

UP SCOPE!

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SPI GAME BY TONY JONES

(I have selected two articles on 'up Scope' for this issue - too many you say? Not so. Both reflect valid points of view yet in ways contradict each other - this is what the hobby is all about.

Tony has had a long association with boardgaming with a special interest in sea games as evidenced by his design for a game called 'Wolf Pack' which briefly saw the light of day in Albion 50. He has obviously played this game through a number of times and has some cogent points to make. Editor)



Having had a chance to study and play this game a great deal lately, I must say that in some respects it worries me.

Up Scope is a very comprehensive game on submarine warfare from the 1914-18 War through to the 1980's; I would liken it to Air War in complexity and, without doubt, very little about submarine warfare is missing, both from the Escort Commanders point of view and from that of the submarine player. A lot of the points and details will come out further in this article together with a trial game played recently. My main initial reservations fall under two main headings: one is playability for a limited market, which naval games attract, and the other is the scope (no pun intended) of the game.

Firstly, I am a naval war buff but am in a sphere of wargaming which has only a limited market and my feeling is that this game is only going to appeal to the devotee of naval games. This is a pity due to the enormous time and research which has gone into trying to convey what is a very difficult gaming situation into a game suitable for a mass market. Many people who try the odd naval game may well turn to Battleline's 'Submarine', soon to be republished by Avalon Hill, as certainly from the playability aspect this game is much easier to play and (dare I say it) more fun than Up Scope. Up Scope is a much more accurate portrayal of submarine warfare but, due to its complexity, lacks as a game due to being much longer to play.

Submarine warfare is made up of long periods of boredom with action limited to a very short time span. Though we are talking about a game period of 90 seconds per turn, a lot of the game has limited action in it and I feel that there is too much rule searching to keep a reasonable flow going so as to keep up one's interest. In my mind, this is due to trying to do too much in one game. I would have preferred to see SPI concentrate on the period up to 1945 and, if they so wished, do a separate game on the contemporary era. Trying to cram the whole development of submarine warfare, which has undergone as many changes as the development of the aircraft scene, into one rules book, gives us a very disjointed and hard to follow set of instructions. It seems the designer and the developer may also have had some words over this and I must side with the fact that had the game left out the contemporary era, a more understandable and easier to refer to set of rules could have been produced.

Anyway, this all may seem to an extent unduly harsh criticism on what is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and thorough submarine game produced, but bearing in mind that all games are made for sale and profit, to as wide a market as possible, this may not be as big a seller as it could have been - I hope I am wrong.

Now on to the game itself.

- One receives in the game:
- two 34" x 22" sea blue maps plus approximately 400 counters depicting birds eye view silhouettes of various ships e.g. submarines, various freighters, tankers, escort vessels, cruisers and capital ships - not historically accurate though! Most of the others depict the various markers used in the game torpedoes, aircraft, oil slick, depth charges, contact markers and, amongst the many command instruction markers, a nice little lifeboat with three tadpole-like characters paddling for all they are worth - a nice touch.
 - a rules book, 32 pages long, reasonably free from error but, as stated earlier, somewhat muddled due to the different eras depicted in the game.
 - there is also a very good book with all the charts for combat, etc. plus a very thorough list of the very many ship types for the British, German, Italian, American and Japanese participants in the war.
 - also full details of all the major torpedoes, sonar, radar and weapons used right up to the present day. For the buff, a wealth of information translated into easily understandable game values, so one can make up almost any submarine/escort encounter one wishes.
 - also in this booklet one gets some command track sheets, though I would have liked to have seen more included, say in pad form. After all, games are not cheap these days and the cost of the map graphics must have been small in comparison with land games of a similar sale price.

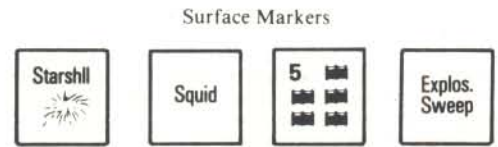


I can't speak for the accuracy of the data in the tables but it looks about right and a vast improvement on Battleline's tables of ship data which were very inaccurate.

Just a point on Italian World War II escorts. It is stated that they do not have sonar - this is not quite correct as, though the Italians did not use their own sonar as none was developed in time to have been any use, they did install from the Germans some of their sets, though only a few of the escorts were so fitted. I suggest in Mediterranean scenarios vs. British subs one allows the Italians to equip a percentage of the escorts with the German 1939 sonar as otherwise they will do no more than dollop depth charges all over the map not knowing where the submerged submarine is; quite a few British subs were destroyed by the Italian escort forces.

Though not in the set scenarios in the game, the Malta submarine campaign vs. Rommel's supply ships is a fine scenario for this game and the sample test game later is based on this sort of action.

Generally, the physical production is fair but the real value lies in the hard data provided. Without going into long boring details of all the rules in this game, suffice it to say that all the elements of submarine warfare are in it.



The sequence of play is as follows :-

A. Command Phase
This is where both players secretly determine the movement and search operations for the turn to be played. Various instructions such as speed, turns to be made, depth of submarine charges, etc. are made in this phase and all movement markers are put on the ship upside down, unless it is a submerged submarine where they are left recorded only on his command sheet. Once orders have been made they cannot be changed.

All combat decisions are also made in this phase. For the submarine commander - he records how many torpedoes to be fired, in what direction, when do they fire during the movement phase, what type of torpedo fired, etc. For the Escort player, he decides what depth charge patterns to fire, where and when and at what depth are they set to explode, are hedgehogs, squids etc. fired - all are recorded on the command track, plus markers put under the ship where required.

Then after this is done both players may move their ships, a submerged submarine moving secretly, in line with their recorded instructions.

Command Markers			
Hard Port	Maneuver	Maneuver	Hard Strbd
Port 60°	Maneuver	Maneuver	Strbd 60°
Port 30°	Maneuver	Maneuver	Strbd 30°
Port Search	Search	Search	Strbd Search
↑ 1	Speed	Speed	↑ 2

B. Combat Phase
Each player, starting with the Escort player, executes all combat which he has decided upon, followed by the submarine player executing all his anti surface attacks.

All attacks are in fact conducted at the same time and to be successful the ship or submarine target must be in the exact hex at the right time for the attack to be successful. This is all explained in the rules and though complex at first it soon becomes quite easy.

Electric 23	Electric Torpedo	Acoustic Homing Type	Homing 23
Hedgehog	Hedgehog ATW	Mousetrap ATW	Mouse trap

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C. Search Phase

In this phase all air, surface or submarine units can search using their various radar, sonar, hydrophone equipment to find the enemy.

Features such as rough water, previous depth charge attacks causing disturbed water, pillenwerfer (dummy subs) are all there to cause problems aplenty for both sides. It is not easy once a submarine is contacted to hold it with one escort, as it must proceed slowly to try and keep contact; to speed up risks loss of contact. Obviously when going in for a depth charge run one has to speed up and contact is usually lost a few hexes away from the possible submarine: one must then hope to put down the charges or hedgehogs accurately to cause damage.

After the search phase there is a terminal phase where markers are removed, reinforcements brought into play and victory conditions determined.

That, briefly, is the phase sequence and within this there is a lot to absorb. As stated earlier, this is a very thorough game on submarine warfare and little, if anything, is left out.

Summary

You may feel from all my comments that this game is not for you. Like Air War it will become very popular, I'm sure, with the naval war gamer but for the casual naval gamer it may seem a bit heavy and quite long in playing time until one is fully familiar with the rules - not an easy task. Try it first if you are not sure, it certainly will not fail to entertain the player who digests the content and I doubt if anyone will come up with a more comprehensive submarine game. I take my hat off to the designer/developer, it must have been a labour of love - but why, folks, did you throw the modern era in as well in the same rule book?

Up Scope will no doubt make its niche in the history of wargaming - for me anyway it will provide hours of fun.



has the wherewithal to contain this. Then a quick thrust by Airmobile units at a weak point cutting a small crack in the line enabling paratroops to drop behind the WP line, and the war is as good as over. It is quite possible for a fast-reacting NATO, willing to run risks, and under these circumstances, to virtually win the game by Turn 5 or 6.

But if the WP player manoeuvres from the outset to play the entire board, sacrificing some gains in his initial surge to ensure sufficient defensive strength where it will be needed, then the game will be very much a tough contest. A word of caution, though. To play the whole board does not mean to advance pell mell along the entire front all at once. WP advances must be made in sectors by stages. Where no active offensive is immediately contemplated, WP forces must deploy in the strongest possible defensive positions, taking full advantage of terrain.

Taking advantage of terrain sometimes also means denying the enemy good terrain, especially in regards to rivers. A bridgehead across a river is not a good defensive position, but it denies the enemy the safety of a river defense. A bridgehead upsets the enemy and draws his fire. It's a good diversionary tactic if you can afford it.

When the Soviet army swarms out of Czechoslovakia it is usually a mistake to drive head-on for Munich. Once WP troops have crossed the Danube east of Munich they can too easily be bottled up there.

Here the principle of the Strategy of the Indirect Approach has a textbook application. If the WP makes its river crossing at Nuremberg it will have gained a major strategic advantage. From a Nuremberg bridgehead WP forces can either swing south, thus bottling up the NATO forces in Munich; or they can strike west for Stuttgart and Mannheim, or northwest for Mannheim and Frankfurt. The devil of a situation like this is that whatever the

NATO player does will be wrong - if he reinforces Munich then the WP will strike at Stuttgart; if he reinforces Stuttgart the WP goes for Munich; and if he spreads his reinforcements evenly then he's weak everywhere and bestows on his enemy the crowning advantage of being able to make the choice that suits his overall plan best. Just as in real war, in wargames when an army can manoeuvre itself into a position from where it has a choice of alternative objectives, it is in a position that is hard to beat.

One of the best features of NATO is that both sides can simultaneously play the offensive. While NATO offensive power is limited to local sectors, the Airmobile units give this power interest and effectiveness. Of course, the NATO player must always maintain his paratroopers in reserve ready at an instant's notice to exploit Airmobile breakthroughs.

All in all, NATO properly played is a fascinating game - in almost every regard it's a classic.



GAME SUMMARY - MEDITERRANEAN 1942

British Forces:

U Class Submarines

Utmost, Unbroken

Convoy:

3 Supply Ships (one a Tanker)

5 Destroyer Escorts - Italian - two with sonar

The object of this scenario was for the British to sink the three ships of the convoy prior to them crossing the board.

The Italians win by getting one ship off only, as the object was to get vital supplies to Rommel in time for Alamein.

Turns 1 - 4

During the opening moves in a calm sea, 'Utmost' picks up the sound of the convoy on the hydrophones and on putting up her periscope she sights the convoy heading towards her on a straight course.

'Unbroken', a submarine with a crack crew, closes in on the port bow area and, though at a depth level three, gradually rises to attack depth of 60'. She prepares a full salvo of 4 bow tubes, to fire the Mk VIII contact torpedoes carried. Hopefully she can close to a range of about 1,500 yards max. undetected so as to dive under the convoy after firing to confuse the searching escorts.

The Italian destroyers drop a few random charges in the hope of a lucky strike but apart from confusing the ASDIC (sonar) destroyers, achieve nothing but do improve morale.

Turns 5 - 8

A zig away by the convoy puts 'Unbroken' at a longer range than was wanted - over 2,500 yards but she fires anyway as with her slow underwater speed she has little chance in getting a closer shot. After firing she drops down to depth level three, about 250', and turns away to try a reload for a long shot at the convoy later.

The zig, however, puts 'Utmost' into a good position and she closes on the convoy.

Still no contact by the escorts despite frantic searching.

Turns 9 - 12

On Turn 10 one of 'Unbroken's' torpedoes hits the destroyer Soldati which runs into one of those fired and is sunk. Two of the other torpedoes miss astern of one of the convoy ships. The Italian escorts pick up on the torpedo detector apparatus the track of the torpedoes and run towards the submarine picking up contact. However, the expert crew of 'Unbroken' fire a dummy contact marker causing confusion on the escort's bridge, to the extent that one of the other destroyers unloads two 4 pattern depth charges to no effect.

On Turn 12 'Utmost' fires 4 torpedoes and dives under one of the escorts - not sonar equipped - but is picked up by the other sonar destroyer.

Turns 12 - 20

'Unbroken' scores no more hits and though she fires one more torpedo she broaches the surface - tut tut! - she is heavily attacked and severely damaged by the escorts but escapes by dropping oil slick markers which helps pinpoint her position but with a lot of luck she survives over 60 depth charges. She at one time goes down to two depth levels less than safety level but gets away with it as she runs a huge risk of sinking with this manoeuvre. 'Utmost' hits and sinks a 5,000 ton freighter and, apart from nearly being rammed when she also broaches on firing her salvo, she gets under some of the convoy ships and escapes. The survivors from the sunken ship are left paddling to no avail as the convoy rushes away from the scene!

Result was a win for the Italians who, in fact, played a very good game and the British subs with only a small salvo to fire in these craft could not make up for poor accuracy with their torpedo setups.