

ALL ABOARD!

BOATS IN OATHMARK

Noel Williams shares his house rules for *Oathmark*, which add all kinds of boat and water based fun to the fantasy game.

Oathmark is a great set of mass battle rules by Joseph A. McCullough and it's a game that I really enjoy playing, especially since *Battlesworn* and its unusual, but very welcome, addition of Engineers and Boats. However, the additional ideas do not deal with all the situations they allow in a great deal of depth - at the very least a little clarification is needed, and some additions might be welcome, too.

That's the point from which this article sets sail! I should say at the start of this journey that nothing in here has the official stamp of approval from Joe and although I have discussed my ideas with him this article is unofficial. Both players should agree on their use before bringing any of these rules into your own games.

I've tried to conform as closely as I can to Joe's open game philosophy, especially his open attitude: use what you want to use, disregard what you don't like. I've also worked to a general principle which Joe seems to follow: if something is said to apply to "any unit" then there shouldn't really be exceptions to it.

I hope you enjoy playing around with these ideas.

IMPORTANT CLARIFICATIONS AND IDEAS

BOAT DEPLOYMENT

It seems reasonable that boats could deploy containing crew alone, especially as certain kinds of scenario might require it (such as an evacuation or relief operation, perhaps a ferry). When asked, Joe suggested that it could be gamesmanship to deploy a boat containing only crew and no units, e.g. you could choose a unit of 1 goblin slinger to satisfy such a requirement or you could immediately disembark units in Turn 1.

Suggestion: It's probably a more reasonable and realistic to allow a boat to be deployed with no units apart from crew aboard.

CREW AS A UNIT

To clarify some of the issues around boats, it's probably a good idea to be a little clearer about crew. The rules say any unit called "soldier", "militia" or "Elf Pathguard" can crew a boat. They do not say that the crew are "like" soldiers or "use the stats of militia" or are in any fundamental way different: they are units of soldiers or militia.

However, a few conditions are applied because of their special role, such as not needing to be in formation. To me this means crew should have an officer, may include Characters who can have Magic Items which give them Special Abilities, and can be subject to appropriate Spells.

The only other logical way to play this is to say that Crew are fundamentally different from the units they're drawn from, and that none of the above apply. This would be a simple approach, except that it raises questions about what the boat or its crew might be able to do in some circumstances, e.g. how do they treat Obstacles.

Suggestion: Crew should, in all respects, be regarded as standard units of their type. Also, one figure in the crew must

be nominated as an Officer, whose personal LoS follows the rules for "units of one" as he can be placed independently of his unit. This means that the officer can potentially use a free pivot to obtain LoS in any direction. This can matter if the boat encounters an Obstacle or if Artillery aboard wants to use Indirect Fire.

BOATS, CREW, AND MAGIC

Many Spells explicitly apply to "any unit" so must, in principle, apply to a boat and/or its crew, too. This raises the issue of the sentence "A unit may only target the crew on a boat if there are no other units on the boat." in the Shooting at Boats section. Does it only apply to Shooting, or does "target" mean all directed action, such as Spells?

Suggestion: I take "targeted" here to mean by missile attacks only. This means that crew cannot be subject to Spells which involve a "Shooting Attack", such as Fireball, unless they are the only unit aboard a boat. However, they can be targeted by any non-missile interventions, whether friendly or unfriendly, even if there are other units on the boat. This makes sense of the suggestion on page 33 that Crew might be destroyed even though other units are also onboard.

LAND, WATER, AND SPELLS

Adding bodies of water and boats to the rules complicates some Spells because these additions are not "land" so spells which refer to "the table" or "anywhere" can become problematic. As there are no rules for drowning or units parachuting onto enemy boats, I think Joe intended such spells only to apply to "reasonable" repositioning, not extremes such as Impassable Terrain.

Suggestion: Spells such as Glamour and Special Abilities such as Discorporate, which magically transport units, should be interpreted as "move to any empty space on the table that the unit might legally be." This prevents boats from being transported onto land or dragons being dropped into the bottomless lake.

There's one complicated issue here. Crew, in effect, cannot move. It's their boat which moves. This means Crew cannot be affected by movement spells. And a Spell like Phase makes no sense applied to the Crew in isolation, only to their Boat.

Suggestion: Any Spells or Special Abilities magically altering the movement of a Crew are applied to their Boat (and, by implication, all it is carrying).

UNIT FORMATIONS ON A BOAT

It's hard to fit *Oathmark* units onto many commercial boats in perfect formation, especially large units, because the model has curved surface, superstructures or details such as masts, ship's wheel, or hatches.

Although the rules say units on boats should be in their "usual formation", this actually does not matter much in play. It will matter if the unit is targeted (i.e. whether given figures are within a shooter's LoS or not) and when calculating movement off a ship in disembarking, although that's another issue.

Suggestion: A more accommodating, if slightly longwinded, rule is:

“A unit aboard a boat must be as close to its usual formation as possible, although the position of figures may be adjusted slightly to conform to the shape of the ship. All figures in the unit must be in base-to-base contact with at least one other figure in the unit, ranks must be clearly identifiable, it must be clear which is the front rank and the officer should be in central position.

“If the unit becomes a target, the firing unit will target the actual position of figures at the time of the shot, but if this is problematic, then an imaginary rectangle should be drawn around the figures in such a way that all the unit’s figures are within it, and this rectangle is then the legitimate target area.”

This “imaginary rectangle” idea means that a unit which is slightly out of formation presents a larger target than it would have if in perfect formation, so there’s an incentive on the owning player to keep the formation as tight as possible.

OBSTRUCTIONS

The rules aren’t clear about the relationship between “obstacles” and “land”. Obstacles could (at the very least) include such things as sandbanks, shallows, marsh, wrecks, docks, piers, engineered obstacles, and the spell Mud.

Suggestion: One way to handle the range of possibilities is to classify water-related environments for boats in the same way as types of terrain for land units. The actual definitions would be up to players, varying from game to game, but some likely possibilities are:

Rough ground: This counts as double movement for boats (including river velocity) in the same way as land units over rough ground. Examples for boats would be swamps, bogs and marshes (usually at the edges of water, but in a particular scenario the entire area of water may be a marsh or similar), shallows, rocky areas, sandbanks.

Impassable Obstacles: These are too problematic to be passed through or over during a game. Land is the most obvious example, but also waterfalls, weirs, docks, piers, and engineered obstacles in the water. Other boats, both friend and enemy, and units in the water (such as friends and enemy with Waterwalk) are also impassable. As with impassable obstacles for land units, gaps through impassable terrain may be found in some circumstances, such as lock gates. These must be agreed before a game.

Navigable Obstacles: these are obstacles that might be impassable up to a point, but can be navigated around with some effort, such as wrecks in the water or visible rocks. A boat may move around such an obstacle if it can pass to clear water beyond it in a single move, the crew’s officer has LoS to that clear water and the whole boat model will be in clear water after moving.

MOVE AND MANOEUVRE

Boats follow all the rules for Movement and Manoeuvre but quite clearly there are circumstances where a boat could theoretically Manoeuvre but can’t because it would pass over land, which it can’t enter.

Suggestion: in cases where a boat could, within the rules, Manoeuvre but would have to pass over land or rough ground to carry out that Manoeuvre, it may do so if it ends that Manoeuvre completely on open water (i.e. not on land, an obstacle or rough ground). Its Activation then ends immediately.



It cannot pass over other boats or units in the water, neither friend nor enemy, during a Move or Manoeuvre. (i.e. a boat cannot interpenetrate units of any kind.)

ENGINEERS AND WATER

Engineers have the ability Waterwalk. This means they should be able to build fortifications in the water, as well as on land.

Suggestion: Engineers may build fortifications in water. These are obstacles both to boats and to other units with Waterwalk. A fortification must be completely on land or completely in water, so there can be no ambiguity about its status in relation to particular kinds of unit.

A fortification in water built by engineers follows all the rules for land fortifications and can only be destroyed by engineers.

BRIDGES

The Engineers’ temporary bridge functions exactly like a permanent bridge. It is best that its position is indicated in some way, such as string laid over a river or perhaps a model of a pontoon bridge. The relationship between boats, bridges and units crossing them needs a little clarification.

Suggestion: Bridges are not obstacles to boats, and units on bridges may not interact with boats except by shooting or magic (i.e. no moves into combat with boats by units on a bridge, no embarking on or disembarking from boat to bridge or bridge to boat.) Units on boats may shoot at units on bridges and vice versa. If a boat passes under a temporary bridge which is occupied by a crossing unit, such that any figure in the unit overlaps with any part of the boat (i.e. they would occupy the same area, in theory) shooting may occur at point blank range but no combat (because the unit on the temporary bridge is theoretically “above” the boat.)

LAKES

Lakes follow all the rules given for rivers, except for the lack of velocity. In theory this would mean Engineers could build a bridge across lakes. However, this is surely excessive.

Suggestion: No bridge may be longer than 12”. In this way, a bridge might cross a “small lake” or be built between the edge of a lake and an island within it or even between islands.

FORTIFICATIONS

Engineers may add to their fortifications on successive turns, to build longer or multisided fortifications (e.g. a sconce).

Suggestion: In principle, this together with the suggestion engineers can build in the water means engineers could build a fortification which surrounds a boat, making, for example, a protected artillery platform. I think this is a fun idea, but you may not like the possibility.

EMBARKING AND DISEMBARKING

The rules for Embarking and Disembarking assume very regular positioning of units on very regular boats moving on straightforward waterways with regular banks. In many circumstances, however, the relationship between a unit on a boat, the boat itself and the riverbank may not be straightforward. For embarking units, the “free manoeuvre” rule pretty much takes care of this, but disembarkation needs similar treatment.

Suggestion: A unit wishing to disembark may make a free manoeuvre at the start of its Activation to orient itself in relation to the riverbank, providing this is followed by a normal move which allows it to Disembark fully from the boat. In other words, the unit can align parallel or perpendicular to the bank to move onto it, irrespective of the actual position of the boat.

This free manoeuvre can cross over or overlap with another friendly unit (which would typically be on board the same ship) providing that after the manoeuvre and the move which follows, the unit is completely beyond the crossed unit, and does not pass over more than 1" of water.

To prevent units shuffling up and down large boats in awkward ways, measure the movement of a disembarking unit from the point of the boat nearest land, not the front of the unit.

FIRING PLATFORMS AND INDIRECT FIRE

Artillery units on boats will only face in one direction, probably forwards (firing over the bow). Unless the boat is approaching a target directly forward, or there's plenty of space on board to manoeuvre the artillery, this rather limits the artillery as a mobile firing platform.

However, Indirect Fire allows fire at targets within a friendly unit's LoS.

Suggestion: If the officer of the boat's crew has LoS to an enemy unit, that unit may be targeted by any unit aboard that boat with Indirect Fire. (Note: this can only be used if the suggestion for Crew is also in play.)

MULTIPLE BOAT COMBATS

Boats may move involuntarily due to river velocity or combat.

There's a slight chance a given boat may make contact with two or more enemy boats in a turn, which could therefore mean two or more combats. e.g., drifting into contact, then being forced back into another boat through combat, then being forced back a second time.

Suggestion: No boat may engage in combat more than twice within any turn. A third contact with an enemy boat results in the boat which moved into contact automatically moving an inch away without any combat. If this is not possible place the moving boat far enough away that combat will not occur, equidistant between any enemy boats within 1".

SECONDARY RULES

All of the Suggestions in this article are optional, but I think the ones above clarify the implications of existing Oathmark rules. However, the following two suggestions are completely

unnecessary enhancements of my own. They're simply a couple of bright ideas, which you might also like to use.

DOCKS, WHARFS, AND JETTIES

It seems odd that boats are sent onto a river without any provision for wharfs etc, especially as there are Engineers around to build such things. They also make great scenics.

Suggestion: If a boat is touching a jetty or other construction intended for mooring, an Activating unit may disembark directly onto that jetty without needing a specific Move or Manoeuvre. There must be enough space on the jetty for the unit to assemble in its entirety and

in regular formation. Its rear rank must align with an edge of the jetty that is either adjacent to the water or to the boat it disembarked from.

A unit cannot disembark in this way directly into combat.

A unit disembarking in this way immediately ends its Activation.

Suggestion: A unit of Engineers may build or destroy temporary jetties in the same way as Fortifications. Engineers may not destroy permanent jetties.

CARGO

Joe says that riverine craft are major transporters of trade goods, but our boats are merely troop transports. Adding Cargo to your game can build in some variety, mystery and perhaps unusual objectives, such as escorting treasure from one side of a dangerous lake to the other.

My idea here, though, merely adds randomness, which means it might be a gamechanger in some circumstances; it should only be used if both players, very definitely, are happy to include it.

Suggestion: A boat may carry a crate of Cargo in place of a Unit of troops, so a large ship may carry two Cargo crates. Each Cargo costs 20 points and should be mounted on a 50x50mm base.

If there are Crew aboard a boat, when the boat Activates the crew may use an Action to load up any Cargo adjacent to the boat or unload any Cargo from the boat. Cargo can be unloaded anywhere adjacent to the boat (including into the water, if so desired).

Cargo cannot move by itself, so remains where it was unloaded. A Unit touching Cargo, and not currently in combat, may use an Action to unpack the Cargo. Roll 1D10:

- 1-2: Medical supplies: Now able to heal minor wounds, the unit gains Shielding(1), which may be added to existing Shielding.
- 3-4: Food and water: Refreshed, the unit gains +1 Move for the rest of the game.
- 5-6: An Elven ballista: Two models must be removed from the unit (which may be of any race) to act as crew. They gain the relevant elven stats for the duration of the game.
- 7-8: Weapons: The unit gains +1 Fight or +1 Shoot (player's choice) for the rest of the game. (If the unit began with 0 Shoot it may now add Bow to its equipment.)
- 9: A spell: Throw 1D10. A randomly generated spell from the unit's racial list, is immediately and automatically cast, i.e. with CN(0). The Cargo counts as a Spellcaster with 360 degree LOS, for this turn only. If the spell cannot meaningfully be cast immediately, it is lost.
- 10: Backpay: The unit must pass a morale test or immediately become Disordered.

REMOVE OPENED CARGO FROM THE GAME

Note that Cargo can be opened by any Unit that can touch it, friend or enemy, including Crew. This opens the possibility of piracy!

And that's it! A wealth of water based possibilities for you to bring to your games of *Oathmark*. I hope you enjoy testing them out.

