

# FRIGATE

## SeaWar

### in the

## Age of Sail

REVIEWED BY PAUL SYMS

This is one of the few games which would qualify for a "general interest" title. It is a very popular simulation with a complexity rating of 6.1, and is well worth investing in even if you are not particularly interested in the period.

Frigate portrays the sea war in the age of sail in twenty scenarios from 1702-1825. These range from ship to ship actions to Trafalgar. The game equipment is up to SPI's usual high standard of presentation, with a generous selection of vessels in four mixes, a thorough (though tedious) rules folder, SiMove pad and a six-part geomorphic mapsheet which is very useful as games 'travel' in the direction of the wind. The scenarios are presented in a separate leaflet with full instructions and historical notes plus some interesting playtest notes with suggested tactics and a hint about the bias of the game.

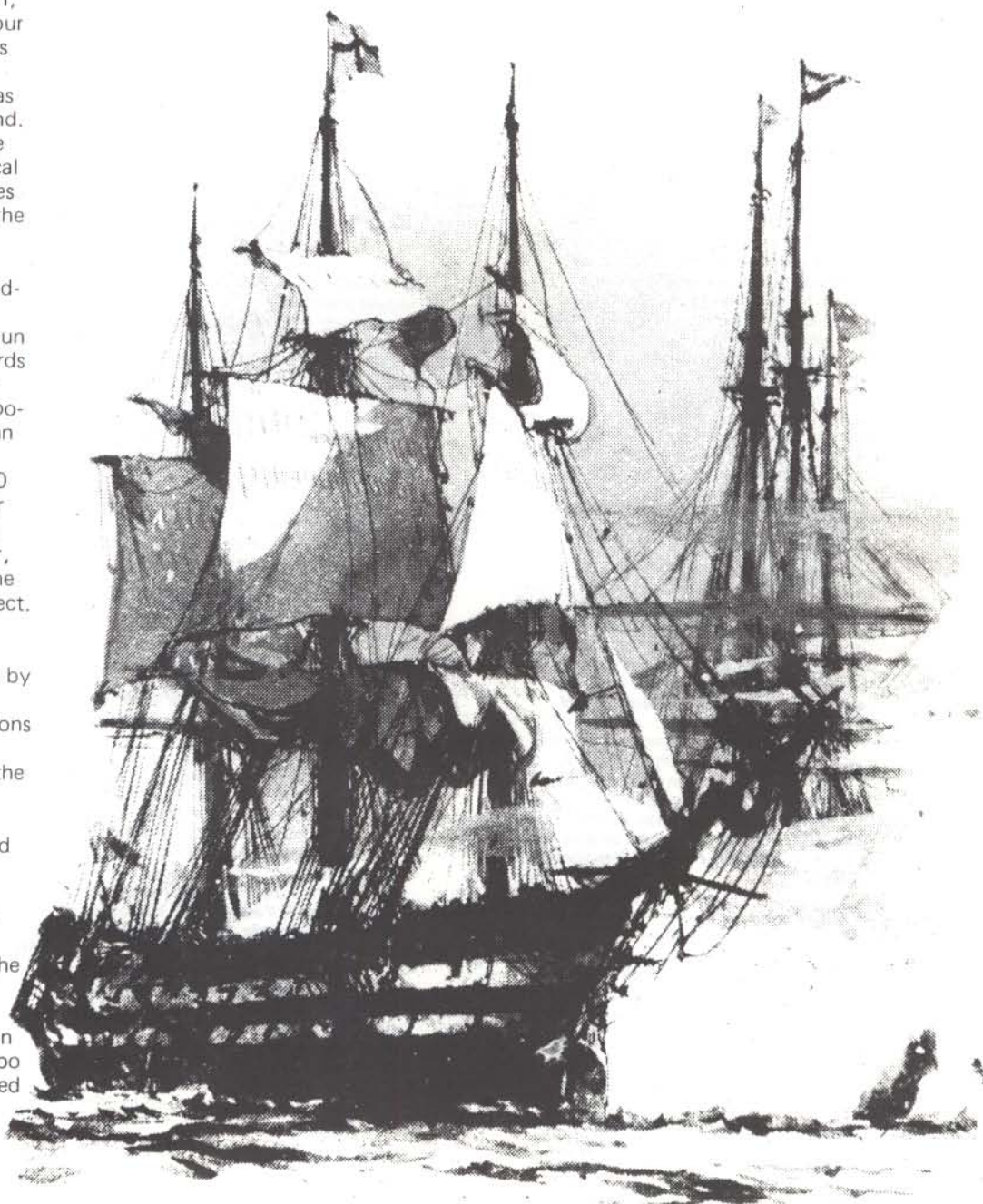
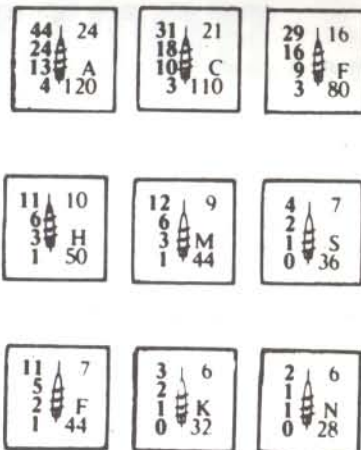
The ships themselves range from a formidable 120 gun first rate to a defenceless merchantman with vast numbers of 74 gun 3rd rates. There seems to be a bias towards the American fleets, although they only appear in substantial numbers in the hypothetical 'Cape Fear' action. The American 74 gun ships of the line are superior in nearly every way to the huge French 110 gun first rates, and the firepower of their 32 gun frigate is greater than that of the British 74 gun ships of the line. However, this does not unbalance 'Cape Fear' as the US player has five merchantmen to protect.

Rules are in a fully indexed leaflet, and can be modified to suit the type of game by using the comprehensive selection of optional rules. Some, such as the explosions and optional afoul combat rules should be used at all times as they add spice to the actions and provide the Franco-Spanish player with the chance of an even game. Other optionals add little to the game and clutter the system.

Combat is done on an odds system, crew efficiency being shown by using one of three CRTs. There is damage control at the end of each game-turn, but this is in my view too efficient, so I prefer to omit it in large actions. However, if this is done in smaller action, 'preservation' is reached too quickly, and if left in, any damage inflicted is patched up before any decisive result can be reached. Therefore I use my own watered down damage control table (optional No. 7.32).

Frigate uses SiMove, but this does not work as well as it does in 'Patrol!' or 'Tank!'. If the wind is fresh, vessels move so fast that one can travel in, through and out of the enemy field of fire without knowing it. This means that it is very difficult to bring down effective fire (i.e. from 0-400 yards) and almost impossible to rake. Another disadvantage with SiMove is when attempting to run afoul (i.e. grappling and boarding). Often the playtest notes advise one player to

make use of his only advantage — afoul combat — as he cannot win any other way. The player must therefore be able to predict what hex the enemy will be in at what time, and then be able to obtain the right die roll. The 'Battle of the Nile' is provided as a solitaire scenario, and shows accurately the massacre when one fleet catches another at anchor. The first time I played this I obtained nearly every victory point available by capturing most of the ships, and I was





surprised to find that Nelson only obtained half my total. This led me to conclude either that I was a better admiral than Nelson or that there was something wrong with the rules. Having considered the latter more probable, I decided to revise the victory points gained for captures (optional rule 11.4) so that if a ship is captured complete it is very valuable, but if it has not much left then it is not worth the effort capturing it.

Wind is a critical factor in 'Frigate' as an unfavourable wind-change can reverse the game. It is vital to have the wind gauge as this enables you to attack the rear of the enemy formation, and with luck push the fleet over preservation before the van can rejoin the action. Of the two wind tables provided, no 6.35 is best ignored, but the optional table is meteorologically more accurate, still enabling the losing player to blame defeat on the weather rather than foul luck.

Strategy and Tactics No. 44 (Tank!), available as a back issue, is an excellent companion to 'Frigate' as the second article 'Sea War in the Age of Sail' gives extra background material on which gamers can base more optional rules. Once the scenarios have been exhausted, this magazine, plus extra information from a book such as '25 centuries of Sea Warfare' by Jaques Mordal, can give all that is required to construct a new scenario, though it is necessary to playtest thoroughly to fix the finer points.

One could also invent further optional rules to expand the subject matter to include cutting-out missions, bomb-ketches, fireships and shore batteries for actions such as Navarino Bay.

Below are some more suggested optional rules.

(7.17) Ships of the first line may not fire at frigates, sloops or corvettes unless they fire first. This does not apply to merchant ships.

(7.18) When any ship fires its first broadside, add one to the die roll. If '6' obtained, it remains as '6'.

(7.19) When firing at an afool vessel from 2 or more hexes range, if a throw of '1' or '2' is rolled, the damage is inflicted on the other ships masts.

(7.31) Merchantmen are not subject to explosions but do suffer from damage due to other ships exploding in their area.

(7.32) Modifications to existing damage control table. From each column subtract 1/6th chance of repairing hit.

(7.51) The American 44 gun frigates suffer from rule 7.5 as they carried 54 guns in two decks.

This is because they were only designated 44 gunners although carrying 54 guns. This is pointed out by S&T No. 44 and also the author, Bjorn Landstrom. In fact, the American 44 gun frigates had their lower ports just seven feet above the waterline, as compared with eight feet for a British 100 gunner. Both ships would have gundecks awash fairly quickly.

(11.4) Ignore the last part of rule 11.0. Instead, give three victory points for each undamaged portion of the ship captured.

Dear Sir,  
Congratulations on another excellent issue. I was particularly pleased to see the detailed treatment given to "Highway to the Reich" and I hope that you will from time to time include more of this type of longer article, which provides a better-balanced magazine as well as a (to me at least) more satisfying article.

D.I.A. Mack (The Principle of the Thing) objects to players being allowed to examine each other's stacks of units, yet his "suck it and see" approach is surely just as unrealistic, for a commander is rarely in complete ignorance as to what units are facing him. In a game on the divisional or even regimental scale, therefore, some form of limited intelligence (as in "Vera Cruz" perhaps) is desirable. In tactical games Mr Mack's attitude is even less defensible, for the scale of most tactical games is such that all units not in covering terrain are visible over most of the map (in reality stacked units are probably mixed up together, not neatly segregated).

This small point apart I thought this an excellent article.  
A. McGea

Dear Sir,  
The quality of the Phoenix continues to improve, indeed I thought issue no.6 rather better than the copy of S&T it accompanied. This is a reflection on the recent nose-dive in the standard of the articles and games in S&T over the last few issues. I hope that the Phoenix will develop to become, among other things, a recognisable stronghold of UK wargamers' opinion with which SPI will have to reckon. Perhaps through your magazine caring wargamers in this country can pressure SPI into taking a bit more trouble with their S&T games, and we would be saved from repeat performances of the recent Road to Richmond and October War debacles.  
Royston Paynter

Dear Sir,  
I would be interested to know if anybody has:  
(1) Played a game of Overlord (Conflict Games, a sort of "Pirate Quad") in which the Germans have won, or even one which lasted into August,  
(2) Played a game of October War which was not decided beyond a shadow of a doubt before the scenario is half over,  
(3) Exceeded my record, in the "Protecting the populus from the local fauna" scenario from StarSoldier (which, for those who haven't got the game, involves a thing known as a "Dinkblog", a creature which can teleport itself anywhere on the board, against which I had three StarSoldiers) which I lost in 1½ turns, around 10 minutes real time, about a minute scale time, and without getting into a situation suitable to hit my opponent!

With reference to (1) I have played five games of Overlord, which by the way is an excellent game, despite rules written for someone with a mental age of two and despite an extremely long set-up time, during which the game has never progressed further than the middle of July before the Allies won, (exited nine divisions). The funny thing is, they have got the game at my school (Collyer's) wargames club, and they have never managed a German win either!

As to (2), I have played four games of October War (although it only came recently). The first was the Israeli Counter-attack scenario (16.5) in which the Israelis had no units left by turn five. My second game, Valley of Tears (16.2) was another "total annihilation" of the Israelis, this time by turn seven, mainly because some fool (I wonder who?) "waited until he could see the whites of their eyes", by which time they had passed the killing ground. Game three, Gamala (16.1) ended by turn eight because yours truly had only nineteen vehicles left. The last game to date was scenario 1 of the Syrian Front Campaign which was over by turn 10, when the Israelis had no units left on the board and only 55% casualties - 3(M3), 4(CNT), 6(M51), 3(INF); OMA:6 (5HCAS):(8H).

N.B. This is after re-grouping.  
Casualties: 1(M3 + INF)D-3; 1(M51) D-1.  
A.J.Holyer

# MAIL CALL



The opinions and comments made in *Reader's Letters* are not necessarily those of the editor or publisher. The editor requests that letters submitted for publication in this column should be short and to the point to avoid unnecessary abridgement. Letters sent to the editor that are *not* intended for publication must be clearly marked as such.

## To the noble editor of Phoenix

My esteemed sir:  
Whilst pausing in a wayside inn I perchanced to come upon a number of your infamous journal wherein I found enscribed an account of an expedition to 'Castle Fil'.

Certain points of this work I feel necessitate comment.

To commence, May I say that, as a lawful cleric, I abhor the attitude of the anonymous hobbit in the party. For a creature who is himself basically lawful I find his suggestion of raiding a cemetery disgusting. Furthermore, his subsequent actions are totally depraved - how could the unpleasant little creature bear to stand around and watch his kin being slaughtered? Perhaps it was for this sin that he is reduced to a mere Spirit forced to give accounts of his crimes to publications such as your own. I shall endeavour to pray for his soul.

I send my condolences to the lawful members of the party. However, I find their association with a party containing chaotic horrors horrifying. I personally would not consider joining such a party even though in the past I have made several expeditions with persons of neutral alignment. Also do they not realise that desecration of wayside shrines constitutes one of the 287 deadly sins? I feel that they got their just rewards!

The Elvish member of the party appears to be incredibly powerful, having abilities far beyond those normally attributed to his kind. My good friend Wislon, himself a 3rd level mage, assures me that it is impossible to sleep an 8th level creature such as the chief orc. In fact, pursuing the line of investigation, our host was good enough to show me a volume entitled Greyhawk where-in it is stated that monsters of 5th level and above are immune to this spell. One wonders how he accomplished this feat.

Further reading of the script leads one to the interesting line "we landed on level 2. We knew this because the magic-users had each gained a spell". Having never noted this phenomenon amongst any of the Mages I had encountered, I made so bold as to ask Wislon about it. He replied that, to the best of his knowledge, the