

High Flying Dice's
Fighting Eagles
By Doug Murphy

The Red Baron... the Blue Max... Snoopy the Flying Ace. The Great War saw the rise of many such champions. Over the years, the cliché grew stronger of knights errant astride their fragile steeds jousting against each other in the air. For the wargaming world, the colorful personalities and eclectic aircraft have always proved compelling. *Fighting Eagles: Air Battles of 1918*, a desktop design published in 2012 by High Flying Dice Games, is a simple, playable, introductory-level contribution to the many games of this era.

Fighting Eagles requires a standard deck of playing cards, as well as a die if the special rules are used, to play. Based on Paul Rohrbaugh's design for *Showtime Hanoi*, his Vietnam air war mini game (Pocket Battle) published in 2008 by Against the Odds, *Fighting Eagles* uses a simple system that highlights the individual nature of these confrontations. The game includes a set of 39 counters (die cut for \$9.95 and cut-outs for \$5.95.), a small monochrome 8 ½" x 11" map, a colorful cover sheet, and three pages of rules, scenarios and players aids. The rules themselves take up little more than a single page. This gives an insight on how quickly it is to pick-up and play.

The map consists of 8 x 8 grid of squares overlaying a rudimentary grey-brown lined trench network as it might appear if seen from far above. At the top of the map are four small boxes to mark game turns, a complete list of combat value modifiers and two small pictures and explanation of an aircraft counter's graphics. The aircraft counters themselves are one inch, two-sided squares. The cut-out versions are easily constructed with a scissors and glue-stick. The front of each counter contains the aircraft name (e.g. Fokker Dr.1), a colorful overhead view of the plane, two numbers representing an action factor and a defense factor, and indicators if rotary engine or piloted by an Ace. The reverse shows the same, except with a damaged (afame) icon and reduced factors. Aircraft types featured include the Pfalz D-III, Fokker Dr. 1, Albatross DV, Fokker D-VII, Fokker E VIII, Halberstadt CL, SE5a, SPAD XIII, Sopwith Camel, Nieuport 28, and DH-4. Other counters indicate turns, sun position, anti-aircraft guns, targets, altitude, rockets, wind direction, balloons, jammed guns, and observer/ gunner status.

The basic game scenario pits several Allied aircraft trying to destroy a ground target protected by anti-aircraft and their German counterparts. The Allies win if the target is destroyed and they shoot down more aircraft than they lose. In addition to this mission, scenarios feature the Red Baron's and Frank Luke's last flights, as well as some balloon busting and bombing variants. Special rules cover the fragility of certain aircraft, the ability to power dive or height climb, observer fire and gun jams.

In the basic scenario, the German player places three anti-aircraft ground units and a Target marker on separate squares in the center of the map, designates three map edges as 'friendly' and places the Sun marker along one of those sides. The Allied player then places three aircraft in any square along the remaining side and the German player places a Fokker Dr. 1 and a second random-chosen aircraft on the opposite side. The German also receives a random third aircraft along a friendly map edge. A coin flip before the game begins brings the plane in at the beginning of the second turn if heads and third turn if tails. Each aircraft are marked at their altitudes, choosing

from Very High, High, Medium, Low and Very Low. The deck is shuffled and the Allied player draws until an ace through ten is chosen in a red suite. This designates the opening number of Allied Action Points (APs). Cards are reshuffled and play begins.

The color of the card draw determines which side can conduct Actions equal to half the card value. Aircraft expend action points to move, climb, dive and fire. Red cards affect the Allies, and black cards are for the German. Ace cards equal one action, and face cards allow an aircraft to expend action points through the limit noted on the counter. A black face card also allows a German antiaircraft unit to fire on an Allied aircraft within two squares.

Apart from the scenario set-ups, any number of aircraft can be in the same square at the same time and even at the same altitude level; each has to face a side instead of a corner. With this visual, movement and combat feel somewhat stylized.

It takes one action point for an aircraft to move into one of its front three squares; two points to move into either of the squares on the side; and three to move into any of the rear three squares. Aircraft with rotary engines are able to move into their forward right or side right squares for 'free' without using an action point: a nice representation of the effect of these engines. The lumbering DH-4 and Halberstadt CL cannot move directly into their rear squares.

Combat is the heart of the game system and very straight-forward. It is voluntary. To fire, an aircraft usually moves at least one square or altitude level and then expends another action point. The enemy must be one or two squares away, at a same altitude level and in the immediately front square. No diagonal or side shots are allowed in the basic game. If the modified value of a drawn card is greater than the target's defense factor, then the target is flipped to its damaged side or eliminated if already damaged. Suite color doesn't matter, and interestingly, face cards can be considered either a miss or a re-draw.

Modifiers to the card value are helpfully listed at the top of the map and call for adding the attacker's action factor; adding one if attacking an aircraft's rear; adding one if an Ace pilot is firing; and, adding one if the sun is behind the attacker. For antiaircraft fire, one is added if the target is flying against the wind and at Low altitude; two is added if the target is Very Low. Negative modifiers subtract the defense factor or subtract one if the sun is behind the defender or subtracting two if not adjacent (both for observer fire), or subtract one if the target is an Ace, or if firing at an aircraft's front or at High or Very High altitude.

Allied aircraft can strafe the antiaircraft or target unit from Low or Very Low altitude. The target is considered to have a defense factor of one at Low or zero at Very Low. Once attacked, a modified card value of eight kills the target.

The sequence of card draws can swing the game wildly toward either side; a string of three to five card draws of a single color can essentially end the game by giving many action points to one side. The basic game is four turns long with each turn represented by a complete pass through of the deck, or ending suddenly if a Joker is drawn. The turn marker is then advanced, cards reshuffled, and play continues with the next card drawn.

The beauty of the card draw determining the expendable action points that a player uses to move and attack made this game very easy to teach. Most of our games went very fast: between fifteen and thirty minutes. The aircraft counter artwork by Bruce Yearian is very finely done and a pleasure to peruse. Rohrbaugh plans expansion games at the squadron level. The initial one is set during the American Expeditionary Force's initial offensive of September 1918. Players will distribute their squadrons to different missions and use the game system to resolve any dogfights that may occur.

The six 'special' rules that can add a pleasing amount of 'chrome' to the basic game without unduly complicating it. They require use of the six-sided die. A damaged Albatross DV, Pfalz D III, Nieuport 28 and Fokker E VIII is destroyed when diving if a six is rolled. Expending all their action points allow a SPAD XIII and Fokker D VII to 'power dive' two altitude levels but they are also destroyed with a modified die roll greater than six. Alternatively, an undamaged Fokker Dr I and D VII can climb two levels by expending all their points. Observers in the DH-4 and Halberstadt CL can fire on an enemy in a square to the side or rear instead of firing to the front or bombing. If an attack damages the DH-4 or Halberstadt CL or a face card is drawn (which would usually indicate a miss), a modifier die roll greater than the target's defense factor incapacitates the observer, causing a bombing mission to be aborted and disallowing observer fire. A die is rolled if an attack misses due to a drawn face card. If the result is greater than the attacker's action factor, then the forward-facing machine guns are considered jammed. Expending an action point when next drawing a friendly card and a modified die roll less than the action factor clears the guns.

The bomber and balloon busting scenarios are fun. Both the DH-4 and Halberstadt CL have a bombing factor equivalent to the number of pips on the counter, and are allowed two bombing attempts per game. By expending an action point when over the target square and getting 10+ after combining a drawn card's value with the bombing factor kills the target. A black face card automatically hits and a red face card automatically misses. The balloon busting variant begins with two aircraft defending a balloon marker at Very High altitude from two attackers. A reinforcing third plane can be added on either side as a variant. The balloon expends an action point to descend upon the draw of a friendly card. Two points and two draws are required to descend a full Level. After descending from Very Low, the balloon is considered landed. The balloon has a defense factor of two at Very Low and one at Low representing the ground crew's small arms fire. The balloon is destroyed with a modified card value of eight or higher. If attacking, Allied fighters can carry Le Prieur rockets which add a plus-one modifier. If desired, a weather die roll can be rolled before play. A five or six yields wet weather and adds a point to the balloons defense factor at low altitudes.

Two real-world scenarios are also included. The first, the Red Baron's final flight on 21 April 1918 sets up the Fokker Dr. 1 against a damaged Sopwith Camel at Very Low altitude, with a second Ace-flown Camel entering later. There's a target fixation limiter on the Red Baron in the first turn until he is fired upon. The Baron must shoot down an enemy, avoid Allied anti-aircraft fire, and escape. The second scenario is Frank Luke's final flight later that year on

29 September. His Ace-flown SPAD and another must shoot down either a balloon or Fokker D VII without loss to win.

We flew all sorts of variants to the provided scenarios – with more anti-aircraft guns; with none; against unescorted bombers; and with a-similar match-ups. We even tracked the development of our own pilots to Ace level. There are not quite enough aircraft to make your own squadron-level scenarios, but the potential as represented by the planned expansions is certainly present.

Considering Rohrbaugh's pedigree as a designer, the amount of depth and play value packed into this game should not be surprising, but he has succeeded here. For a modern paper wargame, it combines the essentials: ease and speed of play, nice components, and straight-forward simple rules, with a bonus of not requiring paper tracking of aircraft status. The desktop version is a tremendous value at under six dollars.