

Signs & Portents

WARGAMER

A Meeting of Behemoths

Massive carrier action battle report

Give Me Ramming Speed!

Order of Battle design insight!

Tactical Manual: Fighters

Getting the most out of fighters in ACTA 2nd Ed.

Plus... Battlefield Evolution battle report, ACTA design studio, Extinction Protocol and much, much more!

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November 2007

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What to write about this month? Not sure really. We've had a very successful ACTA tournament at the Croft Sports Centre in Swindon, where 24 players went at it solid for 8 hours in what's becoming our second home. The staff at the Croft have made us so welcome I'm thinking of living there.

We've got the Victory at Sea tournament at the Studio this month (you'll find details on page 59) and there's still time to sign up and take part in what has become the success story of 2007. I have to say it shows what I know. When Matthew first told me he had an idea for a WW2 naval game I can remember warning him off. Niche subject. Limited interest. You can imagine the sort of profound visions of doom. Since then it's just kept on selling, hammering through print runs and becoming a firm favourite with gamers starved of a good WW2 naval game.

I'm still looking for time to put together the American Civil War ironclad variant we have. It turns out you guys are looking forward to that as well. This time I'm not surprised!

Finally, an extra special word of thanks to my hard-working Number Two, Matt Thomason, who literally worked through the night to get this to you.

Ian

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A Tale of Two Extremes

Numerical superiority faces elite forces in this Battlefield Evolution report.



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Tactical Manual: Fighters

Making the Most of Fighters in A Call to Arms Second Edition.



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Extinction Protocol



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A Meeting of Behemoths

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Give Me Ramming Speed!

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Matthew Sprange is your friendly tour guide as we take a look at the Order of Battle, the new supplement for Victory at Sea.

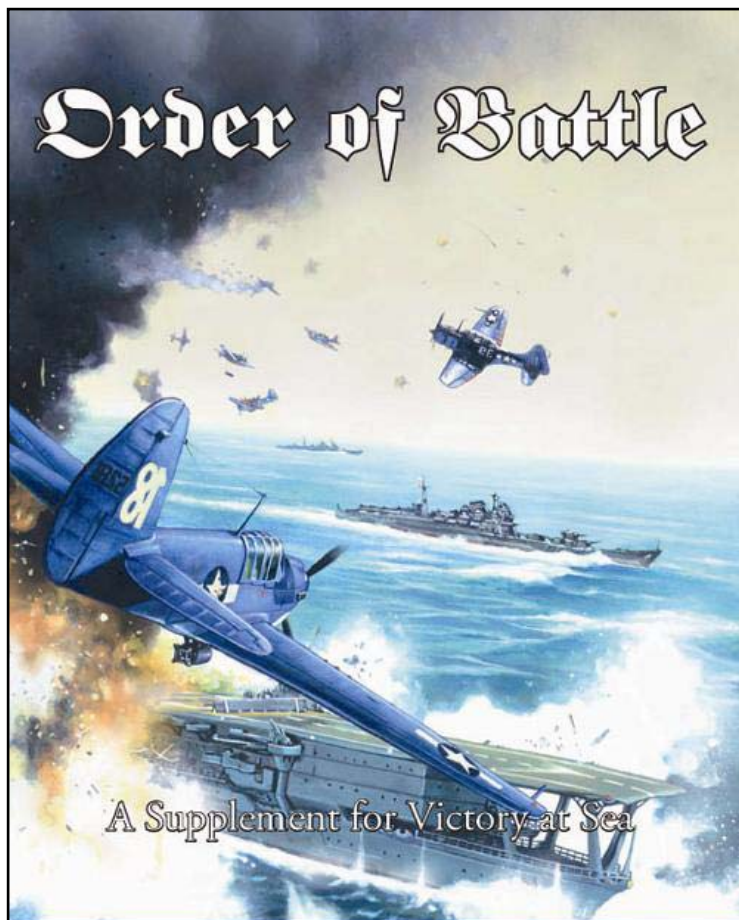
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EYE ON MONGOOSE

This Month's Releases and Gaming News



Order of Battle

The first essential supplement to the popular Victory at Sea naval wargame. Adding to the rules and fleet lists, greatly expanding upon the original rulebook and enhancing the gaming experience.

Inside you will find:

Expanded Fleet Lists

All of the six original fleets gain reinforcements, with new models, both historical and planned but never built. In addition the Soviet fleet makes its entry into the game, with many projected vessels that were never built included.

New Rules

The aircraft rules get an overhaul in this expansion, representing their historical potential to destroy surface craft. Some aircraft even have the ability to attack submarines with depth charges!

Rules on superior leaders who have a real effect on the outcome of battles are also introduced, with motor torpedo boats adding to the options available to players. Minefields and shore batteries make their first appearance in the game, as do Kamikazes, allowing for suicide attacks by aircraft and submarines. Night battle rules are significantly expanded, allowing some of the most exciting engagements of the war to be re-fought with even more accuracy.

New Scenarios and Campaign

Four new scenarios for the game present new challenges, with a complete campaign based around a North Atlantic convoy raid by German surface vessels. Will the patrolling battleships intercept the German raiders before they can strike the convoys bound for Britain?

Order of Battle is a comprehensive expansion and essential for all Victory at Sea players!

Convention and Events Diary

0 Gamesfest 2. New Mill Social Centre, Tring, UK.
Saturday 10th November 2007.
<http://gamesfest2.blogspot.com/>

0 Consequences 2007. Naish Holiday Village, Highcliffe, Christchurch, Dorset, UK.
Friday 16th - Sunday 18th November 2007.
<http://www.consequences.org.uk>

0 Dominicon 2007. N.U.I Maynooth, Kildare, Ireland.
Friday 16th - Sunday 18th November 2007.
<http://www.dominicon.ie/>

0 Grand Tribunal 2007. Cheltenham. UK
Saturday 17th November 2007.
<http://sagalocator.myfreeforum.org/forum12.php>

0 Dragonmeet 2007. Kensington Town Hall, London, UK.
Saturday 1st December 2007.
<http://www.dragonmeet.com/>

0 Warpcon XVIII. University College Cork, Ireland.
Friday 25th - Sunday 27th January 2008.
<http://www.warpcon.com/>

0 Conception 2008. Naish Holiday Village, Highcliffe, Christchurch, Dorset, UK.
Wednesday 30th January - Sunday 3rd February 2008.
<http://conception.modus-operandi.co.uk/>

0 K2 2008. Killarney Country Club, Killarney, Ireland.
Friday Friday 7th - Monday 10th March 2008.
lir@lspace.org

0 TravCon 08. Redwings Lodge, Sawtry, UK.
Friday 14th - Sunday 16th March 2008.
<http://www.bits.org.uk/>

0 Tentacles 2008. Castle Stahleck, Bacharach, Germany.
Friday 9th - Monday 12th May 2008.
<http://www.tentacles-convention.de/>

0 UK Games Expo 2008. The Clarendon Suites, Stirling Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, UK.
Saturday 31st May - Sunday 1st June 2008.
<http://www.ukgamesexpo.co.uk>

0 Continuum 2008. John Foster Hall [also known as New Hall], Leicester University. UK.
Friday 1st - Monday 4th August 2008.
<http://www.continuum.uk.net>

0 Gen Con UK 2008. University of Reading, Berkshire. UK.
Thursday 28th - Sunday 31st August 2008.
<http://www.horsemenevents.com/>

0 Game '08. New Century House, Manchester, UK.
Saturday 1st - Sunday 2nd November 2008.
<http://www.game08.eu/>

ConQuest VEGAS

On April 18th-20th 2008 (the weekend before the GAMA Trade Show), ConQuest VEGAS will play host to what could potentially be the largest A Call to Arms Tournament in the US.

Check out <http://www.conquestvegas.com> for more details on this event, or call 805 218-9590

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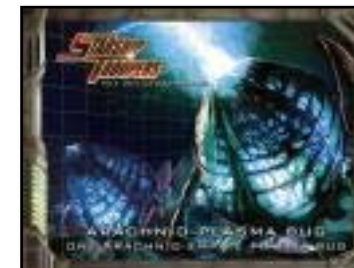
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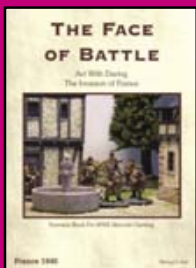
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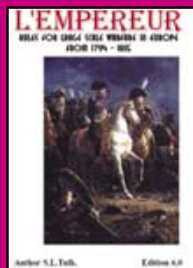
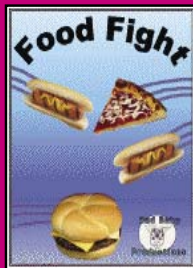
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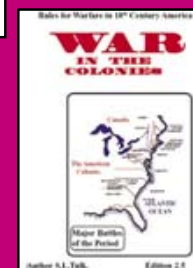
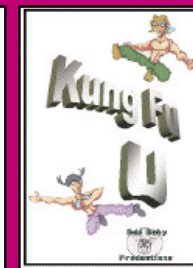
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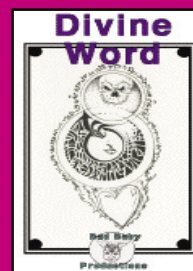


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Design Workshop



A Look at Shadow Fighters in A Call to Arms

Matthew Sprange



We often get asked about various decisions we make during the course of designing our games. Just why is Unit A more powerful than Unit B, or why did you decide to include Rule X, and not Rule Y?

Design Workshop is intended to be a (very) semi-regular series, in which we look at various aspects of our games, and explain exactly why things are the way they have been written. If you have encountered something you would like explained in detail, swing by our forums, and let us know!

This article is based on comments made on our forums, specifically about Shadow Fighters in A

Call to Arms. Just why does the nastiest race in the galaxy have such 'weak' fighters, and why can't we just give them a super dogfighter. After all, the Earth Alliance did it with the Shadowfury, and that uses the same technology, right?

Well, let us explain. . .

Editions Past

First off, a decision was made early in the Call to Arms design process, before the first edition was ever released, that not all fleets would be the same. This sounds obvious, but we wanted to avoid the Star Fleet Battles syndrome (and, please, don't think we are knocking SFB as a game in any way – we are big fans!) of when one fleet got a Missile Dreadnought (say), then every fleet would get a Missile Dreadnought. We felt that in order to be distinct, what didn't go into each fleet list would be just as important as what did.

This incidentally, is a design philosophy that runs through all our games, and we strive to make each army different – this caused a few headaches in Battlefield Evolution, where everybody really does have a main battle tank, a basic infantry unit, a

light transport vehicle, etc, but that is a story for another time. . .

That is the first half of why Shadow Fighters are the way they are. This is also the reason, for example, that Vorlons do not have a Carrier. Lots of other fleets have carriers, so not having one sets a fleet apart. The Drakh have something similar, though in a very different way.

Being Ancient

The decision was also made in first edition, and reaffirmed in second edition that, being about as otherworldly as they are, the First Ones would not 'do' fighters. They had fighter-like craft, clearly, but the likes of Vorlons and Shadows would not consider them in the same way as other races did. There are no Hot Jock Vorlon Aces, for example.

It is just not in them to fight in that way and, indeed, we have always presumed that Vorlon fighters are drones rather than crewed by an actual Vorlon - whether that means they only have part of the essence of a Vorlon or are remotely controlled is immaterial, for this discussion.

So, First Ones do not do fighters per se. A million years ago, before all these upstart younger races came about, there was no such thing as dogfighting. The smaller craft, what the younger races would come to term 'fighters,' were used for swarming around larger ships and smacking the hell out of them by weight of numbers. Lots of damage for little expenditure of resources – just don't ask the drones to do anything complicated like engage in light years-wide pincer movements through asteroid fields.

The fleets of the Vorlons and Shadows have not changed for millennia, and so what you see in their lists is exactly how they used to do things way back when. Yes, Shadows especially do evolve. But they do so on a time scale that makes human existence seem like that of a gnats. So, for the purposes of our game, which only really focuses on a small slice of the galactic timeline, the fleets will remain static, with no development in response to what the younger races get up to (that does not mean no new ships but, again, that is another tale).

In short, their fighters are designed to hurt big ships, not dance around space with other fighters. Other races have craft like this, but they back them up with space superiority craft. That idea is as alien to Shadows and Vorlons as fish fingers.

In the Game

Are Shadow Fighters truly bad then, as has been suggested on our forums?

No.

You are just trying to use them for something they were never intended to be used for. In other words, you are using them as a human would, not a First One.

Let's take a good look at the Shadow Fighter (as the Vorlon craft seems to be escaping attention right now).

The Dodge 3+ is not the best in the galaxy, granted, and is a product of the Shadow Fighter's larger size and lack of agility. However, the combination of Shields and Hull 5 ensure it can actually reach the target without getting blown out of the sky. That Hull 5 also gives it some measure of protection against those pesky point defences that have recently (within the past thousand years) come in vogue.

Once a horde of Shadow Fighters reach their target, they are unleashing AP and Double Damage attacks - that is a rare enough combination in a fighter, as we toned down a lot of their traits in 2e, making them (in general) more like flies rather than heavy-hitters. However, you are also getting three of them per flight. Start stacking flights up (such as in a proposed 5 flights/wing rules change suggested on our forums) and you have something that will tear a new one on any major warship. Which is exactly what the Shadows intended.

Tactics

Sure, you are going to have trouble getting Shadow Fighters near a target that has flooded space with fighters. This is a built in weakness of the fleet and if you are facing, say, the Gaim or an Earth Admiral who you know loves his Avengers and Poseidons, don't play to his strength and your weakness!

On the other hand, if the enemy fighter cover is light, help yourself and have fun!

This, incidentally, is another facet of the 'leave something out' philosophy of games design. You end up building certain weaknesses into fleet lists,

which players must then learn to minimise and work around. This is regarded as a Good Thing in games design, as it forces players to think about tactics. It is also the reason that strict point build systems cannot work in this style of game but, once again, that is another tale for another time!

There are certainly some fights that Shadow Fighters cannot win. A five point Patrol level fight is always going to be hell for a Shadow player, because his fleet list is so heavily weighted at the War/Armageddon end (see note above about fleet weaknesses – while most fleets can contend battles at almost any priority Level, we decided the Ancients should have their power level set to 11!). However, that does not mean you cannot pick your targets. A five point Patrol battle against Gaim or an Earth Alliance fleet that is expecting to face Shadows would be gruelling – you are better off squeezing in a single Scout and fighting like a Blue Hero. Against a Centauri who likes his Vorchans, well, enjoy the game!

Related Technologies

As an aside to all of this, consider the Shadowfury from the Psi Corps list. These guys had the same (or similar) technological base as the Shadows when designing their new super-fighter, but look at the differences.

To a human mind, a fighter needs to be a dogfighter or, at least, have some capability in that area. So, when they take Shadowtech and apply it to their new design, they get a hot dogfighter out of it.

Yes, the Shadows could have done exactly the same thing. They didn't.

It simply did not occur to them.

A TALE OF TWO EXTREMES



USMC ELITE FORCES FACE OFF AGAINST VS NEA SUPERIOR NUMBERS

Matt Thomason and Shawn Gerrold

For this Battlefield Evolution game, we specifically wanted try out an elite force versus superior numbers. Call it an attempt to break the system by taking it to the extreme, but we were quietly confident that the *Battlefield Evolution* rules could cope. We figured that 750 points would be a good figure that would allow enough choices for each side without requiring too many models on the table - obviously this was especially difficult considering our aim for the two opposing forces.

USMC (SHAWN)

The sky was the limit on what I could take! Although I was tempted by the additional unit cards published over the past few months in *Signs & Portents*, I decided to go with stock units.

First off, a standard USMC infantry squad, weighing in at 185 points.

A single M1A2 Abrams took up more than half my points allowance - costing 420.

Finally, a Force Recon team gave me the elite of the elite, for another 150 points - total army cost 750 points (we agreed that 5 points over was not going to do any harm)



MEA (MATT)

Knowing the base costs for MEA units, I knew that 750 points would net me rather a lot of models for the game.

While the obvious choice for this type of battle would usually include a Fedayeen Squad, I was going to limit myself to bog standard troops... I just hoped I had enough boxes of them to make 750 points!

I took a total of five MEA infantry squads, eating up exactly half of my points allowance - 375 points.

Trying to max out the points usage (and not having any more full squad boxes to field!) I added the maximum of two extra gunners to four of them - for an extra 200 points (and okay - I had to cheat here and use some substitute figures as I had run out).

Finally, three MEA technicals gave me some low-cost maneuverability around the board, for 150 points.

Total - 725 points. I could have scrounged up one more gunner substitute to make it the full 750, but to be honest the number of models on the table was already somewhat overwhelming.

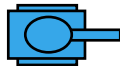


KEY

USMC Infantry Squad



M1A1 Abrams



USMC Force Recon Team



MEA Infantry Squad



MEA Technical



USMC

I've always liked buildings. I don't know why - especially as under the basic Battlefield Evolution rules they just count as an LoS blocker... Still, there's something about buildings that just makes me feel comfortable - so choosing the side of the table with the buildings on was an obvious call for me.

Standard setup for me - park the infantry behind buildings and stuff the tank in the best position for a fast advance.

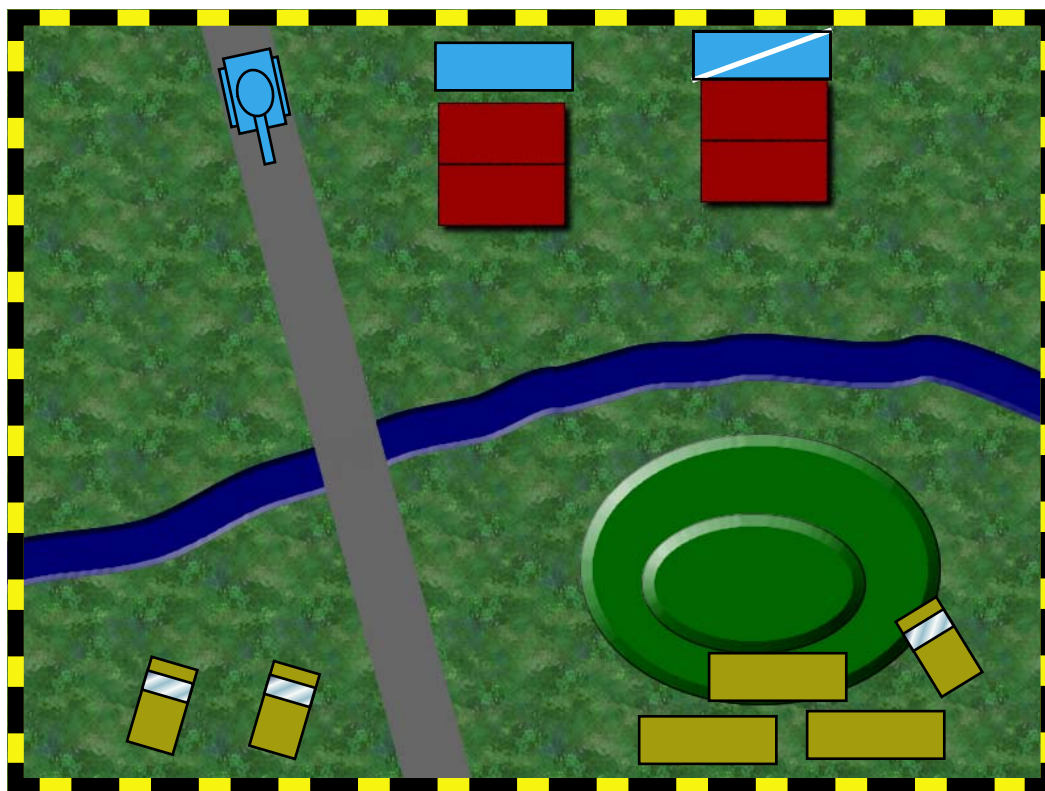
MEA

I was already cursing my table layout - there simply wasn't enough space to hide everyone out of LoS at the beginning of the game.

Oh well - can't be helped now. I put two squads into technicals right from the beginning - hoping to move them to better locations as soon as possible.

DEPLOYMENT

Going for as "friendly" rules as possible, I set up the table and gave Shawn the choice of which side to deploy on. I went for a fairly simplistic table layout with a river crossed by a road, a couple of buildings, and a single hill - something that ought to be easily replicatable by most players.



TURN ONE

USMC

Well, I'm in cover.

I *like* being in cover. The idea of moving out of it just to advance across the table is always something I have an inbuilt resistance to - I'm more the "dig in and wait for the enemy" type.

So, I trundled my Abrams cautiously down the road, taking a pot shot at a Technical as I went... kabloomie, up it went in smoke, leaving the scattered remnants of the MEA infantry squad it was carrying running for cover. A great start for me, already.

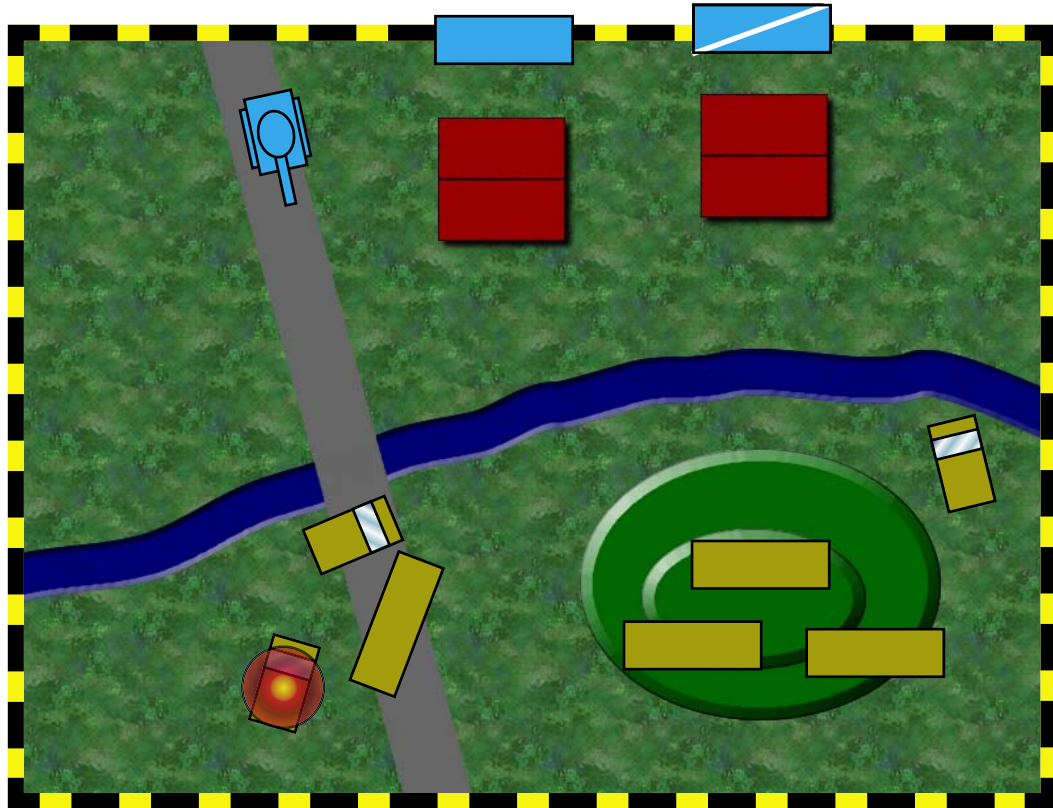
Hmm, whether to move the infantry or not.

Not - at this point poking my nose out from behind the building could get it prematurely shot off. I'll just lay in wait until the MEA get into range then come out with all guns blazing (I'm not known for my innovative tactics).

Although, with any luck the Abrams will simply trundle around the map wiping the enemy as it goes... hehe.

MEA

A cruddy start already. What was potentially my best-placed unit for a fast advance down



the left flank are now picking themselves up out of the dirt after their transport got blown up.

Still, have to make the most of a bad situation - the now pedestrian infantry marched forwards, and I moved the unoccupied technical in front in an attempt to shield them from what would undoubtedly be the next attack from the Abrams.

The other technical drove ahead down the right flank - keeping the hill between it and

the Abrams in case of another lucky long shot across the board.

Meanwhile the rest of my infantry moved up my side of the hill - again, careful not to poke their heads over the top - I needed to close in on the USMC forces and open up with my RPGs before the Abrams simply wiped me off the map.

A bit of a bad start for me, I fear - and one that quite possibly indicates how every subsequent turn is going to go.

TURN TWO

USMC

I changed my mind a little - the infantry squad can quite safely move a little to the right around their building - anything that can possibly get LoS to them is at risk of being mown down by my Abrams.

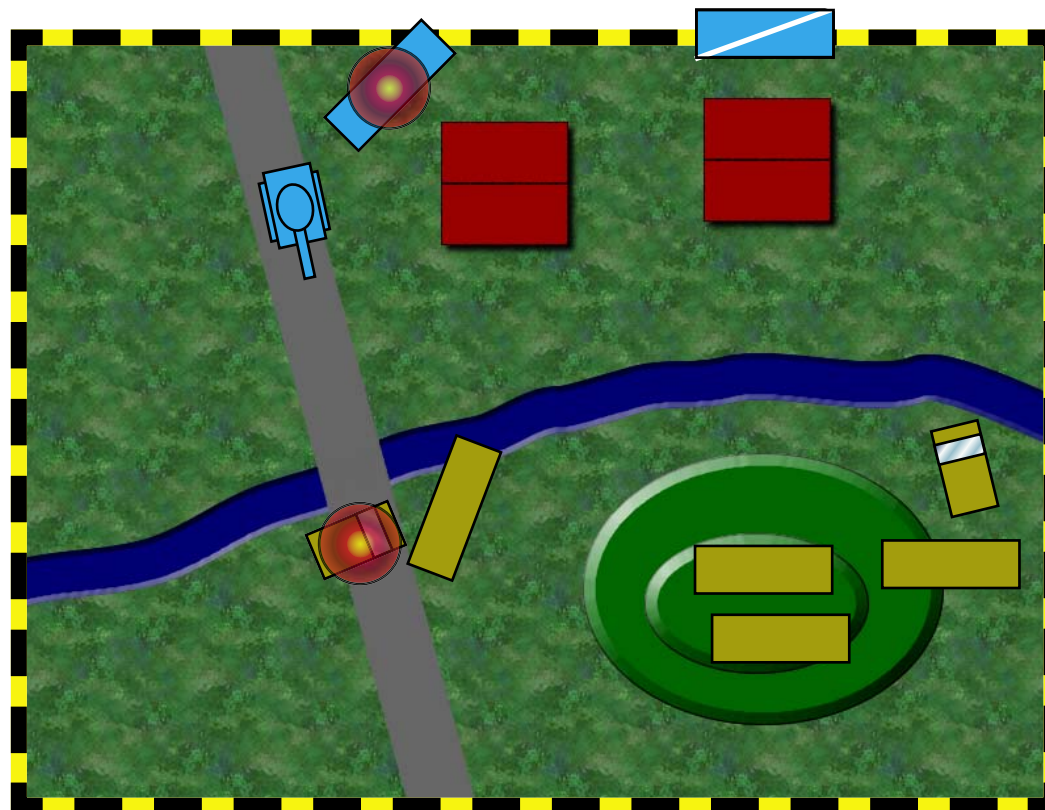
Speaking of the Abrams, another slow trundle down the road, and another pot shot at a technical. Oh, and another nice big explosion!

I'm really enjoying this game so far - I'm not even sure I'm going to need the other units...

MIA

Argh! Another technical lost. Admittedly it did its job - getting in the way of the Abrams to stop it simply advancing straight into my infantry.

Trying to take out the Abrams would be just silly - while technically possible, the odds are pretty much against any RPG fire ever penetrating that thick armoured hide.



So, time to switch to my real plan - trying to take out both of Shawn's infantry units before he takes me apart.

A few long-range RPG shots sail past the Abrams - undoubtedly surprising the driver when they are not aimed directly at him. Not one, not two, but three hits in the midst of the USMC infantry section send bodies flying in all directions.



TORN THREE

USMC

I knew it - I should have kept to the original plan and stayed in cover - it was time to retreat the infantry back behind their nice, safe building.

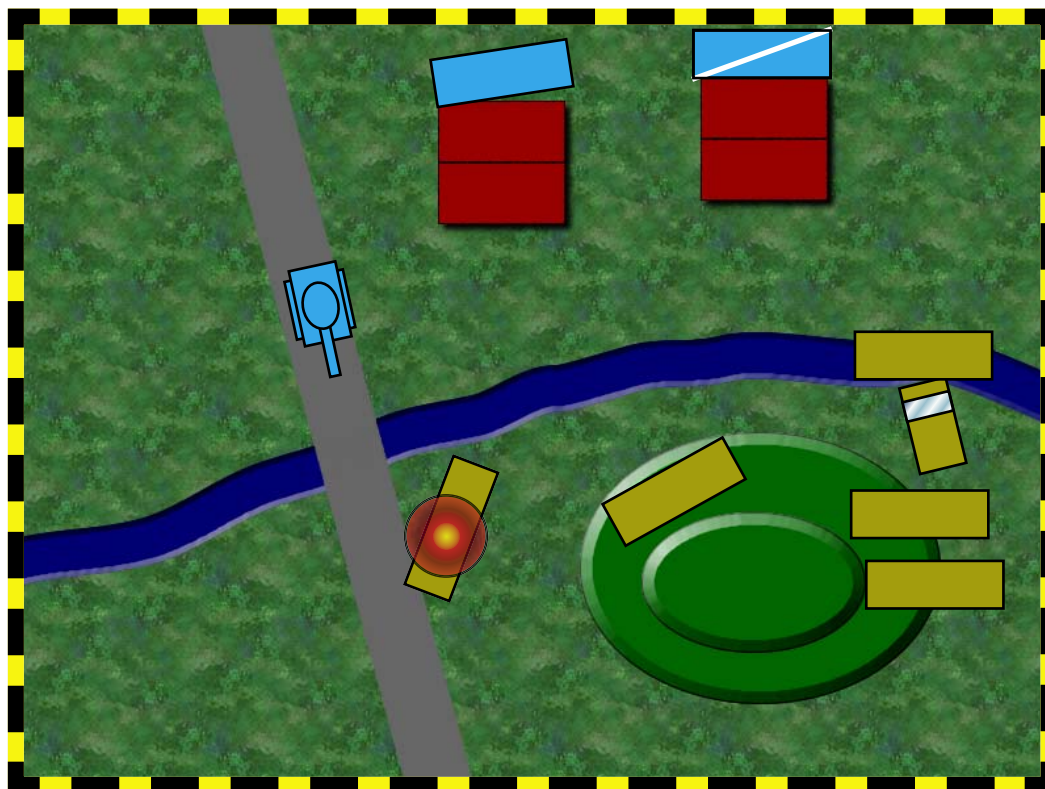
Inching the Abrams forward, I started decimating the unit that had rained RPG fire down on my infantry - revenge would be mine.

I really was uncomfortable now with moving my units out of cover - and there was pretty much nowhere else to move to... so I guess I'd just sit here a while longer. It seemed such a waste of elite firepower, but I figured my best bet at the moment lay with using the Abrams to trundle over Matt's infantry.

Overall - so far so good, other than some casualties in one infantry unit due to my silly mistake, it seemed like I had this one in the bag.

MIA

The casualties were starting to clock up. I had to do something, and quick.



The fairly obvious strategy in this case would be simply to advance away from the Abrams, as that is what was causing most (okay, all) of the damage. Of course, a massed advance down the right flank would just result in the Abrams turning and running them down - so I needed to split my force to keep it occupied while my infantry moved on the USMC positions (which I'd noticed were so nicely

entrenched behind those two very solid buildings, apparently with no intentions of going anywhere).

I knew I was simply leaving myself open to attack, but the only real advantage I had was numbers - if I sat where I was, I'd see those numbers whittled down in the next turn or two - so it was time to use them while I still had them.

TURN FOUR

USMC

In the words of Limp Bizkit... "Rollin, rollin rollin rollin."

My Abrams was next to unstoppable - I simply had to make sure I wiped out the MEA forces before they could reach my infantry and overwhelm them with numbers - this is where the Shattered rule evens things out in a game like this one - I had a big investment in the Abrams which drastically reduced the number of models Matt had to destroy.

It would probably be a mistake, but I moved Force Recon out to take a few potshots at the advancing MEA units - I suddenly felt very indecisive...

MEA

An opening... for some reason Shawn had moved the Force Recon unit into LoS. I took a few casualties from it, but paid back in kind.

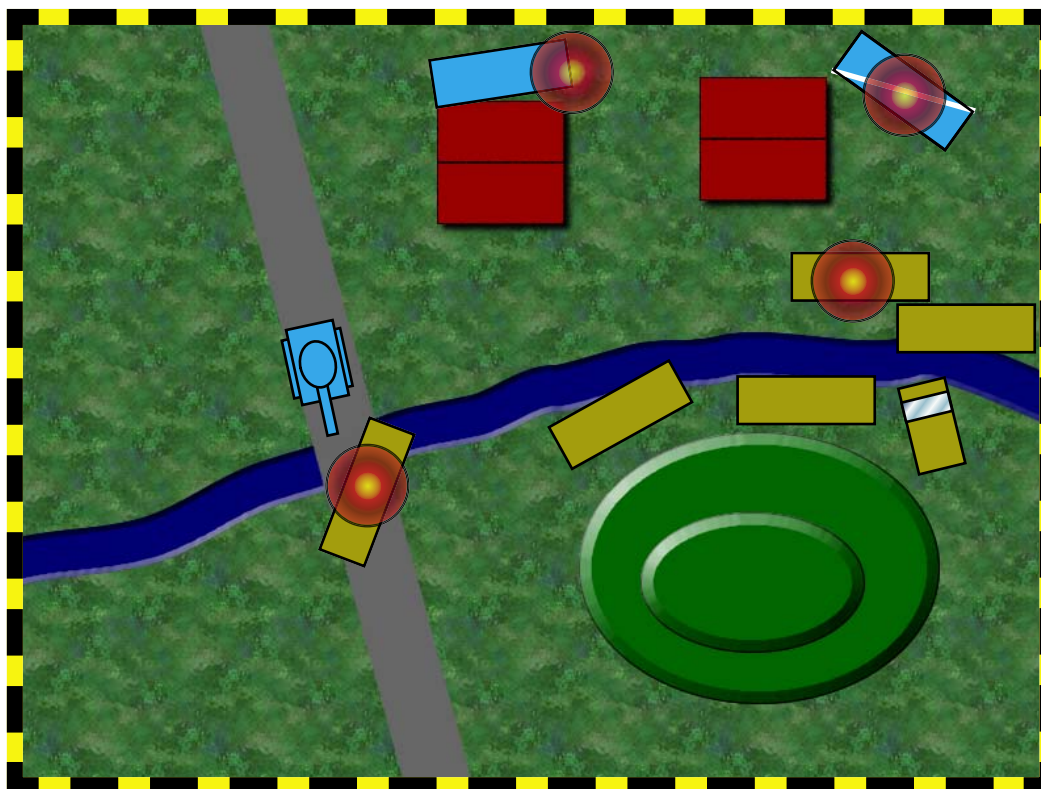
I started fanning out my infantry units - the last thing I wanted was mass casualties from AoE weapons. It was also a good time for a charge down the right hand flank with two squads, straight at that unprotected (well, apart from their weapons and Land Warrior armour) Force Recon team.

Things were starting to look up casualty-wise - I estimated that I was within a couple of turns of the win, just so long as I could minimise the incoming fire (especially from the Abrams).

Sometimes, though, the best plan is the insane one. With one infantry squad left completely in the open in front of the Abrams, the only real option left was to charge straight at it... Okay, not the best plan in the world, but it was designed to make Shawn forget about the

rest of my forces and concentrate on mowing down that single unit. Only time could tell whether or not it would work...

Finally, I managed to draw LoS to the USMC Infantry Squad hiding behind the other building - it was so narrow we had to check it from a models-eye view, but Shawn reluctantly agreed that a couple of models were exposed enough for me to shoot at them.



TORN FIVE

USMC

With my infantry starting to drop at unacceptable rate, it was time to pull the pidgeon out of the bag and put the cat amongst the... erm.. other cats?

Something wrong with that... just like my tactics.

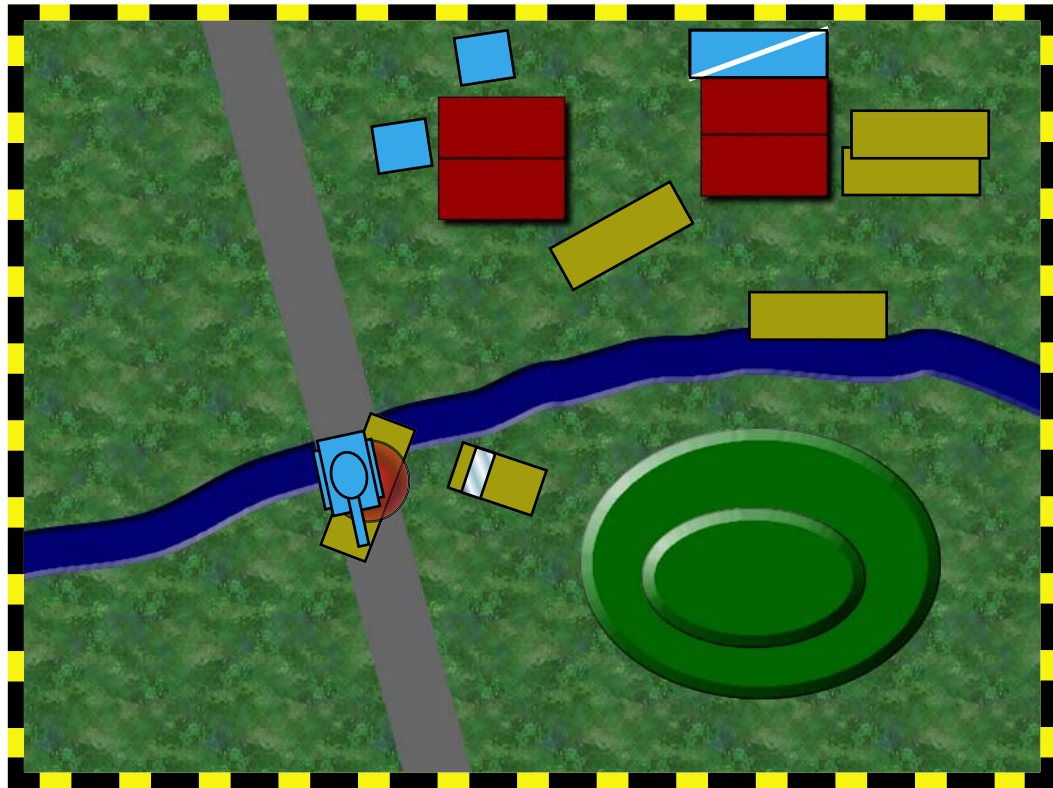
The Abrams continued its rampage of doom, wiping out the remainder of that pesky infantry squad on the road. I imagined a satisfying squelching sound as it rolled over the casualties.

Time to remember that a USMC infantry squad is actually two teams, and treat it as such - one remained behind their "safe" building, while the other moved around to the right (now out of LoS since the only enemy that way had just been dealt with by the Abrams).

Force Recon, having taken some fire, moved back behind their own building.

MEA

Despite the feeling I had him pinned down, I knew that Abrams was still a very nasty threat - and one I couldn't really deal with other than to keep out of its way.



Another mad dash this time saw my last remaining Technical charge at the Abrams, in another attempt to delay it, while the infantry simply charged forwards into the USMC positions - most could now avoid any threat of incoming fire from the USMC armour by hiding behind the same buildings the enemy infantry had been covering behind for the whole game - time to use their own tactics against them!.

Now I just had to keep enough models alive long enough to get into close combat... I was certain I could do enough damage on the remaining US forces even if I had to throw away another unit or two to do it.

TURN SIX**USMC**

Using the Abrams full firepower, I blew that lowly Technical to smithereens...

And then realised how stupid I was. Half the MEA army were on my doorstep and my tank was on the other side of the board...

Going back to "Plan A", I dug in and waited for the attack.

MEA**CHARGE!**

Throwing pretty much everything I had into the USMC lines, there was sheer devastation amongst the ranks. Everything, and I mean everything was dying. However, by sheer weight of numbers I could simply keep on pouring on the attack.

The USMC forces were shattered before I'd even rolled the last dice.

CONCLUSION**USMC**

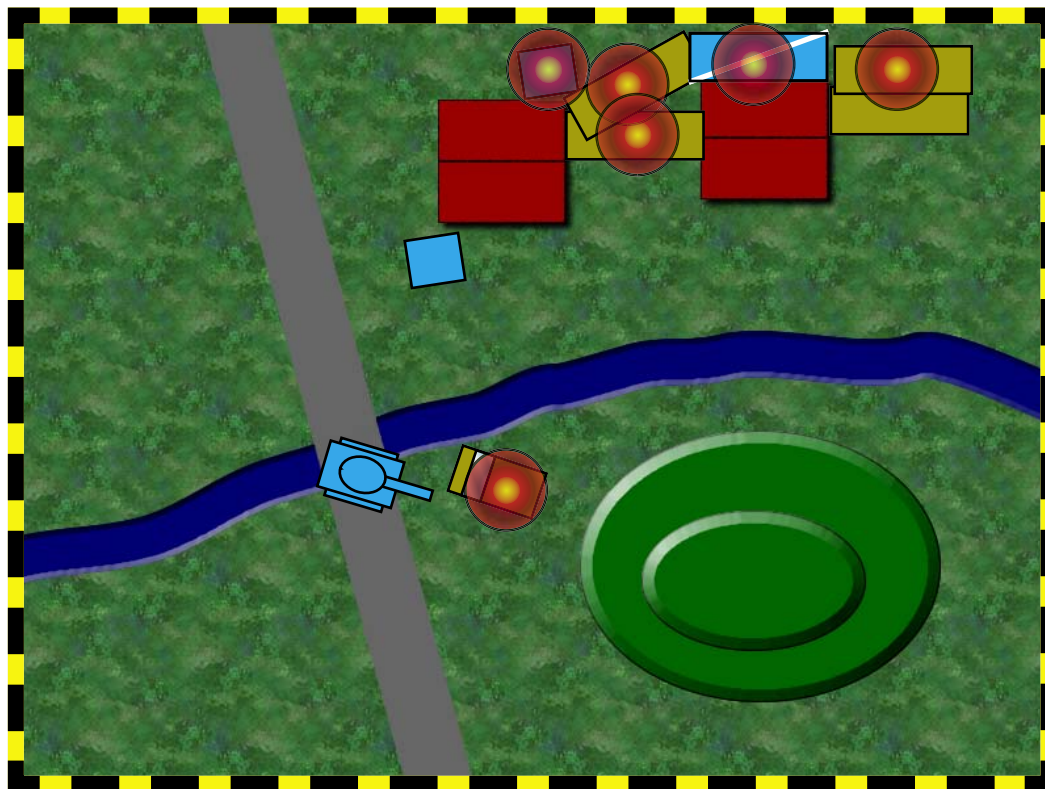
I let myself be lured away from my objective, it was as simple as that. I should have been mowing down the enemy infantry and instead was enjoying watching the Technicals fall one by one...

Distracted from my rightful victory :(

MEA

Muahahaha!

Sometimes a simple psychological ploy is all you need. Throw in an attractive target, and use it to keep the firepower off the part of your force you value the most. It may seem simple, but don't reject ideas just because of that. they can still be mightily effective!



Tactical Manual:

Fighters



Making the Most of Fighters in A Call to Arms Second Edition

Alan Oliver

This is the first of a series of articles examining the ships of the second edition by class rather than by race. Some articles will cover specific classes of ships and their role in combat, carriers for example. Others will look at line warships by priority class and what their respective roles within their fleets are. To start with we shall be looking at the different fighters to be found out there.

Fighters can be divided into four different groups based upon their capabilities; General purpose, Assault, Superiority and Elite. General purpose fighters can be used in either assault or superiority roles but are not good at either. Assault fighters are designed to make attack runs on ships. Superiority fighters are designed to engage other fighters in dogfights and win. Elite fighters are capable of winning dogfights and have the weapons and armour to attack ships. I will look at the fighters of each group shortly, but first a few common principals.

Common Principles

All fighters live and die by some common principals. For a start, they are unlikely to be the first choice for capital ships to shoot at, so will only take fire at range if there are no other viable targets for the weapon. This means avoiding firing arcs that will otherwise be unengaged is good general practice.

Explosions are the easiest way to get rid of large numbers of fighters. Now that Narn energy mines are generally one shot, and are more likely to hurt capital ships, fighters are less likely to be targets for energy mines unless they create too tempting a target. However ship explosions can do the job

just as well. For a start if you've sent fighters in to assault a crippled capital ship and they don't finish it off, don't then hit it with a massive weapon or your enemy will get the satisfaction of seeing your fighters go down with his ship.

Also targeting an enemy ship that has loads of fighters around it to catch them in the explosion is a viable tactic, especially in larger fleet battles where there is often enough firepower available to kill a smaller ship in one volley. For this reason fighters should not cluster near your own ships, especially anything small.

Fighter initiative is separate from ship initiative for a reason. While it is almost always preferable to have the enemy move their first ship first, the same is not true of fighter movement. It is just as likely that you will want to move your fighters first to control where the dogfight will happen or on what terms as second so you can react to the enemies actions. Don't get into the habit of thinking that you should always move fighters second.

Remember that when using victory points, each individual fighter is worth a single victory point, so they are unlikely to tip the balance unless the battle is particularly close. This also means that elite fighters will give the enemy less victory points per priority point spent on them than cheaper general purpose fighters will.

General Purpose Fighters

These fighters are the most basic fighters around. They won't have a dogfight rating to rival superiority fighters, but are probably superior to most assault fighters. They also don't have the armour or long range weapons to attack ships with any hope of coming home. In general all they have going for them is their very cheapness. When bought as independent fighters you get a lot of them for your points, which means you can afford to throw them in against enemy fighters and through supporting each other lose any disadvantage.

General purpose fighters are best used to protect your better fighters if you have any, for example escorting decent assault fighters against enemy superiority fighters. They can be used to dogfight the enemy, however you will need plenty of them to do this, which is only possible if you buy them in as independent wings unless your one of the races that carries large numbers of fighters as standard. When used for ship assault be aware that they will have to enter anti-fighter range and at best you will lose half of those engaged by anti-fighter fire, more if hull three. Again numbers should be used to make sure that something gets through.

The other use of cheap general purpose fighters is as movable interceptors to protect your own capital ships. This is of particular use to fleet carriers who will have a fifty fifty chance of recycling the fighter if it is killed while on this duty. Of course other fighters can be used for this purpose as well, however the cheapness of general purpose fighters makes them more suited to this dangerous role than other fighters.

Earth Alliance Nova Starfury

One of the better general purpose fighters and the weakest starfury design ever deployed, it shows that the Earth Alliance has always had a good line on fighter design. It's hull is only just short of assault ship standard and it's dogfight rating is just short of that for superiority fighter status. Classic general purpose fighter really and one of the best in the class. It's almost good enough to use as a superiority or assault fighter as required.

Narn Gorith

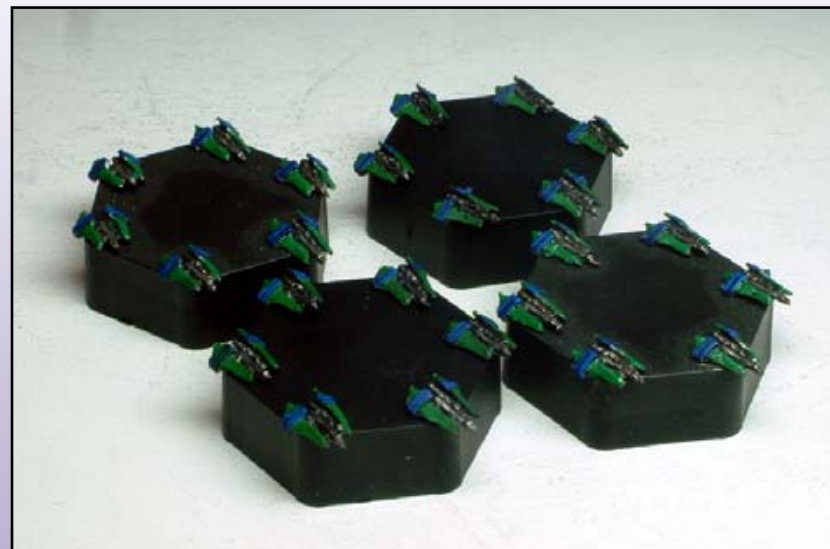
The Narn were aiming at a superiority fighter here, but it's dogfight rating just isn't good enough. It matches the Nova starfury in speed, hull, dodge and dogfight rating, making it one of the more capable general purpose fighters, but it's certainly no match for the Centauri superiority fighters. It can be freely swapped for Frazi fighters, however doing so removes an assault fighter for a general purpose fighter, generally not a good trade.

Abbai Kotha Medium Fighter

The Abbai have never liked the idea of attrition units, sending pilots off to die in large numbers because it's economically more viable just isn't their thing. That's why their only fighter design is one of the weakest out there. The Kotha hull is reasonable for a general purpose fighter, but everything else is sub-standard. There is a reason you get eight of them in a wing, and that reason is that they are terrible.

Drazi Star Snake Light Attack Fighter

One of the best general purpose fighters, equal to the Nova starfury in hull, dogfight rating and dodge, but four inches faster. Carried by the larger Drazi ships they are probably best used as escorts for the heavier Sky Serpent fighters, protecting them from other fighters so that they can get into position to attack enemy capital ships.



Gaim Klikkita Light Fighter

The main superiority fighter of the Gaim fleet, these are not individually dangerous fighters, although a dogfight rating of one is still respectable from a general purpose fighter. Even so, at first glance they are not that dangerous a fighter. However appearances are deceptive as there are two things that make them dangerous, firstly they are around in large, large numbers. The typical Gaim fleet packs more fighters than an Earth Alliance fleet! Secondly is their ability to turn into lethal assault fighters at the end of any turn. To further complicate the picture the Gaim photon bombs will have been able to kill off the enemies best fighters before the Klikkita have to engage them, and the surviving enemy fighters will be heavily outnumbered by the Klikkita, this makes defence against Gaim Klikkita a very difficult prospect.

Raider Delta V

The fighter that rivals the Abbai Kotha as the worst fighter in space, the Delta V has one advantage over the Kotha, a dodge of two rather than three. These are just cheap and nasty fighters to be used in vast numbers and watch the pretty explosions. Actually calling them fighters might be a mistake, they bare a greater resemblance to fireworks. So grab a bucket load of them, send em in and sit back to watch the pretty explosions.

Raider Delta V2

The updated raider fighter is a lot better than the original, actually on a par with the Nova starfury and Narn Gorith as one of the most useful of the general purpose fighter designs. Where points will allow, upgrade your Delta Vs for V2s so that you have at least some capable ships in your fleet. However they cost more than the old Delta V, which will reduce the number of expendable fighters that you have available. You still need a combination of Delta V and V2 fighters to do the job.

Assault Fighters

Assault fighters are designed to engage enemy capital ships, which requires different requirements to other fighters. For a start dodge is less important as hostile anti-fighter fire will ignore it anyway. Likewise dogfight rating is unimportant as assault fighters shouldn't ever be involved in a dogfight if it can be avoided.

Two key qualities for a fighter to be considered a serious assault fighter are either a hull of five or above to give it some chance of surviving anti-fighter fire, or weapons with a range greater than two inches to avoid anti-fighter fire completely when they make their attack runs. Those ships with range greater than four inches and operating from a fleet carrier will also be more likely to be repaired and available again should they be destroyed by enemy fire.

The weaknesses of assault fighters mean that they will be the target of choice for the enemies superiority and even general purpose fighters to engage in dogfights. Protect them by escorting them with your own general purpose fighters. They are also often vulnerable to ships main weapons, although if in the same firing arc as ships of your own fleet the fighters are unlikely to be targeted.

Earth Alliance Tiger Starfury

This is the earliest starfury design, but does have two features that secure it's status as an assault fighter. Firstly it has the necessary hull of five for close assault, although it's secondary weapon is weak, so close assault doesn't provide much benefit. Secondly it has a missile rack with a range of four inches. This is not a great assault fighter, but it is the only one available in it's time period and in numbers could threaten smaller capital ships.



Earth Alliance Thunderbolt Starfury

This is a classic assault fighter, and the mainstay of the Earth Alliance fleet until the elite Firebolt starfury's arrival. The ship has a good dogfight rating, and is only a hair off being an elite fighter itself, which means it needs less escorting than other assault fighters. It has the longer range missile rack to avoid anti-fighter range, but has the hull to close the range and double its attack dice. Excellent all round fighter that should replace as many of the Aurora starfurys in your fleet if possible under most circumstances. The only exception would be where the enemy have large numbers of superiority fighters that can out dogfight the Thunderbolts, when you may need the improved handling of the Aurora starfurys to deal with them, Minbari come to mind.

Dilgar Thorun Torpedofighter

The Thorun torpedofighter only qualifies as an assault fighter because of the long range of the anti-ship torpedo that it carries. Its secondary firepower would certainly be of value against a ship, however the hull of four makes it too vulnerable to anti-fighter firepower to use in this manner unless the situation is desperate. They can freely replace Thorun Dartfighters, and should be used extensively. A group of half a dozen of these fighters operating on the fringe of battle, firing on a specific ship to wear down its interceptors and maybe get a few choice hits in before the main fleet fire will be very useful.

As Dilgar fighters they can still support each other within two inches as long as you moved into base contact. If these fighters are jumped by superiority fighters and you have unengaged fighters, move another into base contact and this will enable

the other unengaged fighters to support as well. There is of course one other attack that all Thorun fighters can do, assuming the battle is set in year 2232. Ramming speed! This is a triple damage attack that automatically destroys the fighter, but may prove worth it.

Minbari Flyer

Not a traditional assault fighter at all, however the firepower of a two attack dice mini beam means that this ship cannot be regarded as a simple general purpose fighter. Good stealth means that it is likely to survive ship capital weapons as it closes, and it has a respectable dogfight rating so can handle other assault or general purpose fighters. The big drawback is that it has to enter anti-fighter range to use its weapons against a ship, and its hull is only four, which will result in heavy losses among them. Those that survive should do some damage to the capital ship, and against ships that have lost, or never had, the anti-fighter trait they will be particularly dangerous.

Narn Frazi

The Frazi is not an exceptional assault fighter, however it does have hull five and four attack dice when it closes on the enemy ship, which will whittle away interceptors and perhaps do some damage along the way. They are a little slow, although faster than the really heavy assault fighters and lack the knockout punch of some assault fighters. However they are the standard fighter carried in the Narn fleet so they are commonly available and can be massed in respectable numbers. This is an advantage as they are best used in large numbers anyway. Also with a dogfight rating of zero they may seem to need escorting, the Gorith is not much better in dogfights and gives up most of its firepower, so you are better off sticking with Frazi and using them on mass.



Brakiri Pikatos Heavy Fighter

The survival chances of the Pikatos pilots is pretty small, assignment to these ships must be something of a punishment for Brakiri troublemakers. They have a weak hull for an assault fighter and a poor dodge as well. However they do have a twin mini-beam with sufficient range to stay out of anti-fighter fire, forcing the enemy to send out superiority or general purpose fighters to kill them, or use it's own capital weapons. They can also be freely substituted for Falkosi light interceptors on any of the four Brakiri ships that carry them. In a skirmish level game a couple of Brikorta light carriers deploying eight flights of Pikatos is going to worry other skirmish level ships. Not the most survivable assault fighter, but capable of doing some damage if it gets there.

Brakiri Riva Super Heavy Fighter

While lacking a meaningful dodge, this is one of only two fighters with a hull score of six. This means that it is pretty safe from anti-fighter firepower when it choses to close assault, but still has the option of hanging outside anti-fighter range and using the grav cannon against the enemy ship. It's poor dogfight rating will mean that they will need escorting to protect them from other fighters, and the best available fighter for this is the Falkosi light interceptor. No ships carry the Riva, nor can they be swapped for Falkosi or Pikatos on ships, so to use them you will have to buy them as independent wings. Their slow speed means that they will end up flying with the Brakiri fleet, waiting to jump ships that come in among the Brakiri ships.

Drazi Sky Serpent Heavy Assault Fighter

Does exactly what it says on the tin. Slow speed and a mediocre dodge make getting the sky serpent into position difficult, however no assault fighter has as much firepower at range as the sky serpent. All eight attack dice are at four inches range, so it should never have to close to anti-fighter range on the enemy. However while you fly around outside of anti-fighter engagement zones be aware that with a low dodge you can be hit and killed by the ships capital weapon systems, so avoid arcs where they have nothing else to fire at. It's main weakness is the terrible dogfight rating, but that is why they are always deployed with Star Snakes to escort them and keep hostile fighters away. There is also the sky hook to launch them that bit further forward, and as they are launched in the end phase now they will be safe when they are first launched, at least for that turn.



Gaim Klikkitak Crewed Missile

Not a traditional assault fighter at all, the only purpose of a Klikkitak is to ram into the enemy capital ship and explode. Klikkita should only convert to this configuration if they are already within ten inches of the enemy fleet during the end phase and can therefore be assured of reaching the enemy. If they reach their target they are immune to dogfights on the way in as they explode before the enemy has the chance to resolve the dogfight, so you will want to be moving your fighters first on the turn you send them in.

Another use for a small group of Kilikkitak is to work it's way around the flank of the enemy fleet to draw off some of the enemy superiority fighters to come deal with them before they can jump a

weaker ship. This would involve converting them early to draw the enemy fighters away, a fairly basic decoy. It may work because the Gaim fleet is new and opponents may not have realised just how many fighters they will be facing, and so would expect six flights to be a sizable part of the fleet, too much to use as a decoy.

pak'ma'ra Porfatis System Patrol Boat

This large fighter or small ship is one of the largest fighters around. It shares the distinction of having hull six with the Brakiri Riva, and the anti-fighter trait with the Vorlon fighter. It is not a good dogfighter as you would expect from a fighter of this size but the anti-fighter trait will make up for some of that. It's biggest drawback is it's slow speed, actually getting to the engagement may prove to be a problem, especially as it is too large to be used on a carrier of any sort. It's biggest strength is the eight inch range plasma torpedo, which while slow loading if used in numbers against a single target can easily do some serious damage.

Vree Tzymm Heavy Fighter

A good all round fighter and the standard design used in the Vree fleet, which admittedly is a little light on ships with their own fighters. It has one of the best dogfight ratings among the assault fighters, rivalling the starfurries. It has a large number of attack dice, over half of them at four inches range. The hull score is good enough to close assault against ships with anti-fighter as well. Weaknesses are just a strictly average speed and an average to poor dodge. Good all round fighter, worth taking the Xeel carrier just to get more of these into the fleet.

Raider Double V Heavy Fighter

Building an assault fighter by welding two general purpose fighters together, you've got to admire the ingenuity of the Raiders at times. This is not a bad assault fighter, although the speed will be it's biggest problem, just getting to the fight will take a while. They also must be bought as separate wings as there are no ships that carry them as standard. As you might expect they are not good in a dogfight, and you will need Delta Vs around to escort them to their target, but when they get there they have the firepower to actually hurt a capital ship, well a small one anyway.

Vorlon Fighter

The Vorlon fighter is an assault fighter on every level. It has the hull to get close to the enemy and survive anti-fighter firepower however it's only weapon is a three inch range beam so it should never have to. That beam is probably the biggest weapon to be found on any fighter and will give any capital ship pause. The vorlon fighters are not excellent dogfighters, however they do carry their own anti-fighter protection so superiority fighters used against them will often get shredded before the dogfight even gets started. Weaknesses are a dodge that is a little weak, the dogfight rating and the fact that no Vorlon ship yet seen carries fighters as standard.



Shadow Fighter

The shadow fighter has the unique distinction of being the only fighter with the shields trait. Unfortunately this doesn't protect them in a dogfight, however it does make them especially difficult ships to kill with anti-fighter defences. Their main weapon is short ranged, forcing them to enter anti-fighter range, but between hull five and the shield, they have a good chance of surviving this to unleash their polarity cannon on the enemy, which will hurt. Additionally they are able to enter and leave hyperspace under their own steam, and can start the battle fully deployed unlike all other fighters carried on ships. And if they don't start deployed, the shadow ships can deploy them to anywhere within thirty inches assuming they don't mind missing a turns fire.

Unfortunately while they are not much use for dogfighting, the vulnerability of shadow ships to fighters means that they will often be called upon to engage enemy fighters in dogfights that they are unsuited to win. The best offensive use of them is to keep them in hyperspace if possible, and bring them on to attack lone ships that are separated from the main fleet, where the polarity cannon will have a chance to do it's thing.

Superiority Fighters

These are fighters designed to kill enemy fighters in dogfights, pure and simple. The only qualifying requirement is a dogfight rating of two or higher. Many are better than this, and there is one lower than this, however that one is a special case.

Superiority fighters are best used killing enemy fighters in dogfights, that's pretty much what they are there for. However they can still be used in other roles. For example if the enemy has no fighters then using them as additional interceptors on your ships may prove to be a worthwhile use for fighters that would otherwise do nothing. Some of these fighters actually have enough firepower to potentially hurt capital ships, and if there are no fighters to kill then they can switch to an assault role, with varying degrees of success. But if they were good at this then they would be elite fighters rather than superiority fighters.

Earth Alliance Aurora Starfury

The most commonly seen Earth Alliance fighter after it's introduction, this sets the bar for a good quality fighter. It has the hull to engage capital ships, however the weaponry on board is just not quite good enough to make them an elite fighter, however once you've killed all the enemy fighters in dogfights, then the Aurora is perfectly capable of making attack runs on ships. The closest thing that this fighter has to a weakness is the lack of a bigger weapon, and two dice of twin linked is not bad, it's just not as powerful as assault fighters normally carry.



Dilgar Thorun Dartfighter

This is the only superiority fighter that doesn't have a dogfight rating of two or more. However this is balanced by the fact that when they engage the enemy they can rack up far more fighters in support when they operate in large groups. The speed of the fighter is exceptional, meaning that they can cover a large part of the engagement area or lurk well back and still jump forward to engage enemy fighters. The low starting dogfight rating is a weakness if caught alone, and the hull is not as high as it could be. However on the up side it does mount a twin linked bolt cannon, which is a nasty little weapon for a fighter if it has to go into an assault role.

Minbari Tishat Medium Fighter

This is a pure superiority fighter, designed to do nothing but kill enemy fighters in dogfights. They can be freely substituted for Nial heavy fighters on ships. The dogfight rating is only equalled by one other fighter, and that fighter is not available on a fleet carrier. When launched from a Morshin fleet carrier the Tishat becomes an unstoppable dogfighter. In a large battle where enemy fighters may be a concern then a Morshin loaded with Tishats, as well as substituting Tishats for Nials across much of the fleet will give you a significant advantage against all other fighters. Although it has a weak hull rating, the combination of stealth and dodge will make these fighters very difficult to kill with capital ship weapons, other than energy mines. Anti-fighter will kill them easily, however these are not fighters that should be committed to making ship assaults. They are not designed for it, the pilots are not trained for it, and they are certainly not paid enough to do it!

Centauri Sentri Medium Fighter

This is the standard Centauri fighter, and it is as good a dogfighter as the Aurora starfury and better than the Narn Gorith, which is their best dogfighter. It's three attack dice and hull four means that it can be of use making assault runs on capital ships, however it is not optimised for that. It is not an exceptional superiority fighter, but is still capable of dealing with general purpose and assault fighters, often with ease.

Centauri Razik Light Fighter

This is the Centauri dedicated superiority fighter, and they can be freely carried to replace Sentri on Centauri ships. This is something that I would recommend for all battles unless the enemy doesn't use fighters at all. As the Sentri itself is a superiority fighter that is unlikely to be used against capital ships anyway, you are better off going for the specialist fighter in the first place. It's dogfight rating puts it up alongside the Nial heavy fighter and other serious dogfighters, and it can be carried by the Balvarin fleet carrier for that added bonus. Obviously given it's specialist nature it will not fare well if misused as an assault fighter. It has neither the hull nor the weapons to perform that mission.

Vree Zorth Light Fighter

The Zorth is the only superiority fighter anywhere in the League of Non-Aligned worlds, and can freely replace the Tzymms carried by the two Vree ships with their own fighter contingent. Given that Vree ships rarely have anything to fear from

fighter assault the Zorth is a fighter that is less likely to see common usage than some. Vree ships may not need it's protection, however a few Zorth along with you Tzymm to further increase their dogfight capabilities may be an interesting addition. The Zorth will be of little use when they finally engage the capital ships, three dice of fire not being that significant, and using them as assault fighters is not ideal usage.

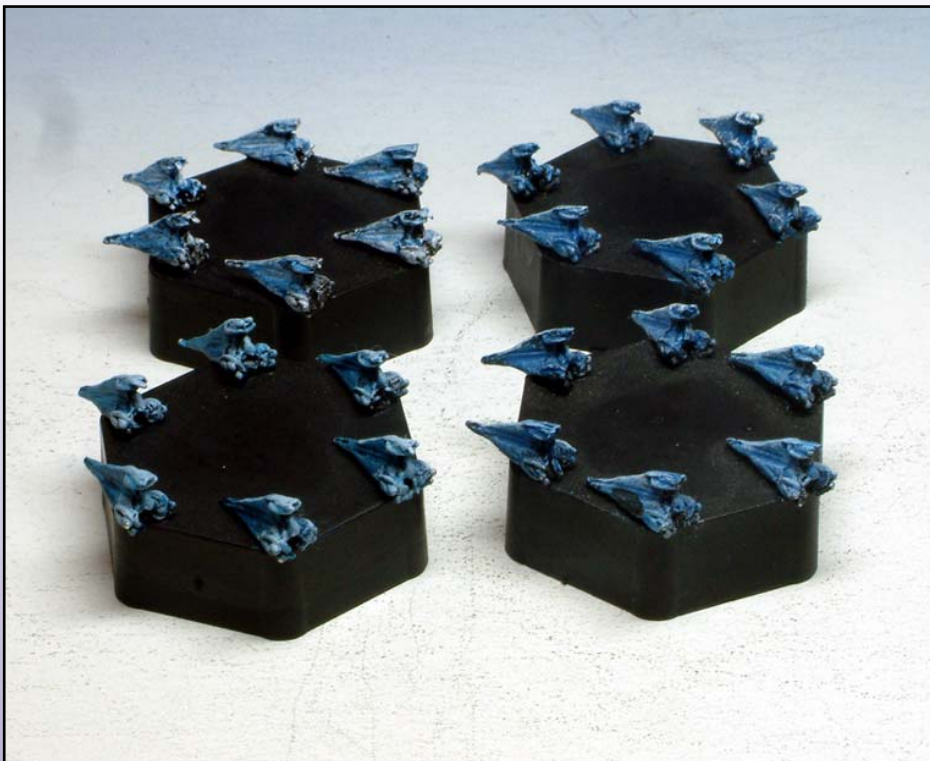
Psi Corp Black Omega Starfury

These are just Aurora starfuries, it is actually the qualities of the pilots that make them superior to other fighters. The telepath pilots give the black omega squadron an even better dogfight rating, rivalling the superiority fighters of most other races and only eclipsed by the Minbari Tishat. The psychic crew also gives them a fifty fifty dodge against losing in dogfights and anti-fighter traits, meaning that even if they lose the dogfight they have a reasonable chance of surviving. This is combined with a hull of five to make assault runs on ships almost look like a good thing. The only problem is that the firepower of the starfuries has not been increased, so while they can survive anti-fighter fire better than most, they will still not do that much damage.

Elite Fighters

These are the best of the best, fighters that can take on superiority fighters with a decent chance while still carrying the weapons to threaten capital ships. Not all races have developed elite fighters, and they represent the pinnacle of fighter design. That said, each one will be better at one or other role.

Elite fighters should generally be used against key enemy capital ships rather than simply as superiority fighters. Their excellent dogfight should be used to get them past the enemy fighters and into position rather than as their entire role. Given that most elite fighters are more expensive than standard fighters, they should not be thrown away too casually.



Earth Alliance Badger Starfury

The Badger only just makes it into the elite fighter bracket. It only has a dogfight rating of two, and it only qualifies for assault missions thanks to a single attack dice of missiles. However it can be freely swapped for the Aurora starfury found on most Earth Alliance ships, giving the fighters a boost in firepower at the sacrifice of a little speed. Easily the cheapest of the elite fighter designs, it is not as impressive as most, but it can still perform in either role.

Earth Alliance Firebolt Starfury

Based on the Thunderbolt starfury, but with increased dogfighting capabilities and the weapons improved, this is a true elite fighter. It can handle most other fighters, although serious superiority fighters may still have the edge over them, and can engage capital ships either at longer range with the torpedo rack or closing inside anti-fighter range, where it has the hull to have a reasonable chance of surviving. There is really nothing that bad you can say about the Firebolt starfury other than it costs more than any other Earth Alliance fighter.

Minbari Nial Heavy Fighter

The standard Minbari fighter, its place as an elite fighter comes from the combination of a dogfight rating of three, stealth at five, dodge at two, hull at four and three dice of mini-beam, all mounted on a fighter hull that is faster than most of the other fighters out there. The biggest weakness is the hull four when dealing with active anti-fighter defences, as neither the stealth nor dodge will protect against that. However this is the standard fighter that you will face from the Minbari, rather than some rare and expensive upgrade, so they will also have numbers on their side.

Centauri Rutarian Strike Fighter

The Rutarian is the latest Centauri fighter, and when replacing Sentri on ships they do cost points. However there are several ships in the Centauri fleet that carry the Rutarian as their standard fighter, which is a nice bonus. Its dogfight rating is not as good as the Razik, however it has hull

five, stealth and a four inch range Ion bolt, all of which makes is a capable assault fighter, while still being able to out dogfight other assault or general purpose fighters. An expensive but capable all round ship.

Interstellar Alliance Shial Heavy Fighter

This is basically a Nial that has traded one attack dice of light fusion cannon for a stealth score of six. While two dice of mini-beam still gives it enough bite to hurt capital ships, entering anti-fighter range negates all of it's advantages. It is best used engaging the enemy fighters and waiting for capital ship targets of opportunity, those that have lost their anti-fighter trait or are otherwise unable to threaten it.

Interstellar Alliance White Star Fighter

The only heavy fighter design to have the dogfight capability to challenge superiority fighters, the whitestar fighter can not only match a Razik or Nial in a dogfight, but also carries enough guns to make capital ships nervous when they are around. While these are only short ranged, the fighter does have a hull of five, enabling it to survive anti-fighter fire much of the time. Only two ships carry the whitestar fighter at present, and one of these is a fleet carrier, which will further elevate the whitestar fighter's dogfighting capabilities.

Psi Corp Shadowfury Fighter

Last of the elite fighters is the Shadowfury fighter, which is the most expensive fighter currently seen, but still only manages to squeeze into the elite bracket. In terms of dogfighting there is only one fighter that will beat it, and that is a Tishat operating with the backing of a fleet carrier. However as an assault fighter, while it has the hull to get up close to the enemy and survive their anti fighter fire, it only has a single attack dice of polarity cannon, a third of the firepower of a shadow fighter. This is definitely a fighter to use against the enemy fighters first, then commit to capital ship assault once the enemy fighters are dead.

Conclusions

Fighters are much more effective now than they used to be, and are around in larger numbers on cheaper carriers in a lot of cases. The anti-fighter trait may make attacking capital ships seem like suicide, however the number of dice on the trait is often small, and if the right fighters are used the casualty rates can be kept to an acceptable level.

Still, at the end of the day it has to be remembered that these are the cheap attrition units of the Babylon 5 universe, they are not powerful enough to take out cruisers and destroyers on their own. If they could, who would bother building capital ships after all. But if you use your fighters for the right jobs, don't send them up against enemy that they cannot defeat, and most importantly roll the right dice at the right time, they will put a smile on your face.

Next time: Carriers



Write for the Mongoose

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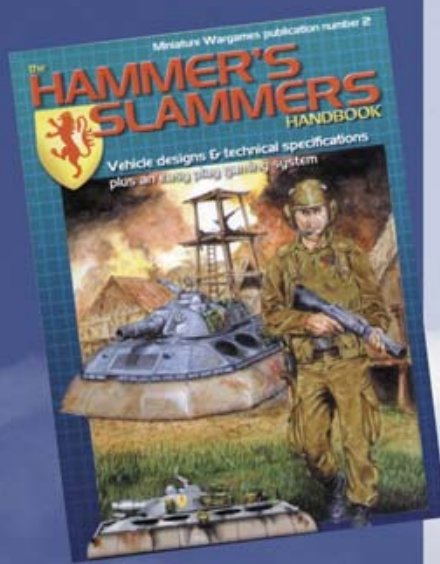
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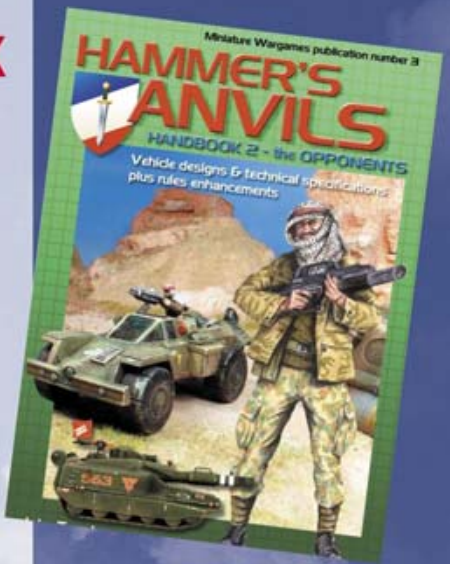
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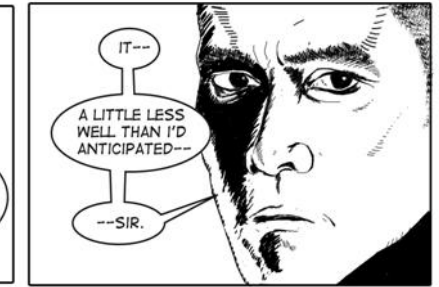
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IT---

A LITTLE LESS WELL THAN I'D ANTICIPATED---

--SIR.



WELL SPOTTED, TROOPER.

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THEY...

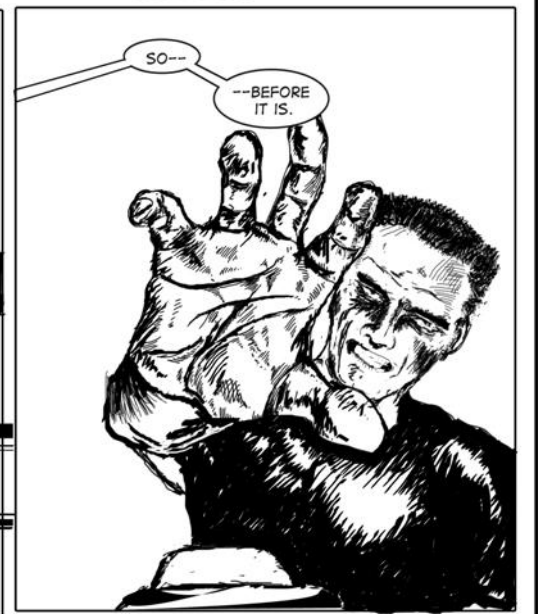
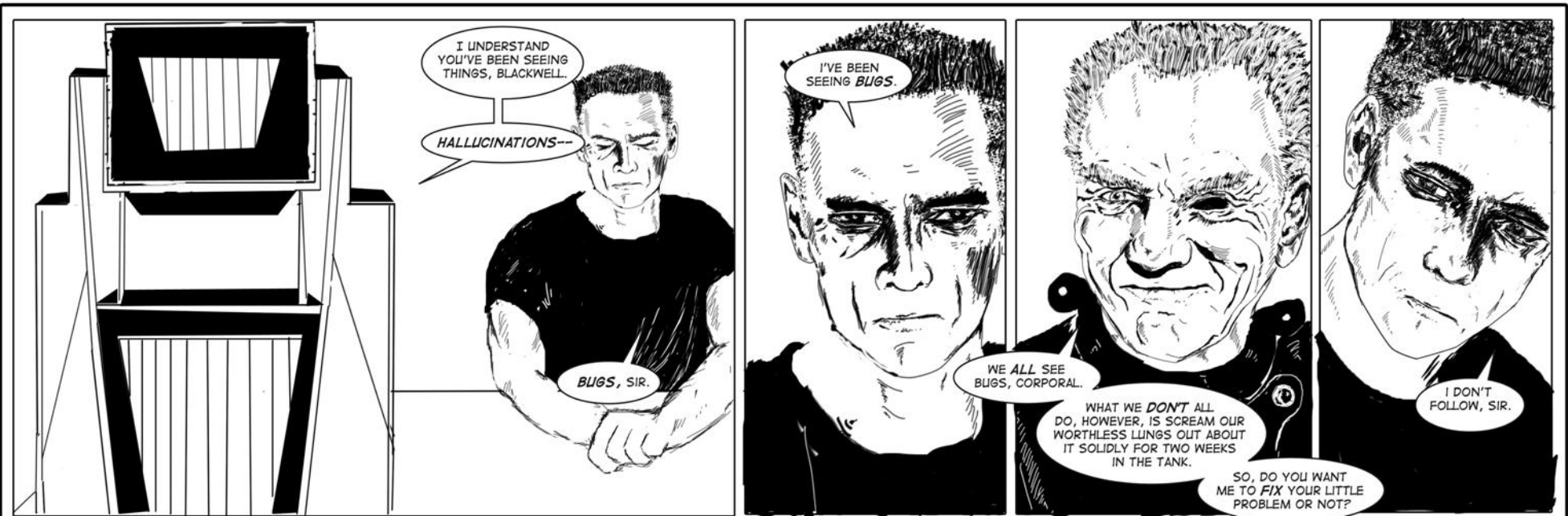
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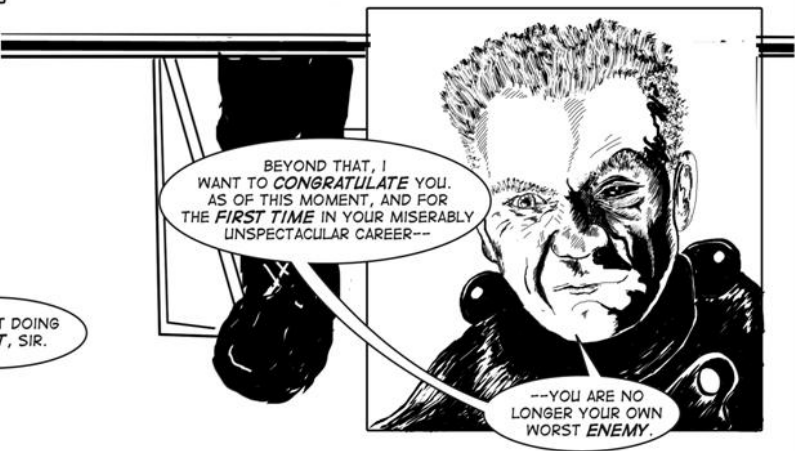


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THAT'S ABOUT THE NICEST THING I'VE HEARD ABOUT YOU SO FAR, CORPORAL.

WRITER: CY DETHAN ARTIST: NIC WILKINSON









**THE EIGHT LONG
YEARS OF WORK YOU JUST
COST ME, YOU JARHEAD
SON OF A BITCH!**



NEXT: THE WONDERFUL THING ABOUT TRIGGERS.

A Meeting of Behemoths



A Call to Arms Battle Report

Ian Barstow and Robert Glass

The Studio was recently graced by the presence of Robert Glass, manager of the miniatures facility in Ohio, and we couldn't have him staying over without dragging him into a battle report! Catching him unawares, Ian produced the well-preserved wet turbot from the office fridge and one good smack around the face later battle commenced.

Everybody in the Studio has recently had to suffer Nick the Greek's incessant moaning at his beating at the hands of Chris Longhurst in a recent Victory at Sea game, and the more he harped on about carriers the more we thought it would be a good idea to try out the fantastic new Brakiri Cidikar model for A Call to Arms. The obvious scenario was Carrier Clash, and the clear rival to the Cidikar is, of course, the mighty Earth Alliance Poseidon.

The forces were thus straightforward: it would be Ian commanding the Brakiri against Rob leading Earth Alliance Crusade Era. Cidikar versus Poseidon, USA versus UK, Good versus Bad and probably a lot more other things besides. The Carrier Clash was set at Battle level with 5 Fleet Allocation Points each.



The Brakiri Syndicracy

Ian: I've never played the Brakiri before, although knowing the fleet list pretty well they are my sort of people, albeit I don't really like such short ranged weaponry, being a natural artilleryman at heart and happy to engage at long distance, preferably out of range of the enemy!

The nature of a Carrier Clash means that I have to take a carrier (doh!) and also that no other ship in the fleet can have a higher level, so it's wise to take the biggest carrier available – obviously the awesome Cidikar. I really wanted to take the carrier thing to heart though, not only because I knew Rob would surely field a Poseidon, meaning my fighters would be outnumbered, but also because it seemed right, so I took a second, smaller carrier in the shape of a Brokados. This would give me the edge in numbers if not quality, and I hoped would provide a strong carrier squadron at the rear of the formation.

To complement the strike power of the carriers I decided on an assault group of typically short-ranged Brakiri ships that would get in amongst the enemy. I had taken quite a shine to the new Haltona variant of the Halik, primarily because of the additional Graviton Beam weaponry up front, although at the loss of the particularly nice twin-linking that the Halik enjoys on its Graviton Pulsars. The Haltona, like the Halik, can oak up a whole lot of damage, which is what makes these such essential vessels to any Brakiri admiral. I added two cheap Ikortas to pad out the assault group, but really wanted something hefty to lead the pack. With one Fleet Allocation Point left I chose the Kabrokta, a heavily armoured assault cruiser, just right for breaking into an enemy formation, and with a massive Heavy Combat Laser up front!

Brakiri Syndicracy

- Neckar* – Cidikar-class Heavy Carrier (1)
- Turgot* – Brokados-class Battle Carrier (2)
- Laune* – Haltona-class Frigate (3)
- Bailly* – Haltona-class Frigate (4)
- Tollendal* – Ikorta-class Light Assault Cruiser (5)
- Lameth* – Ikorta-class Light Assault Cruiser (6)
- Barnave* – Kabrokta-class assault Cruiser (7)

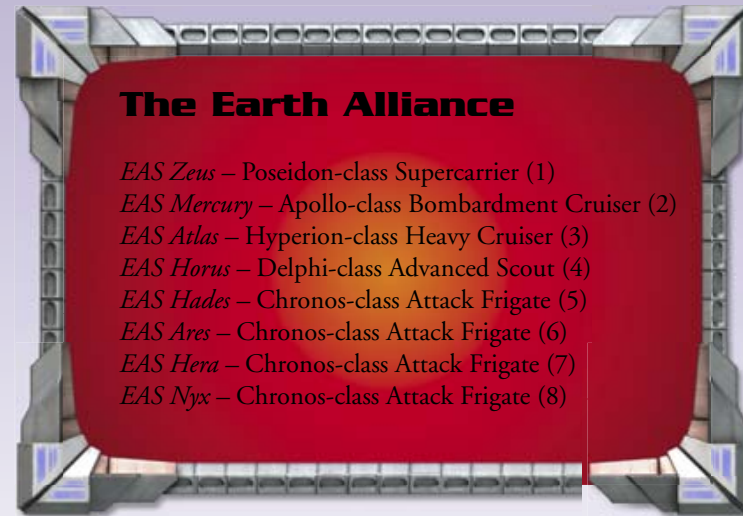


The Earth Alliance

Rob: Ah yes...a carrier duel. If there is one thing that Earth excels at, it is fighter superiority and I love filling a battlefield with dozens of fighters. This was going to be my kind of fight. Of course, I had the burden of defending the honour of the US as well – we certainly cannot let a Brit win! Earth also enjoys a nice mix of long, medium and short-ranged weapons so I would be able to deal with the Brakiri at any range.

The obvious choice for my fleet was the massive Poseidon Supercarrier. It not only sports a plethora of short ranged weapons but holds 24 flights of Starfuries in her belly. Speaking of my fighters, I swapped 12 of the Auroras out for an equal number of Thunderbolts and Badgers. This gave me a nice mix of interceptors and anti-ship flights with the Thunderbolts having the ability to fill either roll.

Next I needed a nice long-range platform. For this I opted for the Apollo, a long time favourite of mine. It could hit out to 30 inches in any direction. To boost my range on the approach I swapped the standard missile load in the front launchers for long ranged missiles. This would let me strike out to 40 inches and would likely catch Ian off guard. Next I selected a Hyperion to handle medium range engagements. Its Heavy Lasers would wreck any ship that let it get lined up on it. A Delphi scout would provide me with some electronic warfare assistance and give me a bonus to my initiative role if Ian opted not to take one himself. Its stealth also meant that it would have a good survivability if it were to be targeted. Finally, with my last fleet point I opted to go with four of the small but nasty-tempered Chronos Attack Frigates. I paired these last into two squadrons to increase the amount of firepower they could dish out at any given moment.





Deployment

Turn 1

Ian: We had a lot of initiative modifiers strewn about the table in the form of vessels with the *Command* special rule and Rob's Delphi scout, but the net result was he had a +4 lead over me on the dice, meaning I'm expecting to lose most initiatives. That meant going first, firing second and generally being at a tactical disadvantage. To counter this one should have a solid plan and stick to it, barring disaster.

As such my carriers toddled forward at half speed, a couple of Falkosi fighters in front of them, while the assault group, although moving individually in order to give me more ships than Rob, all hammered forward All Ahead Full, 12 inches towards the enemy. I had nothing in range, but Rob did, and his Apollo brought some serious firepower down on *Bailly*, inflicting a pair of moderate engine criticals that gave me two -2" speed reductions to repair.

Other than that my only act was to begin launching heavy Pikatos fighters from the *Neckar* and more Falkosis from the *Turgot* during the End Phase. It would have been nice for *Bailly* to have taken a little less damage but overall I couldn't complain too much, and it looked like Rob had been hoping for a lot more.



Rob: With a solid +6 to my initiative roll I felt confident that I would win the roll most turns of the battle. This would help make up for the lacklustre agility that my Earth ships had. Even my little frigates only have a speed of 8 and are not even agile.

My plan of attack was to tie up Ian's fighters with my own for as long as it took to turn them into space junk. To this end I spread them out in front of the fleet and made a bee-line for the Brakiri fighter line though I took care to keep them close enough that the fighters my Poseidon was still launching would not get separated from the main pack. The rest of my fleet made a steady advance with the starboard frigates moving out ahead of the fleet a short way.

When time came to fire my Apollo let loose with her long range missiles taking Ian slightly by surprise. They impacted one of his Haltona frigates which netted some minor damage and a wounded engine. Not the impact I would have liked but it was the first turn so I could hardly expect to dust one ship right off the bat. At least first blood was mine.



Turn 2



Ian: My two Haltonas began a symmetrical inward turn in an attempt to bring maximum firepower to bear while the remainder of my attack group moved forward at normal speed, lining up targets amongst the swarm of Chronos frigates approaching. The remaining ships carry on forwards, and my carriers suddenly decide to get closer in where their 20" range beam weapons can contribute, so they go All Ahead Full as well, outdistanced by their fighter swarm which surged towards the inevitable fighter duel that Turn 3 promised.

Rob's firing this turn is next to useless, with a few light scratches here and there amongst the attack group ships, but the highlight for me is the performance of the *Laune* which opens up with its Graviton Beam against Rob's Hyperion, scoring a Vitals critical and wiping out the entire crew with one shot! There's nothing like double damage on a serious critical to take ships out of the game. Rob was shocked to say the least, and I paused my glee long enough to destroy a Chronos with the same ship. For a change my dice were red hot and it was poor Rob who was on the end of it. I also inflicted significant damage on another Chronos, leaving Rob with a big headache.

In the End Phase I even managed a repair on *Bailly*, although she had taken yet another engine critical this round meaning she was back where she started! Still, as we were in the thick of things now that didn't seem to matter too much.

Rob: Movement in the second turn saw my fighters continue their move directly towards the enemy fighter line. Once again, however, I kept them relatively close to my fleet so that the last fighters needing to launch would stay with the pack. I was happy to see Ian's fighters split into a couple of separate groups as it would allow me to double-team some of his advance screen in the first turn of dogfighting.

My fleet continued their steady advance. My Apollo started swinging wide as there was no reason for the ship to close. Instead he lined up so that he could get his forward launchers to bear on the carriers while his starboard launches could deal with the Brakiri attack group. The Hyperion lined up his heavy lasers on one of the Ikortas with the hope of taking it out early. The lead Chronos moved to get as many of their weapons in range as possible.

Of course, when it came time to fire it made all my manoeuvring pointless. What hits I managed to land didn't do much more than scratch paint. To make matters worse, Ian found his return fire to be not just effective, but down right deadly. His *Laune* devastated my Hyperion in one shot. I'm convinced the beam walked through the corridors of the *EAS Atlas* melting every crewman it could find. The end result was a ghost ship that would forever have the reputation of being a death trap for any crew unlucky enough to be assigned to it in the future. On top of that, one Chronos was destroyed and a second nearly crippled with the remainder of his fire. My morale was hit pretty hard this turn but I'm not one to surrender no matter how bad things got (and things were looking really bad right now).

Next turn the fighter battle would begin and that, I believed, would be the lynchpin of this battle.



Turn 3

Ian: The fighters surged together as my attack group closed with the Earth Alliance as the damaged Chronos turned tail and tried to hide amongst its less damaged cousins. It seemed likely from Rob's continued manoeuvring that he was happy to allow the main confrontation to take place in front of his Poseidon, although I noticed he was moving his long-ranged Apollo away by itself. As such, my carriers both lined up beam shots on the Apollo and I was hoping that my dice luck continued for a change.

In the massive dogfight despite being technically outmatched we only lost 7-6 in numbers destroyed, thanks in part to me recovering three fighters to their carriers. This really seemed to deflate Rob as he had been hoping for a major success in this engagement.

Lameth took the brunt of Rob's attacks and lost an inch of speed on an engine critical before *Barnave* opened up and destroyed two more Chronos frigates, really thinning out Rob's front line and turning the battle decisively in my favour. I was feeling pretty good now and if I made the right decisions it seemed like I couldn't lose, especially when the Poseidon took a weapons critical meaning all weapons would only fire on a 4+.

Time just to launch some more fighters from the carriers to pad out my numbers – I've got 8 Pikatos flights in the air now and ideally I want these guys to engage warships rather than get bogged down in dogfights they can't win, but this may not happen as Rob still has more fighters than me and he'll probably be going first again...

Rob: With another win on initiative my fighters, as a group, surged forward into the Brikiri fighters. With his heavy fighters well outside the ensuing melee I was able to double-team a number of his flights so I was confident the fighter battle would be over quickly. Of course, the ship battle was another story and I was sure I was going to take another beating.

Wanting to keep my nearly destroyed Chronos alive I move him to meet up with the other pair of Chronos that were now in range. My Apollo kept swinging wide of the main battle in an effort to keep both his forward and starboard launchers in arc. The Poseidon continued to move forward, more to act as a giant target than really contribute to the battle. All of her guns were short ranged and light so I really wasn't expecting much out of her. She was there to bring the swarm of fighters to the scene. The Delphi began a headlong rush through their formation.

Despite outnumbering the Brakiri fighters the melee did not go well. While I killed more flights, even after taking into account the flights recovered by his Cidikar, I did not kill nearly as many enemy flights as I should have. Instead, the results were pretty much a wash. This did not bode well and I was starting to get a little panicked.

The ship battle was also turning worse. While I was able to do a decent amount of damage to Ian's ships he tore two more frigates a new hole removing two more of my combat ships from the game. Fire into my Poseidon also hit hard, messing up my weapon controls and reducing me to a speed of 1". My Apollo continued launching its missile causing minor damage to a couple of ships. However, at this point I was down four ships and he had yet to kill even one. The firepower between the two fleets was definitely one-sided now and I could see no way to pull this out of the fire. The only ship of mine not to get into the mix was the carrier but with its weapons being on the fritz I could not count on even the modicum of firepower it wielded. To add insult to injury my Delphi was crippled and could only drift forward until I managed to repair its engines. That took the ship out of the fight for the foreseeable future.





Turn 4

Ian: I suddenly find myself rather closer to the Poseidon than I'd like and faced with the prospect of engaging it within range of its formidable defensive batteries. At this stage there's nothing I can do but take the behemoth on but I can't shake a feeling of unease. Rob had to roll 4+ to fire off his Poseidon's weapons, which he chose to do first having won the initiative as usual. He promptly rolled 4 or more for ALL weapons and proceeded to make a mockery of his previous poor dice rolls and destroying both the *Laune* and the *Lameth*.

In return my firing was desultory and the surviving Chronos added insult to injury by polishing off the already-damaged *Bailly*. The dogfighting, although much reduced was as inconclusive as in the previous turn, with Rob coming out ahead but not by as much as he would have liked. My two carriers this time managed to bring their beam weapons to bear on the Apollo but no criticals were inflicted in some more rather feeble firing.

This turn certainly evened things out and Rob was looking a lot happier. I was getting somewhat distracted, to a point where I foolishly forgot to deeply more fighters from my carriers. This sort of error always seems to crop up on a turn following something going wrong. I should really take a deep breath at the end of such turns in games and weigh up what I've overlooked, but there always seems to be a tendency to drive ahead and recover the position.

Rob: Turn 4 saw things brighten up for me. My Delphi continued its headlong rush to nowhere as crews tried to repair its engines. The Apollo continued keep the range open. My Poseidon inched forward and turned to bring her broadside to bear. It was time to see what these little guns could do.

My fighters continued keeping the Brakiri fighters busy. With my initiative advantage I managed to keep his Pikatos away from my warships and whittled them down quickly. However, the exchange was relatively even again and his carrier kept recycling destroyed flights at an alarming rate. I had thus managed to only recover one of my destroyed

flights. I should note here that wherever I managed to double-team his fighters, I invariably lost the dogfight. This trend was driving me insane.

While I was not happy with the way the fighters were turning out, the ship battle took a turn for the better. My Poseidon crew managed to get all its weapons to fire this turn and she unloaded with scary precision. The deluge of fire resulted in the destruction of two ships while the sole surviving Chronos managed to polish off a third. Suddenly the warship battle was much more in my favour. In addition, his sole surviving Haltona was fairly heavily damaged. The Kabrokta, however, was still a danger as it was in relatively perfect shape. His two carriers were also untouched and I would soon need to start addressing them as well.



Turn 5

Ian: Well, I lost the initiative again...that's every single turn so far. I always seem to pick fleets that end up on the back foot but I can see a problem arising here. My ship numbers no longer outnumber Rob's, and he's finally wised up to my beam weapons. Suddenly it looks like I'll only be getting one or two a turn lined up, rather than pretty much all of them like I've enjoyed up to now.

I do manage to line up both carriers' beams on the Poseidon although *Barnave* can't bring her potent front weaponry on target. I've also been drawn into a protracted fight against the Poseidon almost against my will. This is the nature of having short ranged weaponry. I would like to go after the Apollo and leave the Poseidon well alone but the close proximity of my opening attack means I have little option but to hope for some devastating hits.

Naturally Rob once more fired first, and his last Chronos scored a pair of criticals on *Tollendal*, wiping out the surviving crew and reducing her to so much space garbage. In return I poured everything I had into the Poseidon, but the massive carrier's interceptors accounted for over 50% of the hits, leaving Rob a very happy man!

Rob: My morale was considerably improved at this point. First, my Delphi had finally managed to repair her engines. While she may be under a skeleton crew due to previous damage she could still be a factor in the final stages of the battle. Slowly she started turning back into the battle. The rest of my fleet continued manoeuvring to maximize my firepower. With my control over initiative and few beam weapons to worry about I was now able to more easily avoid Ian's beam weapons. At this point I simply started pounding on the Kabrokta. It was a big ship and would require a fair amount of damage to finish off. My Apollo started slamming missiles into the Brokados in the hope of getting some lucky critical hits. I decided to leave the Cidikar for last.

I must say I was impressed with the accuracy of my interceptor crews this turn. They managed to prevent a significant amount of damage from ever reaching the now battle-scarred hull of the Poseidon.

The fighter battle continued in much the same fashion. It was obvious I was going to win this part of the fight but it was going to cost me. Now I was primarily cleaning up flights that he kept recovering so it was just a matter of time before my fighters were free to start harassing his fleet. Unfortunately it appeared I was going to have mostly Starfuries remaining. The majority of my T-bolts and Badgers were already destroyed.



Turn 6

Ian: Is it worth pointing out that Rob won the initiative? Well, he did, and with four active ships against three it means that even breaking up my carrier squadron means he's starting to run rings round me. With all my manoeuvrable vessels gone, I'm also reduced to three lumbering vessels struggling to get their best weapons into action.

I managed to engage the fast-moving Apollo with three flights of Falkosis and more significantly one flight of Pikatos, but the Falkosis were all destroyed by close in fire as they needed to get in harm's way to use their short-ranged weapons. The Pikatos then managed a desultory shot that did no damage at all.

In fact this turn was something of a lull in the action, with the Poseidon failing to activate any of her damaged weaponry and all my beam weapons off target. Suddenly it's looking like Rob will need a major mistake to lose – which shows how quickly fortunes can change in this game.

Rob: This was a rather dull turn. My Poseidon's weapons fell silent as display exploded in fire control rooms across the ship. I needed to get that critical repaired. Her interceptors continued to minimize the damage done to her however so it was not all bad. The Delphi continued her turn to come back into the fight but was still out of range to do anything. My sole surviving Chronos continued to pound the Kabrokta but I had yet to break it. Of course, I couldn't believe that Chronos was still alive so I was not complaining.

The fighter battle continued on as it had been. A couple flights of Ian's fighters managed to jump my Apollo but three of them were destroyed for their trouble and the fourth was ineffective. A couple Furies would deal with that last one shortly so it really didn't concern me.



Turn 7

Ian: With the usual initiative order in place (I tell you what, just take it as read that Rob goes first unless I mention this again) movement sees me getting encircled a little like something out of a Wild West movie. All my surviving fighters are now covered by Rob who seems more than happy simply to deny me any air superiority rather than attain it himself which, given the current situation seems pretty wise to me.

Barnave is clearly Rob's main focus this turn, and the Poseidon now gets all weapon systems working (it really does seem to be all or nothing with this) reducing my last big threat to a skeleton crew. Return fire causes more engine damage and the Poseidon has so many -2" crits accumulated that it's going to take a week in port to fix, but right now engine criticals really aren't what I'm needing.

The hugely irritating surviving Chronos then drops the *Barnave's* crew down to two before I finally destroy it with a savage beam blast from *Turgot*. Rob then told me the thing was practically a wreck already, so it was a devastating shot well wasted. Still, that's the way it goes sometimes. The *Turgot* also accounted for a stray Badger Starfury flight but the fighter battle has been so chaotic that it's really been a brawl unto itself and we have, to now, effectively neutralised each other, which overall justifies my use of a second carrier, methinks. I'm going to keep telling myself that anyway, as right now the presence of another dedicated attack ship wouldn't go amiss.

This becomes increasingly true as the Apollo inflicts some more hefty crew casualties on *Turgot*, reducing her to a skeleton crew. *Neckar*, shooting last inflicted an embarrassingly small 1 point of damage on the Poseidon.

Rob: My repair crews on the Poseidon finally repaired that annoying weapons critical and all her weapons suddenly light up on line again. The Delphi is still trying to get back in the fight but it would manage to do so in the next turn. At this point I was in cleanup mode and I knew the field was mine.

My fighters occupied his surviving fighters and a couple badgers and a T-Bolt were free to start harassing his ships. Of course, one of the Badgers was taken down for his trouble and they were largely ineffective in their fire.

The Brokados was reduced to a skeleton crew as missiles ripped into her flank and the Chronos and Poseidon managed to finish off the last of the Kabroka's crew leaving her a floating hulk. Return fire at the Chronos tore the already severely damaged ship into two pieces. It was a sad moment as it had been the little ship that could for much of the battle. Ah well – we could build more – we have the technology.



Turn 8

Ian: One working carrier and one on skeleton crew isn't any way to win a battle, kids, and I know it. Unfortunately, so does Rob, and he lays off with his Apollo and Delphi, ensuring that my short-ranged weapons can at best only get at the Poseidon, which shrugs off almost all the hits inflicted on it. The Apollo continues pounding the *Neckar* however, and she suffers a nasty -1AD critical result, which is all I need right now!

I'm doing very little damage now and it looks to be a matter of time as my inability win a single initiative roll is allowing Rob to run rings around me.

Rob: With the last of the fighters being dealt with by my fighters and the two surviving Brakiri ships being damaged or crippled my turn was easy. The Delphi was finally in range and she helped the Apollo continue to reduce the Brokados into a burning wreck. My range advantage meant that return fire was minimal. My free fighters also continued to harass where they could but were still proving less effective than I would have liked.



Turn 9

Ian: The three carriers in the battle are now closer together than most assault cruisers, which in theory should be good for me as far as weaponry goes but the firepower of the Apollo is what is really making all the difference. I manage to get *Turgot's* beam lined up, only for the crew to be annihilated by yet more missiles from the Apollo before they even get a chance to think about shooting.

I'm also all out of fighters now although there aren't exactly swarms of Starfuries threatening me. Rob then rolls a succession of interceptor successes to negate every hit from *Neckar* leaving me teetering on the brink of defeat.

Rob: I finally manage to finish off the last of Ian's fighters. However, there were not enough of my surviving fighters to really matter. In truth, my fighter victory was a pyrrhic victory at best.

His Brokados managed to line up his beams on my carrier but a timely volley of missiles broke the back of the ship before it had a chance to fire. As much of a pounding as my carrier had taken that beam would likely have crippled her so I breathed a sigh of relief as the intact bits of the Brakiri ship floated apart.



Turn 10

Ian: With more damage done than I can possibly repair and more coming, I finally watch *Neckar* get crippled, finishing off any slim chance of a last minute change of fortune. Ironically I then roll a freaky critical that destroys the *Delphi*, but it's way too late, and mustering what dignity as I can I raise the white flag and ask my opponent for terms.

Rob: In a move that I found both satisfying and visually appealing I manage to bracket the *Cidikar* between the *Apollo* and *Poseidon*. Fighters also closed to just outside her anti-fighter range and poured what fire they could into her. I opted to keep my *Starfuries* safely out of the fight as their little pulse cannons would not matter in the end.

Shortly after the initial volley of fire hit the *Brakiri* carrier they announced their wish to surrender. Being the good guys we are, and wanting to get our hands on the carrier to study, we accepted and the battle was over.



Result

Brakiri surrender, Earth Alliance wins!

Conclusion

Ian: Well, it started well. I had great dice luck, caused a lot of damage and smiled contentedly as my rugged attack ships soaked up damage. It was a false dawn though, because the second the dice luck changed, as it almost always does at some point in a game, my attack ships suddenly caved in at the most inopportune moment. I then found myself way too close up to the Poseidon, and in a gunfight I didn't want. Meanwhile Rob's masterly use of his long range firepower on his Apollo conclusively won the day. This was a master stroke and undoubtedly was the game winner, along with the Poseidon's excellent defences.

Both super heavy carriers absolutely soaked up the damage and it took some significant criticals to bring down the *Neckar* to crippled status. It's hard to say whether swapping out the *Brokados* for another attack ship or two would have been the right move, although it would have allowed me to engage the Apollo effectively. Once I was in with the Poseidon there was really little option but to hope to bring it down, as breaking off to engage the Apollo would have been futile.

It was a hugely exciting game, though, and great fun to play. Soon I'm going to win though. I must. Even Chang has started winning. Damn him.

Rob: The honour of the US has been upheld though for a bit there I didn't think it would be. Early on I simply could not seem to do anything. His ships soaked up an amazing amount of firepower and the single beam shot that wiped my Hyperion out was very disheartening. I was almost ready to throw in the towel but I generally never surrender that early in the game. The fighter battle was also a bit annoying. Poor dice rolls meant that it was a lot closer than I believe it should have been.

The turning point of the game was when the Poseidon managed to close, bring up a broadside and destroy two ships. This was rapidly followed up by the destruction of a third. These three victories combined to even up the battle or even shift it slightly in my favour. In addition, the

ability of the Apollo to dish out 14 attack dice every turn with no fear of retaliation kept Ian somewhat off balance I believe which helped me to secure my victory after the turning point.

Using my fighters to maintain space superiority rather than try and attack warships was a good call. While that battle may not have gone quite the way I wanted it meant that the fighters were, ultimately, a non-factor in the game.

Hopefully next time I'm in the UK I can get into another battle report game. It was great fun. I salute Ian for a great and exciting game.



Mongoose Infantry

Thought you guys may enjoy these pics. I'm the big guy with the Tampa Bay Buccaneer Shirt on (Go Bucs!).

This was Operation: Swift Wolf which the USMC were tasked to stop a possible tactical nuclear missile launch from the steamy jungles of China. The PLA wanted to make a surprise missile launch in a remote village in hopes to avoid Satellite detection. They were almost successful however American Intelligence had already had infiltrated their plans. The USMC had to move fast and stealthy to avoid the huge PLA Army. USMC Recon were inserted along with armour and air support by the MV-22 Osprey. Their mission...to destroy the mobile missile platform and get the heck out of dodge!

This was a 2000 point battle with artillery and air assets on both sides. The F117 was in the air along with an actual PLA J-12! The Marines Expeditionary vehicle was also in action. The Marines were successful, but after many casualties. Prizes went to players on both sides according to team play and sportsmanship. A dealer also provided discounts on BFEVO for participants in the event.

As you can see by the pics, this is my Asian Board. A nice change from the usual Middle East boards.

Next up in less than 2 weeks...Necronomicon! Hopefully I get my ACTA2ed books soon from you guys or I am in big trouble!

Take care Guys!
Will Baker





Give Me Ramming Speed!

Taking a Look at the new Supplement for Victory at Sea

Matthew Sprange

It is not an exaggeration to say that Victory at Sea gave us all a bit of a turn here at Mongoose. For two years, the rules had lain more or less dormant, only tweaked with when I had a few spare moments. It was a pet project, a flight of fancy of mine, an experiment designed to prove the core Call to Arms rules used in our Babylon 5 space battle game could be used for more traditional naval warfare. World War II was picked for the era only because I was on a bit of a World War II buzz at the time.

The rules only saw the light of day because Ian tapped on my shoulder one day to ask whether I had any spare material for Signs & Portents, and so we did a few previews, letting people try out the core rules. We listened to their comments, made a few more tweaks and then, looking at collected files, realised we were only a couple of weeks away from actually completing the game and sending it to layout!

Even so, Victory at Sea was still considered a 'pet project', and we never really thought we would sell more than three or four hundred copies in the first year – such numbers would mean it would likely make little or

no profit, making it a luxury, the kind of thing you can do when you run a games company(!).

The intent was to create a historical naval wargame that would interest not the normal salty seadog crowd, but fantasy and science fiction wargamers. The basic premise was, simply;

“It is a really cool thing to roll lots of dice while sinking the Bismarck.”

What we never expected was to strike a chord with traditional naval wargamers. Naval wargaming has a reputation for being long-winded and slow, with close attention paid to realism – then there was Victory at Sea which, like a young Turk, kicked the doors down and proudly proclaimed to have less attention to detail, and more attention to fun. With complete battles being fought



in just an hour or two, it seemed to work very well.

Well, it sold, and then kept on selling. Within four months, two thousand copies had flown out the door, and we were reprinting it continually in our new facility. Even today, it still appears in our monthly top twenty of sales, without fail.

This is good news, as it meant supplements and related games would not be too far away. This month sees the release of the first

of these, Order of Battle. Envisioned as a companion to the main rulebook, Order of Battle has everything you would expect to see in Victory at Sea, plus the kitchen sink!

A Sea Change

We always pay close attention to what our customers say about our games on our forums, and we took a sieve to the many, many posts that had been made to sort out what, if anything, needed to be changed at a fundamental level.

It was gratifying to see very little was deemed actually 'wrong' and there were plenty of good ideas that we thought would work well in the game.

Principally, players wanted more powerful aircraft, reflecting their true role in World War II, and less effective torpedo belts. The second was dealt with in a small tweak. The former. . . well, we'll get on to that.

Other rules tweaks modified the Flank Speed special action, reduced the effectiveness of Weak weapons in causing critical hits, and removed the 'invincible speeding destroyer syndrome.'

New rules have also been added in the form of minefields, land and shore batteries, and some modifications to night fighting. We have also added the much asked for suicide attack rules, so expect some tense games! Nothing is too complicated, and we have stuck to the goal of creating an easy to use



set of World War II naval rules that you can quickly dive into without too much fuss. If you have already played Victory at Sea more than a few times, then you will be able to integrate the new rules into your battles within minutes – they really are that simple.

PTs Off The Starboard Bow!

The rules changed or added above take only the first (very small) chapter of Order of Battle. There then follows three more chapters, each of which looks at a very specific area of the game, and then fleshes it out.

The first covers the use of Motor Torpedo Boats, and is based heavily on the article that appeared here in Signs & Portents a few months ago. If you have already been using them, you will know what to expect. For everyone else, well, let's just

say there are going to be a few more units buzzing about on the table!

Next is a chapter on Admirals – basically, fleet leaders whose leadership abilities and tactics have a real effect on the course of a battle. Taking a cue from the second edition of A Call to Arms, these Admirals have traits purchased for them, which defines their personality and abilities. For example, an Admiral with the Night Fighter trait has trained his fleet to spot enemy ships in the gloom far quicker. A Master of the High Seas is capable of using two special actions at once, and so on. We have also included some real world Admirals, and listed what traits we imagined them to have, based on their war records.

Finally, there is the chapter you have all been waiting for – Advanced Air Operations. This changes the way aircraft are used in the game completely. Bombers can now be



escorted, for example, while fighters can no longer hang around in the air facing wave after wave of attackers, as they can now only engage a limited number of times, due to ammunition constraints. For carriers, there are new rules for operating at night, and for refuelling and rearming (and you don't want to face a bombing attack when you are doing that!). Some aircraft can be designated for specific roles, such as ASW duty, and we have included a list of the aircraft listed under each carrier in the game, and specified which new aircraft replaced them in later years – so, the Royal Navy can finally fly Seafires and Corsairs off its decks!

Ships, Ships, my Kingdom for More Ships!

Of course, when you first pick up the book, you are going to ignore all of that, and go straight to the new fleet lists to see what ships you can now use in your games! The answer will be, well, almost all of them. While we have glossed over certain classes of ship (with some exceptions, one US destroyer begins to look much like another once you boil down their capabilities down into the characteristics used in Victory at Sea), we have added many, many new hulls to the game.

The greatest beneficiary of this new wave of ships is probably the Royal Navy. No national bias on our part, I assure you – there were just a heck of a lot of ships to cover! From the Activity-class aircraft carrier to the N3 battleship, we have included just

about every type of ship we could find data for, and added one or two hypothetical designs for good measure – we know a lot of Victory at Sea players like to try the 'what if?' scenarios.

The N3 is joined with the Lion and Malta classes to give the Royal Navy some heavyweight War level choices, and we have tweaked some existing ships too. The Barham and Warspite, for example, have been split away from the standard Queen Elizabeth entry, while the Hood has been given Radar and moved down to Battle level.

Every fleet list follows a similar mould, with some changes to existing ships, and as many new vessels as we could cram into their section.

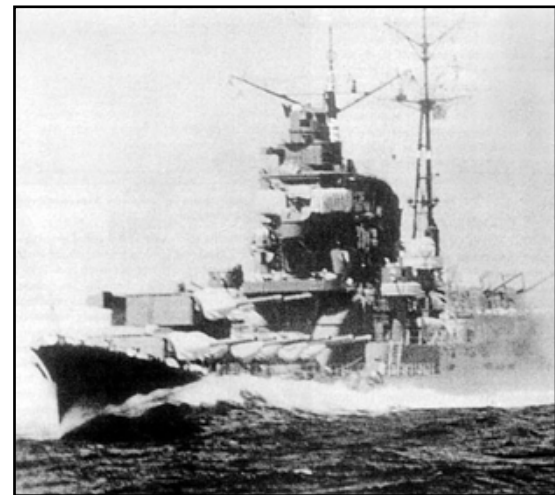
The Kriegsmarine have elements from the Z-Plan fleet (also an article in Signs & Portents) added to their list, though we have reigned things in slightly and merely included those ships that were at least theoretically possible (no 150,000 ton monsters!). The Schelswig Holstein, though I don't expect it will appear much in tournament play!

Not to be outdone, the French and Italian navies also have a wider spread of choices, which should make them more attractive to competitive players (always been partial to the Free French myself!) and, by popular demand, we have included the Surcouf submarine, just for those who are looking for something a bit different in their naval games.

The Russian fleet (another set of ships that first appeared in Signs & Portents) have been tweaked following comments made on our forums, and now stand as an 'official' fleet in the game.

Aircraft are also a big factor for all the fleets, with many more choices now possible with the Advanced Air Operations rules. Catalinas can hunt submersibles for the US Navy, while the Japanese can launch the terrifying Okha rocket bomb (yes, it included a pilot. . .).

In short, there is something for everyone in Order of Battle and, written primarily by our Salty Seadog playtesters and a few committed fans of the game, it is a supplement by the players, for the players. If you are looking to take your games of Victory at Sea to the next level, whichever theatre you favour, this book is going to give you pretty much everything you need.



ADMIRALS OF THE HIGH SEAS II - NOVEMBER 24th

We will be holding the Victory at Sea tournament at our offices in Swindon. And yes, Order of Battle will be available on the day! You will need four fleet rosters, each at five points Raid, drawn from the appropriate years - see the Tournament Pack, which can be downloaded from;

<http://www.mongoosepublishing.com/pdf/vashighseas2.pdf>

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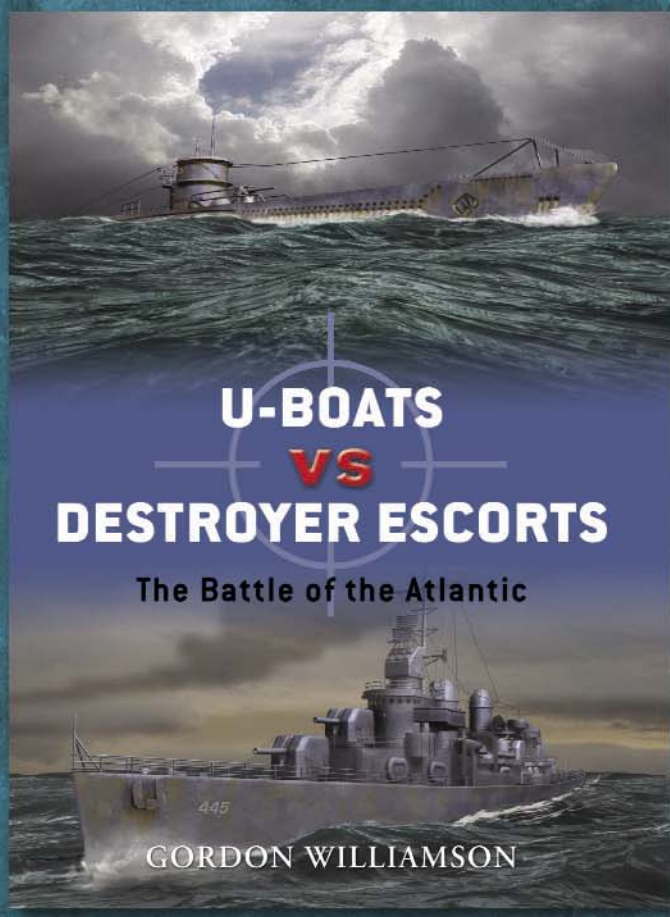
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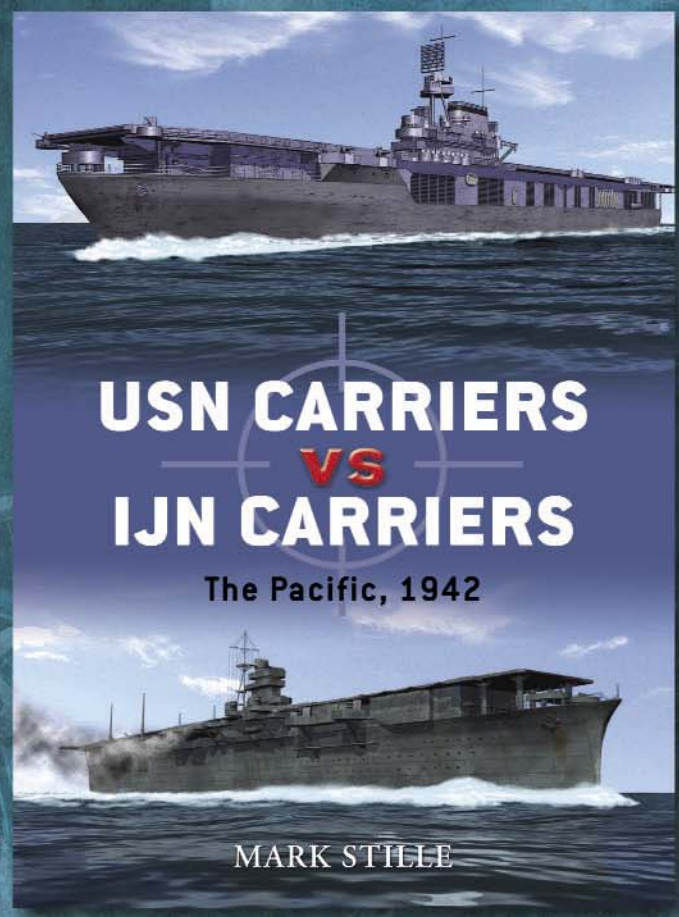


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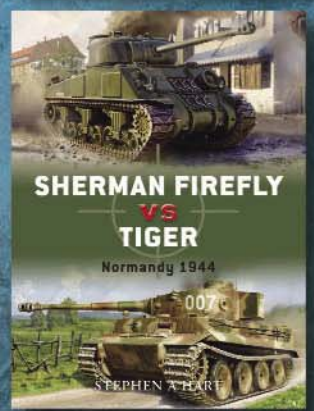
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A Type 97 Carrier Attack Plane on fire. Of the 18 Japanese torpedo bombers committed on May 8, only ten survived to recover on *Zuikaku*. [US Naval Historical Center]



THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY, JUNE 1942

The next carrier confrontation was not long in coming. For its attack on Midway, the *Kido Butai* employed *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, and *Hiryu*. The Japanese believed that if their green aviators of the Fifth Carrier Division could sink two US carriers in the Coral Sea, as they erroneously thought, then the cream of Japan's naval aviators would surely have little difficulty finishing off the Americans.

The Americans made several key strategic changes before the showdown at Midway. The size of the fighter squadrons was increased from 18 to 27 aircraft, made possible by the introduction of the F4F-4 with its folding wings. However, despite the increased numbers of fighters, air defense of the carriers remained problematic given the improvement needed in fighter direction. *Yorktown* was quickly repaired in Pearl Harbor and made ready for action. Her air group was re-formed using squadrons from the damaged *Saratoga*. Fletcher remained in overall command and exercised direct control of Task Force 17 (TF-17), centered on *Yorktown*. Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance commanded Task Force 16 (TF-16) with *Enterprise* and *Hornet*.

By this time, the Americans had broken the IJN's code and had deduced many essential elements of the Japanese plan. The two American carrier groups were placed north of Midway in order to ambush the Japanese carriers. TF-16 was charged with executing the strike, and TF-17 was charged to conduct search and act as a reserve. As at Coral Sea, the two sides were closely balanced, but at Midway the Japanese held an advantage in fleet carriers (four to three) while the Americans had the invaluable advantage of superior intelligence and the use of Midway as an unsinkable flight deck. Despite the common perception that the Americans were grossly outnumbered at Midway, in terms of comparable numbers of aircraft, the opposite was true. The four Japanese carriers embarked a total of 247 aircraft, and the three American carriers embarked 234. When the number of US aircraft based at Midway is added to the figure, the Japanese were actually outnumbered.

As predicted by American intelligence, the battle opened on June 4 with the Japanese launching a 108-aircraft raid on Midway. The Japanese strike group tore through the defending US fighters to attack the island's facilities. However, no US aircraft were caught on the ground, and US opposition was so heavy that the Japanese strike commander indicated to Nagumo that another strike was necessary. Meanwhile, just after 0600hrs, Fletcher was informed of the Japanese carriers' location from Midway-based aircraft. According to plan, TF-16 launched an all-out strike with 116 aircraft while *Yorktown's* aircraft were held in reserve.

The American launch commenced at approximately 0700hrs. Because of delays with *Enterprise's* launch, TF-16's strike proceeded in three groups. This seemed to doom any possibility of mounting a coordinated strike. At 0830hrs, *Yorktown* launched the aircraft she had held in reserve. This added another six fighters, 17 dive-bombers, and 12 torpedo bombers to the American strike.

Just as the American strike was being launched, the *Kido Butai's* ordeal began. Between 0700–0820hrs, 51 American aircraft from Midway attacked the Japanese carriers. Against a Japanese CAP of almost 30 Zeros, 18 US aircraft were lost, and no Japanese ship was hit. In the midst of these continuing, though ineffective attacks, Nagumo began to receive reports of US naval units in the area. The first report was received at 0728hrs when a floatplane spotted a large US task force. Later, as the last of the American air attacks was ending, Nagumo received confirmation that the US force included a carrier. His actions in the face of this report were to make this time the pivotal point of the battle. Caught in the midst of rearming with bombs the aircraft he had held in reserve to attack Midway, and with his first Midway strike group returning, Nagumo hesitated. He decided to recover his Midway strike force, rearm all his aircraft with the proper weapons necessary to attack ships, and then launch a massive strike at the American carrier force at 1030hrs. Nagumo desperately needed two hours to carry out his plan – a break he was not to receive.



NEXT PAGE

The view of a downed US naval aviator showing the destruction of the carrier force at approximately 1035 on June 4, 1942. This is just after the American dive-bombers have set fire to three Japanese carriers and in the midst of the torpedo attack on the fourth.

A Dauntless of *Enterprise's* Bombing Six returning after taking part in the bombing of carrier *Kaga* on June 4. Note the battle damage to the rear of the aircraft. [US Naval Historical Center]



Yorktown viewed from one of her escorts, a fire and dead in the water after being hit by three bombs from Hiryu aircraft. The damage was soon repaired, but Yorktown's ordeal was just beginning. (US Naval Historical Center)



At approximately 0915hrs, strike forces from the three American carrier air groups began a series of uncoordinated attacks that successfully kept the Japanese off balance. Furthermore, the Americans were graced with the most important factor in any carrier battle – good fortune. Ultimately, these attacks would prove to be the most devastating carrier attacks of the entire war. Quickly adapting to the changing weather conditions, the skillful, intuitive American squadron commanders brought their attacking air groups over the Japanese carriers at different times, rather than in a single assault. The first to attack was Torpedo Squadron Eight. Without any fighter escort, the attack was pressed home in the face of defending Japanese fighters battling with suicidal bravery. All 15 Devastators were destroyed and no damage inflicted on the Japanese.

The aircraft of Torpedo Six were next and faced a similar result – all but four of 14 aircraft were shot down to no Japanese losses. The final torpedo squadron from Yorktown completed the process of keeping the Japanese fighters occupied at low level, and though provided with a fighter escort, the squadron lost ten of 12 aircraft and scored no hits.

As Yorktown's torpedo aircraft were conducting their attack, the American dive-bombers finally located their target. Hornet's dive-bombers missed the Japanese carriers altogether, removing the largest force of American strike aircraft from the battle. However, in the battle's key moment, dive-bombers from Enterprise and Yorktown found the Japanese carriers while the latter's CAP was still at low altitude. Enterprise's dive-bombers targeted two carriers, Kaga and Akagi. Most dove against Kaga, and she was hit her four times. One of the attacking American pilots described the attack on Kaga:

I was the ninth man in our squadron to dive. I was making the best dive I ever made... We were coming in from all directions on the port side of the carrier, beautifully spaced. Going down I was watching over the nose of my plane to see the first bombs land on that yellow deck... As I was almost at the dropping point, I saw a bomb hit just behind where

I was aiming... I saw the deck rippling and curling back in all directions, exposing a great section of the hangar below... I dropped a few seconds after the previous bomb explosion... I had determined that during the dive that since I was dropping on a Japanese carrier I was going to see my bombs hit... I saw the 500-pound bomb hit right abreast of the island.

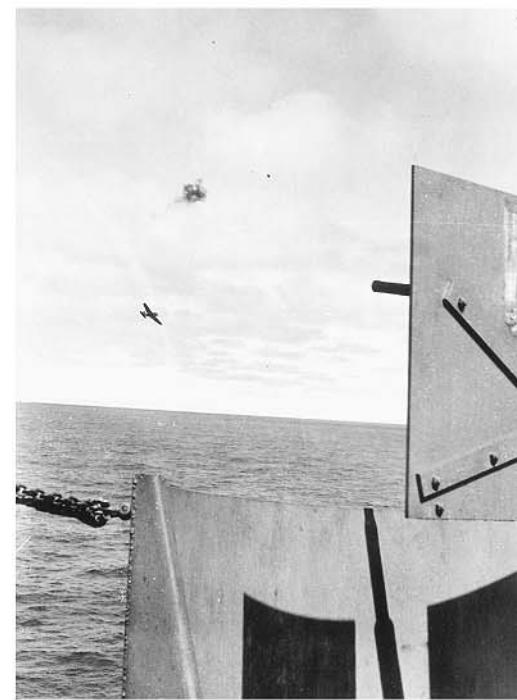
In the confusion, Akagi almost escaped attacks, but three Enterprise aircraft took her under attack and scored a single hit. Commander Fuchida Mitsuo described being on the receiving end of the American assault:

I looked up to see three black enemy planes plummeting toward our ship. Some of our machine guns managed to fire a few frantic bursts at them, but it was too late. The plump silhouettes of the American Dauntless dive-bombers quickly grew larger, and then a number of black objects suddenly floated eerily from their wings. Bombs!... The Terrifying screams of the dive-bombers reached me first, followed by the crashing explosion of a direct hit... Looking about, I was terrified at the destruction that had been wrought in a matter of seconds. There was a huge hole in the flight deck just behind the amidship elevator. The elevator itself, twisted like molten glass, was drooping into the hangar. Deck plates reeled upward in grotesque configurations. Planes stood tail up, belching livid flame and jet-black smoke.

Yorktown's Dauntlesses attacked Soryu and scored three hits with 1,000lb bombs. With the hangar decks of the Japanese carriers jammed with fully-armed and fueled aircraft, these hits were sufficient to start immense fires that the Japanese had no hope of extinguishing.

The Hiryu, Japan's only intact Japanese carrier, prepared to strike back and even the score with the Americans. However, her strike contingent of 18 bombers and nine attack planes was small. Hiryu's first strike took off at 1100hrs with Yorktown being its target. American radar detected the carrier bombers 32 miles out, and the CAP of 18 Wildcats made the strike costly to the Japanese as defending US fighters accounted for 11 dive-bombers and three fighters. Seven Type 99s survived long enough to dive on Yorktown. Their accuracy was amazing: three scored hits and two gained damaging near misses. Two aircraft were destroyed by antiaircraft fire,

One of Hiryu's Type 97 Carrier Attack Planes turning away from Yorktown after delivering its attack. In the foreground is one of Yorktown's 20mm guns. (US Naval Historical Center)



allowing only five carrier bombers and a single *Zero* to return to *Hiryu*. However, the damage caused by the attack proved to be less severe than initially thought. By 1400hrs, *Yorktown* had controlled the fires on board, brought her boilers back on line, and she was steaming at 24kts. Therefore, when the second *Hiryu* attack group arrived looking for undamaged American carriers, *Yorktown* was again selected as the target. This small strike group achieved good results. Of the seven aircraft that survived to drop their torpedoes, two scored hits. These proved crippling and brought *Yorktown* dead in the water, caused her to list 17 degrees. Five Japanese torpedo planes and four fighters survived.

At 1445hrs, American scout planes spotted *Hiryu*. The Americans committed their remaining striking power, the dive-bombers aboard *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, to finish *Kido Butai's* last carrier. Twenty-five Dauntlesses departed *Enterprise*, followed by another 16 from *Hornet*. Their attack began just after 1700hrs. For the loss of three

Dauntlesses, the *Enterprise* group placed four hits on *Hiryu*, all forward of her island. *Hornet's* aircraft then attacked escorts upon seeing that *Hiryu* was doomed.

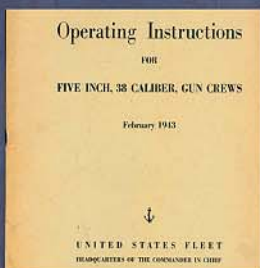
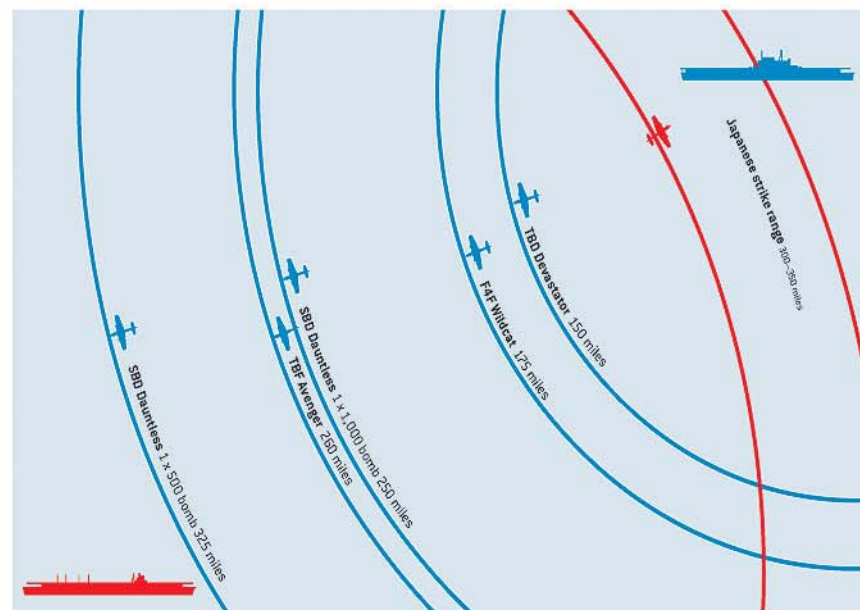
The destruction of the last Japanese fleet carrier effectively ended the battle of Midway. Though *Yorktown* was lost after she was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine on June 6, all four Japanese fleet carriers committed to the battle were destroyed along with all of their aircraft. The tide in the Pacific had turned.

THE BATTLE OF THE EASTERN SOLOMONS, AUGUST 1942

After the Japanese defeat at Midway, both combatants turned their attention to the South Pacific. With the arrival of *Wasp* from the Atlantic, the US Pacific Fleet now boasted four carriers – *Wasp*, *Enterprise*, *Hornet*, and *Saratoga*. Their air groups had all been rebuilt following heavy losses at Midway. With the exception of *Hornet*, all carriers were now committed to the South Pacific.

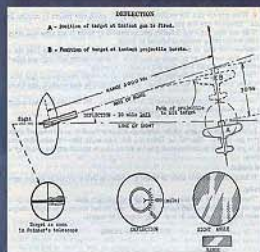
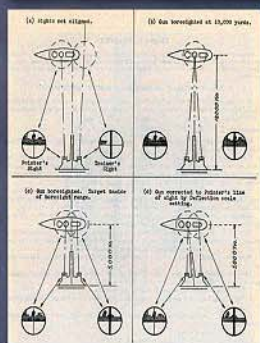
Following the debacle at Midway, the Japanese were forced to reorganize their carrier fleet. Despite the loss of four fleet carriers, one light carrier, and almost 300 carrier aircraft at Coral Sea and Midway, the IJN still possessed a powerful carrier force. The First Air Fleet was renamed the Third Fleet. The Fifth Carrier Division was renamed the First Carrier Division, and was allocated *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, and light carrier *Zuiho*. The former Fourth Carrier Division was reconstituted as the Second Carrier

Diagram illustrating operational range of the American aircraft which fell far short of the range achieved by all Japanese carrier-borne aircraft.



USN ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNNERY

Although first produced in February 1943 to assist with the training of the rapidly expanding US Navy, the *Operation Instructions for Five Inch, 38 Caliber Gun Crews* is a useful insight into the training of US guncrews as well as the difficulties of their role. Each gun was manned by a crew of 15 under the direct command of the gun captain. He worked closely alongside the pointer who was responsible for the correct elevation and depression of the gun to aim at the target. Good eyesight was crucial but so was a practised understanding of the gun's sight settings and the deflection scale. The pointer worked with the trainer to "mark" the target. As the manual illustrates, the pointer's and trainer's sights would have to be boresighted on a target. In the illustration alongside it is a ship but similar principles would apply to an airborne target. The deflection scale also needed to be accounted for as during the few seconds it takes the projectile to travel to the target and burst, the target has already moved to the left. Nor does the projectile move in a straight line but rather curves a little to the right of the line of sight of the target. As the manual explained, "this is exactly the same thing as the 'spin' that the pitcher gives to the baseball in order to pitch an 'in curve' to the right-handed batter." Gunnery crews were expected to adjust their sights accordingly. Accurate sighting was crucial and the manual urged crews to remember that "an error of 1mil in setting deflection can make the gun miss a target entirely... Remember, in a fight between two equal warships, it's the best trained crew behind the best aimed gun that wins. There is no medal for 'second place' in a fight." By the end of 1942, the USN gunnery crews had achieved a mathematical precision in anti-aircraft firing in direct contrast to the ineffective barrage fire of the poorly trained Japanese crews.



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