



Torpedo Tactics

Ordnance tactics for BFG

By 'Volandum'

Like all ordnance, torpedoes allow damaging strikes at extreme range and are dependent on the successful execution of Reload Ordnance special orders. They have the advantage of speed, and allow effective cohesive strategies both damaging and disruptive. This essay explains tactics for their use as a weapons system in battle, and tries to guide the pre-battle choices allowing for this use.

This essay is going to be divided into four parts - the general properties of torpedoes, the varieties of torpedo and their peculiarities, archetypal torpedo uses and counters to torpedoes.

GENERAL NOTES

1. Torpedoes do shield-negating damage to ships, gain economy of scale advantages against turrets, damage multiple ships in a straight line, strike at unlimited range and experience synergy with bombers.

First, torpedoes, like other ordnance with the exception of barrage bombs, ignore shields - but risk destruction by blast markers so they are not synergistic with direct fire. Heed this, particularly when employing the Eldar's Aurora- and Shadow-class cruisers. Shield negation, on the other hand, gives you credible chances of damage with incidental fire in a game in which massed fire has a significant advantage. For instance, torpedoes allow a Dauntless to expect to deal one hit of damage to a Desolator or Planet Killer, a chance the lance variant would certainly not.

Turrets offer protection against torpedo attacks, but nowhere near as effective as against bomber attacks. Thus torpedoes allow ordnance damage against otherwise almost invulnerable targets such as the Imperial Oberon battleship. An economy of scale is noted here - small salvos will still often be ineffective (save as Eldar) - but almost all salvos can be made large: Orks can roll well, escorts can combine salvos and capital ships (with the exception of two Imperial light cruisers not worthy of consideration) have large salvos anyway. Sometimes escort squadrons may be constructed with only a few torpedoes total, note that this carries a lack of versatility.

Torpedoes can damage many ships in a line, and disregarding turrets if fired into sufficient targets will do the entire salvo strength in damage, which particularly for Imperial ships is extreme. Note that here, generally against escorts, Eldar torpedoes and large torpedo salvos are at risk of overkill. This is not a major concern, but something to be noted nevertheless, and is partially compensated for by their prolonged effectiveness despite turret attrition.

Torpedoes outrange Nova Cannon and Armageddon Guns, a property it is quite enjoyable to exploit with Eldar torpedoes on a 3-metre long battlefield. Be inspired by the doom of the Planet Killer in the legends of the rulebook and be aware that you can use torpedoes at extreme range to guide and restrict your opponent. Escorts of manoeuvrable ordnance are generally required to ward off enemy ordnance, and be aware that Nova Cannon, Armageddon Gun and Necron area effect weapons will destroy your ordnance en masse if you are careless with placement.

Synergy with bombers is a handy characteristic probably best seen with Tau (whose torpedoes can keep pace with their bombers) and Orks (whose bombers are effective against heavily

turreted ships and almost as fast as their torpedoes). Other races, however, can also employ it well against ships with 5+ armour facing them and 1-2 turrets, against whom the decision is a viable threat. Note that it is possible to bomb a target with torpedoes as a threat, have torpedoes be chosen as targets for turrets and then have the torpedoes attack something else, or vice versa. This is even better when you have torpedoes and assault boats - you can send a torpedo salvo through a line of escorts, but any who choose to fire with turrets at torpedoes can then be safely dispatched with a single assault boat. Efficient.

Your optimal situation may well be striking with both torpedoes and fighta-bommas against an Exorcist class grand cruiser with a Dauntless light cruiser behind it. Here your opponent must choose to damage either the torpedo strike or the fighta-bommas, and both are effective sources of damage. You're probably looking at a Braced Exorcist, allowing your carriers further dominance next turn. This may well be too much to hope for, though, since an Exorcist may well have CAP fighters - a Vengeance provides a slightly more likely example.

2. Torpedoes destroy other torpedoes and fighters - even on cap - without leaving blast markers, and without being limited by launch restrictions.

Here the squadrons with the option to launch many small salvos come into their own - as do torpedoes which can be manoeuvred. Boarding, Tau and Guided torpedoes can be employed very profitably in this role, but other torpedo types can also be used to good effect, particularly against larger torpedo salvos.

Note that Cobras, Nightshades and Falchions have the launch capacity for their points to overwhelm any carrier launching fighters with the exception of the Explorer, so if you make your torpedoes count (a challenge in itself) you will likely win any ordnance battle of attrition. Another advantage here if an enemy fleet is advancing into already launched torpedoes is your lack of launch limit.

Fighter removal can be conducted in support of attack craft as well as other torpedo salvos, and while it may be easier to do so with direct fire this avoids risking your own big ordnance waves or salvos with passage through a blast marker.

3. Torpedoes can be used against hulks, and are in general unaffected by target priority.

This allows a rather vicious tactic as the Eldar. In general, however, this allows you to target enemy ships reliably without a leadership test you may have trouble with. Some targets, such as transports in scenarios, you can fairly reliably down with a good-sized salvo aimed through another enemy. You can also deny victory points before you flee the field.



TORPEDO VARIETIES

1. Normal. The handy plasma torpedo employed by the Imperial Navy, Chaos, Orks, Demiurg and Space Marines.

This is reliable and inexpensive. Fire straight into a swarm of escorts or the 5+ armour of a capital ship for good effect.

2. Boarding. 45-degree turn each move, do not attack friendly ships, inflict hit and run attacks. Used by Chaos, Orks, Space Marines and Tyranids.

This, again, is reliable and inexpensive. It is excellent for sacrifice against enemy ordnance, as you can fire it through your own ships. It can also be used to target weaker enemy armour by turning round to strike sides on Imperial, Tau and Ork ships without too much difficulty. Beware the lack of reliable damage, though Engine Room Damage, in addition to dealing a hit, likely dooms the target to painful annihilation before your guns. Unfortunately, Orks and Space Marines may well lack those guns!

3. Tau missiles. 45-degree turn each move, 20-40 cm move, salvo loses strength on rolls of 6.

These would be excellent range strikers if it weren't for their tendency to vanish on the way. As it is, they are still good for direct strike at 40cm, and their ability to travel 80cm in two turns is something to underestimate at one's peril. Note that worn-out salvos can still negate enemy torpedoes and fighters as well as full ones. Consider moving more slowly and using Mantas to escort your torpedoes - you have synergy and resilience.

4. Eldar torpedoes. Hit by turrets on 6+ only, reroll to hit. Ah, the Eldar torpedo. I'll explain some peculiarities about their use later, but for now a few things to note. They can be launched in small salvos (with the reduced risks of the same) without many more losses from turrets. If fired into a line of capital ships, you can expect that they will do damage nearly equal to the salvo strength. They are death to escorts even in pairs, and are even effective against 6+ armour.

Dark Eldar use Leech torpedoes. There is some rules confusion on this subject - a simple reading indicates that they lack Eldar torpedo benefits and just roll to hit and are hit by turrets like normal torpedoes. You will typically do better with normal torpedoes: though you might be able to slow an Emperor or Oberon down to 5cm, such damage is easily and quickly repaired whereas hits damage is not.

5. Torpedo bomber torpedoes. Slow, but directable, and with possibility for forming very large salvos. Aside from their prohibitive expense, they contribute little to your fleet. The torpedo bombers may not turn into torpedoes in the player turn they are launched, so will need to attack in the opponent's turn or end up unused and restricting your launches in your next turn. They lack two uses of torpedoes - countering fighter and torpedo counters - as you might as well launch the faster fighters instead. Your opponent gets a shooting and ordnance phase before you can actually attack, so you'll be quite vulnerable - at least to prepared CAP fighters.

Furthermore, one might as well against almost all fleets launch bombers as there will be suitable targets for those. Torpedo bombers aren't bad, but if their use is planned torpedo escorts prove able to do the job much more cheaply - and rather better at close quarters.

6. Other special torpedoes. These cost points (many points for not many torpedoes in the case of the Eldar, for whom they are generally not worthwhile - Nightshades are the favoured sources for long-range torpedo shots, not the cruisers), and you roll randomly - you might end up with the highly dubious barrage bomb. I judge them not worthwhile.

Short burn torpedoes are okay, but you are likely to only have a few of them, so they will probably just be wiped away by a few fighters while nothing else moves fast enough to support them. Barrage bombs have poor to very poor synergy with everything. They are neutral against Eldar and Necrons, but then you might as well not have paid for them. Seeking torpedoes, again, are okay, but not worth the points cost for a single salvo, particularly as they are so vulnerable to the almost ubiquitous blast marker.

Guided torpedoes are again useful, but are expensive and often inferior to boarding torpedoes. Melta and Vortex torpedoes are rare and neutral to normal torpedoes against Escorts. Melta torpedoes are often inferior to normal damaging torpedoes, as you will expect slightly less damage from fire than you do from normal damage unless you land many fire criticals, which is unlikely as you roll randomly. Vortex torpedoes are good. Just hope your enemy has no assault boats, and that you actually get a chance to target a worthy enemy. (And, of course, that you actually get vortex torpedoes at all.)

ARCHETYPAL TORPEDO USES

Imperial torpedoes have two main uses - make enemy ships manoeuvre disadvantageously or Brace, or take out larger torpedo salvos. A torpedo-oriented Imperial navy will be prepared for both, using the prow torpedoes of line cruisers, possibly augmented by Dauntlesses, for attack and the lighter salvos of Cobras and Falchions for defence. Ultimately, Dauntless and sizeable Cobra squadrons one wants to fire torpedoes down enemy lines of ships, though it is difficult to find opportunities for this which are not suicidal in nature.

Space Marines lack guns and have excellent leadership, so it is hardly surprising that they have an effective ordnance fleet based around Cobras and Hunters. This allows a powerful torpedo flood at extreme range, and will effectively sweep away enemy escort cover, making outmanoeuvring the enemy even easier. Such a list should focus on the torpedo escort of choice and a few Strike Cruisers - assault boats would wreak havoc on such a list, so fighters are useful.

Chaos fleets are few on torpedoes, though the Infidel's certainly prove useful for countering the massive torpedo waves Imperial navies can dispense. One can typically get away with heavy use of Devastations.

Tau fleets either employ Heroes or do not. Defender torpedo salvos can be used to destroy fighters or torpedoes in the way of larger Hero and Explorer salvos when Barracudas and Mantas aren't in reach, but aren't so useful as the Hero and Explorer both launch attack craft, and Mantas are favoured for torpedo protection. In fleets based around a Hero core, torpedoes can be used as slightly longer reach Imperial torpedoes, with correspondingly improved disruption. In Explorer-core fleets, torpedoes destroy the ships Mantas are ineffective against - 3+ turret vessels. Explorer torpedoes are highly vulnerable to interception, but Explorer fleets will typically dominate in ordnance anyway.

Tyranid torpedoes are slow and just another part of Tyranid ordnance power, but now that Tyranid ordnance is subject to launch limits Cruisers' potential for sustained launch is useful. They are still vulnerable to interception, and typically inferior to assault boats.

Dark Eldar fleets I'm uncertain about. They have access to Eldar torpedoes, and they can if desired manoeuvre with them almost as flexibly as the Corsair Eldar - free Come to New Heading - but not quite, and besides such manoeuvring disrupts Reload rolls.

Craftworld Eldar lack the ability Corsair and Dark Eldar do of putting out masses of torpedoes. Consider those torpedoes incidental attack weapons like the torpedoes on Corsair Eldar cruisers.

Finally, you have the Corsair Eldar, the very best torpedo users in the game - they have many Eldar torpedoes mounted on cheap ships, and the leadership to use them. The Aurora is a worthy lance boat, whose torpedo armament is also worth using - just fire it off at a different target from the lances, and you might against some enemies force two Braces with just one light cruiser. The Nightshade, on the other hand, is salvation for the Eldar, death to their enemies and board control from extreme range. A varied Eldar fleet can use Nightshades to project torpedo screens which wipe away insufficiently supported escorts, constrain enemy movements and limit enemy ordnance reach, as well as torpedo its own Locked On Hemlocks for safety and a good to excellent firepower boost. Such a fleet would be advised to add Aconites to its Nightshade squadrons, giving them good direct firepower in addition to their ordnance options.

A Eldar fleet focussed on torpedo strategy can screen the entire gaming board off. So much for the enemy fleet. Escorts die to incidental torpedo salvos - a salvo of two has an excellent chance of obliterating any escort it meets - and cruisers take steady damage, forcing them to try to close - at which point they meet large and thoroughly fatal salvos. Even the Necrons are insufficiently protected to last very long, though the star pulse generator gives some protection they must close as they cannot affect the Eldar at range, and chances are at this point the Eldar can either engage for destruction, flee the board, or both. Annihilation of the Necrons is possible, but difficult.

Only Tau Explorer-based fleets and Space Marine torpedo-based fleets can match Nightshades in ordnance combat, and Explorers lose due to leadership problems and their launch limit, whereas the Eldar can simply close with the Space Marine fleets and torpedo them from close up, as they have holofields to protect whereas the Marines do not. Holofields, however, are not so effective that the Nightshades do not also devastate Eldar foes. The trick to this fleet is that by playing as Eldar with their

torpedoes you are allowing yourself to disregard many limiting principles of the game - unfocussed fire fails, strike range limitations allow retaliations, and ordnance is limited to a support role.

COUNTERS TO TORPEDOES

Very torpedo-heavy fleets, such as massed Nightshades, are very difficult and effort-consuming to counter: it may well be preferable to play to your own strengths. More mundane torpedo usage is fairly easily countered.

1. Out-ordnance them. If you can do this, great. If you can't, find another method. This is a strategic issue, though of course if you're playing a manoeuvrable fleet you may manage a local advantage, and when the enemy's torpedo ships start Bracing or dying you may keep the advantage unto victory. Eldar fleets and some Imperial fleets can achieve this locally, whereas Tyranid and Tau fleets can try to achieve this on a wider scale.

2. Otherwise destroy or force to Brace the torpedo ships. This is a job for the Imperial Navy's Nova Cannon, though Chaos and Necrons also make use of speed and range to engage in direct-fire combat. This is the favoured tactic of Necrons, as they can hardly do otherwise.

3. Destroy the torpedoes as they come. This is not effective unless also combined with another counter, which should be obvious. Nova Cannon and Armageddon Guns are instant death to torpedoes, lances in sufficient number can be effective, Bombardment Cannon work, as do Necron area-effect weapons. Do not use Shadowhunters. Consider yourself warned.

4. Let highly resilient ships take the lead. This is another temporary measure, to use as you close with the enemy. Various fleets have ships that are resilient and cheap enough to handle torpedoes by running into them. 40-point Eldar escorts, Ork Brutes and Tyranid Kraken can all sweep torpedoes away before them, allowing the rest of the fleet to progress easily. Space Marine Strike Cruisers may also be suitable for the job, as are Necron Dirges.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

We know very little of the enigmatic 'Volandum' because other than submitting this article he has told us very little. We know he plays Battlefleet Gothic!