

AIRWAR

Modern Tactical Air Combat

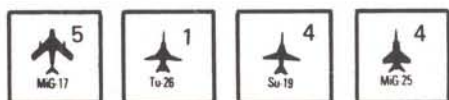
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I've been interested in aeroplanes for as long as I can remember.... books, models, magazines, the whole lot. When SPI brought out 'Flying Circus' I got hooked on air games too. 'Richthoven's War', 'Spitfire', 'Foxbat & Phantom', 'Air Force', Ed Smith's 'Battle of Britain', 'Fight in the Skies' — I've played them all. What I really wanted to do though was fight Mig's v. Sabres over Korea; so naturally, when **Air War** came out I just had to get a copy.

Well, they warn you in the adverts that it is a complex game and when you open the box you can see why. The rule booklet is quarto size and covers 48 pages. Add to that a quarto size sheet on each of 30 aircraft, full characteristics table for 16 different guided missiles; add 12 pages of charts, a one-page sequence of play and a two-page rules summary and then, on top of it all, take a look at an aircraft's control panel sheet.... it's 3 inches deep and 21 inches long... for each aircraft. Of course you also get an 8 piece 'geomorphic' board and 600 counters. Well, it's enough to put anyone off and it was a week or two after I got it, after several "well, perhaps tomorrow's", before I finally settled down to try to digest it all.



Once you do get started however it's not at all as bad as it seems. Having played an air game before certainly helps. The game is split into steps, of increasing complexity, each with its own scenarios. The first deals with aircraft movement and cannon/mg combat; after reading and mastering this (it is 11 pages long) players can go on to play the first three scenarios and make up their own situations covering any combat which does not include missiles. The complexity level at this stage is still fairly high, as players have to master such things as "energy levels", "12 point facing", "turning progress" (before each 30 degrees turn is made) and to be successful manoeuvres such as the Immelman, wingover etc etc.



Once mastered, however, games flew fairly well and can be very enjoyable. Pilots rated 'Turkey', 'Novice', 'Average', 'Honcho' and 'Super Honcho' and the survival chance for a Turkey is pretty poor over a number of games. Although jockeying for position in a Mig 15 against an F86 Sabre can be pretty enjoyable, the game's constant aim for 'realism' results in a low number of aircraft shot down or damaged which is somewhat frustrating... so is the Mig's limited ammo!

To get more kills you gotta get missiles and that leads to stage two.... heat seeking missiles. The

increase in rules is actually fairly small, three pages and all the systems are for aircraft so its straightforward. However, the disadvantage of missiles is that you need a new control panel in use as soon as you fire one of the damned things! Heat seekers soon lead you to radar homing (two more pages) then you can fly a basic game with any type of aircraft and the full panoply of weaponry.

After this, optional rules cover visual and radar search, clouds and sun, infra red and radar counter measures, bombing and strafing, ground to air fire and ejecting. Some of these e.g. visual search and ejecting, are useful even in stage one games, as soon as you've covered the basics, as they enhance the game considerably (make sure your wing man has good eyes).

Next come the scenarios, 10 historical ones, covering everything from 'action over Mig Alley Sept. 13th 1952' involving 2 F86's and 2 Mig 15's, to the 'Return of the Red River Rats Route Pack Six, Dec. 22nd 1972' involving F105's, F4E's, A7E's, Mig 21's, AIM 7 and 9 Atoll missiles, buildings, trucks, dumps, bridges, barges, SAM missiles, AA guns, bombs, SMART bombs and Bullpup missiles.

Finally, a section on constructing your own scenarios, aircraft availability, pilot capabilities and situation types, followed by some general hints on playing.

Despite its complexity, I enjoyed **Air War** — in fact, it might be partly because of its complexity — there is always something new. However, I guess you've gotta be an aeronut like me because it does require commitment to master it all. And, most difficult of all is finding an opponent. Still, I know this guy in Brum who's pretty interested in aeroplanes, if...

