THE ENEMY IS SAILING TO YOUR BASE

MARITIME TACTICAL DECISION GAME #1 BY JERRY HALL

PLAYER INSTRUCTIONS **Read this side only. Do not turn the page until you have made your decision.**

THE SITUATION

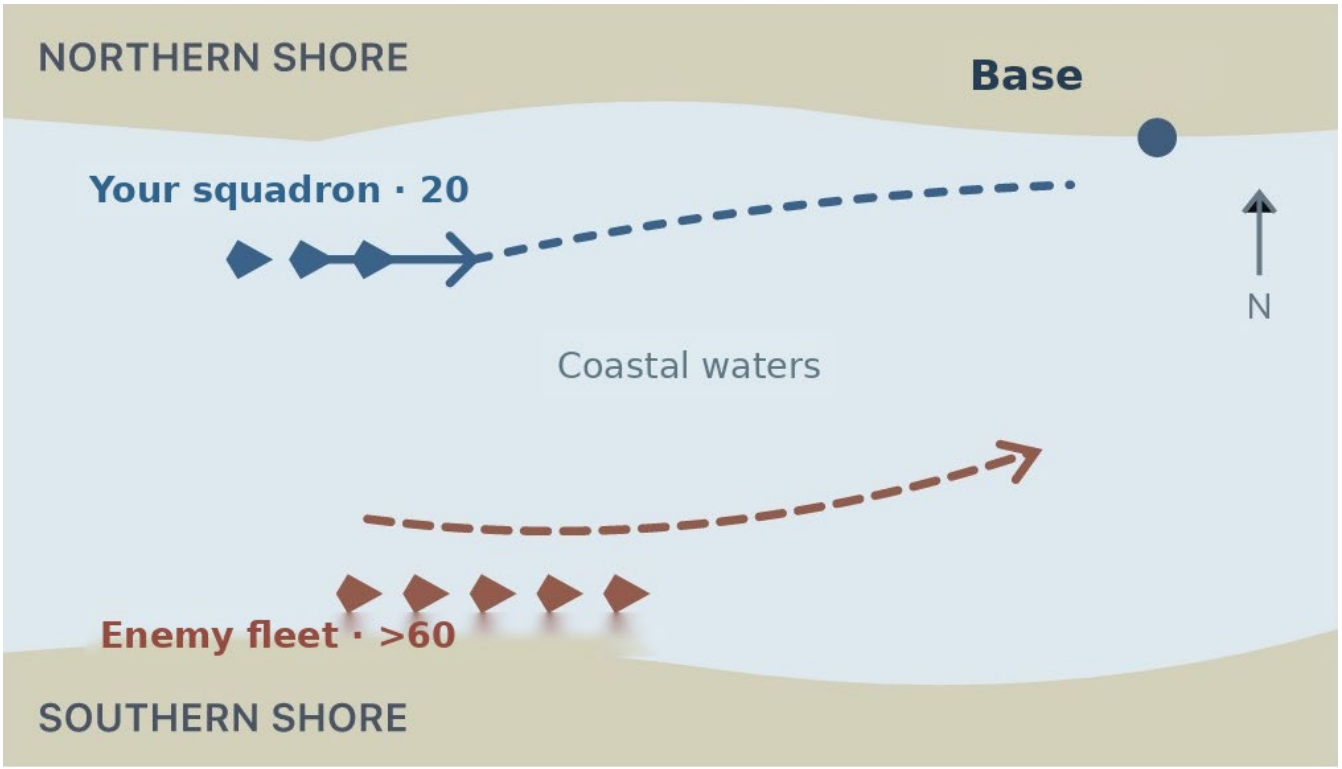
You command a squadron of 20 oared warships operating in coastal waters. Your experienced crews recently defeated a larger enemy force. Now the enemy has assembled a new fleet, perhaps more than three times your strength.

Your ships are most effective in open water, where speed, maneuver and seamanship can offset inferior numbers. Close to shore, those advantages may diminish.

Your base lies farther along the coast and is essential to your continued operations. If the enemy reaches it unopposed, your position may be compromised even if your fleet survives.

At dawn, lookouts report that the enemy fleet is underway and sailing toward your base. Your officers await your orders.

TACTICAL SITUATION · SCHEMATIC / NOT TO SCALE



MISSION & DECISION

Protect your base while preserving your squadron's ability to continue operations. What orders do you give, and why? You are not limited to a list of courses of action.

MISSION:

INTENT:

MAIN EFFORT:

PRINCIPAL RISK:

STOP | MAKE YOUR DECISION BEFORE TURNING THE PAGE

FACILITATOR / HISTORICAL REVEAL

Read only after the player has committed to a decision.

THE HISTORICAL CASE

The scenario is based on the second Battle of Naupactus (429 BCE), described by Thucydides in History of the Peloponnesian War, Book II, sections 86–92. The Athenian commander Phormio had 20 triremes against a much larger Peloponnesian fleet, conventionally given as 77 ships. The Peloponnesians sought to draw the Athenians toward the coast and threaten their base at Naupactus.

WHAT HAPPENED

Phormio moved to defend Naupactus, accepting a fight close to shore rather than remaining in open water. The Peloponnesians initially gained the advantage, disabling or capturing several Athenian ships as the Athenians were pressed toward the coast.

A single Athenian trireme, pursued by a Leucadian ship, rounded a merchant vessel anchored in the roadstead and rammed its pursuer. The sudden reversal created confusion among the Peloponnesians. Athenian ships near Naupactus then counterattacked, recaptured ships and forced the enemy fleet to withdraw.

THE COMMAND LESSON

A threat to an essential base can force a commander to trade preferred tactical conditions for operational responsibility.

The larger fleet sought to exploit an obligation Phormio could not simply ignore. The outcome also illustrates how cohesion, maneuver and individual ship initiative can reverse an apparently favorable situation.

FACILITATED DISCUSSION

1. What did you infer about the enemy's intention, and how certain were you?
2. What did your course protect, and what advantage or option did it sacrifice?
3. How could the enemy exploit your decision?
4. What would cause you to change your orders once the fleets were underway?
5. Does the historical result make Phormio's original decision sound, or must we judge it from what he knew at the time?

FACILITATOR GUIDE

Suggested format: 5 minutes for the decision, then 10–15 minutes for comparison and discussion. Invite several different solutions before revealing the historical course. Do not equate matching Phormio with making the only reasonable choice.

USE, SOURCE & IMAGE

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Historical narrative: Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, II.86–92 (especially II.90–92). Public-domain English translation: Richard Crawley, via ToposText, https://topostext.org/work/52.

Map: AI-generated schematic for Art of Command™. Anonymized for the player handout.

Photo: George E. Koronaios, "The trireme Olympias on 23 February 2019," Wikimedia Commons, source image; CC BY-SA 4.0. Photo cropped for layout.