

# PLAYER'S NOTEBOOK

## From the Admiralty's Point of View

BY TONY CURTIS

The Admiralty was more than willing to defend England — but not defend England to the death. These men were not great risk takers.

**Britain Stands Alone (BSA)** is easy enough for the British player to handle from the standpoint of game mechanics, but knowing when to commit the Royal Navy and how much to send in seems to be much more challenging, according to the feedback so far. The main problem seems to be that early losses are so catastrophically high that the Royal Navy cannot effectively intervene for the rest of the game.

The key to all of this pain and agony is the British Naval Release Table, a truly Machiavellian gem from developer, Kevin Boylan. In its simplest terms, this table is a matrix of Royal Naval Losses (represented by NVP's) and German ground gains in England (OVP's). When Royal Naval losses are high and the OVP total is relatively low, the table is structured to keep all but the lightest Royal Naval units from steaming into the invasion sea zone. Only when the OVP totals rise appreciably does the Royal Navy get its *second wind* and again venture into harm's way. All well and good, you say, but why is my freedom to command the Royal Navy

severely limited at times? The answer in two words is *The Admiralty*.

We need to back away from the BSA game system and look (ever so briefly) at the mind-set of the 1940 British naval leadership. The men in the Admiralty bore the responsibility of committing the Royal Navy to battle and maintaining it as the ultimate force in being for the protection of not only the British Isles but also of the British Empire. Serving as the seagoing bulwark for England was a mission going back in history to the time of the Spanish Armada. Protecting Britain's global empire was a mission forged in the

white heat of nineteenth century colonialism run amok, but it was taken no less seriously by the Admiralty than the defense of Britain itself. Indeed, there was a pervasive feeling that so long as the Royal Navy retained sufficient strength, any part of the empire that was lost could be retaken. Whether this *force in being* argument made sense if England were lost is a moot point. We have over fifty years of hindsight. The Admiralty truly believed the argument, and that was all that mattered in 1940. Simply put, the Admiralty was more than willing to defend England — but not defend England to the death. These men were not great risk takers. They were not prepared to go *double or nothing* with Germans in the English Channel. They were determined that if England did fall, there would still be a Royal Navy there to keep the rest of the Empire from disintegrating.

Back to Britain Stands Alone and the Naval Release Table (see Table, left).

### Naval Victory Points:

The German Player receives these for sinking or damaging your ships for the most part. The heavier your losses, the higher the Naval Victory Point total climbs.

### Other Victory Points:

The German Player receives most of these for capturing territorial objectives in England. Capturing an airfield nets one VP, a minor city 2 VPs, and major cities 5 VPs each.

As with any good matrix, you cross-reference the Naval VP total with the Other VP total and you end up with numbers. For example, cross-referencing 5-10 Other VPs with 7-12 Naval VPs gives you 2/8/9. These three numbers get compared to a single Naval Release die roll made with a ten-sided die. You

		British Naval Release Table					
		Naval Victory Point Total					
Other Victory Point Total		0-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-35	36+
	0-5	2/8/9	1/6/9	0/4/7	-/2/5	-/1/3	-/0/1
	5-10	2/8/9	2/8/9	1/6/9	0/4/7	-/2/5	-/1/3
	11-15	4/8/9	2/8/9	2/8/9	1/6/9	0/4/7	-/1/3
	16-25	6/8/9	4/8/9	2/8/9	2/8/9	1/6/8	0/2/5
	26-39	8/8/9	6/8/9	4/8/9	2/8/8	2/8/8	0/4/7
	40+	8/8/9	8/8/9	6/8/9	4/8/8	2/8/8	0/4/7

## Britain Stands Alone

match each number to this die roll. If the die roll is less than or equal to any given matrix number, the class of ships represented by that matrix number get released. The left hand matrix number applies to your capital ships, the BB's and BC's. The middle matrix number covers your most critical class, the heavy cruisers (CA's). The right hand matrix number applies to your lighter classes, the CL's, CLA's, and DD's. So, if you roll a 7 against the example matrix 2/8/9, you've obtained release for your CA's and your lights. The big boys stay in port (which was exactly what the Admiralty had in mind for them).

Simply put, most players come to grief because their NVP's skyrocket while there is only a slow rise of the OVP column. It takes the Germans a few turns to build up strength and advance to take significant numbers of VP hexes. The German player isn't holding back on taking VP hexes to force you back into port; the German player needs all the OVP's as quickly as they can be acquired in order to satisfy victory conditions. Usually, by turn 5 or 6, the OVP's are rising rapidly, and the German player is your willing accomplice in pushing the total higher because his chances of winning increase by doing it.

You, as the British player can't do a great deal about speeding up the rise of OVP's, but you do have a fair amount of control over how fast you lose NVP's. Pre-game *Luftwaffe* attacks on your naval units will usually generate 4 to 6 NVP's from units sunk or damaged. You can't do anything about those NVP's, but the remainder between 6 and 35 are pretty much yours to lose as slowly or quickly as you desire. Try not to ever lose 36+ NVP's. That column on the table is mediocre at best even when OVP's are at high levels. It's impossible to operate effectively at lower OVP levels once you reach this 36+ NVP loss column. You control your loss rate by putting fewer task forces out to sea than you would normally want to commit.

Here's a little playtest trivia which is useful to know: every time you send a 5 or 6 unit task force of CA's, CL's (CLA's) and DD's into the German Sea Invasion Zone, you will lose two NVP's on average. Some TF's will get through



and escape unscathed; others will be torn apart. Anyway, in an average game, you can send 14 task forces after those German convoys. Those players who send in three task forces each and every turn can't sustain that sortie rate as the NVP's climb and the OVP's are still at low levels. How do you keep the Royal Navy nipping at the German's heels for the entire game? You exercise patience and prudence.

Patience. This game runs for more than 5 or 6 turns. Pace yourself. You probably will want to send three task forces after the Germans on Turn 1. This is OK. Every convoy will have troops, and the German player will not be willing to disengage on a turn when it's vital to establish beachheads. Losses will be heavy on both sides. Now, what do you do on Turn 2? You've got the units to put two — maybe three — task forces back into the invasion zone to hit the German hard again. How much should you commit? The correct answer is probably *nothing!* If you've got only a limited number of NVP points left to lose, you should extract the most damage you can


for each NVP you lose. That means let the German return his empty prahms on Turn 2 unmolested by the Royal Navy. Go ahead and send your Beauforts out after them — you might get lucky. When you meet the German next is on Turn 3 when prahms loaded with units are again heading toward England. You should probably only send two task forces on Turn 3. Losses will again be heavy. So you settle into a pattern created by German sailings: even turns in port when empty prahms leave for France and Holland; odd turns at sea when the prahms come back loaded. There will be times from turn 5 onward where you can only assemble one good TF per turn. If your release die roll is poor, and all you can send are DD's and CL's, you would probably be well advised to send nothing at all. Your odds of putting hits on German naval units are so much lower without CA's in your task force that it doesn't justify suffering the NVP losses to bring light units alone into battle.

Now, if you've kept your losses low, the German will help you out mid-game by raising the OVP level to where you almost always get your CA's and lights each turn. You will get several turns where you can send in two TF's per turn, if necessary. The German player may just be in bad enough shape where one TF per turn will be sufficient. The German has even more severe problems at sea than you do.


The German player doesn't have enough shipping. Prahm combat losses are only replaced at a 50% rate, and AP losses are not replaceable. The German can, for a limited time, sustain a *supplied* German build-up with the shipping on hand. The German has a huge dilemma. In order to win the game, the *Wehrmacht* must have at least three *panzer* divisions and a substantial number of infantry divisions in supply. Otherwise the British Army cannot be knocked out to make a dash for the Midlands feasible or possible. A German Army large enough to win on land eats up an incredible amount of shipping just to stay supplied. The Royal Navy's job is to chip away at the Prahms and AP's to the point where there are not enough to sustain a flow of reinforcing units and supply. Usually, if the number of Prahms/AP's drops to 8 points or less,

**Britain Stands Alone**


Operation Sea Lion, 1940  
 Published: 1994  
 Game Design: Jim Werbaneth  
 Game Developers: K. Boylan & G. Billingsley  
 Art Director: Rodger B. MacGowan



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Contents: 480 die-cut Counters; One 22x34 and One 22x17 inch Mapsheet; Rulebook; Player Aid Cards; Bookcase Box

Time Scale: Each turn = Three Days  
 Map Scale: 10 miles per hex  
 Unit Scale: Division/Brigade  
 Players: 1-4

## From the Admiralty's Point of View

the German player is in deep trouble. Here is another piece of playtest statistical trivia: a sustained loss rate of one Prahm/AP point per turn over the course of the game is enough to doom the Germans. That means you don't have to sink every Prahm point in sight each turn.

If you don't have to be aggressive to win, maybe being prudent is the way to go. For those of you who have played BSA, you know the British TF in the extended example of play was doing OK until the decision was made not to disengage prior to the second round of combat. You cannot stop the *Luftwaffe* from hurting you prior to round one of any surface naval combat, but *never, never, never* stay engaged during the second round of combat so that those planes will have a second shot at you prior to the third round. Do what damage you can on round one and declare you are disengaging on round two. This is hard to do when you haven't hit anything in particular during round one and want one more

chance, but don't do it. On balance, what you lose will outweigh any gains you make. Take the one or two hits you get in round one if the Germans don't disengage and know that you've done what you needed to do. Later in the game when it's imperative for the Germans to remain supplied, you will cause the Germans no end of trouble when you attack any of their convoys in the invasion zone. Shipping will be so tight that the German may well disengage convoys carrying reinforcements prior to the first round and lose the opportunity to build-up strength because conserving Prahm points is more vital. Worse yet, when you attack convoys carrying supply, you place the German in a horrible position, because disengaging the Prahm/AP points carrying supply places every German unit in England out of supply. This is not a viable alternative for the German player, so usually the supply ships have to stand and take your attack during the first round and suffer ruinous losses even though you still disengage prior to round two. One last point about

prudence. Whenever a CA or CL becomes damaged, get it out of the fight and back to a naval base as quickly as possible. Damaged CAs and CLs are much easier to sink if they remain in combat or remain at sea. While the chance to repair any one damaged CA or CL is low, there will be times when you have five or six of these damaged units in your naval bases on any given turn. Protect them from the *Luftwaffe*, and over time anywhere from 2 to 4 of them will be repaired and be ready to fight again. Not only will you need the ships, each one repaired reduces your NVP total by one. Get four units repaired and it's like getting one or two extra chances to send task forces out after the Germans. Allow your damaged ships to be sunk, and you are that much closer to being tied up in port instead.

Remember your two key prerequisites: prudence and patience. Good Luck!

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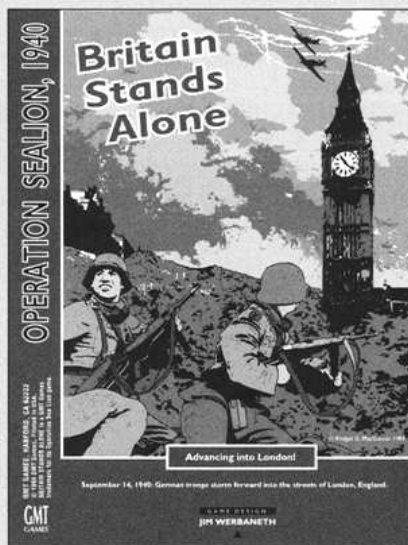
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