



# The Rising Evan

# CARRIER STRIKE

## A Campaign Replay (Part II)

by M. Evan Brooks

**C**arrier Strike is one of the few simulations that this reviewer just could not put down. Thus, this replay will cover the campaign, but from the Japanese side. Also, strategic and tactical suggestions will be offered for the player's edification.

### I. Coral Sea

It is 8 May, 1942. My assignment is to seize Port Moresby and cause as much damage to the American fleet as possible. Enemy activity is noted as heavy, but I am confident that my

	Japanese	American
Fighters	11	68
Dive-Bombers	22	111
Torpedo Bombers	22	45
Medium Bombers	02	-0-
Float Planes	111	-0-
Patrol Planes	-0-	03
Victory Points: Mission	856	-0-
Damage	3,092	105

carriers will carry the day. Since I have four carriers (*Hiryu*, *Soryu*, *Kaga* and *Akagi*), I am sure that I outgun the American opposition.

As I am to learn later, the Americans get three fleet carriers — *Yorktown*, *Enterprise*, and *Hornet*. Utilizing Japanese float planes (a tremendous advantage; the Japanese do not have to divert dive bombers from their more "critical" tasks), I find the American carriers in short order. Multiple strikes (three in a day) lead to the sinking of all three American carriers as well as two heavy cruisers, a light cruiser and four destroyers (an additional nine destroyers suffer varying degrees of damage). My losses are minimal; minor damage to the *Hiryu*, a battleship and two heavy cruisers and a destroyer (although a light cruiser and three destroyers are sunk), but the loss of American carriers is devastating.

Early spotting efforts coupled with the Japanese ability to strike with a longer range yield a tremendous advantage. The worst possible scenario is to begin with the Japanese and American forces within close proximity of each other. However, when one must close to engage, the advantage is with the Japanese. It is disappointing that the Japanese dive bombers can only deliver a 250-lb bomb payload (as opposed to the American 1,000-pounder), but the better Japanese torpedo

bombers make up for the deficiency in this early part of the Pacific War.

	Japanese	American
Fighters	14	59
Fighter-Bombers	32	94
Dive Bombers	30	41
Torpedo-Bombers	03	05
Medium Bombers	02	-0-
Float Planes	12	-0-
Patrol Planes	-0-	02
Victory Points: Mission	504	-0-

### II. Midway

There is NO Midway. The Americans are too weak to risk a major engagement and simply decline battle. Another 1,000 points of mission success.

### III. Port Moresby II

It is 16 July 1942. The American fleet decides to give battle rather than surrender Port Moresby and the stepping stone to the Australian mainland. I only get three Japanese carriers (*Hiryu*, *Kaga* and *Akagi*), but I am undeterred — To the Glory of the Emperor!

The battle lasts for three days, much to my surprise. The *Wasp* had been sunk at the conclusion of day two, and I had not expected the Americans to stick around for more. But they did not withdraw, so I was able to cause additional damage. Since the Japanese fleet lacks radar, one must insure that sufficient float planes have been launched to give some warning. Even so, some American strikes seem to come unannounced, but luckily, they are small.

Confident that the Japanese surface fleet outguns the Americans, I eagerly give battle, only to suffer moderate damage. In fact, by day three, the surface fleet disengages on its own. My consolation is that they have given more than they have received. Actually, my tactics have not been pretty; I was just able to find the Americans early and launch often. In fact, this is the key to success — like basic infantry tactics: find, fix and destroy. However, unlike land combat operations, a mobile reserve is a waste of assets. Use it or lose it!

Three American carriers have been sunk (*Lexington*, *Sara-*

*toga* and *Wasp*), as well as two heavy cruisers and three destroyers. American ships damaged include a battleship, a

when losses are high. In this case, it is the first and last appearance of the British; they must have learned not to challenge Imperial Forces. However, Nippon has not emerged unscathed. The *Shoho* has been sunk and the *Shokaku* damaged. Only carriers have incurred damage on both sides, but with the American withdrawal from battle, it simply was impossible for the Japanese to cause additional damage.

	Japanese	American
Fighters	15	-0-
Fighter-Bombers	01	57
Dive-Bombers	21	31
Torpedo-Bombers	19	29
Medium Bombers	08	-0-
Float Planes	-0-	-0-
Patrol Planes	-0-	-0-
Victory Points: Mission	463	-0-
Damage	1,460	313

	Japanese	American
Fighters	-0-	-0-
Fighter-Bombers	01	38
Dive-Bombers	23	20
Torpedo-Bombers	29	14
Medium Bombers	02	-0-
Float Planes	-0-	01
Patrol Planes	-0-	-0-
Victory Points: Mission	190	-0-
Damage	944	-0-
Campaign Totals:		
Victory Points:	14,013	-0-
Damage	8,255	534

light cruiser, three destroyers and an oiler. My damage is minimal on my three fleet carriers, although the light carrier *Shoho* is going to be in dry dock for four months. A destroyer has been sunk, and damage incurred by two light cruisers, two destroyers and a transport (the latter of which was hit by land-based aircraft staging from Port Moresby). Overall, another successful battle.

## IV. Milne Bay

26 March 1943, and I must transport troops to Milne Bay and engage the enemy. Enemy opposition is expected to be moderate, and my three carriers should be sufficient to teach the impetuous Americans another lesson in carrier warfare. Initial launches occur at 0640, and strikes rage back and forth across the seas. The Japanese manage to stage three strikes during the day, and when it is over, two Allied Fleet carriers are sunk — the *Essex* and the British *Victorious*. British carriers can be employed to the Pacific to assist the American

Given the American declining battle often, campaign totals are:

Victory Points:	9,823	-0-
Damage	7,311	534

It looks like a long haul for the Americans.

## V. Milne Bay II

28 August, 1943, and enemy opposition is expected to be heavy. That is fine; Japanese morale is high, and I am optimistic. My four carriers (*Hiryu*, *Soryu*, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*)

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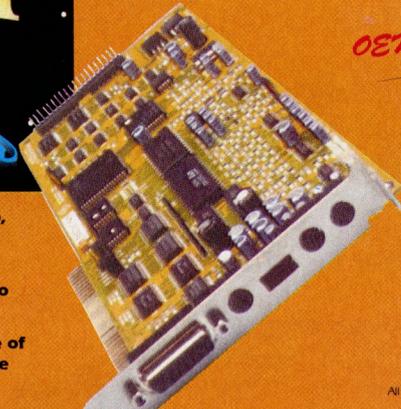
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are ready. Once again, I am lucky to find the American carriers first and strikes are promptly launched in the early morning hours. The enemy carriers seem to number a fleet carrier and two light carriers (later discovered to be the *Bunker Hill* and the *Monterrey* and *Cabot* respectively). Much to my chagrin, my strikes seem to concentrate on the smaller carriers and ignore the fleet carrier. I cannot explain this aberration, but it just means that additional strikes are required for maximum damage.

The American counter-strike is savaged by my CAP; literally fifty percent of the American strike is splashed. However, a second strike bypasses my CAP entirely; luckily, it is small and only a single hit is made on the *Soryu*. My second strike is prepared and launched by 0920, but American flak is beginning to take its toll. The American response to my strike is destroyed by my CAP, and literally no aircraft remain to threaten my control of the seas.

	Japanese	American
Fighter	-0-	-0-
Fighter Bombers	17	41
Dive Bombers	34	23
Torpedo-Bombers	30	19
Medium Bombers	-0-	04
Float Planes	-0-	-0-
Patrol Planes	02	03
Victory Points: Mission	1,033	-0-
Damage	466	6

## VI. Milne Bay III

September 28 1943, and enemy opposition is expected to be

very heavy. When I examine my order of battle, I am reassured. I have six carriers (*Hiryu*, *Soryu*, *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, *Junyo* and *Hiyo*). This should allow me sufficient forces to destroy the American carriers as well as bomb the enemy airfields!

However, the Americans are difficult to find. I begin to worry — how many carriers does he have, and where are they? In the meanwhile, I arm my planes with HE and strike Milne Bay. When I do find the American carriers around 1200, there are only two carriers. Where is the rest of his force? My strike is not as successful as I hope, since the American task force disappears into a cloud bank, and it takes 40 minutes for my planes to find them.

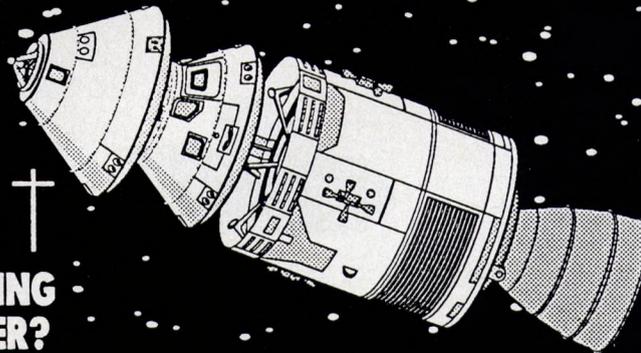
American flak has grown more effective, and I lose 17 aircraft to flak alone. While I secure multiple hits on the fleet carrier, the light carrier emerges unscathed. My second strike is more successful, but my third strike attacks a surface force only. A bad sighting report has forced me to waste a strike!

Day two of the battle is tense. I receive a report of a 235+ strike coming at my fleet. Where have the Americans been able to mount such a strike from? The answer becomes obvious — most of it is land-based. B-25s hit a transport, but their assault against my carriers is faulty, and they get one hit from 40 aircraft. An American sub hits my oiler, and the battle ends after day two as the Americans withdraw.

I was only able to sink a light carrier (*Langley*), although the fleet carrier (*Intrepid*) will be laid up in repairs for five months. Three American surface ships suffer minor damage, but overall, it is not the imposing victory that I had been hoping for.

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## VII. Milne Bay IV

The Americans have licked their wounds for months. But now they come out; opposition is expected to be heavy. The months of March and April seemed to offer battle, but American Forces declined to engage. The date: 1 May 1944. I plan to destroy the American carriers once and for all.

My four carriers (*Hiryu*, *Soryu*, *Shokaku*, and *Zuikaku*) should be enough for the task. Contact is made early, and now I begin to worry. My flak is 1649; the American task force has a flak value of 3472. Will this cause a problem? Between the American CAP and the flak, I literally lose 50% of my strike — 75 planes shot down. And my strikes have caused little damage; mounting everything remaining in a 'go-for-broke' strike, I get zero hits. In fact, only four fighters return; my bomber forces are gone forever. I now realize that the tide has irrevocably turned, and hope to escape with as little damage as possible.

With the Americans pursuing, I use my surface fleet as a pawn. It manages to engage the carrier task force, and allows my damaged carrier force to escape to the north. It is severely mauled, but breaks contact at night, and I decline to continue the battle.

## VIII. Turn Tail & Run

The final two months of the Pacific War consist of my fleet cowering in its bases. I refuse to engage; I cannot take on the American carrier fleet, and it is counterproductive to attempt to do so; better to surrender a thousand points per month.

The final campaign score: Japan: 30,173, U.S.: 2,720.

## IX. Lessons Learned

1. **FIND THE ENEMY EARLY.** The Japanese have a tremendous advantage with their float planes; the Americans have to divert bombers. But always engage in search. While the default pattern may give you clues, be careful and be willing to adjust the pattern based on your intuition. Search planes should be launched no later than 0540, so that their reports come back at first light. An early launch (e.g. 0400) can be counterproductive if the planes sail over a nearby enemy fleet under cover of darkness.

2. **LAUNCH EARLY; LAUNCH OFTEN.** CAP should be in the air before the search planes ever leave; it can be launched in darkness without ill-effect and it should be present at first light. I recommend using two-thirds of your fighters for CAP. As for the bombers, begin launching at 0540 or 0600; do not assign a target until you get the maximum two turns of launches aloft. If there are no enemy task forces available, assign an enemy airfield as the target — even if it is 500 miles away. The strike will begin to move off, and it can be redirected to a task force when necessary. If nothing is found, the strike will return when it realizes that it cannot accomplish the mission. One can launch up to three strikes per day; if possible, do it. **WARNING:** Version 1.2x has corrected some of the AI flaws. It does not allow a computer opponent to sortie out until it has accumulated a reasonable task force, but more important, it checks time in air for aircraft. Three strikes per day will

cause an attrition rate that is more historical, but totally unacceptable to the human player. If you are using version 1.2x (available for download on GENie), NEVER launch the third strike unless you are positive that you can sink a carrier, and even then, consider the consequences.

3. **USE IT OR LOSE IT.** Naval tactics do not use reserve forces. Captain Hughes' classic treatise *Fleet Tactics* repeats this maxim — ignore it at your own peril. While it may be acceptable to unready those four torpedo bombers that you could not fit into a larger strike, it is not smart to hold back a viable strike and wait for a better target. Remember, strikes can be retargeted; planes on sinking ships are flotsam.

4. **DO NOT OVERSTAY YOUR WELCOME.** Discretion is the better part of valor, etc. You've got to know when to withdraw. Losing carriers is not a winning strategy; the Japanese especially have to understand that eventually, they cannot win. Amass a large lead, and don't risk it for minimal return.

5. **SURFACE COMBATANTS: THEY WERE EXPENDABLE.** The name of the simulation is *Carrier Strike*.

Carriers are the victory point makers. Surface combatants are useful to mix up the carriers, but have little utility otherwise. In fact, the carrier is probably overemphasized. Victory points for land bombing is minimal; thus, one should always be armed for naval attacks (Armor Piercing and Torpedoes) and not ground targets (High Explosive). This is historically incorrect, but one must make adjustments.

6. **CHEAT.** Finally, if you are still having trouble, you can 'cheat' your way to victory. Besides, who's going to tell on you? Begin a scenario, and save it immediately. Restart the saved game, only this time with the computer as the other side. Take notes on order of battle and locations. Finally, quit again and resume as your original side; you have just broken the Purple Code.

Also, remember that carrier strikes are random affairs. A supremely successful strike can be replayed into a disaster just by the luck of the draw. Save your game before a strike, and if things are less than optimal, try it again.

Actually, the AI can be handily defeated, so one should rarely have to resort to this Draconian fix. But for the novice wanting to impress, well... **CGW**

