

Stations Manned and Ready II

A work in progress from A&A Game Engineering

June 2011

Introduction

We released the original Stations Manned and Ready in three parts over a period of two years, starting with the First World War then following this up with the Second World War split into Surface and Carrier/Air actions. As is always the case while working on the later parts we found that there were some sections that could be improved and applied one or two tweaks, which were retrofitted into Part I via downloads on our website. Over the years we have also found it necessary to make some corrections to errors in the ship data, and correct some incorrect points values. Of course, we also suffered from “era slip” so data was created for the pre dreadnought era.

In the end we expanded the ship data so that there are around 1300 sets provided to be downloaded from our website, and also provided three sets of scenarios covering Jutland and the Second World War in European waters and the Pacific. These scenarios can be found at www.wargamevault.com.

Since we have gone over to a paperless operation, with all our products commercially available to download from Wargame Vault, the page constraints that we originally had to consider when printing have fallen away. This has given us the freedom to consolidate the rules, ironing out some inconsistencies between the WW1 and WW2 versions, and expanding the rule mechanisms. In the following article you will find many of the changes we are implementing with this project. It is based on our work plan (now in its 23rd iteration), which will soon be used to put finger to keyboard and get the new product ready for release.

Fundamental Ethos

The game should be easy to play rather than a detailed simulation.

Vessel Types

The rules have been expanded further to allow the use of smaller vessels such as MTBs, and also early torpedo boats, these vessels falling under the original lower tonnage bracket of 250 tons.

Command and Crew generation

We have decided to introduce an additional method of generating command and crew values, which takes nationality and period into consideration. Using this system also provides a fixed cost modifier for ships or cost for commanders, depending on which table you are using.

Crew Tests

The rules require crew tests to be taken for a number of reasons during the game. In the past there were various modifiers for specific tests. These are on the whole being removed, and there will be a standard set of modifiers applied in all crew tests, making the system more coherent.

Game set up

The system of strategic initiative has been changed considerably. Your assets can provide up to 5 different values for reconnaissance, each of which is compared with your opponent's. The relative values of each may provide one or 2 bonus points, which are added to your total fleet command values, and the results of a dice roll. The winner has the initiative and the loser must deploy his entire force first. In the case of a draw then fleets are deployed alternately.

Bad Weather

We have modified the effects of bad weather, so that it has an effect on ships' speed. They also provide a negative effect on gunnery, but do not block lines of sight any more.

Tactical Initiative

We have moved away from the system used at present and initiative is determined by rolling a d10 and adding all the on table command values for your fleet. The winner chooses who moves first, movement alternating between the forces.

the winner shoots first, with one formation, then again shooting alternates. If aircraft are present, ships move, aircraft move, ships shoot, aircraft shoot.

Movement

You can now move slowly (you have to in order to carry out damage control) which is moving at the minimum speed (= original MVR). You are as a result more vulnerable to being hit. You can make a tighter turn if you have previously moved slowly, and you can come to a halt if necessary if you moved slowly last turn.

You can also now go evasive with most ships as long as they are relatively fast and don't have too large a turning circle. You will be more difficult to hit, but it will also be more difficult to hit your target.

Damage Control

Damage control has now become part of the movement segment of a turn. You have to have moved slowly to carry this out. Unlike the original rules, this does not have any effect on your shooting.

Smoke

Making smoke is a combat action, available to certain vessels, and requires a crew test to succeed. Smoke blocks lines of sight.

Lines of sight and arcs of fire

All lines of sight and ranges are measured between the nearest front corners of the ships' bases. Arcs of fire have been slightly altered and new arcs introduced. Some of the arcs abbreviations have been altered for consistency. The angles for determining of a target is being raked are also tested on the FRONT corner of the target nearest to the shooter.

Gunnery Procedure

In order that we stick to the formula that the game is intended to present a broad view of a naval action, the intention is that any weapon battery on a ship must maximise its shots at a specific target. There are situations where "spare" guns may be available, but in all cases these are subject to a penalty, because the main directors will be aiming at a primary target.

Gunnery Modifier and Fire Control

We have introduced a Gunnery modifier, which allows a relative adjustment according to the technology available when the ship was built. This runs from -2 to +1. This represents not only the ranging mechanisms but also the method of transmitting to the guns, and it is subject to damage from Critical Hits.

Ships where the fire control system is out of action must now use a different to hit number.

Torpedo Combat

We have completely revised the torpedo system. There are now two attacks, Spread and Salvo. The former allows attacks against multiple targets, while in the latter you attack a specified target, and if you miss you may be able to hit other vessels. On both cases the attack is controlled by a beaten zone, for which we have determined new arcs.

It should be noted that we have made torpedo combat appear potentially a lot more dangerous if you are on the receiving end, with the result that players should take the appropriate action when threatened,

Automatic and Light Weapons

The concepts of Quick Firers and Short Range AA guns have been completely overhauled and replaced with factors (= attack dice) for Automatic Weapons and Light Weapons. These have different ranges and while both can be used against aircraft, surface vessels that may be attacked are restricted appropriately.

Basic Combat Mechanism

The underlying combat system is based on a ship firing the maximum number of guns at its target, the more guns firing gives a better chance of hitting, rather than greater damage. The amount of damage caused (the IP in the rules) remains unchanged (the variable IP roll has been abandoned – see the point on Critical Hits). Originally the to hit modifier ran from -2 to +2, this has now been revised so that it runs from -1 upwards. Normally the best modifier a ship will have is still +2 (because of the number of guns available). The same to hit modifier is used for numbers of aircraft attacking, and large numbers of aircraft can gain a to hit modifier of +3. It must be mentioned that this modifier is structured so that it is less cost effective to put large numbers of aircraft into one attacking element because you get fewer attack dice

“per aircraft” hence fewer hits, though the element will take longer to eliminate due to the numbers of aircraft – it is up to the player to make that choice.

Other combat modifiers have been reviewed and we have introduced modifiers for having damaged steering and moving slow (which is required for certain game operations).

Critical Hits

These are what the players are after in a game. The original system provided for critical hits to occur as part of the variable damage roll, so you could get one or more such effects depending on dice rolls. One thing that emerged also from working backwards to the pre-dreadnought era was that you may have a large gun, but because of its dreadful rate of fire the basic damage was execrable. We have introduced a new method of determining whether the hit causes a critical hit, which is based on the Critical Value (CV) of the weapon concerned. This works on the principle of the bigger the bang the bigger the CV. Success is tested by rolling a D20 and scoring equal to or less than the CV. When successful you roll on a revised critical hit table, depending on the ship hit. In most cases you expend points of CV to knock out bits of the target, in a similar fashion to the original system, though there are now some further refinements to the effects, which add a bit of flavour. There are still opportunities for magazine explosions, though the system for this has been revised, explained separately.

Loss of Main weapons (Guns)

The loss of the main gun weapons remains a significant part of the Critical hit table. We are however refining the way the guns are lost, and that chance of hitting the main guns or other guns will better reflect the proportion of the different guns on the ship and how they are mounted. We have yet to finalise how the hit distribution will be managed. The options are to make it fairly generic (allowing for one or two significant exceptions where the proportion varies widely from the norm), to make it ship specific, or some balance of both.

Magazine Safety

In the previous rules we adopted a long standing view that some vessels were more vulnerable than others, mainly for anecdotal reasons (British Battlecruisers at Jutland being the obvious case). If you study the situation in more detail ships were lost for various reasons, in this case due to a desire to increase the rate of fire leading to slovenly procedures in the handling rooms. We therefore made a conscious decision to handle this effect differently, and in various ways. Firstly, we have considered the type of explosives being used, which range from Guncotton for the very early period, via Picric Acid based materiel in the early 20th C, up to more stable TNT by WW2. This has added a rather interesting variety between navies. If ships are carrying Picric Acid derivatives then the vessel is deemed to be a bit more vulnerable to magazine explosions (-1 penalty on the test) due to the instability of the ammunition. This is balanced by a cost reduction for the ship, and also the availability of some special optional rules: for instance if you are British using Lyddite shells there is a chance that you can opt to go for a considerably bigger “bang” when testing for critical hits, but this balanced by the fact that the shell may not actually penetrate any armour at all. If you are feeling very courageous you can use the Beatty rule, which increases the IP damage caused on the target, however if you suffer a main turret hit your magazine tests are made at an additional -1 penalty. Finally the US and German navies get a +1 bonus on their tests due to better ammunition storage systems from the early 1920s onwards.

Fire

In the original rules we decided that we would not have ongoing fire (or flood) damage because of the requirements for bookkeeping. On the other hand, as part of the revised Critical Hit system, we are now allowing for fires to be started, which will have a deleterious effect on the effectiveness of a crew, so much so that in the end they will be unable to fight fires and are likely to fail their morale tests. It will be essential that fires be brought under control as soon as possible.

Loss of Ships

We reviewed what the actual effect should be when a ship runs out of structure and flotation. In the end we have decided that under most circumstances a ship will stay afloat as a wreck, getting in the way, unless it is destroyed as a specific effect in the critical hit table. On the other hand, it is also permissible to try to sink a wreck (which may be necessary in some circumstances).

Night

The combat system for night time has been revised, providing modifiers for shooting guns and torpedoes, and the rules for the use of searchlights and starshell have been improved.

Morale

Victory and Defeat rests largely on failure of morale of the enemy. The order of morale tests has been revised so that the tests are done for ships, squadrons then fleets, so a failure can quickly cascade through the force.

Ship data

As part of the work, the ship data will; be updated and revised. This means a considerable refinement in the amount of data which will be presented for any given ship class, but also an expansion in the actual number of data sets that will be available. We are considering the best way of presenting the information.