Steam and Iron North Sea Campaign AAR

This AAR has been prepared using the latest SAI executable currently being tested. It is written with the aim of highlighting some of the features of Steam and Iron to those who might be thinking about purchasing the game when the Campaign DLC is released. Some of you will no doubt be familiar with aspects of the simulation but there are a number of features that might be new.

Superimposed throughout the narrative is the rationale behind certain decisions and the thought processes used to analyze the information provided within the context of Turn-30 in a 200+ Turn campaign game.

The standard North Sea Campaign begins 04 August 1914, this AAR was prepared from the actions that developed on Turn-30, commencing 23 February 1915 playing as Germany using the Rear Admiral and Normal preferences.

The campaign to date:

Above you can see the losses, date and cause of the loss and the button for the Loss Map that will open a new window with a map of the theatre with all losses indicated by a small icon. We'll see the final version of the Loss Map at the end of the AAR. Note that I have lost 3 U-Boats to various causes including *U7* to friendly fire. The dates for the losses of U-28 and U-31 are anomalous and probably caused by the multiple campaign executables and turn do-overs that have been part of the testing process. My boats have sunk three merchants, a destroyer and possibly the submarine E-6 since here loss icon was practically on top of one of my U-Boat locations on that turn.

So far I have made several trips across the North Sea, bombarding Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Cromar and Hartelpool, the latter on two occasions. My last major sortie on 21 January ended disastrously when *SMS Mainz* struck a mine and sank in a few minutes (some 70-

crew were rescued). Since this was a Player selected minefield objective and worth zero victory points (VP's) I decided to cut my losses and not risk Scouting Group 1 (SG1, *Derfflinger*, *Seydlitz*, *Moltke* and *Bluecher* only since *Von der Tann* was in unscheduled dockyard hands with condenser problems) any further and cancelled the operation. On the way home, *SMS Stralsund* was mined and almost made it to the safety of the port of Emden before foundering with heavy loss of life. Just like that almost 20,000 VP's were lost and a significant portion of my light scouting forces. In a 200-turn campaign with finite and limited resources, it's easy to become a bit risk-adverse and the game provides small window on the problems faced by Ingenhol, Pohl and Scheer.

So now, onto Turn-30 and planning for the next sortie, scheduled for 23 February.
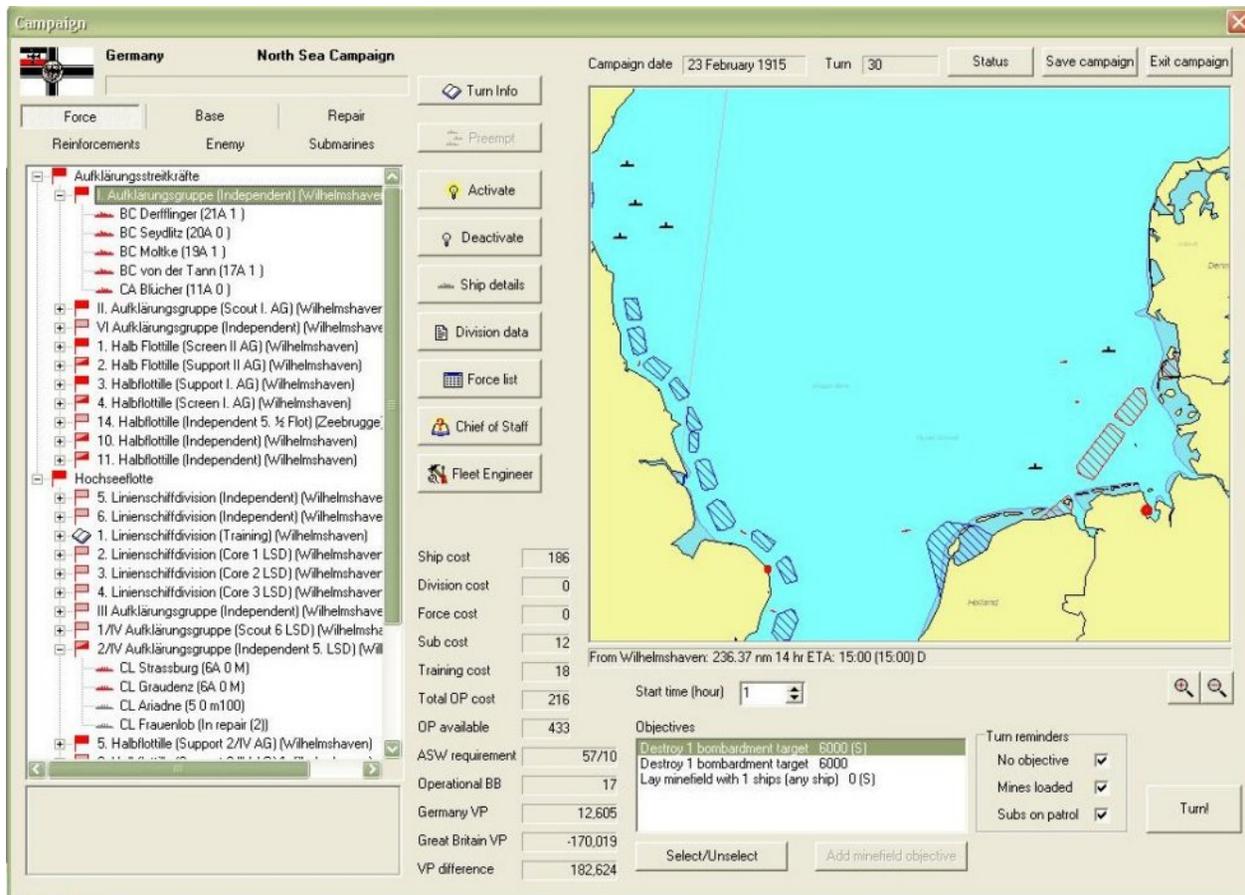
I had not intended to write an AAR for this turn and so had to recreate this screen from the previous save. Therefore there may be some minor variations from the original but the major features are the same.

On the left are the forces available; virtually all of my Scouting Forces have been selected except for SG6 where the *CL Coln* has been reassigned since she's undergoing refit, replacing the *CL Pillau*, now assigned to SG2. Reassigning ships costs Operations Points (OP's) and may result in a crew quality penalty. Also note that 14th Half-Flotilla is unselected as they have been sent to Zeebrugge, in Flanders with the aim of heating things up in the Channel at some later turn. For the High Seas Fleet I have selected *Strassburg* and *Graudenz* from SG-2/IV (2nd Division/SG IV) as they are fast and carry 120 mines each that, are shown as already loaded. In support is 5th Half-Flotilla of torpedo boats. The reason for organizing the sortie this way is that, when the scenario is run I will have two independent forces each of which has a specific task.

Since I have no mandatory Objectives I could give the turn a pass at no cost of VP's but the temptation to return to Yarmouth (the red dot on the English coast) is too great to pass up. Winter nights are still long; if I show up with an hour or so of daylight I can carry out my

bombardment program and lay mines in the waters between the coast and the British defensive minefields before escaping into the darkness. I know from previous sorties that this is a high traffic area so any enemy forces at sea will be drawn to Yarmouth like a magnet as soon as I come into view. So now I have two forces and two different objectives, the bombardment being worth 6000 VP plus those awarded for the destruction of any enemy units and the minefield, not shown here but located near the bombardment target.

Note that there have been some minor changes in the information presented in the Force window so *Derfflinger* (21A1) means that *Derfflinger* cost 21 OP's to activate, she's been Activated and has a Crew Quality of +1. In this case you can see that Battleship Division 1 (the four *Helgoland's*) has been sent off to training and will be unavailable when the turn is run.

Both British minefields discovered by the cruiser losses of 21 January were identified on the map and so could be taken into account of when planning later sorties. In the campaign, player and AI laid minefields decay each turn and eventually disappear so both of these locations now show as mine-free several weeks later. However, I still plan to avoid the Frisian Islands area and so will depart from the base at Wilhelmshaven where the initial deployment area will be between Horn's Reef and my defensive minefields rather than re-basing to Emden, which, would place my starting position off the Dutch coast.

Plan in place, it is time to press Turn and execute the sortie.
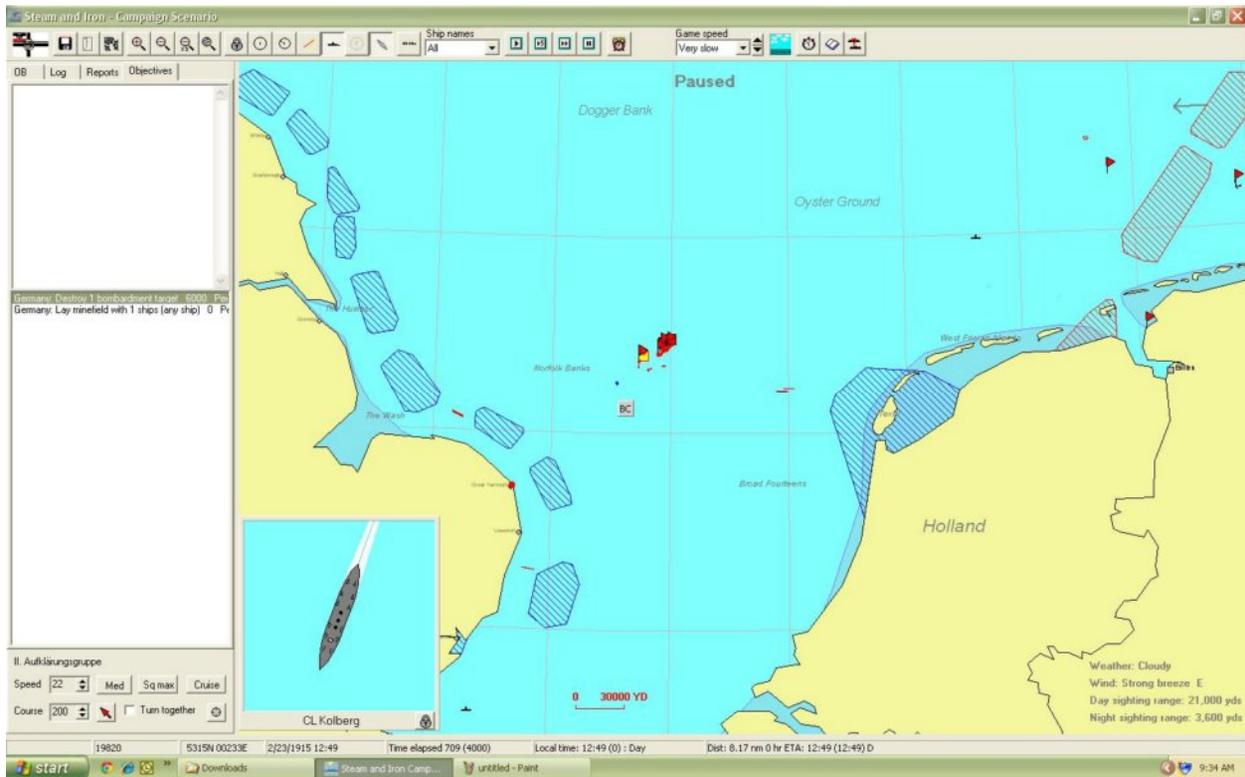
At 1238 (all times will be local, usually GMT or GMT +1), *SMS Kolberg* scouting ahead sights unknown vessels that are quickly identified as battlecruisers. In response SG2 was ordered into line ahead and SG1 increased speed to 20 kts. A strong breeze reduces all ships to a maximum 23 kts and on occasion light cruisers can be identified as BC's. I should note the at about 0830 my screen detected a submarine. I have no way of knowing if the contact was real or not but it's possible that I was detected and reported and at some point this can evoke a reaction from the AI. Later, a close examination of the track charts indicate that there is a distinct probability that the AI received the contact report shortly after 0900 since there was a simultaneous course changes at about that time by all British forces then at sea.
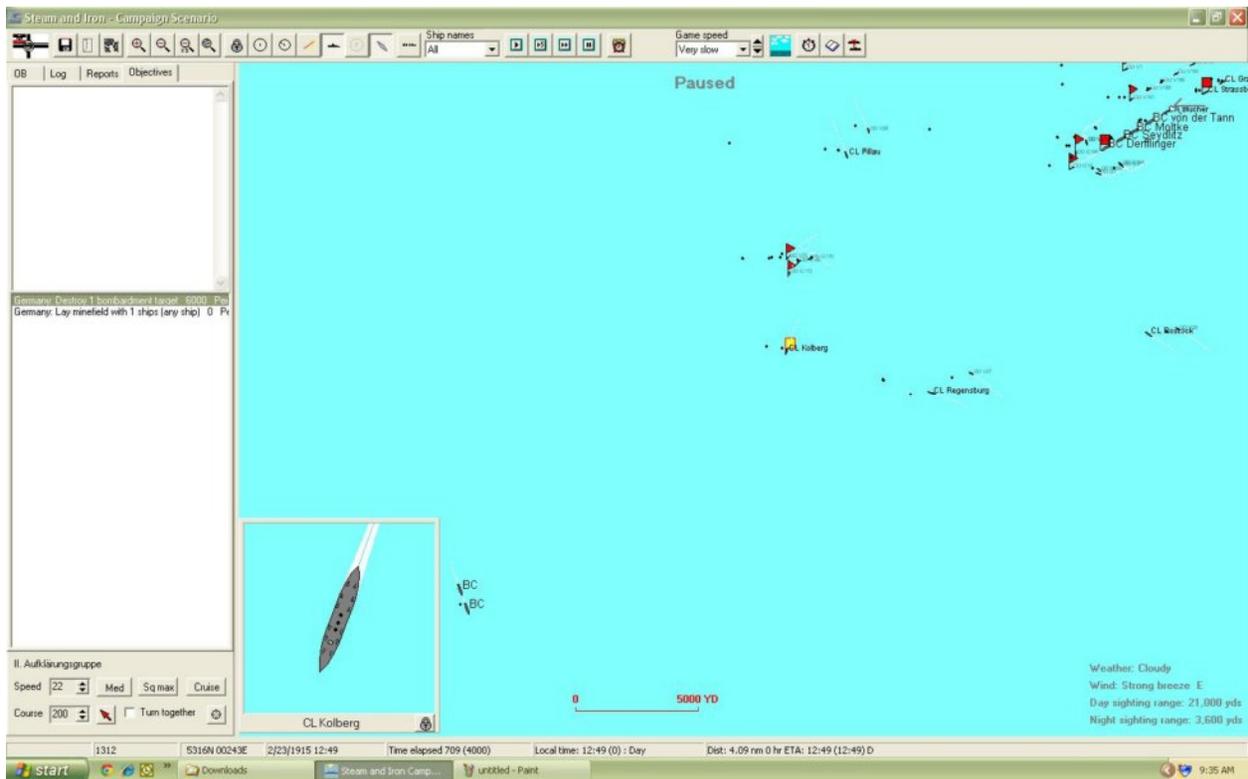
I'm a bit nervous now, on the 21 January sortie, the AI sailed 16 BB, 3 BC, 5 B and 17 CL so it's unlikely that this force is alone. So I'll be cautious, remember the bombardment program is worth only 6000 points, about half the value of a CL. On the other hand, sinking two unsupported BC's would definitely help the war effort.
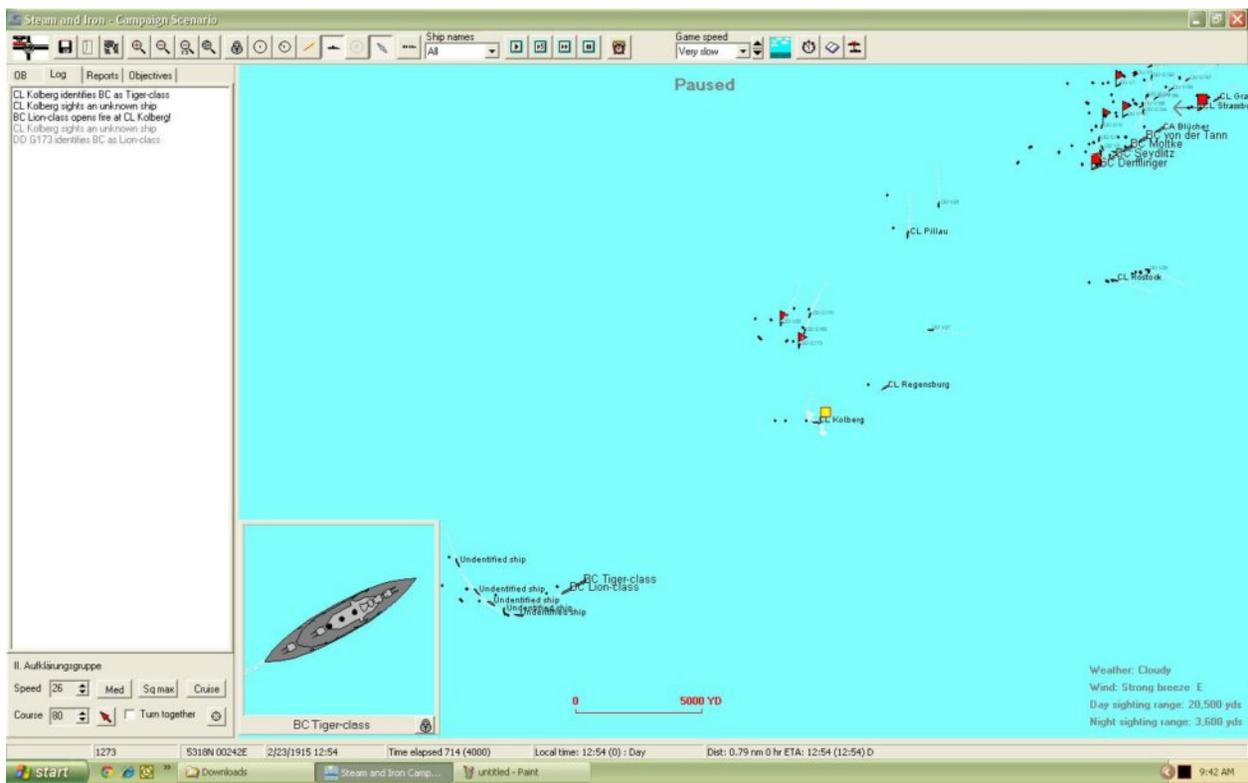

Decision time. There are good reasons to force an action; only 2-BC's have been spotted so I have a vastly superior force at hand and destroying two of the "Splendid Cats" would help the VP tally quite a bit.

On the other hand, with speeds limited to 23 kts due to weather and the superior range of the British 13.5" guns it means that I am vulnerable should a lucky hit cause critical propulsion damage to any of my capital ships. Plus the wind means that my force will suffer from smoke interference but the British will not. Allowing them to close to engagement range means committing to an action that might not allow me to escape unscathed should there be a battleship force or additional BC's nearby. Since the AI also suffers from FoW it is possible that the presence of SG1 is so far undetected, if they pursue *Kolberg* I may be able to lure them into a favourable exchange.

Command decision made: cancel the bombardment program and head for home via the west entrance in my defensive minefields. Just in case there are major RN units out, I will also activate the HSF and sortie it in support of SG1's withdrawal. Normally the button for emergency activation is located at the top-centre of the toolbar and is grayed-out and inactive until a contact (with surface ships, submarines or aircraft) is made.
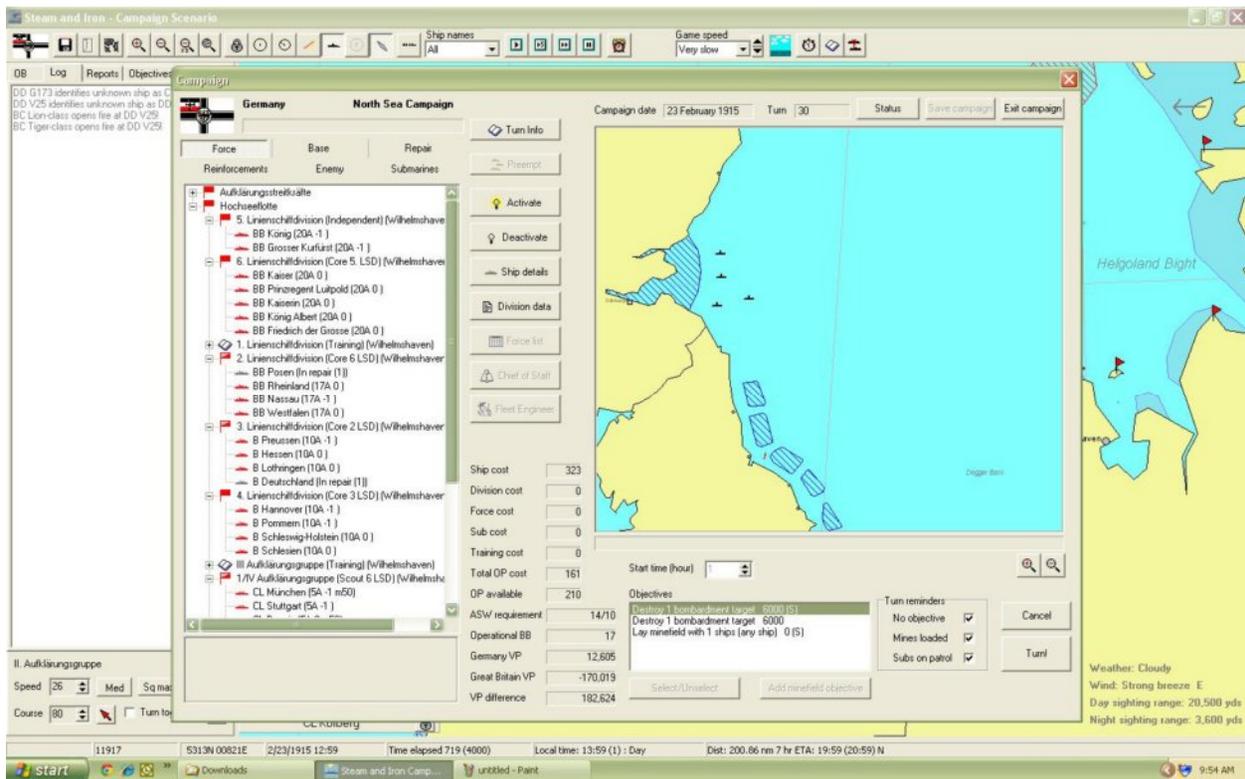
Pressing the Emergency Activation button opens the main planning screen and activating ships will cost OP's at the usual rate. Note that Battleship Division 1 (the four-*Helgoland's*) is off on a training exercise and so is unavailable for activation. Because of this lack of firepower and my intentions to fight close to home I am going to take Squadron II, comprising the two pre-dreadnought divisions, along for the sortie. Also at this point it is important to set the roles and formations of all the divisions, which will prevent any confusion when the Force activates. Once activation is complete, the new Force will appear near Wilhelmshaven getting up steam. They should be ready to sail in 2-3 hours and in this case the time required was 167-minutes.
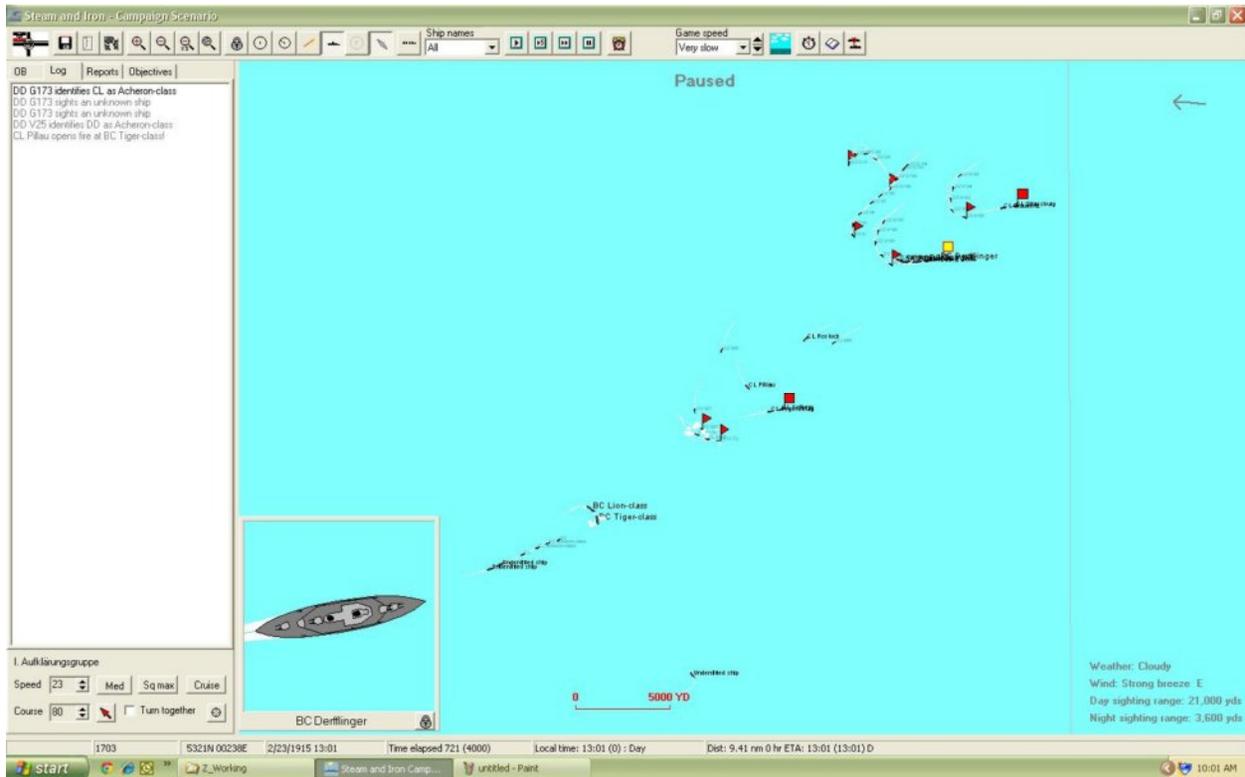
Meanwhile, SG1 has reversed course, I plan to slow to 20kts after the turn and form on a line of bearing to minimize interference should the Cats close the range. Meanwhile the TB division supporting *Kolberg* cuts across the line of fire as if preparing for a torpedo attack. Every AI Force in SAI is given a mission posture: Attack, Normal, Cautious or Withdraw and these help determine how the AI reacts to the Player's actions. In this case, having turned to open their "A" arcs, the reaction to my TB maneuver is to turn away. My flotilla launched two-torpedoes but both would miss. The net result though was that contact would be broken as the weather continued to deteriorate and visibility reduced. Rather than turning around and trying to force an action, I stuck with the (new) plan and continued on course for the Bight at a fleet speed of 16-kts. The British force failed to catch up before dark.
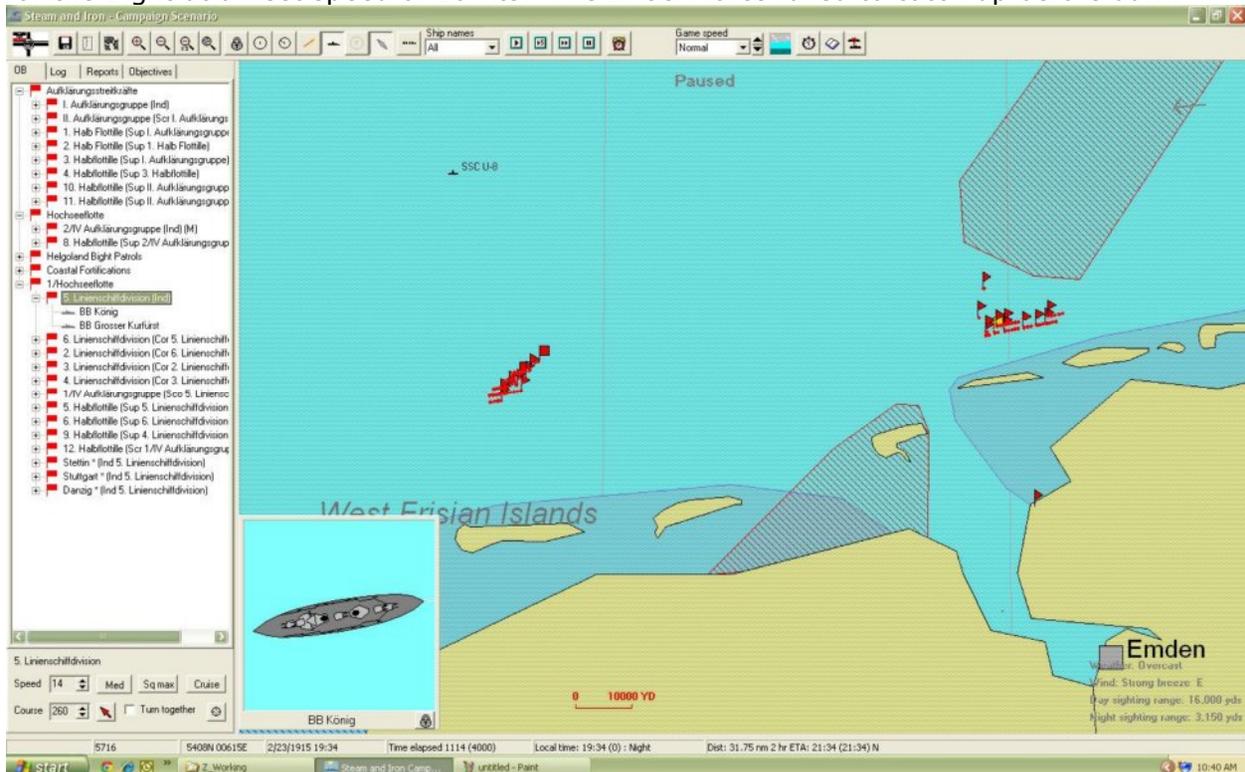
By 1930 local time, visibility is down to 3150-yds and the seas remain high, still limiting maximum speed. The HSF is exiting the swept channel and is about 30-nm from SG1, taking about 7-hours from activation. Given the bad weather, a couple of ships have become separated from their formations. These will sail around under AI control until they establish the conditions required to rejoin. Here you can see the 1/SG4 CL's *Stettin*, *Stuttgart* and *Danzig*, which were deployed on a search line have lost contact with the Fleet. With the coming of darkness I should have ordered them to screening stations rather than scouting stations.

After a brief sweep of the lower Bight, I turn the HSF for home followed by SG1 as it seems that there will be nothing happening tonight.
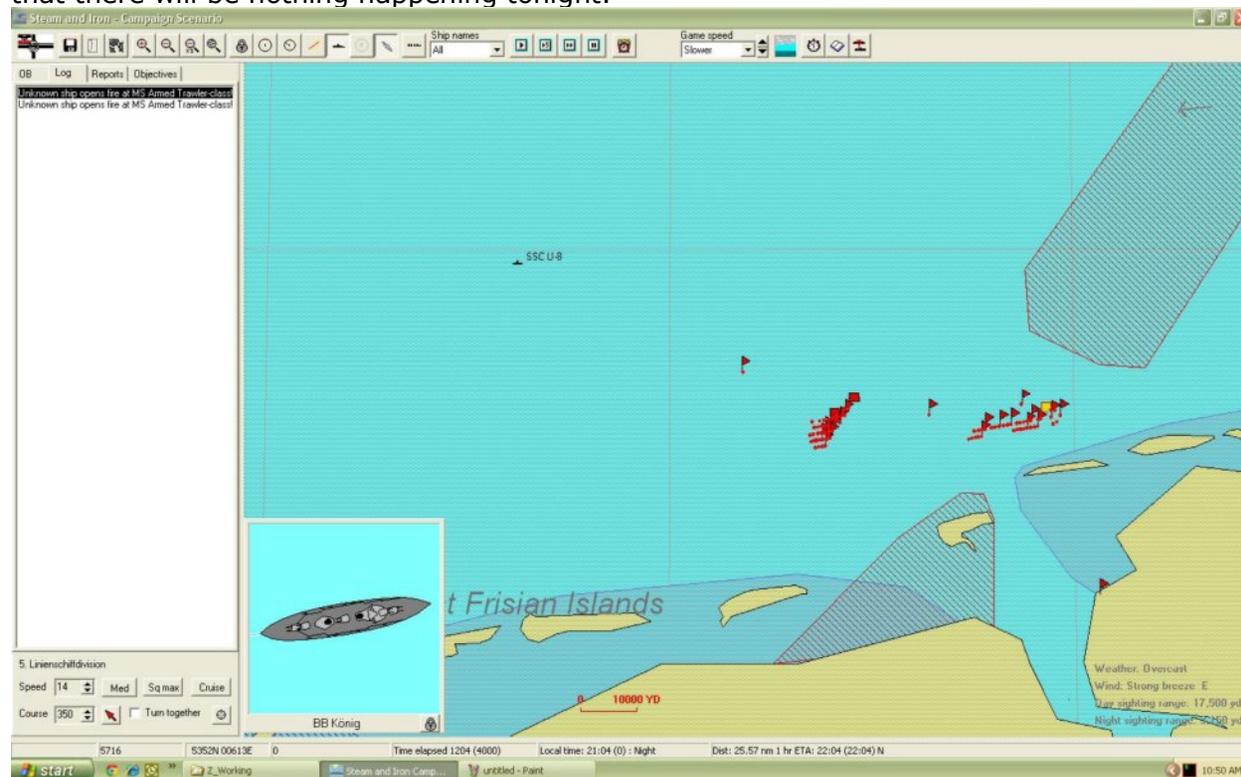

Every time you run a campaign turn, forces are deployed under AI control performing mundane missions like trade and commerce (including neutrals), laying defensive minefields, patrolling and the like. As the Player, you cannot control them unless at Rear Admiral or easier difficulty and they are in sight of one of your Force leaders and frequently have only a very general idea of their locations. In this case the Log has reported that some unknown ship has opened fire on one of my patrolling trawlers. Clicking on the message centres the screen at that point but nothing is visible. The lone ship with the pennant symbol near the centre is the SG4 cruiser *Stettin*, wandering around in the dark. However, it is obvious that there are British forces nearby but I do not know where and in what strength. With the safety of my minefields nearby and most of the Fleet at sea, it's time to get a bit more aggressive and see if I cannot give Britannia a bloody nose.

I decide to order 2/SG4, *Stralsund*, and *Graudenz*, still loaded with mines to find and support *Stettin* and so they and their supporting half-flotilla head off to the northwest, accelerating to 22-kts followed closely by SG1. The HSF is also ordered to a course of about 300* and a fleet speed of 16-kts.

The decision to try a night action is a fairly easy one in this situation. With strong light forces and heavy firepower in support the prospects of doing significant damage to the enemy is pretty good while the proximity of the HSF and the safety of my defensive minefields means an excellent chance of getting any damaged ships back to port. So I'll chance a close-in knife fight.
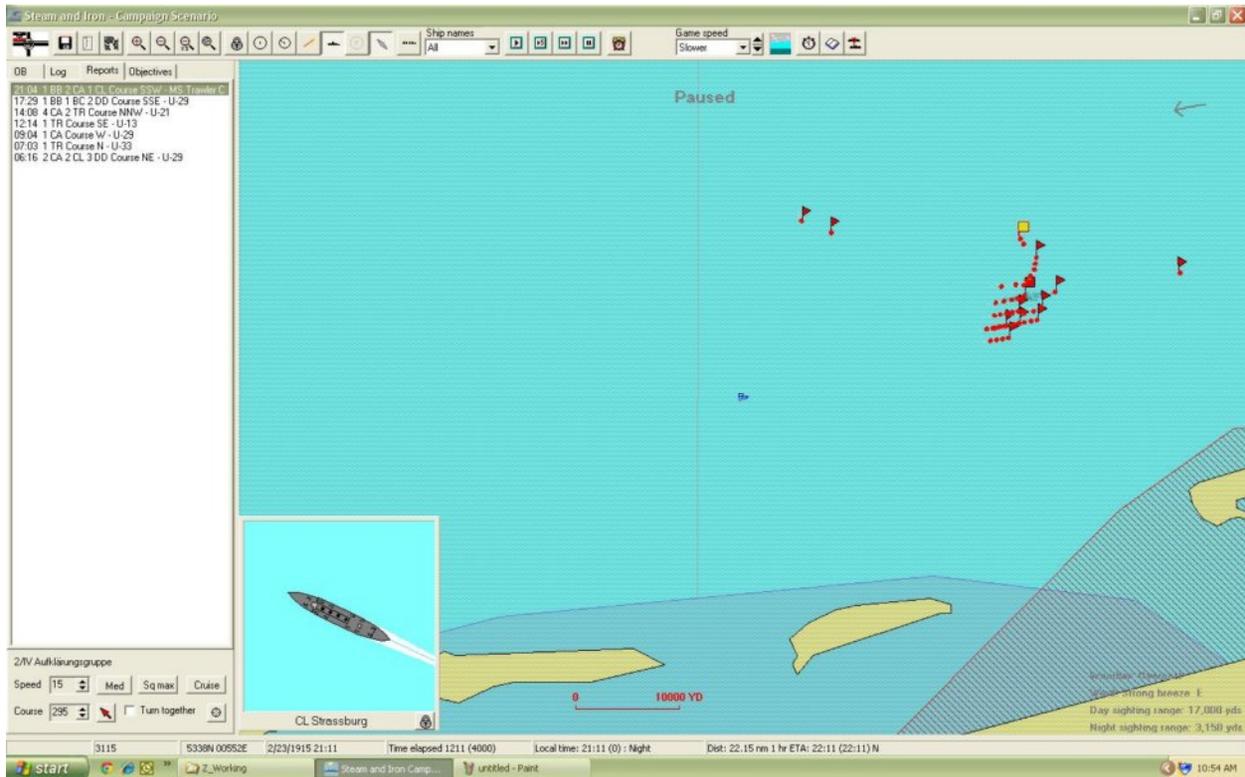
A couple of minutes later some hard information from one of the 2104 contacts (shown on the previous screenshot); clicking on the report centres the screen over the location, now marked with a blue (enemy) flag icon. Note that it has taken seven minutes for Trawler C to make the report and in the meantime *Stettin* has sighted Trawler B. I can see what *Stettin* sees but she is entirely controlled by the AI. A few minutes later, *Stettin* heads in the general direction of the contact and while making her turn, meets an unknown ship.
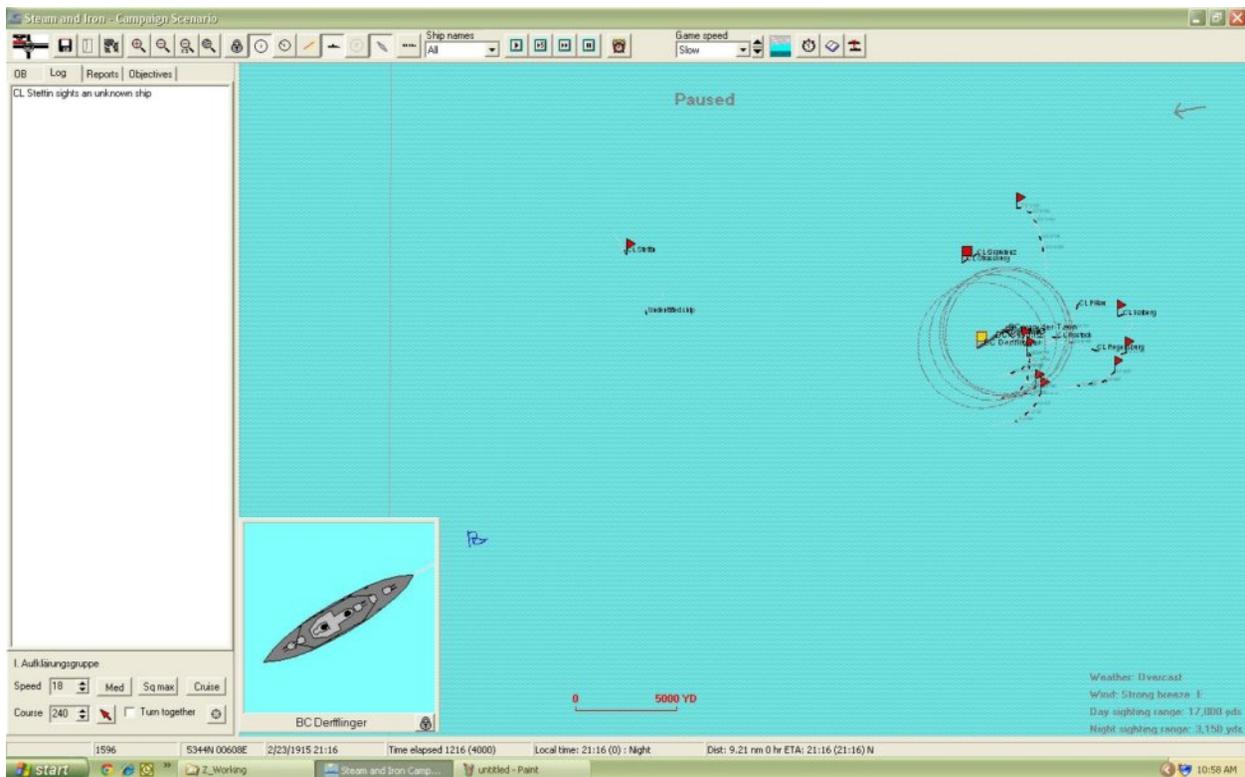
I don't usually use the range rings but for this screenshot you can see what 3150-yds worth of visibility means. *Stettin* turns away from the U/I ship, which vanishes in the dark as a

new contact from nearby Trawler B comes in, timed nine-minutes ago (screenshot below). FoW is capable of causing great confusion and it is sometimes difficult to try and piece together what's happening based on the available information. That the AI probably has similar quality information is small comfort.

You can have occasions in SAI where you see the enemy but they cannot see you and vice-versa. This can lead to all sorts of nasty situations; the emptiness outside the range circles may not be empty at all and unseen destroyers just might be launching a spread of torpedoes that will announce their arrival when one of your ships gets hit. Neat feature this, it adds to the tension.
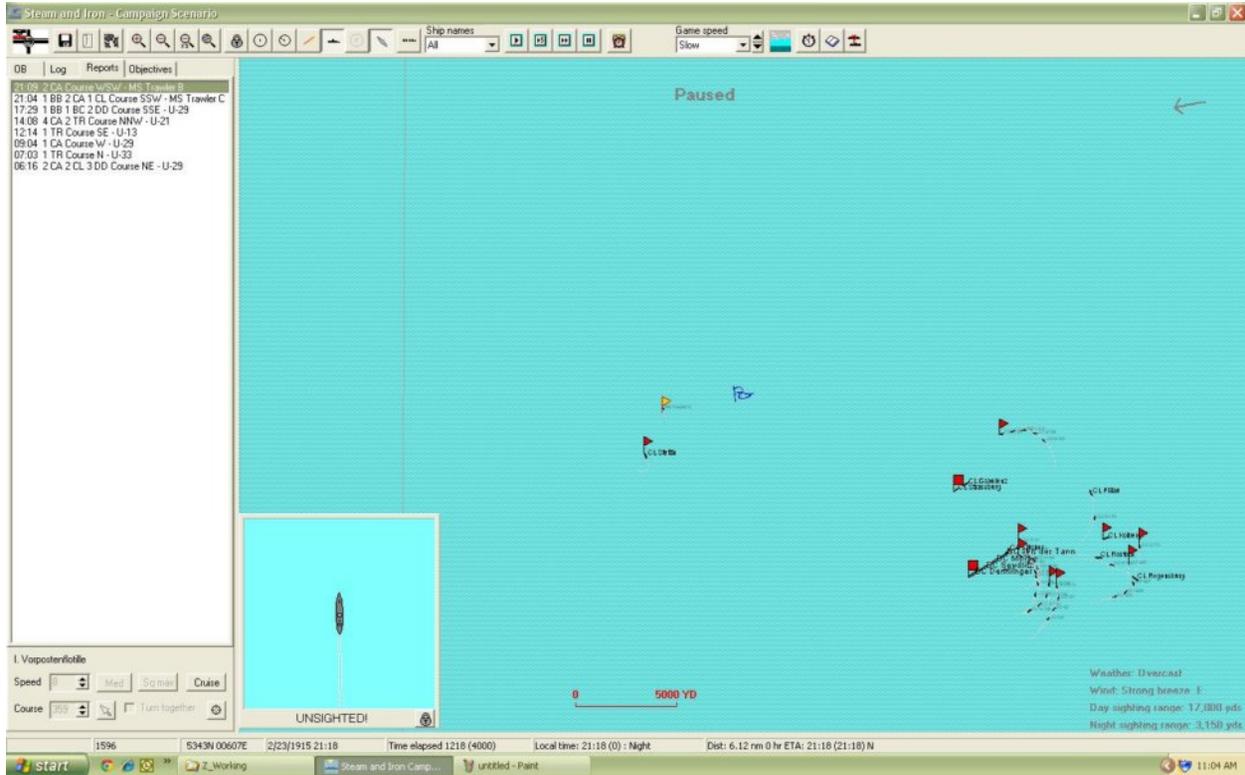
Since the contacts seem to be dispersed, *Strassburg* and *Graudenz* head off to the northwest while SG1 continues southwesterly. The HSF is now sailing at 280* to split the difference and is off the screen to the east.

After about 15-minutes of groping around the light cruisers run right into an unknown force that quickly turns into a British DD division. The screenshots below show the initial contact and the close action that followed.

The third screenshot shows the modified hit probability for *Strassburg* in action at a mere 800-yds. The action never really became general and continued off and on for 20-minutes or so. However, it was still pretty intense and at one point a British destroyer was hit 11-times in 3-minutes by 10.5 cm gunfire from *Strassburg*. It staggered out of view on fire and badly damaged. There were also torpedoes fired but none found a target. *Graudenz* never shot as well but she also suffered from additional smoke interference probably caused by her proximity to *Strassburg*.

Steam and Iron - Campaign Scenario

OB | Log | Reports | Objectives

CL Strassburg sights an unknown ship
CL Strassburg sights an unknown ship

Undentified ship
Undentified ship
DD V180
DD V182
CL Strassburg
CL Graudenz
DD V183
DD V184
DD V185

CL Stettin

CL Kolberg
BC Von der Tann
BC Derfflinger

DD V2
DD G9
DD V25
DD V27
DD G173
DD G197

Weather: Overcast
Wind: Strong breeze E
Day sighting range:
Night sighting range: 3,150 yds

2/IV Aufklärungsgruppe
Speed 18   Med   Sq max   Cruise
Course 295   Turn together

CL Strassburg

752   5346N 00613E   2/23/1915 21:33   Time elapsed 1233 (4000)   Local time: 21:33 (0) : Night   Dist: 2.76 nm 0 hr ETA: 21:33 (21:33) N

start   Z_Screenshots   Steam and Iron Camp...   untitled - Paint   11:08 AM

Steam and Iron - Campaign Scenario

OB | Log | Reports | Objectives

CL Graudenz identifies unknown ship as DD
CL Strassburg opens fire at DD!
CL Graudenz opens fire at DD!
DD V180 opens fire at DD!
UNSIGHTED! opens fire at CL Strassburg!

Paused

DD
UI
CL
UI
CL
DD
DD
DD
DD
DD

Weather: Overcast
Wind: Strong breeze E
Day sighting range: 16,500 yds
Night sighting range: 3,150 yds

2/IV Aufklärungsgruppe
Speed 22   Med   Sq max   Cruise
Course 35   Turn together

CL Strassburg

508   5349N 00610E   2/23/1915 21:42   Time elapsed 1242 (4000)   Local time: 21:42 (0) : Night   Dist: 3.24 nm 0 hr ETA: 21:42 (21:42) N

start   Z_Screenshots   Steam and Iron Camp...   untitled - Paint   11:17 AM

After a short, violent action where I gave better than I got the British destroyers escaped into the darkness. *Strassburg* and *Graudenz* never jettisoned their mines and since these greatly increase their vulnerability to catastrophic damage, I decide to send them back to port since visibility is now down to a mere 2800-yds.
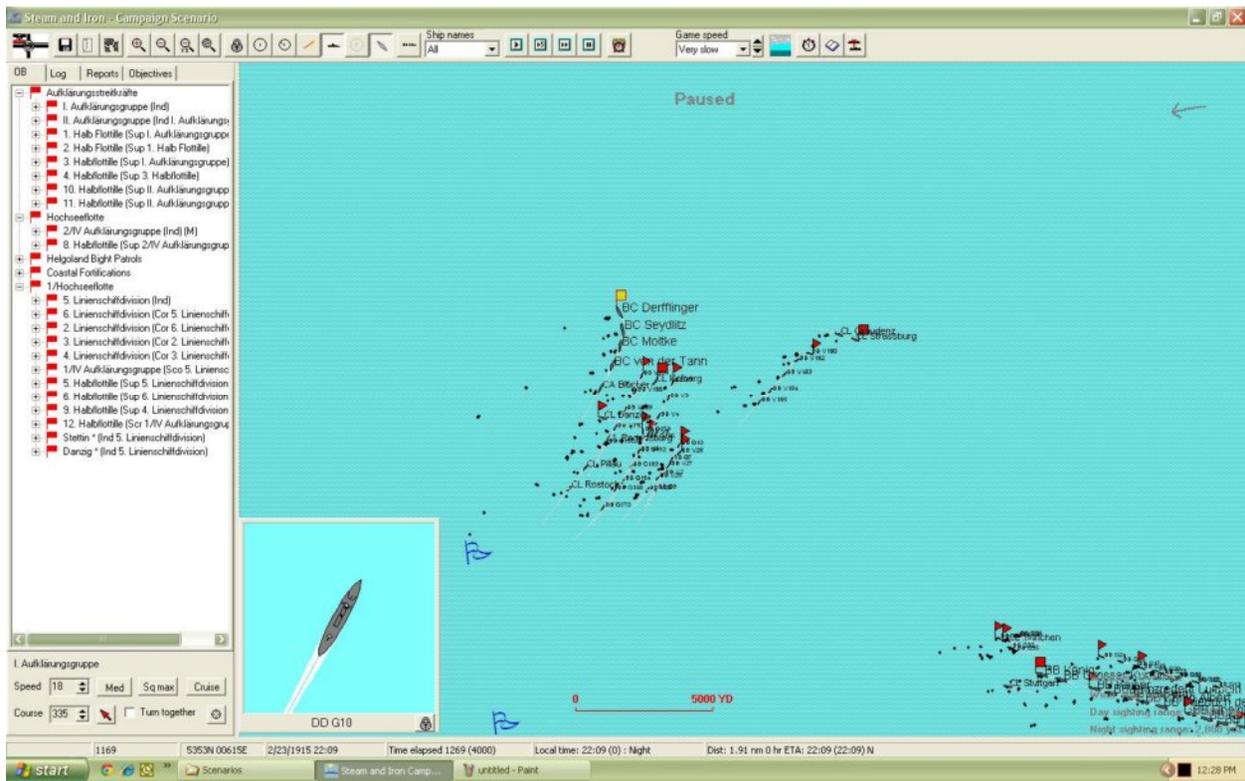
In reducing visibility and higher winds (maximum speed is down to 22-kts now) I decide enough is enough and turn SG1 for home, to be followed by the HSF.

On the way, SG1 happens upon a crippled British destroyer and take the opportunity to have some close-ranged target practice until torpedo boat *V1* goes and gets herself rammed!
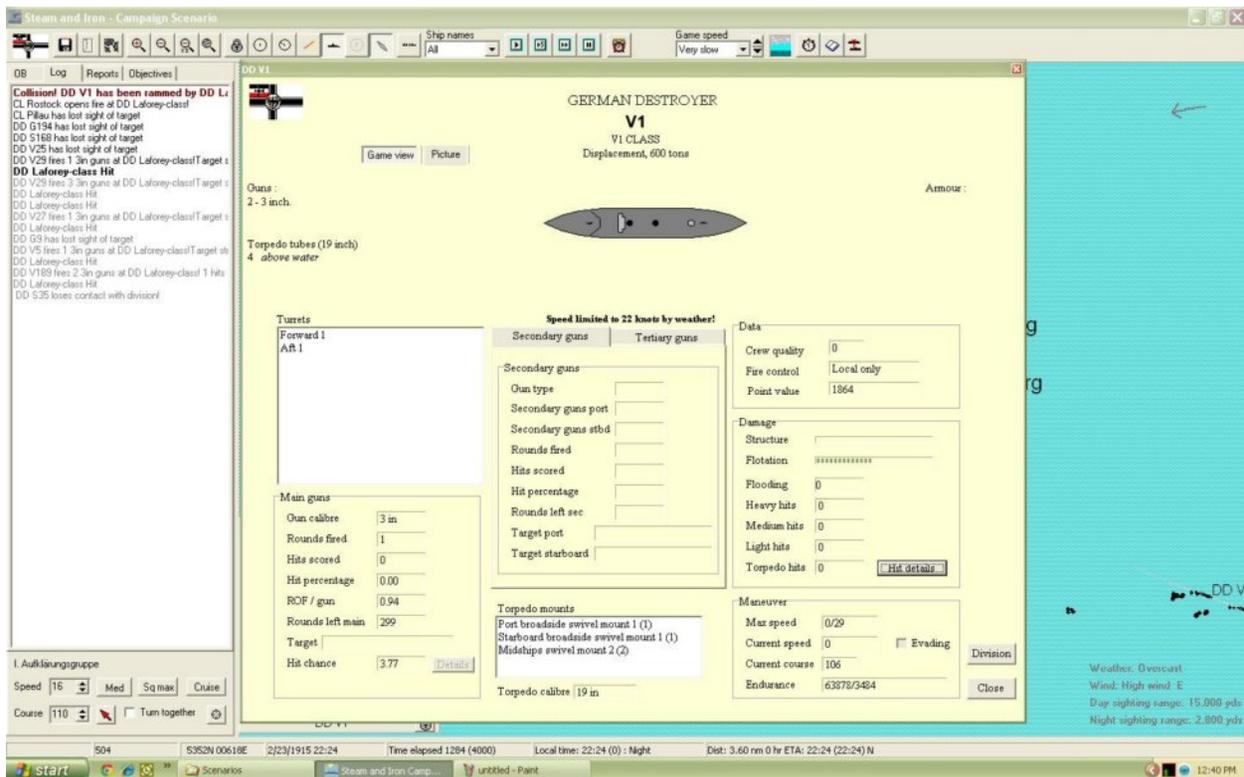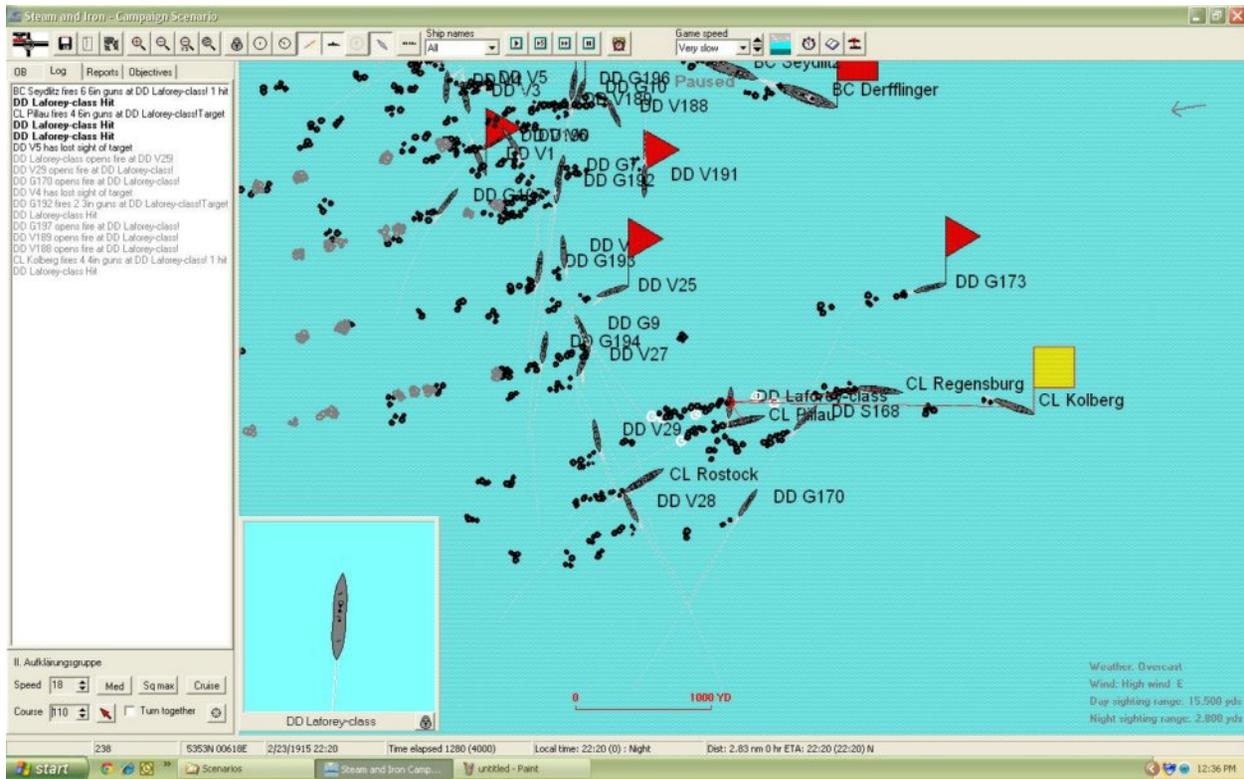
By 2300 Local I have secured the damaged V1 and am heading to the western swept channel.

Still, contacts keep coming in from my patrols but I'm pretty much committed to returning to base. Even the reports of battleships cannot turn me around since the weather is too poor and any engagement would likely be a crapshoot.
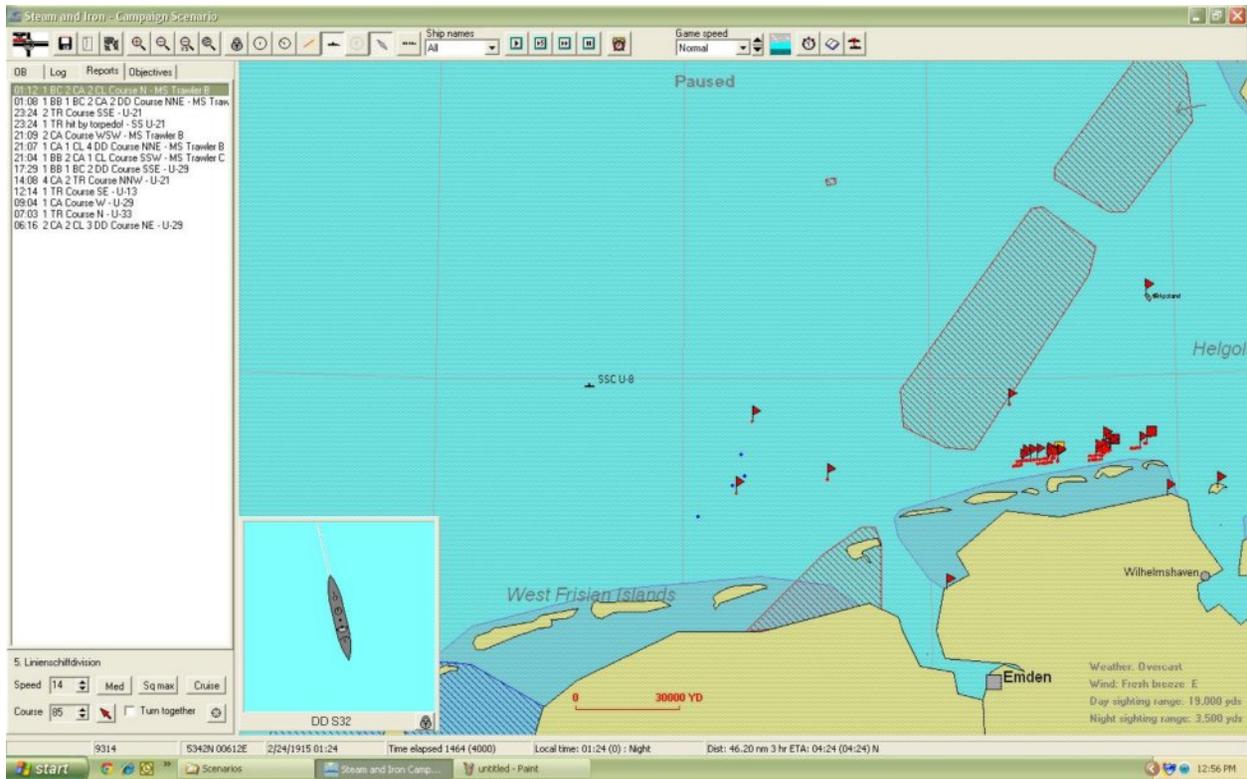
Once I got my forces home, switched to Ultra Fast speed and the scenario ran on until daylight. Campaign scenarios do not necessarily terminate as soon as your Player controlled forces reach port since the AI may have missions to complete. Below is the last turn and I learn that *U8* has been sunk.
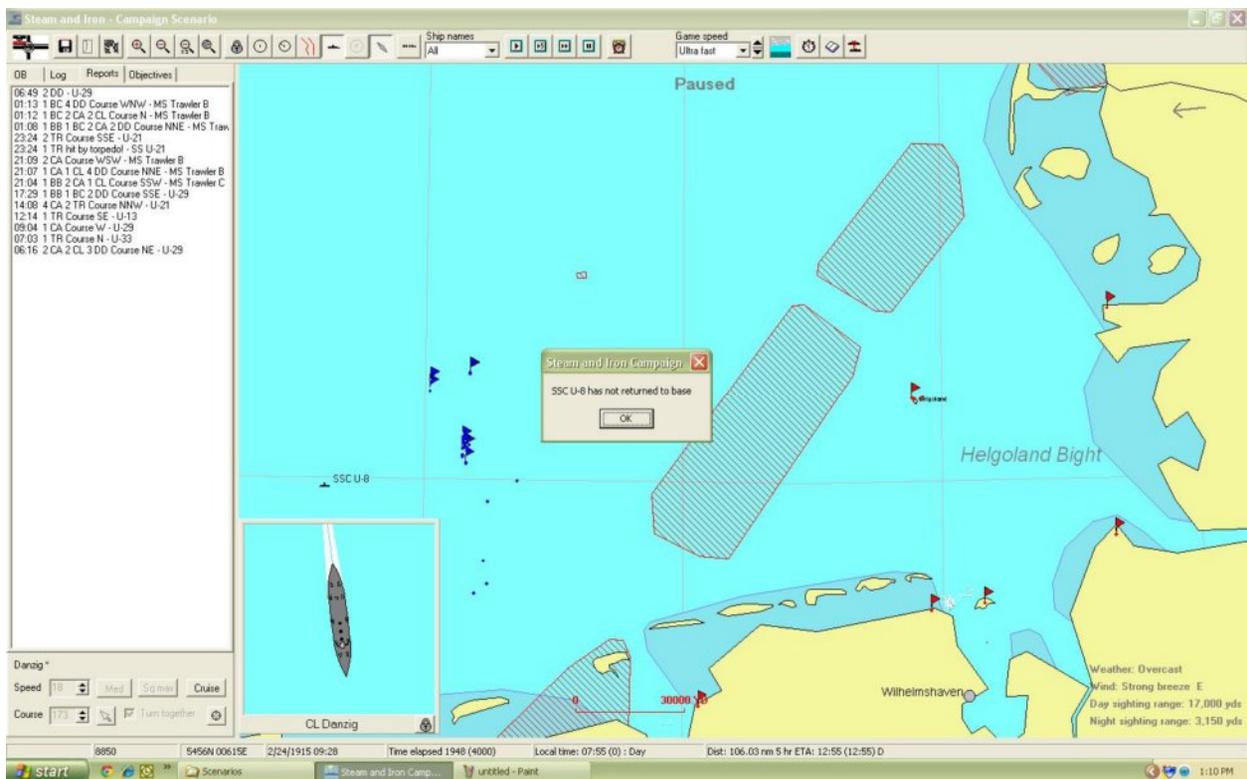
Below is the results page:

The Statistics:

The AI completed its two objectives, I presume (but do not know) that one was a Reach objective and the other was to lay mines. *U8* was rammed and sunk by *HMS Apollo*, a minelayer so the latter objective is probably a pretty good guess.

Here is the Track Chart of the area of operations. The RN had only sailed 5-BB's and none were within supporting range of the two Cats, *Tiger* and *Princess Royal*. But 2-CA's were. Had I chose to fight it out in the afternoon it would have been SG1 vs. 2-BC's, 2-CA's plus lots of light forces. Canceling the bombardment probably the prudent thing to do, all things considered.
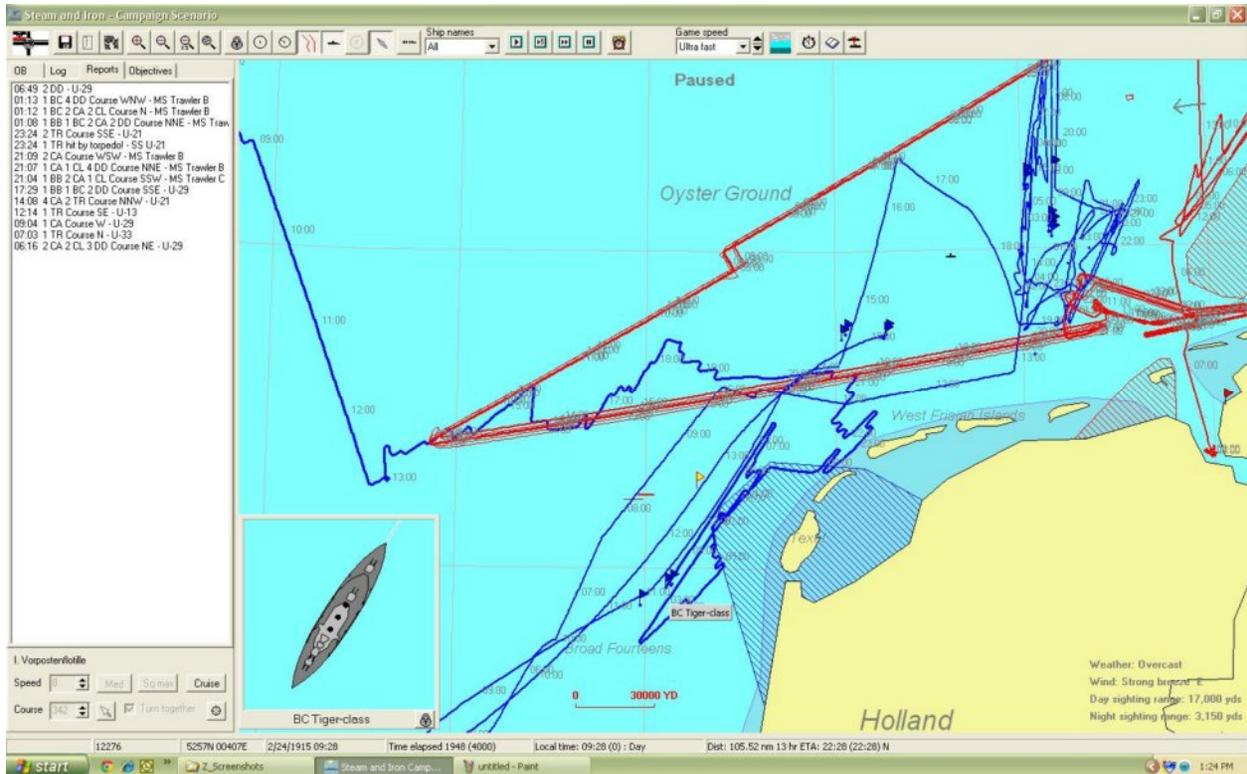
All in all, a splendid and engrossing way to spend a couple of hours. Below is the campaign status at Turn-31:

North Sea Campaign

Campaign status 3/2/1915

| Friendly ships lost			Enemy ships sunk		
Ship	Fate	Date	Ship	Fate	Date
DD T49	Gunfire.	10/2/1914	Yarmouth 2 Battery	Gunfire.	8/11/1914
DD T73	Gunfire.	10/2/1914	Great Yarmouth	Gunfire.	8/11/1914
DD T71	Gunfire.	10/2/1914	TR Glencarron	Boarded and scuttled by SS U-...	9/3/1914
MS Trawler C	Unspecified cause.	11/18/1914	TR Volnay	Boarded and scuttled by SS U-...	9/24/1914
SSC U-7	Rammed by MS Trawler C	11/18/1914	DD Lynx	Mined.	10/1/1914
CL Mainz	Mined.	1/21/1915	DD Test	Gunfire.	10/2/1914
CL Stralsund	Mined.	1/21/1915	Hartlepool	Gunfire.	10/2/1914
MS Trawler A	Gunfire.	2/23/1915	Heugh Battery	Gunfire.	10/2/1914
SSC U-8	Rammed by CL Apollo	2/24/1915	DD Waveney	Mined.	11/18/1914
SS U-28	Failed to return	6/10/2161	Lowestoft 2 Battery	Gunfire.	12/8/1914
SS U-31	Rammed by MS Courtier	6/24/2161	Lowestoft Battery	Gunfire.	12/8/1914
			TR Standish Hall	Boarded and scuttled by SS U-...	1/5/1915
			Railroad Battery 3	Gunfire.	1/5/1915
			Cromer Battery	Gunfire.	1/5/1915
			Heugh Battery	Gunfire.	1/13/1915
			Hartlepool	Gunfire.	1/13/1915
			TR Indian Prince	Gunfire.	1/13/1915
			DD Doon	Gunfire and mines.	1/13/1915
			SS E6	Failed to return	1/14/1915
			DD Minos	Torpedo	2/9/1915
			TR Minorca	Boarded and scuttled by SS U-...	2/23/1915
			DD Leonidas	Gunfire.	2/23/1915

Germany VP: 20354

Great Britain VP: -179229

Great Britain VP	-179,229
VP difference	199,583

And the Loss Map:
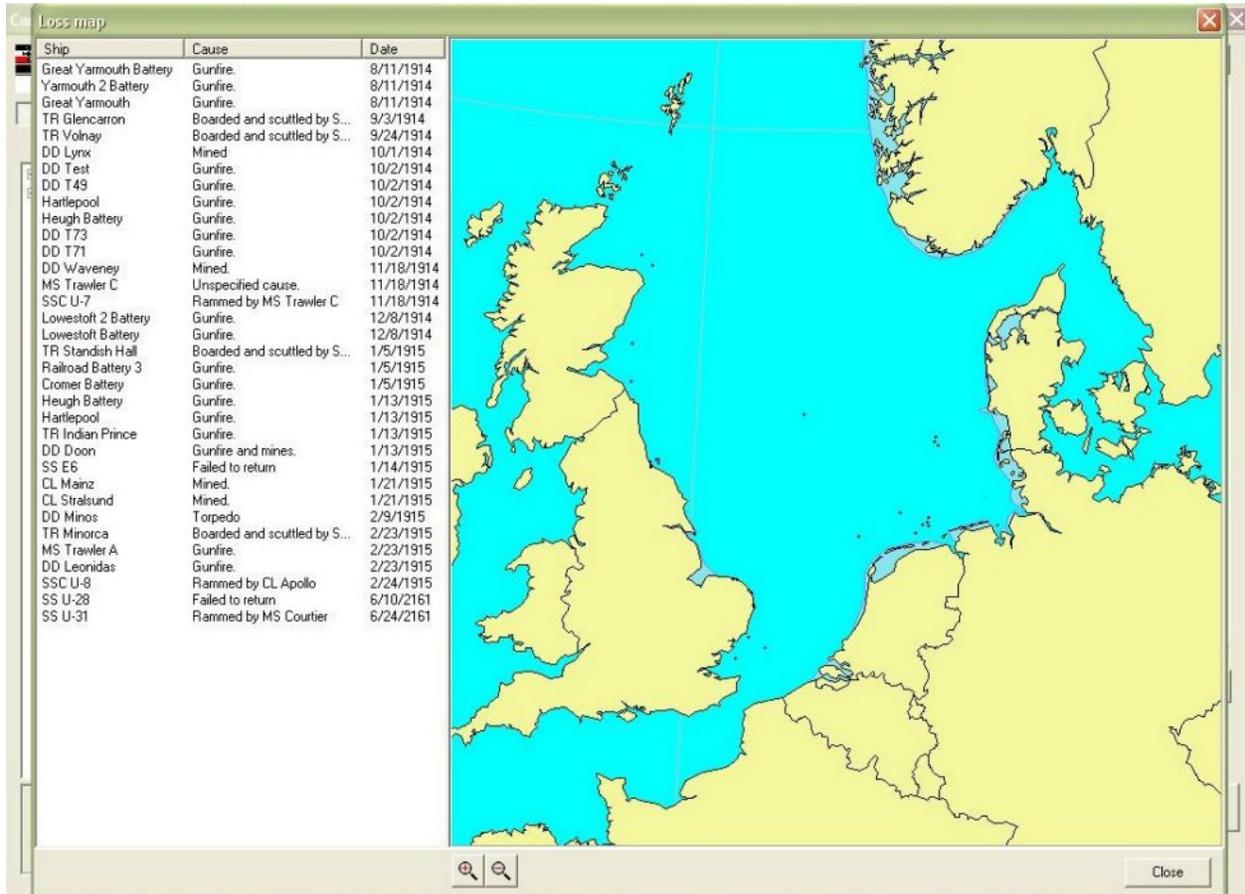
In the game, click on any line in the left-hand column and it will highlight the location of the wreck. Note that land targets regenerate but warships stay sunk forever.

So I sank a destroyer and lost a U-Boat while another U-Boat got one merchant and winged another. Also while I am pretty certain that there's a new British minefield near where *U8* was sunk, it has not been detected as of Turn-31 so that area is to be avoided. Other messages came in after returning to the strategic planning screen but good news was lacking. *SMS Rheinland* ran aground entering port and will be in dockyard hands for three-weeks and battleship *Oldenburg* accidentally rammed the brand new torpedo boat *G102* while on exercise; she'll be under repair for a month and the TB for 7-weeks. These things happen in the campaign from time to time but this is the first occasion where it has happened to me twice in one week even after all the turns I've run during testing. I consider it a nasty dose of realism.

Comments and questions are welcome.