



Strikingly Handsome

SSI's *Carrier Strike Expansion Disk*

by M. Evan Brooks

TITLE:	Carrier Strike Expansion Disk
SYSTEM:	IBM
GRAPHICS:	VGA
# PLAYERS:	0-2
PRICE:	\$29.95
PROTECTION:	Documentation Look-Up
DESIGNER:	Gary Grigsby
PUBLISHER:	Strategic Simulations, Inc. Sunnyvale, CA (408) 737-6800

Carrier Strike has previously received extensive coverage, with both review (CGW #97) and replay formats (CGW #98, 99). In this expansion disk, designer Gary Grigsby has added four scenarios and a new campaign. Most of the game mechanics haven't changed (see below for exceptions) and the graphics treatment is the same. The sound support has been extended somewhat, but the major benefit for those who purchase this expansion module is to get the new scenarios.

README (Documentation)

The documentation may generously be described as sparse; realistically it may be described as virtually non-existent on paper. A data card (5.5" square) tells how to install the program. That's it! Luckily, there is a text file of three pages, which should be printed out. It explains the changes in Version 1.1 and gives a short paragraph about the new scenarios. Overall, the documentation is chintzily sufficient.

Keep 'Em Flying? (Game Mechanics)

Certain game mechanics have been modified. The longer an aircraft is operational, the higher the attrition rate. Thus, the "three strikes per day" rate may still be maintained, but non-combat losses will render such tactics self-defeating. Additionally, aircraft may be repaired at night (roughly six planes per carrier per night), the computer uses more discretion in sailing "in harm's way," and finally, one may divert aircraft to another carrier due to flight deck damage.

While these changes are incremental, the operational attrition radically changes the complexion of the game. Historically more accurate, it presents an obstacle to

the player which can only be overcome by proper tactics and even better luck.

Fresh Waters (New Scenarios)

There are five new scenarios, and each may be used as a new starting point for a Pacific Campaign:

(1) WAKE ISLAND (Dec., '41): Two American carriers attempt to support Wake Island following the "Debacle at Pearl." While the number of carriers per side is generally even, one of the American carriers is using Brewster Buffaloes as its primary fighter. An exercise in futility, the historic scenario begins with the American carriers placed too far eastward to be of any help; the typical scenario will generally see the Japanese sink the carriers with little risk. This scenario is best used as a start for a long campaign — and the American may well consider declining battle.

(2) PLAN ORANGE (Jan., '42): Assume the Japanese did not attack Pearl Harbor. This scenario envisions the battle-wagons rushing to engage as each side uses around three carriers to scout ahead of the "Main Battle Fleets."

(3) ROSSEL ISLAND (March, '42): The worst case scenario, assuming that the Pearl Harbor Raid also hit the carriers. Luckily, the British lend a hand, and a huge battle develops off Port Moresby (five Allied vs. six Japanese carriers).

(4) GUADALCANAL (August, '42): Midway never occurred, and now the crux of the Pacific War will be fought off Guadalcanal — eight Japanese carriers against five American. Losses will be high in this one!

(5) OPERATION KE (February, '43): The Japanese try to retake Henderson Field — four Japanese vs. two American carriers. Ironbottom Sound fills with more than destroyers and cruisers...

Finally, and most importantly, the 1947 Campaign. Postulating a world in which war was delayed for five years, this campaign allows for a year of battles with new ships, planes and weapons systems. Generally, I find the Fascist Hypotheticals somewhat "bombastic." However, the 1947 Campaign simply allows for a different look at carrier employment.

With night fighters and bombers capable of penetrating the "Shield of Darkness"

(akin to the "Cone of Silence?"), the player will have to husband his night fighters carefully. Night CAP can drastically reduce incoming threats. Massed strikes cannot be accomplished at night (technology was not sufficiently advanced), but even a minor bomb hit (and with bombers now carrying up to 2-ton bombs, a minor hit may not be so "minor") can render a flight deck inoperable. Also, night searches find the enemy, minor damage may render him *hors de combat*, and the breaking of a new dawn may well see a massed strike bringing it all home.

Even more interesting, the first-generation of "stand-off" weapons is available. While the bombers will have to break through enemy CAP, they will not have to endure flak. While it is difficult to tell how statistically accurate the new weapons are, it appears that their use engenders some major damage to enemy carriers.

Overall, the 1947 Campaign is an interesting facet of carrier warfare. However, do not be lulled into a false sense of security. An easy first victory by the Americans may be followed by a major Japanese effort (and success). As noted in earlier replay articles, "you've got to know when to hold them, and when to fold 'em!"

Sunset (Conclusions)

What can be said of the Expansion Disk? It is interesting and makes *Carrier Strike* even more challenging to play. However, there is a major caution with the expansion disk — marketing and pricing. Normally, I never address pricing in product lines. Discounting is so prevalent and heavy that retail prices are a ceiling which is rarely touched. However, the Expansion Disk is *only* sold by mail from SSI. Its price of \$29.95 when compared with the full program's retail cost of \$59.95 may only be described as excessive.

Although an interested user may well derive full value from the Expansion Disk in terms of cost per hour of use, it should also be noted that the full program can be purchased at discount for about \$37. Similar expansion disks have heretofore sold for \$19.95; at such a price, I would feel no hesitation in recommending this product (especially when one could again purchase it at discount for \$15), but at full list price, I would defer a purchase of this sort.

CGW