

Fleet Preservation Rule for Age of Sail Games

From
*Admirals and Commodores: Hypothetical Scenarios for “Close Action”:
Squadron Actions, 1793–1815*

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Preservation Levels

Fleets never fought to the last ship, just as armies never fought to the last battalion. After a number of ships had been lost, one side would try to break off the action and retreat to the nearest friendly port. At that point the victors would usually be too tired, too badly damaged, or too disorganized to pursue (common phenomena among land armies also). The battle would end with the victors in possession of “the field” and some of the enemy’s ships.

1. All actions take place between “battle fleets” or “mixed squadrons.” A battle fleet includes only ships of the line on the scenario ship data chart; a mixed squadron includes smaller ships—frigates and corvettes—and sometimes one or a few ships of the line. (*Admirals and Commodores* Scenarios 1795B, 1812B, and 1812C are between “mixed squadrons;” all other *Admirals and Commodores* scenarios are between “battle fleets.”)

2. Each ship in a fleet or squadron has a preservation point value as follows:

Battle Fleets

Three-deckers (type 1 ships)	3
Flagships, regardless of ship size	3
Two-deckers, including 50s and razees (type 2 ships)	2

Mixed Squadrons

Ships of the line, 50s, razees (types 1–2)	3
Flagships, regardless of ship type	3
Frigates or corvettes (types 3–5)	2
Smaller vessels (type 6, if in scenario ship data chart)	1

3. The preservation level of a fleet is the proportion of the total preservation point values the fleet can lose without trying to disengage and retreat. If not specified in the scenario, the level varies by period and nationality as follows:

Nationality	Period	
	American Revolution (1778–1783)	Napoleonic (1793–1815)
British	30%	50%
American	25%	40%
Russian	—	40%
Dutch	30%	30%
French	20%	30%
Spanish	20%	20%

These differences reflect both general national fleet morale levels and differences in doctrine (both the French and the British were more cautious before 1793; after that date, the British became increasingly daring in seeking decisive actions).

4. Whenever the total preservation point value of ships lost or dismasted exceeds a fleet's preservation level, all the ships in that fleet must try to retreat. The ship's entire preservation level is counted if the ship strikes, sinks, burns up, explodes, or is captured by boarding. *One less* than the ship's preservation value is counted if the ship is dismasted (loses all rigging squares). The extra point is added if a dismasted ship strikes, etc., later. For example, suppose that in 1808 a French squadron composed of a 120 (flagship) and four 74s is in action with a British squadron composed of a 98, an 80 (flag), and three 74s. The French would have 11 preservation points: 3 for the flagship/120 and 2 each for the 74s. The British would have 12: 3 for the 98, for the 80 because it is a flagship, and 2 for each of the 74s. Therefore, the French preservation level would be 3.3; a loss of 4 points would cause the survivors to flee. The British preservation level would be 6.0; a loss of 6 points would cause the British to retreat. The French, therefore, would reach their preservation level if: 1) the flagship/120 struck (3 preservation points or PP) and a 74 were dismasted ($2 - 1 = 1$ PP); 2) two 74s struck ($2 \times 2 = 4$ PP); 3) all four 74s were dismasted [$4 \times (2 - 1) = 4$ PP]; 4) the flagship/120 were dismasted (2 PP) and a 74 blew up (2 PP). The British would have to lose 6 pp, which they would do if: 1) the flagship struck (3 PP), the 98 were dismasted (2 PP) and a 74 were dismasted (1 PP); both the 98 and the flagship struck (6 PP); or 3) one 74 blew up, one was carried by boarding, and one sank (6 PP). There are other possible combinations of 4 or 6 PP for each fleet.
5. Unless the players have agreed beforehand to play an *extended scenario*, or the scenario is designated as an extended one, play ends when one side exceeds its preservation level, and the other side becomes the winner. Extended scenarios are recommended for tournament play.
6. In an extended scenario, on the turn immediately after a fleet exceeds its preservation level all of the ships of that fleet must attempt to exit the board through one of the following board edges, called the refuge edge, in order of priority:
 1. The board edge from which any ships that began the game off the board entered or the edge away from which ships that began the game on the board were headed in the initial placement.
 2. The board edge toward which the fleet was headed in the initial placement.
 3. The board edge directly down wind (the one toward which the fleeing ships would be headed in wind attitude B). This edge may change if the wind direction changes.

Ships must exit the refuge edge with priority 1 unless it is a land or shoal hex or they have no movement points if they head directly toward that edge (at a 90° angle to it) or on a course up to

60° to either side of such a direct course. For example, if board edge 1 had first priority, the losing ships would have to sail for it if they had any movement points when headed in directions 1, 2, or 6. Ships must sail toward the priority 2 refuge edge in these conditions unless the conditions also apply to that edge; only if the first 2 priority edges are land or shoal or cannot be reached may ships head for the priority 3 refuge edge.

7. Retreating ships do not have to move in a straight line directly toward the refuge edge regardless of the presence of other ships or the possibility of rakes. However, any ship which does not, during its movement phase, reduce the distance between it and its highest priority refuge edge by at least one hex must take a morale check in the morale phase.
8. Retreating ships must plot full sails in the first plot phase in which there is no enemy ship within short range (1–3 hexes), if they still have sufficient rigging squares for full sails. Once they have set full sails, they may not reduce them to battle sails except as required by rigging damage.
9. Extended scenarios end when all retreating ships have struck, sunk, burned, blown up, or been captured by boarding, or have exited the map. The sea room rules does not apply once one side has reached its preservation level, i.e. the map may not be moved or extended once one fleet starts to retreat.