

Shortly before dawn on the 13th of December 1939, the lookouts on the pocket-battleship "Admiral Graf Spee" saw first two and then four thin masts appear above the horizon off the starboard bow. In less than a quarter of an hour, Captain Langsdorff knew that he was faced with three cruisers of the Royal Navy — the 6-inch cruisers HMS "Ajax" and HMNZS "Achilles" and the 8-inch cruiser HMS "Exeter".

A number of courses were now open to Langsdorff at this fleeting instant in time. Firstly, he could turn and run, holding off the faster British cruisers with "Graf Spee's" six 11-inch main armament for as long as possible, hoping to inflict as much damage as would make pursuit impracticable — not a choice likely to appeal to the commander of the first Kriegsmarine capital ship to find action with the Royal Navy (at this time, Germany technically had no first-line battleships in commission). Alternatively, he could make smoke and retire behind the smoke screen, hoping to confuse the pursuing gunners and split the British squadron into penny packets, to be dealt with individually.

In fact, Langsdorff elected to advance and fight, influenced by, no doubt, the lighter armour of the British warships and hoping also to strike a crippling blow in passing through to the safety of the open sea. Against an uninspired opponent, this bold gamble might well have paid off handsomely. Unfortunately, in Commodore Harwood, Langsdorff was faced with a fighting seaman who had already decided how his squadron would tackle their heavier opponent — if and when they met. "Exeter" now acted independently of the other two ships, effectively splitting "Graf Spee's" target into two hard-hitting groups as "Ajax" and "Achilles" manoeuvred and fired in unison as planned.

In another quarter of an hour, "Graf Spee" had turned and run, intermittently making smoke to elude her all-too-persistent pursuers, back to the safety of the Rio Plata estuary to be ignominiously scuttled.

"Graf Spee" had hit "Exeter" badly enough to put her out of the immediate fight for survival but had singularly failed to deal with the two weaker 6-inch cruisers. In terms of the simulation "CA" the results were as follows:

"Graf Spee" — approximately 1 weapon hit  
 "Exeter" — 2 weapon hits, 1 power hit (ship control damage)  
 "Ajax" — 1 weapon hit  
 "Achilles" — no hits

The most serious factor for breaking off the action, in both British and German terms, was shortage of ammunition — a factor tacitly ignored in "CA" in true American fashion but significant to those fighting far from any Fleet Train.

A simulation of the River Plate action using the "CA" materials and rules is comparatively easy.

### Scenario

Off the River Plate, 13th December 1939  
 (using the complete map sheet — no land)

Hex	Ship/Type	Speed/Heading
4734	1 Leander CL-6 (Ajax)	3/ne
4933	1 Leander CL-6 (Achilles)	3/ne
4632	1 modified Canberra CA-4 (Exeter)	3/n
2723	1 modified Myoko CA-2 (Graf Spee)	5/se

**Game Length:** 20 Game turns.

### Special Rules

- A. The Canberra CA-4 counter has gun and torpedo strengths reduced to '9'.  
 B. The Myoko CA-2 counter has its torpedo strength reduced to '12'.

### Victory Points:

One Power or Weapon hit 5 points  
 Two Power or Weapon hits 10 points  
 Ship Sunk 15 points

### Victory Conditions:

British player totals first, then the German player's total is subtracted from the British total to achieve the overall score. Example:

British total = 5 points; German total = 15 points  
 Therefore final total = (5-15) points = -10 points

0 to +15 points = British decisive victory  
 0 to -10 points = British marginal victory  
 -10 to -20 points = draw  
 -20 to -35 points = German marginal victory  
 -35 to -45 = German decisive victory

Before anyone tells me, I know that there are only enough CL-6 counters for one Leander-class cruiser in the "CA" counter mix: either you must substitute or make another — indeed, why not make the four counters for the River Plate combatants as a separate set?

6	12	6	12	9	14	14	14
AJAX		ACHILLES		EXETER		GRAF SPEE	
4	12	4	12	6	9	7	12

A new scenario for SPI's game "CA" devised by Rob Gibson

The Battle of the

# River Plate

