

Tim Gow

Author of the classic Mega Blitz rules for operational WWII Games

In common (I suspect) with most of those who attended this session, I was familiar with the Fletcher Pratt (FP hereafter) game despite never having played it. I put this down to the reprint of most of the rules, which appeared in Don Featherstone's 'Naval Wargames' book. As we all know, most naval games have two main problems - they involve lots of bookkeeping and as a result are deadly dull. With FP, most of the scary paperwork is done before the game in preparing the ship record sheet, and John has created an Excel spreadsheet to take away some of the number crunching in its preparation. Additionally, John has streamlined some of the games processes, but FP's core feature of estimating ranges remains intact.

In the game at COW, I commanded a pair of British light cruisers and along with a small screen of destroyers I was assigned to scout ahead and to the left (or port?) of the fleet. Given the distances involved (we were using 1/1200 scale toy boats on the floor of the Practical Room) it was a challenge to tell destroyers from cruisers, even with the aid of the monocular I'd smuggled into the game. As a number of the British ships were being stood in for by whatever models John had available (including some of my dodgy scratchbuilds), nobody in our fleet seemed overly concerned when a vessel with all the less attractive qualities of the Yamato appeared at the head of the Japanese battle line ...until its shells started to land (not on me, fortunately - a pair of 18in shells will sink a light cruiser!). Soon Admiral Nick Mitchell ordered a retreat, and with my surviving vessel I limped along in his wake. My other cruiser had been torpedoed and then rammed by a Jap cruiser under the command of the wily and inscrutable Phil Barker.

It was a splendid experience to play the game at last and I look forward to its next outing. Now then, the Sheffield club meets in a ballroom...