



All Guns Blazing!

Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

No. 160 – August 2007

Editorial

Hi Everyone,

Something a bit shorter than last month's marathon effort, with an excellent report from Simon Stokes (are Simon's group the only people playing naval wargames just now?). Next month I hope to be posting a visit report covering the port defences of Auckland, along with notes of a rather nice coastal forces action that I managed to wargame whilst I was there. Also look out for something on the Jutland refight that is taking place on board HMS BELFAST on the weekend of the 11th. Places are still available for that one (see below)

Yours aye,

DM

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Jutland Refight

August 11/12th 2007



A refight of the battle of Jutland is planned for the weekend of August 11/12th. The battle will be fought out on board HMS BELFAST in the Pool of London. As with previous events on board sleeping facilities are available. If you would like to take part please contact Simon Stokes:

simonjohnstokes@aol.com

Note this is NOT an official Belfast event and thus doesn't appear in the ship's programme or on their website.

Yellow Sea Battle Report

By Simon Stokes

Introduction

For the Northants group games that were held in March and May, we decided to turn Jeff's living room into the Sea of Japan one month and the Yellow Sea the next, no he wasn't flooded out fortunately, Robert Kirk had kindly volunteered to run some Russo Japanese War scenarios. RJW isn't a common subject for us, so Robert started us off gently with the Battle of Ulsan. Chronologically this battle took place a few days after the second scenario that Robert had planned for us, but the two battles were not directly linked so were fought as stand alone games.

Ulsan

This was a cruiser action fought off Ulsan, Korea, in the Sea of Japan, 14th August 1904, 0500 hrs. The news that the Port Arthur Squadron had sailed (see battle of Yellow Sea below) reached Vladivostok in the afternoon of 11 August, but the Vladivostok cruisers were not ready for action. Owing to the delay in sailing there was little hope of being able to assist Admiral Vitgeft's squadron at the critical passage of the Tsushima Straits. It was calculated that if Vitgeft was successful, and the Port Arthur Squadron was able to break through, it would already be coming up the Sea of Japan. Admiral Ilesen therefore headed his squadron southward at 14 knots, in hourly expectation of sighting the Port Arthur Squadron. At dawn they approached Tsushima, and began to cruise all day on the parallel of Fusan. Before dark they sighted the Korean coast, and closed with Fusan. Ever since 0130 hrs, Admiral Kamimura had been heading back from his night patrol area on a course that took him directly to where the Russians were. No sooner had Admiral Ilesen put his helm over he sighted the four Japanese armoured cruisers. The lightening day revealed the two columns of warships, whose converging tracks gradually closed the range.

Order of battle was as follows:

Russian

Far Eastern Fleet (Rear Admiral Ilesen)

Armoured Cruisers *Rossia*, *Gromoboi*, *Rurik*
Protected Cruiser *Bogatyr*

Japanese

2nd Battle Division (Vice Admiral Kamimura)

Armoured Cruisers *Idzumo*, *Iwate*, *Adzuma*, *Tokiwa*
Protected Cruisers *Naniwa*, *Takachiho*

Jeff and I downed a vodka and steeled ourselves to steer our motley bunch of cruisers through the storm of shells that was set to come their way. Rob, Andy and Robert took a sip of saki and looked forward with relish at the fight that was to come.

The disparity of numbers forced Jeff and I to tag *Bogatyr* to the rear of our line so the Russians could match the Japanese battle line ship for ship. This meant that the modern Japanese protected cruisers under Rob Hutton's command, had freedom to manoeuvre as they wished.



The pirouette begins, Russians in the foreground Japanese in the distance.

An unfortunate design feature of the Russian armoured cruisers was that their entire armament was positioned in batteries down the sides of the ship and they possessed no centreline turrets either fore or aft. This meant that Jeff and I were very careful so as not to get our squadron end on to the Japanese cruisers. Jeff had the dice

during which the Russians had the best of the exchange of broadsides, *Idzumo* being particularly hard hit, so much so that Robert eventually hauled her out of line to save her from suffering any more punishment and the distinct possibility of foundering. The Russians were also spared the attentions of the unmarked Japanese protected cruisers which continually found themselves on the disengaged side of their armoured cruisers and unable to get a bead on the Russian cruiser squadron.



The Japanese battle line under heavy fire.

Jeff's magic dice rolling couldn't last forever and when it started to fail the Japanese qualitative and quantitative superiority began to assert itself. Added to this Rob managed to guide *Naniwa* and *Takachiho* out from the shadows of their own cruisers and concentrated their fire on *Bogatyr*, it being the one ship their small calibre guns had much chance of doing serious damage to. *Bogatyr* was the most modern ship in the Russian force, but it could not withstand the attentions of *Tokiwa* as well as *Naniwa* and *Takachiho*. It soon began to lag further behind the rest of the Russian squadron as its speed fell away, and it wasn't long before she was a floating wreck unable to defend herself. Jeff took the hard nosed decision to leave her to her fate as the rest of the squadron peeled off from their pirouetting and headed at full speed for Vladivostok. The Japanese were still pirouetting in the opposite direction and continued to haul themselves around in as tight a turning circle as they could manage so they could try to chase the now silent Russian cruisers down. They were too late to stop them from reaching the table edge however which was when we drew stumps on the game.



End Game – Idzumo drops out of line while the battered Russian armoured cruisers disappear over the horizon leaving Bogatyr to her fate.

The Yellow Sea

South of Encounter Rock, 10 August 1904, 1230 hrs. Throughout late July and early August, as Japanese troops had closed in on Port Arthur, the correspondence between Viceroy Alexieff (commander of Port Arthur) and Admiral Vitgeft (Makaroff's replacement) had become more and more acrimonious. Alexieff favoured a sortie so that the Port Arthur ships could link up with the Vladivostok Squadron and create a force powerful enough to challenge the Japanese. Vitgeft felt that just staying at anchor and contributing some of his armament to the land battle was the safest course. With the Japanese Army tightening its grip on Port Arthur Admiral Togo expected an attempted breakout by the Russian squadron and positioned his divisions accordingly. The long awaited sortie took place on 10 August 1904, when the tide permitted the exodus to commence at dawn. Encountering Vitgeft's squadron in the early afternoon, Togo's first moves were designed to put himself between

it and Port Arthur, so as to prevent its return and force a major fleet action. However when it had become clear that the Russians had no intention of going back but were making for Vladivostok, Togo was so far behind the Russian fleet that he had to waste hours in detouring around Vitgeft's weaker vessels so as to catch up with the battleships at the head of the Russian line. It was 1743 hrs when he opened fire on the leading Russian ships.

Order of battle was as follows:

Russian

Far Eastern Fleet

1st Battle Division (Admiral Vitgeft)

Battleships *Tsessarevitch, Retvisan, Pobieda*

2nd Battle Division

Battleships *Peresviet, Sevastopol, Poltava*

Scouting Division

Armoured Cruiser *Bayan*

Protected Cruiser *Askold, Pallada, Diana,*

Light Forces

Protected Cruiser *Novik*

Destroyers *Blestyashchi, Buini, Byedevoi, Bodri,*

Grozni, Buistri, Gromki, Bravi, Bezuprechni

Japanese

1st Battle Division (Admiral Togo)

Battleships *Mikasa, Fuji, Asahi, Shikishima*

3rd Division

Armoured Cruiser *Yakmo*

Protected Cruisers *Kasagi, Chitose, Takasago*

5th Division (Vice Admiral Kataoka)

Armoured Cruiser *Hashidate, Matsushima,*

Itsukushima

Battleship *Chinyen*

6th Division (Vice Admiral Uriu)

Protected Cruiser *Akashi, Suma, Idzumi*

2nd Destroyer Flotilla

Ikazuchi, Oboro, Inazuma, Akebono, Niji, Sazanami

3rd Destroyer Flotilla

Usugumo, Shinonome, Murakumo, Kagero, Shiranui,

Yugiri

4th Destroyer Flotilla

Ariake, Fubuki, Hayatori, Asagiri, Harusame,

Murasame

This time round we decided to swap things round a little and Rob was given the job of trying to get some revenge for Ulsan (even though strictly speaking Ulsan hadn't happened yet). He was joined by Dave Sharp and Mark Russell. Meanwhile Jeff took over from admiral Togo in the *Mikasa*, Andy Jose took command of the Japanese pursuing force and I decided to try my hand at driving a destroyer flotilla. We were joined by Nathan Girdler who commanded the 6th division and 4th destroyer flotilla. Robert Kirk umpired and nominally took control of the old and slow 5th Division which weren't initially on the table.

Starting positions for this game were rather different than for Ulsan with the Russians deployed in the middle of the table, the main Japanese force heading them off from the north and a pursuing force coming up from the south.

The Russians, already deployed in line ahead sheared away to starboard to open their firing arcs, which were partially obscured by their own cruiser division, while *Mikasa* led the Japanese line round to port in a reciprocal move. Both battle lines opened up a continuous fire upon each other while the Japanese light forces attempted a double envelopment of the Russian line from both ahead with cruisers and destroyers and astern with destroyers.



Battle lines engage.

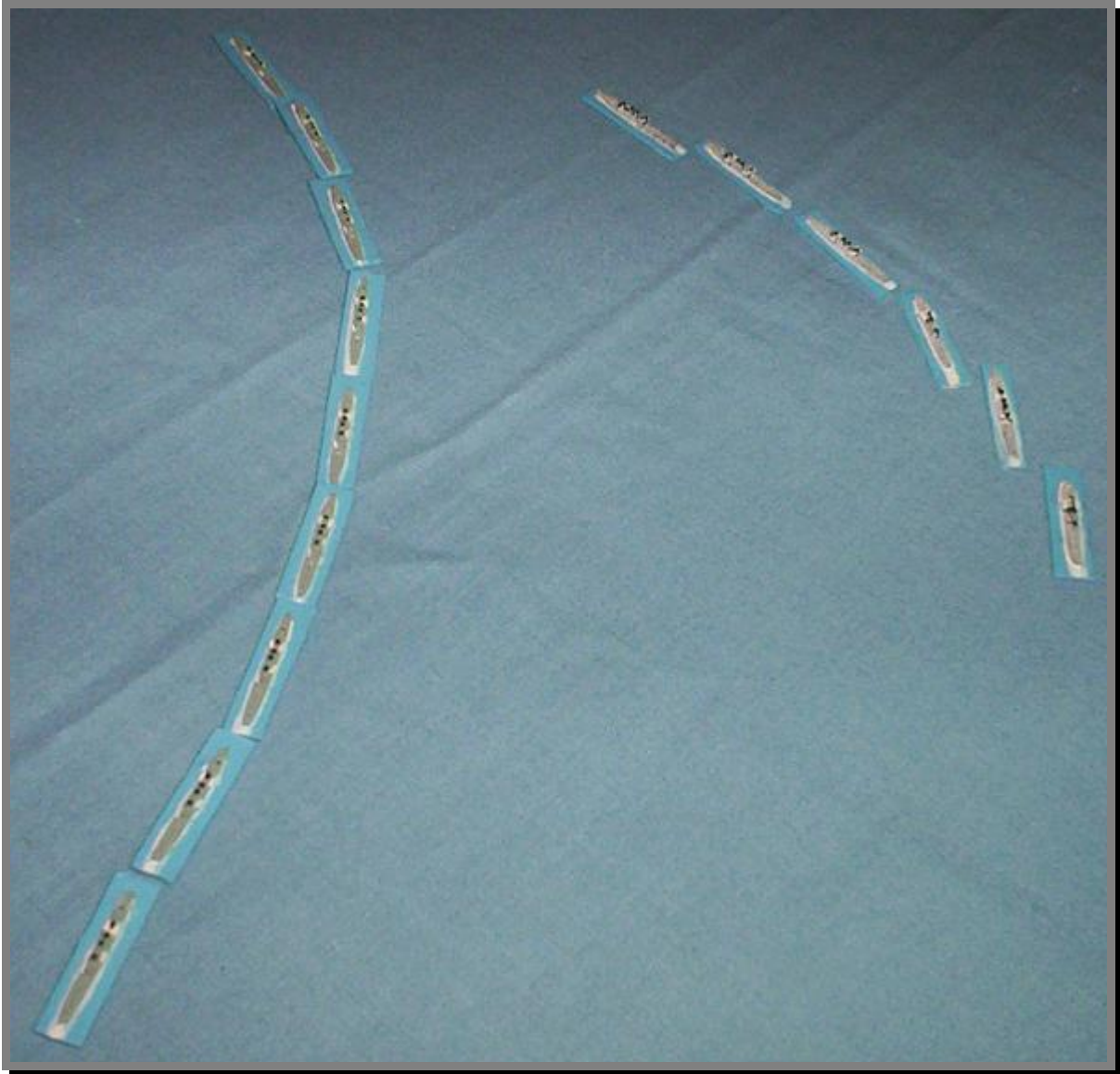
The Russian light forces under Dave Sharp's control, were concentrated at the rear of the Russian line, and moved to intercept my 2nd and 3rd destroyer flotilla's leaving Nathan and the 4th destroyer flotilla unmolested to try to close with the head of the Russian battle line. There was an early success for the Japanese as the protected cruiser *Novik*, leading the Russian light forces back round to the rear of the Russian Battle line, strayed too near the rear of the Japanese battle line which, lacking at that moment a more worthy target, let rip at her. *Novik* staggered under the hammer blows that hit her and she was quickly brought to a standstill with fires raging below deck the smoke from which obscured the rear of the Russian battle line for a while.



Novik damaged and on fire in no-man's land.

At this stage in the game Andy seemed happy to trail the Russians with the 3rd division, it not being strong enough to stop the Russian fleet on it's own.

Meanwhile back at the rear of the Russian line, my destroyers were having a torrid time battling with Dave's heavier and more numerous Russian destroyers. The two parallel lines of destroyers arced round in the direction of the Russian battle line exchanging both gunfire and torpedoes as they went, but the Japanese were coming off worst. One by one they slowed as a result of damage and soon they were dropping out completely leaving fewer and fewer of their number to engage the Russians. They pressed on though taking a few of the Russian destroyers out, until finally the unit failed a morale test and turned tail. An early bath for me this time round!



Private battle between the destroyer flotillas at the rear of the Russian line.

Back at the contest between the two battle lines, the war of attrition between the two lines continued. The two sides were evenly matched and at the ranges between the two fleets the hit rate was quite low on either side. The one major casualty was *Tsessarevitch* which was hit and set on fire, though she maintained her position at the head of the Russian line. This was not the case between the cruiser screens of the opposing sides the Japanese 6th division and Russian scouting division. Ranges were shorter and protection far less comprehensive in these ships, so the damage was far more extensive than in the battleships.

Andy got in on the action at this point and closed the starboard side of the Russian battle line with the 3rd division. The secondary batteries on the as yet unengaged starboard side of the Russian battle line were up to the task of keeping them at bay and began to accumulate hits on the closing Japanese cruisers, *Kasagi* in particular being hard hit.

In order to support his destroyer torpedo attack Nathan used the 6th division to close the head of the Russian line at the same time as attacking with the 5th destroyer flotilla. Mark countered by placing his scouting division directly in their line of advance. The tracks of the squadrons converged with batteries firing at near point blank range. Many hits were scored on either side. *Askold* was most heavily damaged of the Russians but the much lighter units of the Japanese 6th division suffered catastrophic damage and in a very short space of time ceased to exist as a functioning unit. The Japanese torpedo attack on the head of the Russian battle line did however get through albeit with heavy losses on their approach. The torpedoes were launched close in and were only narrowly avoided by the Russian battleships. Meanwhile the Japanese battle line took up the business of avenging the damage done to the 6th division by the Russian cruisers.



Russian scouting force mixes it with the Japanese battle line after disposing of the 6th cruiser division.

The Japanese 5th division put in a late appearance but its position and lack of speed combined to ensure that they never really got into the action beyond a few long range pot shots.

We drew stumps at this point in the game. All was still to play for between the main battle fleets, but the Russians had managed to inflict far more damage to the Japanese light forces than it had taken in return, so we declared the game a tactical victory for the Russians. Could they have fought their way through to Vladivostok from here? – possibly.

Conclusions

Thanks to Robert Kirk who organised the games and provided the ships and scenarios. Yellow Sea in particular was quite a substantial game with many ships and many players on both sides that were fairly evenly matched. Due to previous experience with command initiative modifiers in FWR we decided not to play any in our game. This gave a very equally matched game, though probably does a disservice to the Japanese who had the upper hand with regard to both command ability and crew efficiency. Were we to play the game again I'd probably give just Togo's squadron a command bonus.

Thanks as ever to Jeff for the venue and vitals.

References

<http://www.russojapanesewar.com/index.html>

NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2007

NWS Northern Fleet – Falkirk East Central Scotland

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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.