

GAMING THE AWI WITH *BLACK SEAS*

THE REVOLUTION ON THE HIGH SEAS

From the outset of the American Revolution, the newly formed Congress recognised the requirement for the newly independent states to have a navy. The foe they faced was the most powerful naval force on the earth at the time: the Royal Navy.

By David Davies

In a time of poor roads and no rail transportation, river and coastal transportation were key to trade. While the British did have some supply lines from the loyalist areas they controlled, they were primarily reliant on supplies and materials from across the Atlantic, which made them vulnerable to privateers. Colonial efforts were at first haphazard, but growing experience (and help from abroad) allowed the Americans to 'redirect' much-needed supplies to their hands.

PLAYING THE REVOLUTION AT SEA

While the Americans were limited in the size of their fleet, the British faced similar issues. They simply couldn't be everywhere at once, and nor were their larger ships suitable for navigation up the larger rivers or for operations close in to the shore. Interdiction, patrol, and convoy duties were left to the more manoeuvrable frigates and smaller unrated vessels.

Rule adaptations

The Continental Navy was drawn up from scratch.

As such, it does not enjoy the 'Drilled' rule from page 84 of the *Black Seas* rulebook, nor the 'Over Fitted' rule, as heavy guns were in short supply. Instead, they should have 'Maritime Pilot' and should reroll all skill tests for sandbanks, shoals, or shorelines (page 37 of the rulebook).

The squadrons were made up of gunboats, sloops, galleys, brigs, and converted merchantmen. The few frigates that were built should be classed as sixth-rates with perhaps one fifth-rate. None were the 'super frigates' US Navy, so leave the *Constitution* at home!

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The British likewise do not yet have the experience they would earn in the decades to come. Thus, they also do not have the 'Drilled' special rule from page 78 of the rulebook. They should have the 'Admiralty' special rule, however. Likewise, their ships should be limited to sloops, brigs, and frigates, as most of the time the Americans would outrun the larger ships of the line (USS *Randolph* vs HMS *Yarmouth* being the only exception).

The rules for the French remain unchanged, but they too have a limit on ship size. They captured several British prizes when they joined the war, taking them into service.

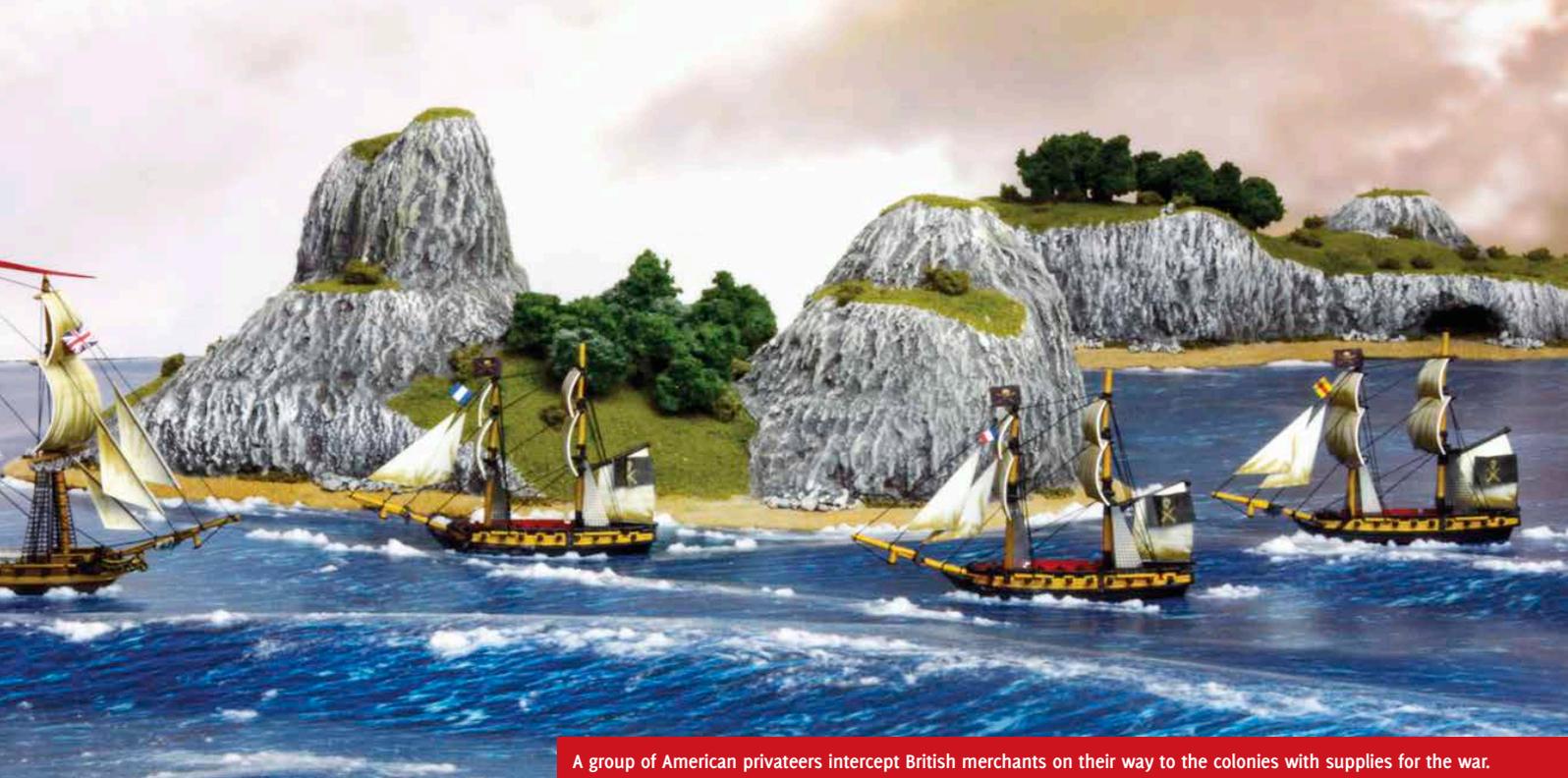
Terrain wise, many of the engagements happened close to land or in the larger river systems, so terrain should be plentiful. Fortifications were few and mostly improvised – so no fortresses or Martello towers.

SCENARIO – AMERICAN SEA WOLVES AND THE IRISH LINEN

There were rich pickings in letters of marque; some 2,000 were issued by the Continental Congress during the American War of Independence. American privateers used whatever ships they could, often repurposing captured ships. There were also loyalist privateers fighting for the Crown, which makes actions even more interesting.

John Paul Jones, privateer extraordinaire, attacks the HMS *Serapis* during the 1779 Battle of Flamborough Head.

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A group of American privateers intercept British merchants on their way to the colonies with supplies for the war.

American privateering wasn't limited to the shores of the Eastern Seaboard. Using northern France and the Dutch Republic as safe havens, they raided shipping along the British coastline.

In early 1777, the USS *Lexington* joined the *Reprisal* and *Dolphin* to raid the Irish Sea, attempting to intercept the Irish linen fleet due to leave Dublin in June. The three American ships captured in successive actions two ships, nine brigs, two schooners, and five other vessels. Eight were kept as prizes, three were let go, and seven were sunk.

The 70-gun third-rate HMS *Burford* was ordered to hunt down the privateers. When it was sighted, the American ships split up and escaped, as *Reprisal* caught the *Burford's* attention.

So successful was the raid that the British threatened the French with war if they continued to permit safe harbour for the privateers. France expelled the privateers, leaving the ships to their fate. *Dolphin* was handed over to the British as it had failed to leave port in time, *Lexington* was captured by HMS *Agile* (a 10-gun cutter), and *Reprisal* was wrecked attempting to return to the Colonies.

This scenario represents one of the many actions the three American privateers undertook against British merchant shipping.

Setup

Use the setup for the "Chance Encounter" scenario from page 40 of the *Black Seas* rulebook. If you are using other systems, place the American and British ships opposite each other.

The American squadron consists of:

- USS *Lexington* (16-gun brigantine)
- USS *Reprisal* (18-gun brig)
- USS *Dolphin* (10-gun cutter)

The British merchant squadron consists of:

- 2x brigs (18-gun)
- Small merchant vessel (inexperienced)

Special rules

The British vessels may not fire unless fired upon unless they pass a skill test; they will otherwise assume the closing vessels are friendly. American privateers would typically only hoist their colours at the last minute. The Americans have the 'Privateer' upgrade.

Victory

This is a straight fight, with the option to capture enemy ships as per the scenario. The side with the least destroyed or captured ships wins. **WS&S**

The American Revolution is a rich period for naval skirmishes and battles.

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An American frigate is caught in rough seas as it searches along the Irish coastline for signs of the linen fleet.