

IMPROVING AIRWAR GAMES

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Richard Berg's omission of air war games from his Basic Library is understandable, especially for one like myself who shares his prejudice toward operational and strategic simulations. AH's Luftwaffe is a fairly good strategic simulation-I speak of the full Campaign Game with all options-but, unfortunately, the simulation breaks down toward the end of the game when the outcome usually rides on one or two German cities that must be bombed. The Germans throw all defense on these two targets, while the Allies throw everything they can put in the air at them; strategy is damned to the winds, and the die rolls in this battle-for-a-city decide a campaign.

The tactical air games (Flying Circus, Richthofen's War, Spitfire, Foxbat & Phantom) suffer a different problem; e.g., they are mostly short tactical scenarios and as such are little more than suicide missions. Losses be damned-it only matters that you fulfill your assignment.

However, I would like to point out that Randy Reed's Campaign Game for Richthofen's War goes a long way toward solving this problem for all tactical air war games. I have played this campaign game many times with a couple of friends-we play a three-man

game; one German, one Allied fighter command, one Allied bomber/recon command (who is Allied boss)-and are absolutely delighted with the results. When you have to plan for seven days of operations, five operations a day, you become very sensitive about damage to your aircraft. How many planes you have in the shop, and how many will be available for operations next day, is extremely crucial. Many a commander with an ulcerated stomach finds himself laying down the law: any fighter approaching 50% damage should immediately break off contact and head for home. That becomes critical. An aircraft actually getting shot down is a catastrophe of such proportions it rarely happens in a campaign game--and when it does, it's usually due to a Critical Hit (i.e., lucky shot). Unfortunately, like Luftwaffe, even the Campaign Game starts breaking down when you get to the last day. Losses no longer matter, and the "suicide syndrome" reasserts itself. None-the-less, you can have a good, realistic operational/tactical study up until then.

Moreover, this RW Campaign Game system can be adapted to most other tactical air games, as Spitfire and Flying Circus. Foxbat & Phantom is an all-or-nothing affair-

no damage, you simply survive or you don't survive. Still, even here, you may give each side an "on paper" force, and a number of missions they must carry out with that force. Losses are permanent, reflecting declining control of the skies; and, of course, as time progresses, losses will also make it increasingly difficult to carry out each new mission. Unless, of course, you've put a few dents in your opponent also, or have racked up enough Victory Points on successful bombing runs to offset this. Another interesting scenario might be to have intruding bombers striking at enemy airfields, meaning a successful strike reduces the interceptor forces from turn to turn.

In short, RW's campaign game rules set a nice pattern for imposing operational realities on tactical air games and in turn converting insane "suicide" battles into startlingly realistic tactical aerial encounters. Those who are interested may wish to dust off some of their air games and try it. I suggest you begin with an RW Campaign Game, to get the feel of the system.

-Mark Saha