

DESIGNER'S NOTES

FLAT TOP reflects some hard research, and the accumulation of data from all sorts of sources. This information had to be assembled, evaluated, and converted into the game format. Later, this format was expanded, simplified, polished, and modified through a period of extensive playtesting.

Air operations were far from perfected at this period in World War II. Some strange things could, and did, happen. The Initiative Roll for Plane Movement simulates many of the problems encountered in a simple and playable, yet realistic manner.

The restrictiveness of the rules for Air-to-Air Combat is based on historical fact. Combat is possible only in certain hexes, because only in those hexes would the planes converge into a small enough area to find each other and stage a battle. Although there were a few cases where fighters assigned as Escorts left their charges to attack enemy planes, these instances were few and far between. Normally, the commander of a fighter Escort would stay with his charges to ensure that they completed their mission. Otherwise, he would look pretty silly later at the court martial trying to explain why none of the bombers he had been ordered to protect had come back.

But why if all Allied ships have radar, is Air-to-Air Combat not permitted in the radar range of all Allied ships, instead of just the carriers? What bases and the American flattops had that the other Allied ships lacked was a fighter director team, with radio links to the fighters, who could vector Interceptors onto radar plots. The technique of placing these teams on other ships, such as in the case of the radar picket destroyers off Okinawa in 1945, had just not been developed yet (such a team was aboard the Chicago during the early stages of the Guadalcanal landings, but this was a temporary measure, and not repeated during this period). Why don't the Japanese ships have

radar? Well, some of them did, but they got absolutely no worthwhile service out of them. The American servicemen of 1942 were as "gadget-oriented" then as they are today, and there was no problem recruiting good personnel to operate and maintain complex radar gear. The Japanese of this period had a much different outlook on such equipment. The average Japanese officer or rating wanted to play a more active and traditional role in the fighting and running of their ships than sitting in a closed room twisting dials. As a result, Japanese radar technicians tended to be recruited from a pool of men that nobody else wanted. The radar equipment was poorly maintained, and indifferently operated.

As demonstrated by the game's mechanics, "wave attacks" were a function of range, as opposed to being a deliberate tactic. Air strikes would include every possible plane that could be launched and formed up, and still have the range to reach the target. The more distant the target, the less planes could be launched and formed in each group, and the more "waves" the attack force would have to be broken into.

Why didn't the Japanese commit their heavier battleships to the Solomons fighting, especially their super-battleship Yamato, which was available at Truk. Actually, for all their carrier expertise, the Japanese high command were still great believers in the battleship's big guns. All the best Japanese battleships were held in reserve to face the battleships of the Pacific Fleet in Jutland-like confrontation. And where were the American battleships? They were, as part of an elaborate cover plan, being used to neutralize large portions of the superior Japanese surface fleet. A Task Force of old, slow American battleships was busily steaming all over the Pacific (California, Oahu, the Fijis, Australia) to keep the Japanese guessing their intentions, and force them to hold back their own battlefleet.

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