

VICTORY AT SEA™

OPERATION PEDESTAL

(OR HOW A TANKER WON THE WAR)

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Operation *Pedestal* was the most important World War Two naval battle in the Mediterranean, possibly even the entire war, and deserves to be mentioned alongside the Battles of Britain, Stalingrad and Midway as one of the defining turning points of the war.

In mid-1942, Britain and the Commonwealth had their backs to the wall, with their forces in Africa in retreat towards the Suez Canal and the vitally important oil fields of the Middle East. A linchpin to their continued survival in this struggle was Churchill's 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' in the Mediterranean – Malta! From Malta, the RAF and Royal Navy harassed and attacked Axis convoys as they attempted to resupply Rommel's Afrika Korps; without their efforts Montgomery would have had a much tougher time. But Malta, under siege, and heavily bombed by the German *Luftwaffe* and the Italian *Regia Aeronautica*, was running out of food, oil, petrol and aircraft – simply put everything it needed to carry on operations. A message was sent to London stating that if the island was not resupplied soon, they would have to surrender to the Germans.

This desperation birthed Operation *Pedestal*. There had been many attempts to resupply Malta by convoy and all had failed. Operation *Pedestal* was very much a last-ditch attempt to resupply the beleaguered island, with every possible resource thrown at it. Intelligence services enacted a campaign of deception, describing fake convoys and air strikes, whilst actual air strikes were conducted against both

Italian and German naval facilities and airbases, to throw the Axis forces off the real objective.

In late-July of 1942, the Admiralty gathered together a collection of fast merchantmen, alongside a single tanker, SS *Ohio*, the only tanker that could maintain enough speed to match the rest of the convoy. This collection of vessels, with a minimal escort of just four destroyers made its way to Gibraltar to meet up with Force Z, which would escort the convoy to a distance just beyond the range of Axis air cover from Sardinia. It had been intended for the British carrier HMS *Eagle* to continue to attend the convoy (with long range fighters arriving from Malta as the convoy reached the Skerki Banks), but on 9 August they were discovered by both French and German aircraft. On 11 August the *Kriegsmarine* U-boat U-73 attacked the fleet and sank HMS *Eagle*, with another attack on the fleet by German medium bombers soon following.

On 12 August the convoy was hit by multiple enemy air attacks, as well as by Italian submarines and MTBs, these lasting well into the night. By the following morning, only six merchantmen and SS *Ohio* remained,

albeit scattered with two escorting cruisers and around a dozen destroyers still able to continue. They had no respite. Air strikes soon resumed, which successfully eliminated another merchantman and damaged the tanker. Despite this, three merchantmen reached Malta that afternoon. Another aerial torpedo attack broke the back of *Ohio* meaning that she needed to be towed onwards. In the Allies favour, the intervention of Royal Navy submarines prevented the Italian surface fleet from engaging the convoy directly.

Enough of the crippled convoy still made it to Valetta Harbour, with the *Ohio* finally being towed in by two destroyers on 14 August, despite the constant risk that the severely damaged tanker might blow up at any time! The final damaged merchantman reached harbour on the 15 August, somehow evading U-boats as it limped to its destination. Of the original convoy, *Ohio* was crippled, two merchantmen were damaged and nine were sunk. Though loss of life and equipment were extraordinarily high, the overall strategic value of the *Ohio*'s supplies were a much-needed relief, allowing for the continued disruption of Axis supply routes and operations in the Mediterranean and crucially in North Africa.

This series of linked scenarios will allow you to replicate the feats of Operation *Pedestal* using *Victory at Sea*.



SS *Ohio* &
Armed Merchant Cruiser

SCENARIO: U-BOAT STRIKE

11 August 1942

Royal Navy Fleet

- Eagle-class Carrier (HMS *Eagle*)
- Two L-class Destroyers (HMS *Lookout* & *Laforey*)
- Four Merchantmen (Troop Ships)
- Five Flights of Hawker Hurricane Fighters

Kriegsmarine Fleet

- Type VII U-boat (U-73)

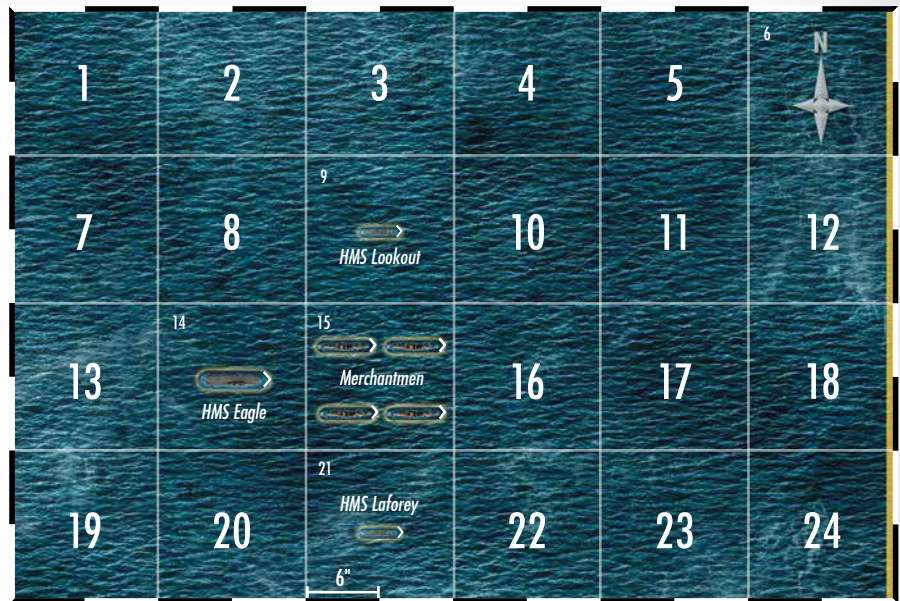
Pre-Battle Preparation

This scenario features a submarine, and so uses the rules and map for deployment as described on page 60 of the *Victory at Sea* rulebook.

- HMS *Eagle* is deployed in Sector 14, with one flight of Hawker Hurricanes.
- HMS *Lookout* is deployed in Sector 9.
- HMS *Laforey* is deployed in Sector 21.
- The Four Merchantmen are deployed in Sector 15, in a square formation.
- The player controlling the Kriegsmarine fleet secretly marks down which Sector the Submarine is within.

Scenario Rules

The Royal Navy group is attempting to catch up with the rest of the convoy



and must leave the table by its eastern edge. The destroyers may not make use of the Sub-Hunter trait until the U-Boat has been Detected.

Game Length

The game continues until the U-boat is sunk or has run out of torpedoes, or the merchantmen have successfully left the eastern table edge (highlighted yellow on the map, above).

Victory and Defeat

If the Royal Navy fleet is able to withdraw HMS *Eagle* and all four

merchantmen via the eastern table edge, it gains a major victory.

If HMS *Eagle* and either one or two merchantmen withdraw from the eastern table edge, the Royal Navy fleet gains a minor victory

If HMS *Eagle* is sunk, the Kriegsmarine fleet gains a minor victory.

If the Submarine sinks HMS *Eagle* and both destroyers, the Kriegsmarine fleet gains a major victory.

Any other result is a draw.



A German U-boat stalks the convoy and the attendant HMS *Eagle*.

SCENARIO: A DAY OF AIR STRIKES

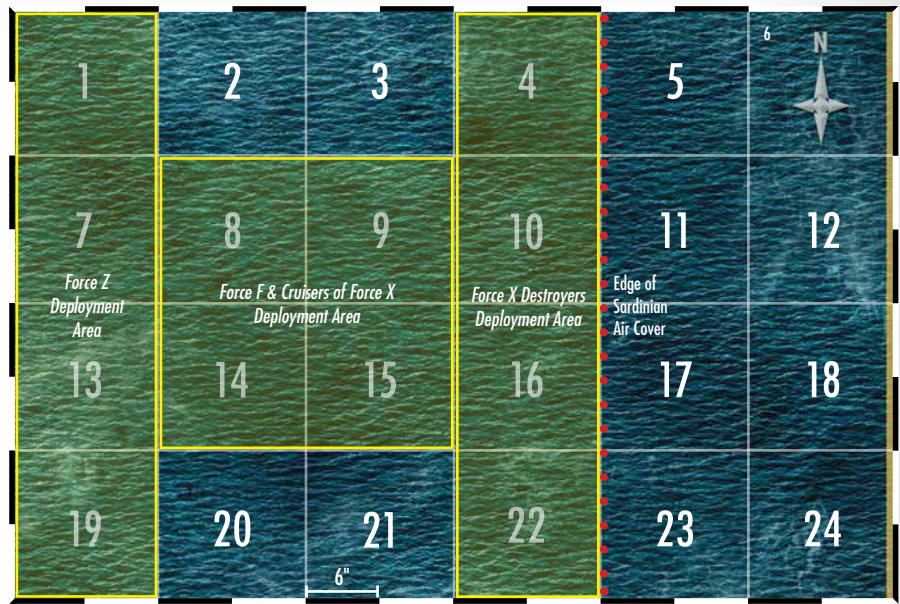
12 August 1942

Royal Navy Fleet (Force Z)

- Two Nelson-class Battleships (HMS *Rodney* & *Nelson*)
- One Illustrious-class Fleet carrier (HMS *Victorious*, with one flight of Sea Hurricane fighters, four flights of Fairey Fulmar fighters & three flights of Fairey Albacores Torpedo Bombers)
- One Indomitable-class Fleet carrier (HMS *Indomitable* with two flights of Grumman Martlet Fighters, five flights of Hawker Sea Hurricane fighters & four flights of Fairey Albacore Torpedo Bombers)
- Three Dido-class Light Cruisers (1st group: HMS *Phoebe*, 2nd group: HMS *Sirius*, 3rd group: HMS *Charybdis*)
- Three L-class Destroyers (HMS *Laforey*, *Lightning* & *Lookout*)
- Q-class Destroyer (HMS *Quentin*)
- Three Tribal-class Destroyers (HMS *Eskimo*, *Tartar* & *Somali*)
- Four W-class Destroyers (HMS *Vansitart*, *Westcott*, *Wrestler* & *Wishart*)
- Hunt-class Destroyer (HMS *Wilton*)
- A-class Destroyer (HMS *Antelope*)
- I-class Destroyer (HMS *Ithuriel*)

Royal Navy Fleet (Force X)

- Two Fiji-class Cruisers (HMS *Nigeria* & *Kenya*)
- C-class Cruiser (Type 3A) (HMS *Cairo*)
- Gloucester-class Cruiser (HMS *Manchester*)
- Tribal-class Destroyer (HMS *Ashanti*)
- Two I-class Destroyers (HMS *Intrepid* & *Icarus*)
- Two F-class Destroyers (HMS *Foresight* & HMS *Fury*)
- Four Hunt-class Destroyers (HMS *Derwent*, *Bramham*, *Bicester* & *Ledbury*)
- Two P-class Destroyers (HMS *Pathfinder* & HMS *Penn*)



Royal Navy Fleet (Force F)

- Oil Tanker (SS *Ohio*)
- Thirteen Merchantmen (mix of Troop and Ammunition Ships)
- Five V and W-class Destroyers (HMS *Keppel*, *Malcolm*, *Amazon*, *Venomous* & *Wolverine*)

Kriegsmarine Fleet

- Two S-14/26 S-Boats
- Two Flights of Messerschmitt Bf 110C Fighters
- Nine Flights of Junkers JU 88 Bombers
- Two Flights of Heinkel HE 111H Torpedo Bombers

Regia Marina Fleet

- Three MS Boat Type 1s
- Seven MAS Boats
- Ten Flights of Savoia Marchetti SM.79 Sparviero Torpedo-Bombers
- Six Flights of Savoia Marchetti SM.79 Sparviero Bombers
- Four Flights of Junkers Ju 87 Picchiattello Dive-Bombers
- Ten Flights of Reggiane Re.2001 Falco II Fighters
- Four Marcello-class Submarines

Pre-Battle Preparation

This scenario features submarines, and thus uses the rules and map for deployment as described on page 60 of the *Victory at Sea* rulebook:

- Force F and the Cruisers of Force X deploy across Sectors 8, 9, 14 & 15.
- The Destroyers of Force X deploy across Sectors 4, 10, 16 & 22.
- Force Z deploys across Sectors 1, 7, 13 & 19. A maximum of four Fighter flights may be deployed.
- The Kriegsmarine's aircraft flights should be deployed across the northern edge of the table.
- The Regia Marina's aircraft flights should be deployed across the eastern edge of the table.
- The player controlling the Regia Marina Fleet secretly marks down which sector each Submarine is within.
- MTBs should not be deployed, but will move on to the table as described in the scenario rules.

Note an imaginary line crosses east side of Sectors 4, 10, 16 & 22. This marks the edge of the range of air cover from Sardinia.



HMS Nelson

Scenario Rules

The Axis fleets automatically have initiative every turn.

The Axis fleets ignore the Poor Coordination rule for this scenario.

Turns 8 and 9 are played in twilight (this is the same as Night but with a 25" spotting range).

Turns 10 and 11 are played at Night.

Royal Navy Battleships and Carriers will not pass into range of Sardinian air cover. If any are damaged or reach the line as described in the Pre-Battle Preparation, they will all turn around and head west as soon as possible, along with half of any remaining destroyers within Force Z (player's choice).

Axis single-engined aircraft flights cannot cross westwards of the line of Sardinian air cover as this is beyond their operational range.

Each time any Axis aircraft flight is removed from the table roll a D6. On a 4+ it may return to the table on a future turn. For an Axis flight that leaves the table of its own accord it this is modified to a 2+ for success. When four or more flights are available to be returned to the table as a result of successful rolls, they may be deployed via Sector 6, as if they were a returning ship.

All MTBs are deployed on Turn 8, via the north-eastern edges of Sector 6.

Ju 88 Bombers are able to conduct shallow dives. As such they will hit their targets on a 4+.

Game Length

The game lasts 12 turns.

Victory and Defeat

If the Royal Navy fleet has at least half of its merchant vessels either surviving or having withdrawn via the eastern table edge (highlighted yellow on the map) without any of the battleships or carriers being crippled they gain a major victory (note that SS *Ohio* must be one of them). If only one of these conditions is met they earn a minor victory.

If the Axis player sinks all the merchant vessels and at least one carrier or battleship they gain a major victory. If they complete just one of these it is a minor victory.

Any other result is a draw.



From sea and sky, Axis forces repeatedly set upon the beleaguered convoy.

SCENARIO: THE ATTACK THAT COULD HAVE BEEN

13 August 1942

This scenario represents the hypothetical battle that could have occurred but for the intervention of Royal Navy Submarines.

Royal Navy Fleet (Force X)

- Two Fiji-class Cruisers (HMS *Nigeria* & *Kenya*)
- C-class Cruiser (Type 3A) (HMS *Cairo*)
- Gloucester-class Cruiser (HMS *Manchester*)
- Tribal-class Destroyer (HMS *Ashanti*)
- Two I-class Destroyers (HMS *Intrepid* & *Icarus*)
- Two F-class Destroyers (HMS *Foresight* & *HMS Fury*)
- Four Hunt-class Destroyers (HMS *Derwent*, *Bramham*, *Bicester* & *Ledbury*)
- Two P-class Destroyers (HMS *Pathfinder* & *HMS Penn*)

Royal Navy Fleet (Force F)

- Oil Tanker (SS *Ohio*)
- Thirteen Merchantmen (mix of Troop and Ammunition Ships)
- Five V and W-class Destroyers (HMS *Keppel*, *Malcolm*, *Amazon*, *Venomous* & *Wolverine*)
- Three Flights of Supermarine Spitfire Fighters (land-based from Malta)

Kriegsmarine Fleet

- Two Flights of Messerschmitt Bf 110C Fighters
- Three Flights of Junkers JU 88 Bombers
- Three Flights of Junkers JU 88 Torpedo-Bombers
- Two Flights of Messerschmitt Bf 109 Fighters
- Four Flight of Junkers JU 87 Stuka Bombers
- Two Flights of Heinkel HE 111H Torpedo Bombers

Regia Marina Fleet

- Zara-class Cruiser (*Gorizia*)



- Two Trento-class Cruisers (*Bolzano* & *Trieste*)
- Duca D'Aoasta-class Cruiser (*Eugenio di Savoia*)
- Two Montecuccoli-class Cruisers (*Muzio Attendolo* & *Raimondo Montecuccoli*)
- Seven Soldati-class Destroyers
- Two Maestrali-class Destroyers
- Oriani-class Destroyer
- One Flight of Savoia Marchetti SM.79 Sparviero Torpedo-Bombers
- Two Flights of Junkers Ju 87 Picchiatello Dive-Bombers
- Six Flights of Reggiane Re.2001 Falco II Fighters

Pre-Battle Preparation

This scenario uses Sectors for the deployment of ships as described as part of the Submarine rules on page 60 of the *Victory at Sea* rulebook.

- Force F and the cruisers of Force X deploy across Sectors 8, 9, 14 & 15.
- The Destroyers of Force X deploy across Sectors 4, 10, 16 & 22.
- The Regia Marina Surface Fleet deploys across Sectors 5, 6 & 12, and within 6" of a board edge.

- The Kriegsmarine's aircraft flights should be deployed across the northern edge of the table.
- The Regia Marina's aircraft flights should be deployed across the eastern edge of the table.

Scenario Rules

Ju 88 Bombers are able to conduct shallow dives. As such they will hit their targets on a 4+.

Game Length

The game lasts 12 turns.

Victory and Defeat

If the Royal Navy fleet has at least half of its merchant vessels either surviving or having withdrawn via the eastern table edge (highlighted yellow on the map) they gain a major victory (note that *SS Ohio* must be one of them). If less than half survive or have withdrawn from the eastern table edge, it gains a minor victory.

If the Axis player sinks all the merchant vessels they gain a major victory. If they sink at least half, they score a minor victory.

Note that in this scenario, it is possible for both sides to achieve a minor victory.

SCENARIO: A PERILOUS APPROACH

14 August 1942

Royal Navy Fleet

- Oil Tanker (SS *Ohio*)
- Hunt-class Destroyer (HMS *Ledbury*)
- P-class Destroyer (HMS *Penn*)
- Two Flights of Supermarine Spitfire Fighters (Land-based from Malta)

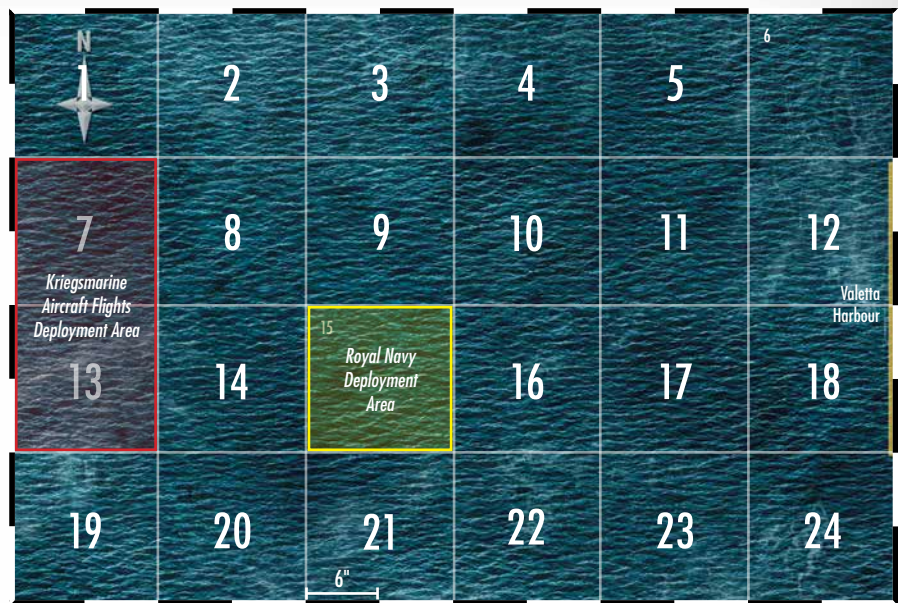
Kriegsmarine Fleet

- Five Flights of Junkers Ju 88 Bombers
- One Flight of Messerschmitt Bf 110C Fighters

Pre-Battle Preparation

This scenario uses Sectors for the deployment of ships as described as part of the Submarine rules on page 60 of the *Victory at Sea* rulebook:

- All Royal Navy vessels are deployed in Sector 15.
- The Kriegsmarine aircraft flights deploy across Sectors 7 & 13.
- After deployment, the Axis player may deploy up to six mine tokens (these should be no more than 2" in diameter). These may not be deployed within 3" of another mine token, and not within 6" of an Allied vessel.
- Valetta Harbour is on the eastern edge of Sectors 12 & 18.



Scenario Rules

The area is extensively mined. If a ship's move begins or ends within 3" of a mine, roll a D6. On a result of 2+, it will explode, and the ship immediately takes 1D6 worth of damage (note that on a roll of a natural six, this will not trigger a critical hit). Then remove the mine token from the table.

SS *Ohio* has suffered greatly at the hands of relentless attacks. A destroyer must be in contact with SS *Ohio* at the start of its move in order for it to be towed at a flank speed of 3". The towing destroyer gains the lumbering trait. If, for any reason, there is no destroyer in contact, SS *Ohio* counts as having a flank speed of 0", but will move 1" straight forward when nominated in the Movement Phase.

SS *Ohio* will never lose its AA battery for any reason.

Ju 88 Bombers are able to conduct shallow dives. As such they will hit their targets on a 4+.

Game Length

The game lasts until all Ju 88s have exhausted their bombs, or SS *Ohio* reaches Valetta Harbour.

Victory and Defeat

If SS *Ohio* survives, the Royal Navy gains a major victory.

If SS *Ohio* sinks, the Kriegsmarine fleet gains a major victory,



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