

Review of  
“The Fred Jane Naval Wargame (1906)”,  
John Curry (editor)

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This book is part of John Curry series on the History of Wargaming and comprises a collection of articles related to the Fred T Jane (FTJ) wargame, and other related material.

The main parts of the book are: Background material comprising a short biography of Fred Jane by Richard Brooks, the introduction to the FTJ wargame from *The Engineer* (1898), a fast play variant of the 1905/6 rules by Bob Cordery. The main material comprises the rules of FTJ's 1905/06 game, The Royal Naval wargame of 1921, and Fred Jane's 1914 work "Your Navy as a Fighting Machine".

In general the work provides a window in to a disappeared world which is fascinating. The mechanism of time space and movement of the Jane's game will be familiar in most respects to the modern wargamer but the gunfire system is what differentiates the game from most of its modern counterparts. Jane's own explanation for the form of the gunnery system is to teach the effects of guns and armour on naval combat. In this it differs from the main emphasis of most modern games which are more concerned with the tactical and strategic side of naval warfare (or for the more Avant-Guard the recreation of the "Stoker Experience", or similar, of naval warfare) and in which gunnery is happily treated at a more abstract level. With the models use by Jane the modern gamer would feel instantly at home, they being to a scale of 1:2400, but made of cork.

In a sense the 1921 RN game is not a game in the sense that the term is commonly used today, but is a system for tactical exercises conducted on paper and with models, and the competitive element is deprecated. The object is to develop and evaluate tactics, and the most plausible outcome is sought.

“5. Conduct of Tactical Exercise - it is considered that no hard and fast method of assessing damages should be drawn up or adhered to, but that the value of an exercise lies chiefly in drawing attention to, and, where possible, in summing up the main points of the various situations presented during an exercise ...”

Thus all the tables on weapons effectiveness at the end are purely advisory, the umpires are going to decide in practice. This approach possibly provides a context in which reports of the Japanese gaming of the Midway campaign may be made sense of [5][6] (RAdm Ugagi over-ruled the dice

which would have resulted in a US air strike sinking both Kaga and Akagi so that only Kaga was sunk and Akagi received only light damage, even then Kaga reappeared at later stages of the gamed operations).

An important feature for the modern reader in addition to the historical interest is that the tables and other rules give the professional opinion of the RN on matters of weapon performance which will be of interest to modern rule designers for the WW 1 and 2 period, at a period when that opinion was based on operational experience.

An interesting item in the 1921 game is the evaluation of the effectiveness of search plans by overlaying the plan on tracks of a number of target tracks. This is an obvious antecedent of the similar technique used in World war 2 in operational research [2][3][4], which is one of the three main origins of the Monte-Carlo method used extensively today in operational research and analysis (the others being the use of sampling experiments in statistics, and the modelling of diffusion equations at Los Alamos).

FTJ's book (pamphlet?) "Your Navy as a Fighting Machine" which given it's provenance in the first year of The Great War is fascinating in its view of the balance between speed protection and offence in RN and German capital ships. This is now mainly of historical interest as a lot of what he says about the use of navies and other technical issues were largely superseded or invalidated by operations not long after the pamphlets publication. Also strange to modern eyes will be FTJ's insistence that a naval officer was in reality no better paid than a bus driver, can this really be true?

There are a number of typographic errors some of which to my eye look like Optical Character Recognition errors, the majority of these are in "Your Navy as a Fighting Machine". At least one of the typographic errors is inherited from the original publication, this is the description in *The Engineer* article of a ship model for the game as being 15 inches in length, this must be from the original as the exact same phrase occurs in Don Featherstone's quote [1] of the same source (from context and as correctly reported in Richard Brooks short biography of FTJ, it is evident that the models were 1:2400 scale and so the ship in question was about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, so we are looking at a typo for 1.5 inches, which in itself would be an unusual way of expressing  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches at the period). Typos in the tables make some of these difficult, but not impossible to interpret.

## References:

- [1] Featherstone D., "Naval War Games", Stanley Paul 1965
- [2] Kimbal G.E. and Morse P.M., "Methods of Operations Research", Peninsular Publishing 1970 (and Dover reprint 2008)
- [3] Waddington C.H., "O.R. in World War 2: Operational Research Against the U-Boat", Elek 1973
- [4] Koopman B.O., "Search and Screening" Pergamon Press 1980
- [5] Wilson A., "War Gaming", Pelican 1970
- [6] Prange G.W., "Miracle at Midway", Penguin 1983