

Phil Barker

WRG, DBM, DBA etc, Phil needs no introduction. What is less well known is keenness to try out different ideas in wargaming and his interest is discussing developments in wargaming

This is one of those legendary systems that everyone has heard of but very few played with. Since the author is long dead, there is no chance of hurting his feelings and I can mention that his rule set is credited in some USN circles with being responsible for many of the initial defeats in the Pacific in WW2. It would not have been a bad set for refighting Jutland (though in fine weather and unrestricted visibility), but its concentration on the gunnery of the fighting line at extreme range and downplaying of the surface ship torpedo led to tactical mistakes made fatal by the Long Lance torpedo.

It is also not a convenient set to play with. Typically, you need a gymnasium floor as the playing area, you risk back ache and the ships risk being stepped on. With those lovely 1/1200 models, that would be especially distressing... Other game mechanism faults are two:

(a) The player range estimation system encourages players to fire "ladders", with each turret firing at a different range, rather than all at a common range found by bracketing. The disparity between model and sea scale meant that when firing at a head-on target, all your shots fired at different ranges would usually hit. Unless, of course, one was using the new "Bobimoto" range estimating system...

(b) Ship loss is largely by attrition. You total all the hits received and the target's capability degrades gracefully, without any sudden losses like the Hood or crippling of fire control like Scharnhorst. My destroyers took an awful lot of 8" and 6" hits before they started to notice.

To the game. I was allotted a division of 4 modern powerful Japanese destroyers, represented by a variety of models that may have confused the opposition. I was detached to operate semi-independently and determined to show the true Samurai spirit by leading them in a classic torpedo attack with guns silent. In Japanese text book fashion, I would close rapidly in column, with slight changes of course encouraging the enemy to ignore me. On being fired on, I would immediately turn the column 90-degrees and launch half my torpedoes in a broad spread.

My target was a cruiser squadron currently being distracted by our own cruisers shooting. What shooting I did receive usually missed for range, since having turned side on to fire the fish, I was a very narrow target and though several times straddled received few hits. I also made a point of staying away from the edge of the 300mm floor tiles and continuously altering course and range slightly. Those 6" shells that did hit had no immediate effect beyond broken glass and scratched paint work. However, I had underestimated enemy speed and my torps passed behind the cruisers to blow apart an innocent enemy destroyer on the far side.

The enemy cruisers now split, and I retraced my path to reattack two of them with my remaining torpedoes, scoring I think 3 hits, but having one of my 4 destroyers sunk by an enemy fish in the disorganised melee. Finding one of my destroyers hard-hit at last by gunfire and close to one of the cruisers, I did a "Glowworm" and rammed it shouting "Banzai", leaving both participants in a sinking condition. My remaining pair of destroyers now remembered they had guns and plastered the other cruiser until it went away.

We then picked a fight with a pair of British destroyers in which we benefited greatly by having 5" guns, which, being an American calibre, were allowed twice the effect of the British 4.7" guns of the same shell weight! As these pulled away, I noticed torpedo tracks heading for the Yamato, and was about to order one of my boats to hurl herself into their path, when the admiral unaccountably turned away and hoisted the signal to withdraw. Rumour has it that he was heading for Curry's to buy a new range finder to replace that he had obtained from the "One £" shop.