Chanson de Geste: Naval Supplement

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Introduction

Naval warfare during the Medieval era is not frequently gamed, but it does offer some interesting possibilities. Engagements such as the Battle of Sandwich in 1217 and the Battle of Zierikzee in 1304 have fleets of Western European cogs and smaller vessels clashing, and many actions in the Mediterranean (and elsewhere) add galleys to the mix. When you start looking into it, you will find many possibilities for depiction on the tabletop. Ships were not yet carrying artillery for use at sea during the feudal era, so ship-to-ship fighting included smaller missile weapons, boarding actions, and ramming.

This supplement to the *Chanson de Geste* rules provides a means of adapting the core game to these battles, employing the same game app and basic rules. What they add are the means of maneuvering ships and using them in combat. The idea is to have a simple way of using the same armies collected for regular field battles with a fleet of model ships.

Often, battles will involve landing troops or take place in harbors, so there may be a combination of land and sea play in the same game.

Classes of Ships

These ship classes are based on a generalized view of the range of vessels used during the period. They should be understood as typical, rather than as an historically rigorous or exhaustive list.

Barge

This is the category of rowed vessels which will hold 1 (or at most 2) base(s) of troops. They are generally slow.

Hoy

Smaller sailing craft, which comprised a large portion of fishing fleets and supply tenders for coastal use. Typically carry 1 base of troops (2 at most).

Small Cog

Small cogs were the typical trading and military vessels of the period. They can hold 3 bases of troops, but only 2 on deck at any given time (the other is in the hold). They provide cover for troops in the "castles" fore and aft.
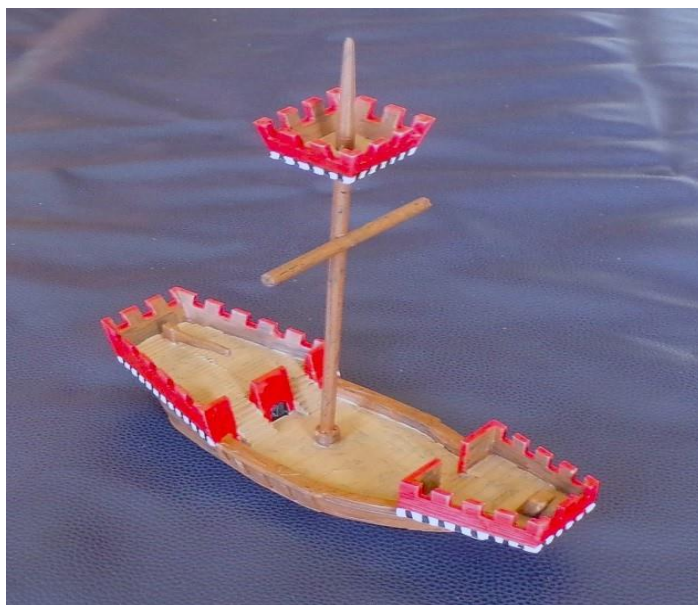
A small cog.

Large Cog

The biggest cogs could hold as many as 5 bases of troops, although only 3 on deck at any given time (the others are in the hold). They provide cover for troops in the "castles" fore and aft.

Galley

Galleys were typical of Mediterranean fleets, and they featured large banks of oars, as well as sails. Unlike other vesssels, they are capable of ramming by design. They can hold from 2 - 4 bases of troops, depending on the size. they have no hold, and do not provide cover as they have low decks. This category also covers the "galleys" in use in the British Isles and Scandinavia ("birlings", "knarrs", etc.)

Medieval sailing craft, whether cogs or galleys, tended to have very shallow drafts, so running aground was not the issue it would become later during the age of sail. Scenarios can specify very shallow areas which cannot be entered, but in general this was not an issue for these ships. For this reason we leave it up to scenario designers to implement whatever rules they think appropriate. (In some cases, galleys - which do have a significantly shallower draft than cogs - might be able to take advantge of shoals.)

A large "royal" galley carrying its full complement of troops.

General Notes

All ships except Barges are capable of using either sails or oars for movement. Before play starts, the size of each ship, expressed in number of bases, should be indicated, as this is used to determine "unit size" for different combat actions, and to track ship damage.

Placing Troops on Ships

Unlike field battles, units in the naval game are mostly made up of 1 or 2 bases, to allow for mixing the right types of troops onboard ships. (When they debark, they are still in the small units, however, reflecting the difficulties of command control in such a situation.) Troops on deck are capable of firing or fighting (when boarding actions take place). Unlike field battles, soldiers would be ready to face whatever threats presented themselves, so units do not have normal facing, but may adjust their facing at any time unless in combat contact with the enemy. Thus, flanking only occurs when a base is attacked from more than one side at once.

Mounted units may be carried on ships but may not fight, as the horses needed to be kept safely tied up.

The cog with a unit of Crossbowmen and some Foot Knights.

Command Control

Each ship is assumed to have an integral Leader (the ship's captain) who is only represented as a figure if also a field commander. There are no Exceptional ship's captains, but there may be Exceptional field commanders. They do not count as bases for determining carrying capacity. Only one Leader is allowed to take the Initiative for any given ship in a turn. Ship's captains do not count against Army Morale, but field commanders do.

All units on board a ship are considered to have a Leader attached, until all available Leaders are killed in combat.

Each vessel counts as its own Battle for game play purposes.

Troop Movement

Bases on ships are allowed to move freely on board the ship, and this includes switching places with another unit on the ship. Both units will require activations to be able to do this, however - there is free interpenetration. Movement in and out of the hold will require activation like any other movement, but may be combined with boarding or leaving a vessel. Units may move onto and off of ships which are docked or beached using March movement, or will have to pay for their movement as if passing through a 1-inch choke point if in a non-March formation. You may charge into combat using this mechanism directly from on board a vessel, but only with non-mounted units.

Non-mounted units and field commanders may transit between friendly vessels if these are in contact with each other. Note that bringing friendly ships into contact does not cause any damage - that is reserved for the enemy (see Ramming, below). Non-mounted units and leaders on board ships may move onto a new vessel in the same

turn in which the ships move into contact. Like all moves, units will require an activation to do so.

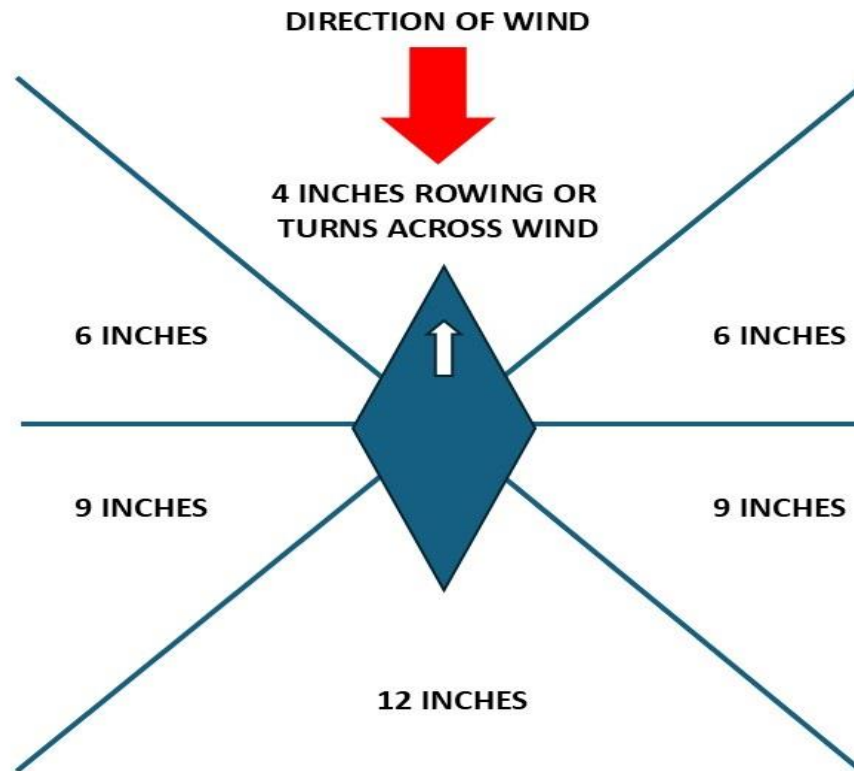*Knights and Footmen come ashore - the invasion has begun!*

Ship Movement

Wind and Weather

Wind direction was a critical factor during this era, as sailing vessels were not yet equipped to sail into the wind as well as they were later on. (That said, it is possible for a square-rigged cog to sail 50 degrees into the wind, or so I have read.) For the purposes of simplicity, we keep our representation of medieval seamanship at a very general level in this game.

Wind direction should either be specified by scenario, or randomly determined at the start of play. (We use a spinner for this, but you can also specify north and then roll an 8-sided die, counting clockwise from north around the points of the compass - north, northeast, east, southeast, south, and so on.) If players agree, or as specified by scenario, wind direction can change on a 1 in 6, with a roll at the start of each turn. If it changes, re-determine the direction randomly.

Movement Rules

When a ship is given the Initiative, it is allowed to move. All ships may choose to use oars, or - if they also have sails - to instead use those. You may not combine the two in a single turn. Oared ships move at different speeds, but sailing ships all move at the same speed. This depends on the direction of the wind, as shown in the diagrams below:

DIRECTION OF WIND

4 INCHES ROWING OR
TURNS ACROSS WIND

6 INCHES   6 INCHES

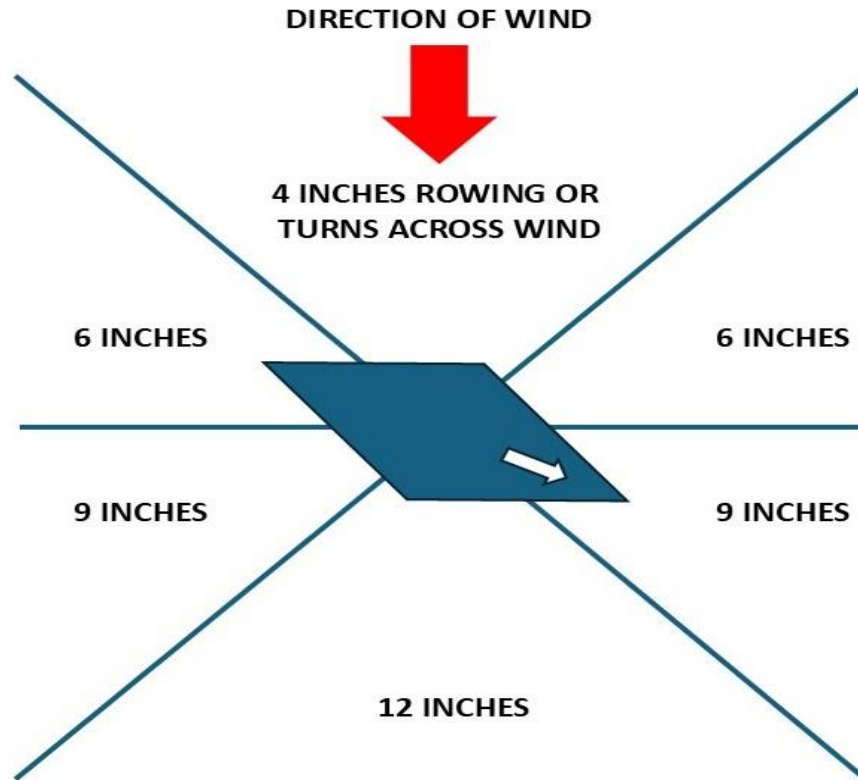9 INCHES   9 INCHES

12 INCHES

A ship pointed directly into the wind within a 90-degree arc centered on the direction the wind is coming from may either move under oar power or pivot around the vessel's center point until it is just out of the 90-degree arc. Note that galleys under oar power will move 8 inches instead of 4.

DIRECTION OF WIND

**4 INCHES ROWING OR
TURNS ACROSS WIND**

6 INCHES **6 INCHES**

9 INCHES **9 INCHES**
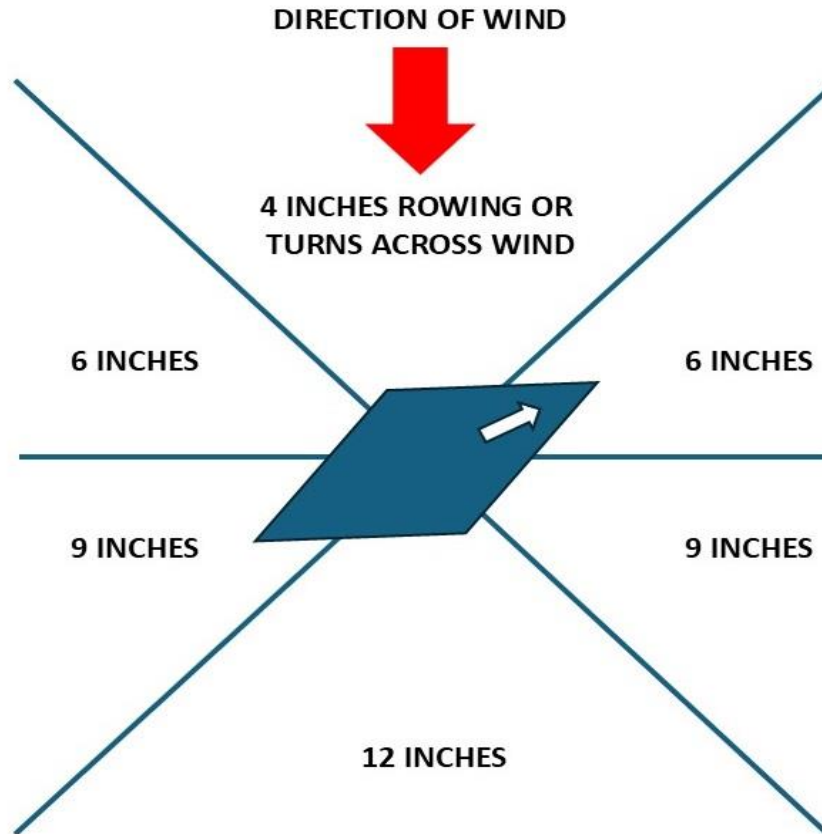
12 INCHES

*Ships beating into the wind (or "tacking"), in the 45-degree arc toward the
wind direction, and forward of a line perpendicular to the direction of the
wind, will sail 6 inches. Vessels under oar power will move 4 inches,
except for galleys, which will move 8.*

DIRECTION OF WIND

4 INCHES ROWING OR TURNS ACROSS WIND

6 INCHES | 6 INCHES

9 INCHES | 9 INCHES

12 INCHES

Ships which are reaching, in the 45-degree arc behind a line perpendicular the wind, will sail 9 inches. Vessels under oar power will move 4 inches, except for galleys, which will move 8.
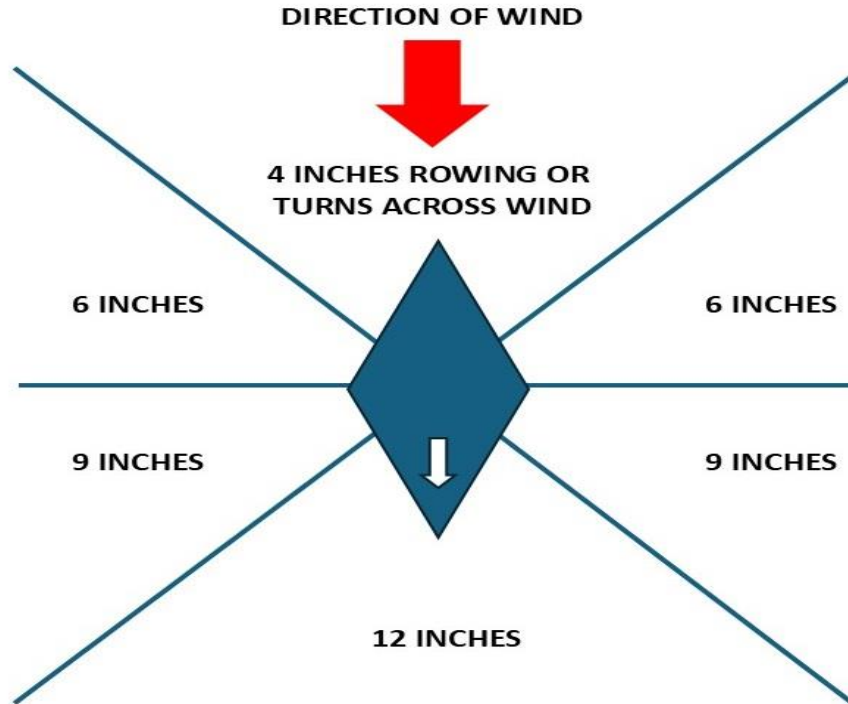
Ships which are running before the wind, in the same direction as the wind or within a 90-degree arc centered on the wind direction, will sail 12 inches. Vessels under oar power will move 4 inches, except for galleys, which will move 8.

Note that a ship which is on the line between two arcs may always choose the fastest speed. Turns being made other than turning across the wind (the first diagram above) will be made by pivoting the ship around its center point, and paying the sideways distance move by the prow of the vessel. This is subtracted from forward (or backward) movement. Together, they may not exceed the full movement total in inches.

Ships may not sail backwards, but may row backwards with a penalty of 2 inches off their total movement.

Ships move independently of the units aboard them. Ship movement never requires an activation - it happens automatically each turn when the ship is given the Initiative, even if no Leaders are present.

Missile Fire

Shooting is very much the same as for battles on dry land. Ranges are the same, and all the usual settings are needed. When shooting at an enemy, you must indicate which unit is the target, as for regular shooting. Be aware that cogs of all sizes will provide soft cover against fire, as a result of the "castles" fore and aft, but that other vessels do not provide this (not even galleys, because the decks are so low).

*A galley takes fire from Irregulars in a barge.*

Melee

Melee is handled a bit differently when combat involves forces on a ship. Charges are not declared: melee occurs whenever two enemy ships are in contact ("grappled"). The different aspects of this are: (1) moving into contact and grappling, (2) breaking a grapple, (3) ramming, and (4) resolving melees. Each of these is addressed in a separate section below.

Moving into Contact and Grappling

When a ship moves into contact with an enemy ship, the enemy ship is immediately considered grappled. A melee will take place immediately if any unit(s) on the deck of the moving ship have not yet acted. The attacking unit must be on the deck of the moving vessel, and will face any unit of the defender's choice on the deck of the target vessel which is not already an actor or target in a melee. This reflects the fact that units on the deck of a ship will generally be mixed together, and that boarding actions will be faced by the best-armed troops if they are available.

If a second ship moves into contact with the target vessel - or if an enemy ship moves into contact with a vessel which is already grappled - then the unit used as a target must be one which has not already acted as an actor or target in a melee that turn. If none of these are available, the new actor may select the unit to target. If all units on the ship being attacked have already been actors or targets during the turn, then any new attackers will get the benefit of flanking the target, assuming they are contacting the

ship at least 90 degrees from other contacts, as judged by superimposing a circle centered above the target vessel.
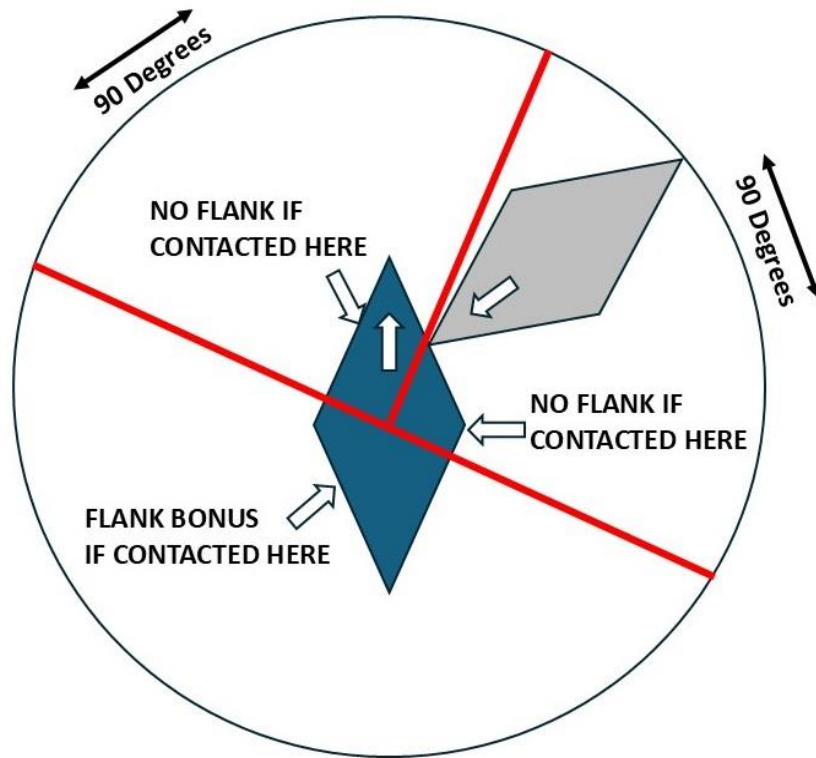
How to determine whether a flank bonus applies in a melee.

As with land combat, if there is a unit which is being flanked, but which is not in "frontal" combat in a subsequent turn (that is, it was a supporting unit, or its enemy has been destroyed), it may shift facing to deal with the new threat. This may mean that it cannot support in a subsequent round of an ongoing combat as it did in the earlier round, however.

Breaking a Grapple

Instead of fighting a melee, a unit may choose to attempt to break a grapple. This involves making a successful Retire action. If more than one ship is grappled, then a separate activated unit must make a successful Retire action during the turn to break away from the additional grapples. Each separate grapple requires a successful Retire action. If all grapples are broken, the retiring vessel may move 2 inches away from the enemy to break contact. Any units which did not Retire can still perform actions if there are available activations (for shooting, for example).

Ramming

If a cog of any size moves into contact with an enemy ship with its prow, within a 90-degree angle centered on a line perpendicular to the axis of the eenemy ship, then it is considered to have rammed the enemy ship. The ramming player will roll a die for each unit on board the rammed ship, and on a score of 1 that unit will immediately suffer loss of a Level of Status as a consequence.

Galleys will do the same thing, but for each 2 inches of movement they perform under oars before making contact, the score needed to damage the enemy units will increase by 1. After being rammed, a melee is fought as the ships are considered to be grappled.

Resolving Melees

As described above, the actor and target of a melee are selected in a different fashion from combat on dry land. All other units on the deck of either vessel are assumed to be supporting units in the combat, however, as they will have troops mixed up in the fight.

Units in the hold may not engage in combat unless a unit on deck has been destroyed, and the unit in the hold can use its activation to join the fighting. When this happens, they will trigger an additional melee for all the involved units.

Note that when troops from a cog (large or small) fight against troops from other types of ships, they are considered to have a height advantage, which should be indicated with the "Actor Uphill" or "Target Uphill" boxes checked, as appropriate. All other vessels are assumed to be on the same level, as are two cogs meleeing each other.

Note that units are not physically moved onto the ships they are meleeing in this game: that only happens once a ship has been captured. Units may automatically be shifter forward to the part of their own vessel adjacent to the enemy, however, when a friendly unit in front of them is destroyed. This will maintain contact between rounds for melee purposes.

Destroying and Capturing Ships

Given the nature of naval warfare during this era, it is not usually the case that ships were destroyed - instead, they were generally captured. Consequently, the assessment of damage to ships is tracked through the fate of the units on board. This is admittedly a simplification, but it avoids having to keep track of hits on the ships themselves.

Whenever all units on a ship are destroyed, the ship surrenders or is captured. When missile fire is the thing which causes the last unit to be destroyed, the ship will surrender or flee and is removed from play. When it is the result of a melee, then the ship is captured, and may be sunk at the discretion of the capturing player. Captured ships do not require "prize crews" to occupy them, nor may they join the fighting, as there would be no time to organise a crew in the midst of battle. They should simply sail off the table

as quickly as possible, without necessarily having any units on board. If grappled and meleed, they may be recaptured, which will happen automatically if there are no units aboard them.

If all units on the deck of a ship are destroyed, but there are units in the hold, at least one unit must move into the deck to defend the ship, as an immediate priority during the next move. If this does not happen and the ship has been captured in melee, the unit in the hold is trapped there, and is captured along with the ship and is removed from play once it leaves the table. Such captured units count against army morale.

Note that army morale works the same for naval engagements as it does for land combat.