
THE BATTLE OF TSUSHIMA NEBULA

Submitted by fallout11

"The most important naval battle since Trafalgar..." - Mahan

As I've always had an interest in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and as such our local Star Blazers fleet battle system gaming group has been running through an Earth vs. Gamilon campaign loosely based on the historical events of this war. Recently, this came to a climax with the naval battle of Tsushima straight, re-fought as a SB-FBS space battle.

Much historical commentary has been written about this battle, but I'll leave the details to you to look up. At the end of May in 1905, after sailing halfway around the world, the Russian Baltic Fleet arrived in the Straits of Tsushima to do battle with the Japanese Imperial Navy. This battle would decide the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War at sea. The clash of Admiral Togo's fleet with that of Admiral Rozhdestvensky's would be one of the most decisive naval battles in history....

Special Rules

This battle requires the use of several special rules:

A) Floating game map: The game map for this battle "floats", that is, if the center of the action gets too near one edge of the board, simply move the board, re-centering the battle as needed.

B) Tsushima Nebula: The entire battle takes place within the Tsushima Nebula, a vast mass of low-density ionized gas and dust, which has the following effects:

1) Primary radar range is halved. Secondary radar range is unaffected. This represents the effects of the smoke and haze in the historical battle, which cut visibility and actually caused lulls in the fighting.

2) Communications are severely disrupted. Ships must communicate by blinker lights and similar methods. As a result, ships are arranged in "division", and any ship in a "division" must always be adjacent to at least one other ship in the same division at the end of movement. The only exceptions are ships which fall out of line (adjacency) due to the effects of damage, or otherwise cannot keep up. Ships may leave one division and join another at any time, provided that they end their movement adjacent to another ship from the newly joined division. This rule represents the tenuous historical communication situation, where ships could only communicate and coordinate actions with flags, lights, and the like at close range.

3) Targeting and IFF signals are partially disrupted, so that firing near other friendly ships is dangerous. As a result, ships may not fire through hexes containing friendly ships, unless those ships are in the same division as the firing ship (they can coordinate their moves and firing to avoid disastrous consequences), in which case they may be ignored. This also represents the difficulties faced in the historical naval battle, where it was not possible to "shoot through" your own ships, which necessitated the formational tactics of the time.

C) All Gamilon ships suffer a -10% penalty to all accuracy and special weapon success rates. Naval historians agree that the Russian fleet at Tsushima was staffed with poorly trained, low morale conscripts, led by inexperienced, overbearing aristocratic officers, held together only by their iron-willed admiral, who was wounded twice and unconscious within minutes of the opening salvo, and this showed in their performance. Their arduous 18000 mile voyage to the battle had taken its toll on men and machine.

Japanese firing throughout the battle was significantly more accurate than the Russian shelling, on a shot per shot basis, and this is reflected here. For our campaign, it was assumed that with the Gamilon ships suffered under similar circumstances, combined with some internal unrest, etc.

Starting Placement of Forces

The starting locations of each formation or division can be found on the attached map sheet. In each case, each division is arranged in line ahead formation (except for any attached escort flotillas), which means each ship is in a line immediately behind each other, with the first ship listed for each division as the lead one in formation, closest to the center of the board, and the others in order strung out behind it, towards the board edge. Any "Attached Escorts" may be placed in any hex adjacent to any ship in the division they are listed attached with. No battlecraft of any kind are used, and none are carried in this battle. Each division is color coded to match up with the colored hexes on the map. All units start the battle with 0 (zero) special power points accumulated, and the speed listed.

THE FORCES AT TSUSHIMA

The EDF (Japanese) Fleet

First Squadron-

First Division: (Dark blue hexes) Speed 5

- 1 Borodino class battleship (Mikasa w/Admiral Togo)
- 1 Borodino class battleship (Shikishima)
- 1 Lexington class battlecarrier (Fuji)
- 1 Borodino class battleship (Asahi)
- 1 Hood class battlecruiser (Kasuga)
- 1 Hood class battlecruiser (Nisshin)

Attached Escorts:

- 3 Lightning class torpedo destroyers (1 flotilla) (1st Destroyer Division)
- 3 Lightning class torpedo destroyers (1 flotilla) (2nd Destroyer Division)

Third Division: (Light blue hexes) Speed 4

- 1 Hood class battlecruiser (Kasagi w/Vice Admiral Dewa)
- 3 Gearing class destroyers (1 flotilla) (Chitose, Otowa, Niitaka)
- 3 Lightning class torpedo destroyers (1 flotilla) (4th Destroyer Division)

Second Squadron-

Second Division: (Yellow hexes) Speed 4

- 1 Konigsberg class patrol cruiser (Idzumo w/Vice Admiral Kamimura)
- 1 Konigsberg class patrol cruiser (Adzumo)
- 1 Konigsberg class patrol cruiser (Asama)
- 1 Konigsberg class patrol cruiser (Yakumo)
- 1 Konigsberg class patrol cruiser (Asama)
- 1 Konigsberg class patrol cruiser (Iwate)

Attached Escorts:

- 3 Lightning class torpedo destroyers (1 flotilla) (5th Destroyer Division)
 - 3 Lightning class torpedo destroyers (1 flotilla) (3rd Destroyer Division)
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Fourth Division: (Red hexes) Speed 4

3 Stilleto class frigates (1 flotilla) (Naniwa w/Vice Admiral Uriu, Takachiho)

3 Gearing class destroyers (1 flotilla) (Akashi, Tsushima)

3 Gearing class destroyers (1 flotilla) (Itsukushima, Matsushima, Hashidate)

The Gamilon (Russian) Fleet

First Division: (Dark green hexes) Speed 3

1 Conqueror class battleship (Knyaz Suvorov w/Admiral Rozhdestvenski)

1 Conqueror class battleship (Imperator Alexandr III)

1 Conqueror class battleship (Borodino)

1 Conqueror class battleship (Orel)

First Scouting Division: (Olive hexes) Speed 3

2 Dominator class improved destroyers (1 half-flotilla) (Zhemchug, Izumrud)

4 Eradicator class missile destroyers (1 flotilla) (1st Destroyer Division)

Second Division: (Light green hexes) Speed 3

1 Vindictive class carrier (Oslyabya w/Rear Admiral Baron Felkerzam)

1 Undaunted class carrier (Sisoi Veliki)

4 Exterminator class destroyers (1 flotilla) (representing the Navarin)

4 Eliminator class cruisers (1 flotilla) (representing the old Nakhimov)

Third Division: (Brown hexes) Speed 3

1 Emperor class command cruiser (Imperator Nikolai I w/Rear Admiral Nebogatov)

1 Audacious class battleship (Apraxin)

1 Audacious class battleship (Senyavin)

1 Audacious class battleship (Ushakov)

First Cruiser Division: (Orange hexes) Speed 3

2 Dominator class improved destroyers (1 half-flotilla) (Oleg w/Rear Admiral Enkvist, Aurora)

1 Devastator class strike cruiser (Dmitri Donskoi)

1 Devastator class strike cruiser (Vladimir Monomahk)

4 Eradicator class missile destroyers (1 flotilla) (2nd Destroyer Division)

Second Scouting Division: (Purple hexes) Speed 3

2 Dominator class improved destroyers (1 half-flotilla) (Svyetlana w/Commodore Shein, Ural)

Historical Notes

I emphasize that the Star Blazers battle scenario presented here is not wholly accurate, and some liberties had to be taken to both balance the battle, and to represent the forces with the Starblazers miniatures and ships available to us. An effort had to be made to balance the sides, too, which although appeared balanced on paper in 1905, were historically very much proven to be in the Japanese's favor. Several changes to the historical order of battle were done to accomplish this balance.

One of the easiest but most significant changes was the deletion of all ships that played no major role in the battle, and all non-combatants. This helped reduce the number of ships on the board significantly, and helped to even the odds a little bit. For example, the Japanese torpedo boat flotillas in the battle were deleted. In Star Blazers terms, these ships would have 1 hull box, half an SD battery, and 1-2 T1 torpedoes each, and since there is no correlating SBFBS ship for these, and the torpedo attack conducted by them during the battle could easily be carried out by the small Japanese destroyers instead, I elected to delete these. In addition, historically the Russians had to protect and escort a 9 ship transport contingent, (including 2 hospital ships!). I elected to delete these, even though historically they were an albatross around the Russian fleet's neck, slowed the Russian fleet down, and had to be protected, thus affecting the decisions made during the battle. However, they still played no part in the battle, and were not actually attacked. Besides, since Gamilon spaceships do not suffer the slower speed penalty found with the historical Russian naval units, part of their effects are already ignored. To further balance things out, the Japanese 5th and 6th divisions, along with their escorts, were deleted, as they did not become involved in the battle until it was already pretty much over, and the 4th division was strengthened slightly to compensate.

Some liberties were taken with representing the historical ships in the battle. For instance, in some cases a Japanese 'protected cruiser' became a Gearing destroyer. Additionally, because locally we only play with multiple ship based escorts (we have no single escort ships), all escorts were played as flotillas, and so a direct 1 to 1 correlation between historical escorts and Star Blazers escorts was not possible, so some liberties were taken to achieve a similar result (example 4 protected cruisers became a Gearing destroyer flotilla, or 1 armored cruiser became an Exterminator destroyer flotilla). Still I believe a good feel for the historical battle has been achieved.

On a side note, much has been made in naval circles of the revolutionary Japanese tactic of using special, high explosive shells (instead of standard armor piercing rounds) to shred the largely unprotected upper works of the Russian ships during this battle. By attacking the poorly protected crewmen, rather than the main weaponry or motive parts of the ship, they quickly reduced the effectiveness of the Russian fire against them, and made effective damage control all but impossible. In addition, the Russian battleships were heavily overloaded with coal, having had to bring their entire operational fuel supply with them, and rode very low in the water. In fact, much of their waterline armor belt was actually below water level! As a result, the unarmored portions of their hulls, when subjected to the blast of high explosive rounds, were easily breached, resulting in disastrous internal flooding and eventual capsizing/sinking, even without any significant internal damage. Of the 4 Russian Borodino's present at the battle, 3 capsized with their screws still turning in the air! In our battle, no effort was made to simulate this effect, but one could argue that the requirement of formations, coupled with the EDF (Japanese) fleet's reliance on splash-damage weapons (WMG's), makes the Gamilon fleet more susceptible to "blast" attacks, which kind of achieve the same results.

Finally, Tsushima and Ikishima islands have been ignored the setup of this battle, as the main action took place miles from the shores of either.



