

MIGCAP

The Air Wars Campaign Game

Version June 2011

INTRODUCTION

This campaign game is loosely based on the air war over North Vietnam during 1965-68. It is simplified (as are the rules) but offers some slight flavour of the air to air battles.

The campaign uses the Air Wars rules but in an unconventional 'back to back' setup. It requires at least two umpires, one North Vietnamese Air Force (NVAF) player and 3 or more US players.

The bulk of the players are US aircrew, with one player per aircraft. Each US player controls one aircraft and represents part of an American fighter squadron. Players are given ranks and are all on the same side. The aim of the game is advance your career, and to become the First Ace. Obviously this will not affect how much players support each other in combat.



The NVAF player (more about this role later) controls all the 'enemy' aircraft. There are usually at least 2 enemy aircraft per US Aircraft.

The umpires adjudicate the rules and update the player's plots (see below). It really needs

LAYOUT & GAMEPLAY

The game has an unusual 'back to back' setup. This is tricky to run, but really gives the flavour of the confusion of air combat.

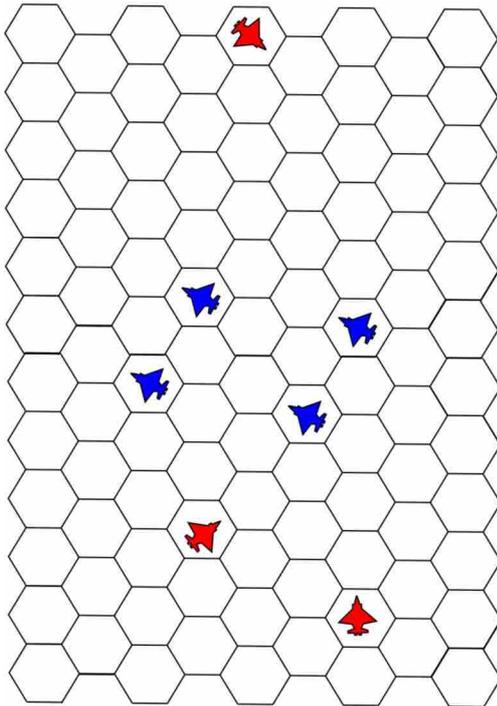
For this game, the umpires have to set up a number of separate playing areas, either physically separate, back to back, or separated by screens.

Separate rooms even – though that put a significant strain on the umpire who has to move quickly between players.

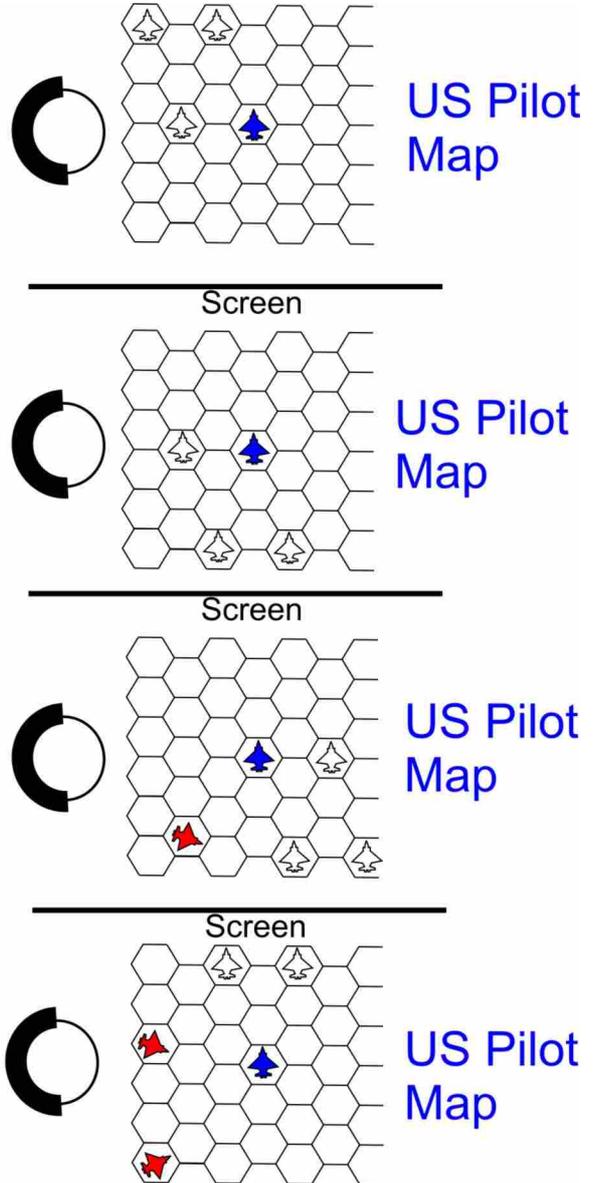
One large master hex map is needed for the Umpires/NVAF players and one smaller hex map for EACH US Player. US players are to be placed so that they cannot see each others maps or the master map. The NVAF player should not be able to see the US Player's maps.

MIGCAP

Game Layout



**UMPIRE / NVAF
MAIN MAP**



The umpire's role is to place on the US Player's maps what they, as the pilot of their aircraft what they could actually see from their location. In the case of aircraft with two crew, the second crew member get a 'second view'.

The Umpire/NVAF map is the master map for all the aircraft positions.

Whilst the NVAF player is not subject to the same limitations, she has the problem of managing a large number of aircraft of inferior types. There is also a C3 limitation (more on that later).

US Players may communicate with each other verbally or over intercoms if available.

Ideally, using this set-up there should be one umpire per player, to make the game work fast enough to be really interesting. There should never be more than 3 players per umpire.

VISIBILITY

The angle of attention for an aircrew is indicated on the players plot by placing a coloured counter on an adjacent hex. This represents the centre of a 120° arc of visibility. After all movement, the umpires place on the player's plots, models (or counters) representing the positions of aircraft in that arc, and indicate their direction of movement, and anything else that could be seen.



The aircrew have two other options:

- a. they can 'track' a specific aircraft. To indicate this, they place a **visibility marker** on the target aircraft. The umpires will then treat that as the centre of their visibility arc. This is usually selected when one aircraft is closing to engage a specific enemy. The disadvantage is that the angle of vision is narrowed to 60° - to represent the fact that the crew's attention is focused in one specific direction.
- b. They can 'go RADAR', and stop looking out of the cockpit but look down at the aircraft's tracking radar display. This will indicate the general direction of all nearby aircraft (within 30 hexes), but they cannot be given an external view at the same time (and therefore can't fire at anything that turn).

Alternative Easy Setup

If you lack the umpires or space to run the full back to back version, then you can, of course, use the rules in the normal way face to face. Its not as scary though, as you lose sight of the enemy and wonder if they are coming up on your blind side.

Special Missile (Un)Reliability Rule

The missile technology of this period is in its infancy. Missiles frequently 'go ballistic' and fail to engage properly. After a player has decided how many missiles to fire, roll 1d6 for each missile, score 1 or 2 for a failure. This applies to both sides.

US PLAYER ROLES

The US Squadron can be either USAF or US Navy.

All the players are in the same squadron – so decide at the start which you are. The strength of the squadron will be the number of US pilot players.

If the campaign is being played over a number of sessions, the number of players/pilots present are the number of aircraft available for operations (the rest having technical problems etc).

Players might like to give the squadron a name (for example 'The American Eagle Squadron') or base it on an historical example. Each player has a rank, the highest is determined by the number of players:



Ranks

All start at Lieutenant (Naval Sub-Lieutenant), and may be promoted to Captain (Naval Lieutenant) or Major (Lt Commander).

A flight of four aircraft is normally commanded by a Captain (or equiv.) but can be by a Major. 2 or 3 flights are commanded by a Major (or sometimes a Lt Colonel).

Promotion will be as vacancies occur in the squadron's order of battle. It will go to the most senior lower rank player (judged by the number of missions). If this is tied then the combat performance will decide (i.e. number of kills).

Players wounded are taken off operations for 2 missions.

Players killed are taken off operations for 3 missions and come back as a green pilot.

Pilots taken off operations fly bombers. Killed pilots who understand the system well enough might also help the umpire whilst they are dead.

Pilots that eject in combat survive, but play NVAF for the next mission before returning to the Squadron as a rookie.

Skill Development

As the pilots gain more experience, you can add to their abilities with their aircraft.

The main areas of development are gunnery and piloting – and player's characters gain skill points in each of these separately:

Gain 1 piloting skill point per mission completed.

Gain 1 piloting skill point each time you get heat seeker parameters on an enemy and fire (missiles do not have to work or hit).

Gain 1 gunnery skill point every time you fire at an enemy aircraft



within range.

Gain 1 gunnery skill point every time you shoot down an enemy aircraft with cannon.

Accumulated Skill Points Needed	Level	Effect on Piloting	Effect on Gunnery
0-24	FNG	None	None
25-49	Regular	Can do one extra 60° one per mission	+1 to one cannon fire roll per mission.
50-99	Experienced	Can do one extra 60° in a move twice per mission	+1 to three cannon fire rolls per mission
100-199	Veteran	Can do one extra 60° in any move	+1 to all cannon fire roles
200+	Unbeatable	Can write movement orders after enemy moves have been plotted.	+1 to all firing rolls including missiles.

Aces

The first player in the squadron to become an Missile ACE (shooting down 5 enemy aircraft using missiles) gains 5 piloting skill points.

The first player in the squadron to become a Gun ACE (shooting down 5 enemy aircraft using only cannon) gains 5 gunnery skill points, and can be regarded at the winner of the game.

Flight Log

Each player is encouraged to maintain a flight log and write a debrief of the mission at the end of each mission.

These can be of any length and provide an important narrative of the campaign for future historians.

OPERATIONS

The assumption for this game is that the US fighter aircraft are usually operating as MIGCAP and protecting bombers or recce operations.

The simplest operation is merely a dogfight against equal numbers of enemy fighter aircraft, and this type of action is recommended while players get used to the game system.

Throughout, the normal set up for a game will be the US aircraft flying as a single unit, in a formation to be decided in advance by the US players.



They are then given, by the umpires a 'RED CROWN' (or 'DISCO') report by the umpire(s), along the following lines:

"Hello Wolfpack Leader this is Red Crown. I have three bogeys at 15 miles on your 3 o'clock and closing."

This gives the players a chance to look in roughly the right direction from the start.

To help the atmosphere, umpires should try and refer to miles rather than hexes. The conversion is as follows:

Hexes	Miles	Hexes	Miles
1	½	10	6
2	1	16	10
3-4	2	20	12
5	3	30	18
6	4	33	20

During the dogfight, the supporting radar station will take little part, except that it can tell the pilots when the enemy has broken off or more have arrived (if they haven't seen it themselves already)

Mission Profile

All the air combats take place over North Vietnam, usually during some mission to bomb Hanoi or some military target.

US policy limited the actions that their air force could take against targets such as NVAF airfields, so that the main opportunity for the USAF and USN to achieve decisive air superiority was in dogfights with the enemy fighters.



Most missions will therefore include bombers as part of the force – these will be umpire-controlled unless there is a 'downed' player available to run them.

There will normally be at least one bomber per US fighter. The bombers are not armed for air to air combat, and will evade MiGs if possible.

Ejecting

The operation over North Vietnam means that ejecting is not an easy option for the US pilots, since this will almost certainly make them prisoners and the treat of a trip to the 'Hanoi Hilton'.

NVAF TACTICS

The North Vietnamese Air Force was defending its homeland against the US bombing forces.

Whereas the US fighter pilots were regarded as heroes back in the USA, they were regarded as evil war criminals by the North Vietnamese, many of whose families were the subject of repeated heavy bombing in Hanoi and elsewhere in the north.

The unwillingness of the US government to bomb airfields gave the NVAF had a certain amount of freedom of operation and base security - despite being on the strategic defensive.

Tactically, the MiG preferred to make a single pass on bombers, launch all their missiles then break away and go home. Similarly in dogfights, once their missiles have been spent they could legitimately break off. Favoured tactics include:

a. Defensive circle. A group of MiGs circle, each covering another's rear. An enemy joining the circle to attack one aircraft is immediately vulnerable to missile or gun attack from the one behind. This tactic particularly took advantage of the MiG's greater maneuverability.

b. When attacking, to maneuver to approach an enemy formation or aircraft from two directions at once, preferably 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock, so that whichever way they turn they give the other MiG missile target opportunities.

In most cases, the NVAF fighters were closely controlled from ground-based fighter direction controllers who used radar to assess the situation. They would be directed on virtually an aircraft by aircraft basis into the area of enemy fighters or bombers. In effect, in this game, the NVAF player is the ground controller.

To make the NVAF role more interesting, it is possible to give the NVAF player a more limited awareness of the master map, by separating him off with a simple map or radar plot. This just shows coloured counters as 'blips', and he relays orders to the umpires, who translate them into tactical moves on the master map.



ALTERNATE MISSIONS

If, once the players have got used to the system, you wish to try further and more complicated situations, then the following can be tried.

There are 5 types of mission:

- a. Rescue Missions.
- b. SAM site destruction.
- c. Bridge destruction.
- d. Military installation destruction.
- e. Fighter Sweep.

a. Rescue Mission:

Downed pilots had to be rescued. This was carried out by a number of specialised aircraft. These are to be escorted to the search area and protected during the pick-up.

Victory Conditions: For the Helicopter Rescue Force - retrieve the downed pilots at a given hex on the ground. Landing in pilot's hex counts as « a successful mission, safely leaving the area after counts as a full mission.

For the US Fighter escort to keep at least one helicopter flying.

For the NVAF fighters to shoot down 1:1 fixed wing enemy aircraft.

Force Levels: Rescue Forces = 2 CH53 Medium Lift Helicopter
1 HC130 Tanker

Escort = The US Players

NVAF = One MiG per US Player

b. SAM Site Destruction:

A group of bombers with specialised anti-radar missiles and conventional bombs are protected as they attack.

Victory Conditions: For the Bombers to hit the hex (or hexes) containing SAM sites. If all sites bombed then that counts as a mission. If only some bombed it counts as « mission, other wise does not count.

For the Fighters to keep defending fighters off the bombers.

For the NVAF to reduce the number of bombs dropped on the SAM sites.

Force Levels: Escorts = The US Players.

Bombers = 2 bombers per escort.

SAM Sites = 1 SAM site per 4 bombers.

AA Positions = 2 per SAM site.

NVAF = 1 MiG per US Player.

c. Bridge Destruction

A key bridge has to be destroyed to disrupt the NOVA advance. Bombers are targeted on the bridge.

Victory Conditions: For the Bombers to hit and destroy the bridge. Dropping bombs in the bridge hex counts as a mission. Destroying the bridge counts as two missions.
For the fighters to keep the defending fighters off the bombers.
NVAF to prevent bombs dropping on the bridge at any cost.

Force Levels: Escorts = The US Players.
Bombers = 2 bombers per US Player.
SAM Sites = 1 SAM per 4 bombers.
AA Positions = 2 near the bridge plus 2 per SAM site.
NVAF = 1 MiG per US Player.

d. Installation Destruction

A major military installation has to be destroyed (such as an oil refinery, port or base). This will occupy 2 contiguous hexes per US player

Victory Conditions: For the Bombers to hit as many hexes as possible. Dropping bombs in any installation hex counts as a mission. Hitting ALL hexes counts as two missions.
For the fighters to keep the defending fighters off the bombers.
NVAF to prevent bombs dropping on the installation

Force Levels: Escorts = The US Players.
Bombers = 3 bombers per US Player.
SAM Sites = 1 SAM per 4 hexes of installation
AA Positions = 1 per 2 hexes of installation
NVAF = 1 MiG per US Player.

e. Fighter Sweeps

At certain times in the war, US Air Forces were forbidden to directly attack NVAF Bases to hit MiGs on the ground. They instead went on fighter sweeps covering 'decoy' bombers' to draw out the NVAF to air combat.

Victory Conditions: US Fighters aim to inflict maximum air combat casualties with minimum losses. They must shoot down more than they lose.
US Bombers are to impersonate a bombing raid until attacked and then avoid combat.
Remaining in the combat zone throughout counts as 1« missions. Leaving the area before being fired on counts as an unsuccessful mission.
NVAF aim to shoot down as many Americans as possible.

Force Levels: Fighters = The US Players.
Decoy Bombers = 4 x fighter-bombers with Air-to-Air armament.
NVAF = 2 MiGs per US player.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

For those that like to role play, or who want to get into the feel of air combat a bit more, here is a short summary of some of the common US codewords and jargon in use in Vietnam at this time.

Bingo Fuel	All combat fuel used, only enough left to return to base.
Homeplate	Base.
MIGCAP	Anti-MiG Combat Air Patrol - aircraft assigned to this role were free to hunt and engage any MiGs detected.
TARCAP	Navy role, like MIGCAP but the aircraft are under the control of a fighter director and not free to engage anything they see.
Thud	F105 fighter-bomber.
deep six	directly behind and just below.
music	ECM. As in 'start the music'
Green 'em up!	Expression used by F105 pilots for arming their bombs.
Padlocked	Enemy located and under attack. For example, an aircraft codenamed "Elgin 3" might report to the rest of his flight, one seeing and closing to engage some MiGs "Elgin 3 is padlocked".
Honeymoon"	I note that you're attacking, I'll cover you"
Go boresight	Command by a Phantom pilot to his no.2 to start to try and lock-on to a target for a MR missile launch.
Fragged	posted or assigned to a particular mission.
Bandits	Enemy aircraft.
RHAW	Radar Warning system that warns when a SAM is trying to lock on to you.
go ballistic	A failure of a heat-seeker, where the guidance fails, and the missile just falls away ineffectively (this happened very frequently).
punch out	Break off contact and leave the battle area (usually by diving out and igniting afterburners).

Red Crown	Navy Radar station off the north coast of North Vietnam which plotted air movements and reported these to aircraft.
Disco	Air Force EC-121 orbiting over Laos, which does the same as 'Red Crown'.
Heads Up!	Call from Disco/Red Crown that there are MiGs in your area.
Splash	Codename for a MiG kill. ie. splash two = 2 MiG kills.
Bullseye	codename for the Centre of downtown Hanoi. This was used as a reference point for locating enemy aircraft. ie. Bullseye 12 = 12 miles from Bullseye. usually combined with a radial degree position, ie. "Possible bandits, one eight zero, Bullseye Fifteen" = contact 15 miles directly south of Hanoi.
Ship	Aircraft
Bogey	Unidentified aircraft, possibly hostile.
Tallyho	"I have the enemy in sight". For example "Tallyho on one MiG-17."
Blind six	Like 'deep six', the position directly behind and aircraft that is invisible to the crew.
Welded wing	Tight flight formation.
smoke out	Navy slang for lighting afterburners on an F-4.
into the weeds	Navy slang for low flying.
feet wet	Navy slang for low flying over the sea.
drag	a somewhat dangerous manoeuvre where one Phantom decoys the MiGs, while the other gets behind them and shoots them up. Not recommended when outnumbered.
nugget	a new guy.
Yankee Station	Carrier position in the Gulf of Tonkin.