



Running Naval Games

Tricks of the Trade

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Outline

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What is Tactical Naval Wargaming?

◆ Why even ask such a question?

- Provides a frame of reference in scope, time and space

◆ Tactical

- Derived from the Greek word *taktika* - matters pertaining to arrangement, or the handling of forces in battle
- Focus: Small unit deployments, performance of platforms and the systems on those platforms
- Command level: Ship CO through Battle-group Commander
- Gaming goal: Exploring physical processes and their outcomes

◆ Naval

- Field of battle are the world's oceans and seas
- Maneuver-based warfare
- Objectives can be on the sea or land
- Combat units are ships, submarines or aircraft



What is Tactical Naval Wargaming?

◆ Wargaming

- Tool for gaining insights into the dynamics of warfare
- Not operations analysis, although operations analysis is useful in helping to define the “rules” of a wargame
 - Operations analysis quantifies physical parameters and processes
 - Wargaming deals with human decision making
- Involves individuals in complex and dynamic interactions
- Exciting way to teach history - brings boring facts to life
- Useful for instruction in military science
 - Combat unit strengths and weaknesses
- Teaches decision making skills by forcing the player to make decisions under stressful, but not life threatening circumstances

“the most common reason for playing the games is to experience history”

James Dunnigan



Functions of a Gamemaster

- ◆ Aliases: Referee, Umpire, Controller
- ◆ A gamemaster regulates the flow of the game by translating the players' decisions into terms that can be used by the procedures and models built into a wargame
- ◆ Monitoring player actions
 - Translate player actions into game terms
 - Enforce the rules of the game
 - Prevent physically unrealistic actions or sequences of events
- ◆ Assess interactions between forces
 - Through the use of models, data and rules
 - Exercise judgement when required
- ◆ Inform players about action outcomes
 - Employ realistic limitations
 - Introduces “fog of war”



Goals of a Good Gamemaster

- ◆ Players improve decision making skills
 - Correctly assessing enemy strengths and weaknesses
 - Evaluating and selecting the optimum course of action
- ◆ Players learn something new
 - About themselves
 - About a specific aspect of warfare
 - About a historical fact (operational, biographical or technical)
- ◆ Players have a good time
 - Make new friends
 - They walk away feeling fulfilled or satisfied - *Good war stories*
 - It's a game after all, players should have fun playing it

A successful wargame must be entertaining as well as educational!



The “Four Knows”

- ◆ To be an effective Naval Gamemaster, you have to:
 - Know the rules of the game
 - Game mechanics
 - Combat models and data
 - Know the capabilities of the platforms and systems
 - Basic performance data
 - Basic understanding of the “physics”
 - Know the scenario you are running
 - Basic understanding of the historical context
 - Object of research for hypothetical engagements
 - Know yourself
 - Personality type
 - Strengths and weaknesses

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. When you are ignorant of the enemy, but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant of both your enemy and yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.” Sun Tzu, The Art of War (500 B.C.)



The “Four Knows”

◆ Know the rules of the game

- Need a thorough understanding of game mechanics
 - Establishes the flow or battle rhythm of the game
- Don’t be a rules lawyer, game designers do make mistakes
- Be prepared to reward or pardon exceptional behavior or actions
 - A brilliant maneuver, even if unsuccessful, deserves praise and recognition - *positive learning through positive encouragement*
 - Allow the truly clueless a chance to learn from their mistakes, however, if they keep making the same mistake, terminate them with extreme prejudice - *some players only learn to swim after they sink first!*
- Never argue with a player
 - Ruins the game for everyone
 - If you make a mistake, admit it, correct it as best you can and move on
 - Firmly and respectfully make your call and offer to discuss it over a pint later - Remember, you are in charge



The “Four Knows”

- ◆ Know the capabilities of the platforms and systems
 - Naval gamemasters have to possess at least a basic knowledge of the platforms and systems in their game
 - Tactical naval wargames are heavily influenced by technical characteristics and performance data
 - Understanding the basic physics of how systems function is crucial to the educational goals of wargaming
 - A gamemaster can not know everything, so be open to someone who has specialized knowledge on a particular topic

There is no rule that says a Gamemaster can't learn a thing or two from his own game!



The “Four Knows”

- ◆ Know the scenario you are running
 - A gamemaster needs to have a basic understanding of the historical context of the scenario
 - How did the forces come together
 - How did the battle develop
 - Any obvious indicators as to why a particular side won
 - Historical miniature games have a frightening way of reenacting history if initial conditions and battle orders are accurately reproduced
 - Hypothetical scenarios are by definition exploratory
 - They are the experiments of Dr. B. A. Gamemaster
 - Allows the player’s to explore reasonable “What If” variations of an historical engagement to see if they would have made a difference
 - They can be silly, ludicrous engagements just for the fun of it
 - Gunboat Diplomacy series - one of our most popular games
 - *Note: Try not to refer to the players as lab rats - they don’t like it*



The “Four Knows”

◆ Know yourself

- A gamemaster must be aware of their own personality because it will affect the game being played
- Know your strengths, weaknesses and above all, your biases
 - We all have biases, most people just haven’t figured that out

◆ Gamemaster conduct

- Be assertive: You’re in charge, you regulate the flow of the game
- Be polite: Every player deserves respect
- Be helpful: Not everyone is an expert naval wargamer, new players will require some help to learn to play the game well
- Be patient: You’ll have to deal with rule lawyers as well as neophytes
- Be neutral: You must be impartial, allow the game to develop naturally; don’t try to bring about a preconceived result

Remember, you are the Headmaster of a unique learning experience.

How you conduct yourself will determine how successful you are!



Preparing a Game

- ◆ Preparations is 75% of the effort in running a successful wargame, of any sort - *a poorly prepared game will run poorly*
- ◆ When developing the scenario - *use a checklist!*
 - Keep the type of scenario (historical or hypothetical) in mind at all times
 - Provide forces that are balanced for the mission and the victory conditions, not necessarily balanced forces (i.e. of near equal capabilities)
 - Devise reasonable and attainable victory conditions
 - It's not much fun playing a *Kobyashi Maru* scenario
 - Asymmetrical victory conditions can be particularly rewarding
- ◆ Make sure all the paperwork is ready - *use a checklist!*
 - Ship forms, log sheets, game aids
 - Put together player packages
 - Electronically store or make copies of ship/aircraft forms
- ◆ Bring all necessary miniatures and player aids - *use a checklist!*
 - Protractors, measuring tape, golf tees, pipe cleaners, smoke, dice, etc
 - Don't forget the "Timmies"!



Executing a Game

- ◆ Arrive 15 to 30 minutes early, if at all possible, to set up the playing surface
 - Lay out Seascapes and any land masses, regardless of how small
 - Mark which direction is North and where the wind is coming from
- ◆ Begin at the appointed hour (i.e. start on time)
- ◆ Hand out materials, brief the players on the scenario and establish game procedures
- ◆ Allow player's adequate time to put together their plan of battle - 30 minutes is usually sufficient
- ◆ Cry Havoc! And let slip the dogs of war!
- ◆ Keep the game moving at a reasonable pace
- ◆ If at all possible, don't run a game alone
 - An assistant is invaluable, they can deal with rule questions while you keep things moving along
- ◆ Keep the goals of a good gamemaster in mind



Useful Tools

- ◆ Protractors with string and tape at 20°, 60°, 120° & 160° marks to determine target aspect
- ◆ Fire allocation markers for a ship's primary and secondary batteries
- ◆ Bent pieces of white pipe cleaner - evasive steering markers
- ◆ Fire & Smoke markers
 - Slightly glued cotton balls painted with orange & yellow flames and black paint
 - Quilting batting cut, stapled and painted black, gray and white
- ◆ Wooden golf tees
 - Blue: Underwater hits
 - White: Misses
 - Yellow: Small to medium caliber gun hits
 - Red: Large caliber gun hits
- ◆ Roughly handled miniatures that are cut up and used to mark sinking ships
 - Lifeboats and oil slicks are optional - but a nice touch
 - You now know what a "Timmie" is
- ◆ Distance/speed charts with firing arcs for each player
- ◆ Expanded critical hit tables
- ◆ Regular 12 inch rulers for ship movement
- ◆ Counters with generic ship sizes for initial placement (Fog of War)



Hot Wash Up

- ◆ Always go over the battle when you are done
- ◆ Praise the brilliant maneuvers and point out why they were so good, this helps teach the less experienced players
- ◆ Point out the bone headed maneuvers, in a polite manner of course, and explain why they failed (see point #2 above)
- ◆ If time allows, review the game in seminar fashion and show the salient points that you or the players observed
- ◆ Seek feedback from the players - identify errors or weak points in the scenario, fix scenario - *publish scenario!*
- ◆ Clean up thoroughly after every game



Conclusion

- ◆ Tactical naval wargaming, done properly, can be a very rewarding experience for players and gamemaster alike
 - Improve decision making abilities
 - Learn something about naval history or naval warfare
 - Have fun
- ◆ Tactical naval wargaming, done properly, can be a very rewarding experience for a gamemaster
 - Enjoy watching someone have fun
 - Learn something about naval history or naval warfare
- ◆ Knowing yourself, the scenario and the game system are crucial
- ◆ Preparing for a game is paramount to its success - *the old P⁶*
 - No battle plan survives first contact with the players - from either side

Wargaming Wisdom: When the Gamemaster smiles...it's already too late!