of 'typo'. Nonetheless, this is the best *Osprey* title I've read in a long while, with more than enough to satisfy the beginner and veteran naval wargamer alike. I'm very glad I bought it in the end!

Richard Wimpenny

'Monitor' by James Tertius deKay.

**Pimlico Books, 1997.
ISBN 0-7126-6539-0.
(Original Paperback £9.)**

No, I didn't pay £9 for this 247 page book. It's illustrated too, but with prints and photos which most will know. *Monitor* is recently on sale at branches of *The Works* for 99p, and has to be the naval wargamers' bargain of the month. There are well over a hundred branches of *The Works* across the UK, and a call to 0121 313 6000 will give you details of the nearest one (I don't think they do mail order).

That incredible vessel the USS *Monitor*, brainchild of one of the three men who revolutionised war at sea in the second half of the nineteenth century is described here with great precision and even greater flair. It's as much a background story of Ericsson as of his ironclad, and I found it fascinating reading. The creation of the 'tin can on a raft' was no easy feat, and of course Ericsson had to compete with the other designs of *Galena* and *New Ironsides* also rushed into existence as the war looked set to turn against the Union.

The saga unfolds against the backdrop of these early reverses, and the story begins not with *Monitor* but with the fate of the frigate USS *Merrimack* and her re-incarnation as the Confederate battery ironclad at Norfolk. It was interesting to learn that the US Department of the Navy originally expected their new ship to operate under sail as well as steam, which had it happened might have given *Monitor* an even shorter career!

The book goes on to give one of the best accounts I've read of the CSS *Virginia's* elimination of the eighteen-strong Blockading Squadron; including no fewer than five major US warships mounting 212 guns, by a single ironclad with a ram and only twelve guns. While the actual Battle of Hampton Roads, far from being a decisive encounter between, '...a pair of heavily armoured knights...upon a watery field of honour,' as the book suggests, was in fact a rather scrappy three-hour affair, since neither side actually possessed any experience in ironclad warfare. The US ship, ironically, had a strictly limited amount of powder on board, a limitation imposed after an 1843 explosion aboard the USS Princeton. A valuable wargaming point, especially for the Confederates! Finally, the author follows the two ships beyond their fight, with assessments of the effects of shot, the damage to the armour, the state of the Confederate's engines, which are all well known and have been rehearsed often enough. None of deKay's many listed sources and acknowledgements will surprise any reader with an interest in ironclad warships, though he does tell the story particularly well.

Neither of these incredible warships lasted long of course; only two months for the Rebel Ram and eleven for the Federal, but the ironclad was here to stay.

Rob Morgan

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
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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.
