FIGHTER DUEL LITE by Phil Sabin

INTRODUCTION

My *Fighter Duel Deluxe* total conversion for GMT's *Wing Leader* takes a while to play despite having only 6 pages of rules, so I decided to create this *Lite* spin-off which boils the system down to its barest essentials. As in my *Dogfight Lite* and *Angels One Five* designs, the game focuses on generic single seat piston-engined monoplane fighters - you may use any specific types you prefer. No *Wing Leader* components are needed for this *Lite* version. Unlike in the main game, there is no luck except during deployment, so the game is a chess-like contest in which player skill in applying real formation tactics determines which flight will prevail.

COMPONENTS

Each side has 2, 3 or 4 fighter models or counters as shown, each with a small die or paperclip whose colour displays pilot quality (skilled or unskilled) and whose orientation records energy from 1 to 6. Planes with energy 7 to 12 place an arrow or extra die to show they have 6 additional energy points. Fighters may fly at 3 different altitude steps, perhaps one above another in the same hex. You may show the 2 higher steps using wooden or Lego blocks below each plane or stands of folded perspex like those which allow my side-scrolling *Dogfight* and *Canvas Aces* games to be played in 3D on a simple 12x8 square grid. Each step is 500 feet above the one below, and the dogfight is assumed to occur thousands of feet above the ground. To avoid the artificialities of square board corners, the game uses the same 21 x 17 hexgrid as for my *Legion* game of ancient battles, with six 120 degree corners as shown in Figure 2. Each hex represents an area 200 yards across. Each fighter occupies a given hex at one of the 3 altitude steps. Unlike in the main game, fighters do not track their bank or pitch attitude, and they face only 1 adjacent hex.

SET-UP & SEQUENCE OF PLAY

Start by deciding how many fighters each side will have, and the quality of their pilots. Fighter numbers may differ. Count unskilled pilots as worth 1 and skilled pilots as worth 2 in order to balance the sides or give a less experienced player a compensatory advantage. Each flight begins near one of the angled 17 hex board edges. On a die roll of 1 or 2 it starts in the left corner, on 3 or 4 in the middle corner (on the 21 hex long axis) and on 5 or 6 in the right corner. Fighters start in adjacent hexes in echelon, vic or finger four formation facing towards the board centre as shown, with a non-vic flight leader being placed on the left on an odd roll and the right on an even roll. The first skilled pilot must be the flight leader, and the second a pair leader if present. All fighters begin at the highest step with energy 3. The game is played in rounds, each representing 4 seconds of action. In each round, one flight (chosen by a die roll at the start of the game) flies its fighters in any desired order, and then the other flight does the same. Long range gunfire occurs after each flight's activations. Play ends after 30 rounds or if either flight ends its activations with at least half of the initial enemy fighters removed from play and without gaining any VPs since starting its activations this round. (Hence, enemy fighters can always counterattack to avenge their losses.)

Figure 1: My largest set uses 1:300 scale fighter models on the 6.5cm hex sheet I made to play *Legion* with figures. Scattered kapok or cotton wool suggests a layer of broken cloud thousands of feet below. The perspex stands fit neatly into the hexes and are tall enough to accommodate my models at each step. I use blue and buff paperclips to show skilled and unskilled pilots respectively. Pointing the clip straight ahead indicates energy 1, while each hex clockwise shows 1 more energy point. The skilled P-51 leader is at the lowest step with energy 8, and his unskilled wingman is 1 hex to his right rear in the same heading and 1 step above at energy 4. The two FW 190Ds are adjacent to both, with the skilled leader at the highest step with energy 1 facing the Mustang leader, while his unskilled wingman is below him with energy 3, facing the P-51 wingman head-on at the same middle step.

Figure 2: This shows a smaller layout on the *Legion* board itself, using grey wooden blocks and fighter counters from other games. Here I use generic counters to model a clash over Mongolia in 1939. On a roll of 1 the 1 skilled and 3 unskilled Soviet pilots begin in their left corner, facing diagonally across the board with the flight leader to the left front of the pair leader and their wingmen echeloned back on the flanks. On a roll of 4, the *shotai* of 2 skilled and 1 unskilled Japanese pilots start in a vic in the opposite middle corner. All the fighters begin at the highest step with energy 3. You may easily create a similar board by temporary delineation of the available playing area on a more extensive hexgrid from any other air or naval game.

FLIGHT

Fighters may fly level or climb or dive 1 step. They fly 2 hexes, each one directly ahead or to their front left or right. Fighters which fly left or right may opt to end their flight by turning 60 degrees to that side. Unskilled pilots may fly only 1 hex left or right. Skilled pilots may fly 2 hexes left or right (not both) as long as they end with a turn, and they may also turn either way after climbing 2 hexes straight ahead. Fighters which start with energy 7 to 12 may climb or dive 1 or 2 steps, and unless they climb they fly 1 hex straight ahead before making a normal 2 hex move. Active fighters may fly off the board from any position instead of moving normally, and they must do so if they cross a board edge. After flying, fighters adjust their energy. They gain 1 for excess thrust at energy 1 to 6, and they may opt to lose 1 or 2 by throttling back. They lose 2 due to increased drag if they made a turn. They gain 3 for each step dived and lose 3 for each step climbed. Net energy gains beyond 12 are lost, and manoeuvres which would cause energy to drop below 1 may not be made.

COMBAT & VICTORY

Fighters may fly through occupied hexes, but if they end their flight (after any turn) in the same hex and step as another fighter, the other fighter is damaged and removed if it is an enemy whose heading is within 60 degrees; otherwise the moving fighter is removed as if it had flown off the board. At the end of each flight's activations, fighters of either side count as engaged if directly in front of an enemy fighter at the same step in one of their 3 rear hexes. After their own flight's activations, pilots who just damaged an enemy or are unskilled and facing a skilled pilot not in the same heading may not engage. Each flight scores 1 VP (2 VPs if neither flight yet has any) for each enemy fighter which flies off the board, 1 VP after either flight's activations for each enemy fighter engaged (not for each engaging friendly fighter), and 2 or 3 VPs for each enemy fighter damaged at 60 or zero degrees deflection respectively. Skilled pilots are assumed to suffer fewer hits, offsetting their greater value. The higher the final VP difference, the greater the victory.

DESIGN NOTES

This game stems from a squadron combat game I designed long ago with no altitude dimension, in which the simple moves allowed fighters to be herded off the board unless friends could cover them as they turned back into play. Its key strength was that skilled pilots could manoeuvre more flexibly. I have cut fighter numbers from 12 per side to 4 or fewer, but added simple altitude, energy and long range fire rules echoing those in *Fighter Duel Deluxe*. Switching to hexside facing allows fighters to slow down by weaving as well as climbing. Using 4 rather than 3 second rounds abstractly allows for turn delays due to banking or lack of agility, and using 200 rather than 100 yard hexes makes combat much simpler. There are no die rolls with tangled lists of modifiers, and the flight rules are so simple that players should soon be able to fly each fighter almost in real time. The leapfrog Igo-Ugo system of short overlapping player rounds gives a better reflection of reality than simultaneous movement plotting as used in games like *Check Your 6!*. The lack of distinction between plane types makes *Fighter Duel Lite* rather generic in character, but its simplicity offers an accessible introduction to my more detailed *Canvas Aces*, *Dogfight*, *Fighter Duel* and *Jet Duel* conversions. Google 'Sabin wargames' for links to these and my many other designs.
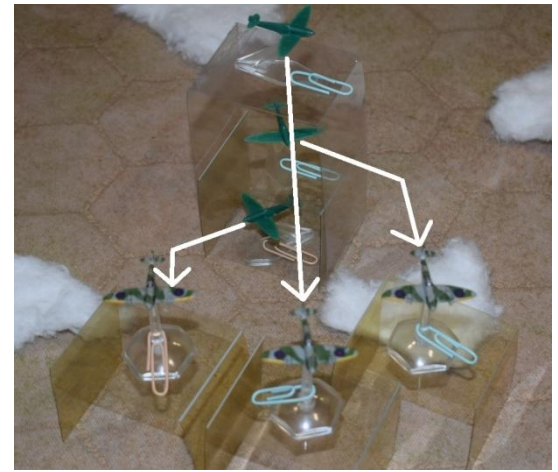

Figure 3: All 3 Spitfires begin in the same hex, and fly to form a vic at the middle step. The skilled leader at the highest step with energy 1 weaves 2 hexes right and turns, which is allowed only because he dives and so accelerates to energy 3. His skilled wingman at the middle step stays level and flies left and then ahead without turning. He throttles back to stay at energy 6 and avoid leaving the vic next round. The unskilled wingman at the lowest step climbs 1 hex ahead and then flies left and turns. His energy of 5 just suffices to cover the 4 point loss, and his new energy of 1 means he must dive if he turns again.
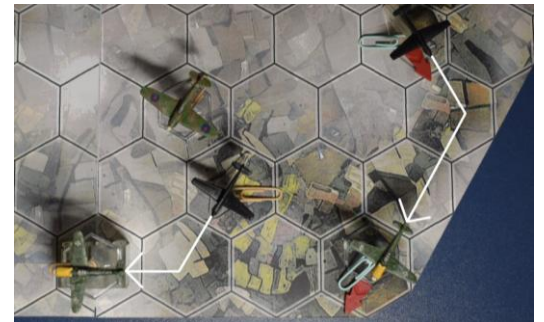

Figure 4: This 4.5 cm hex board made from an expanded copy of Tim Allen's map from my own *Angels One Five* game may be used either with counters or with models on Lego stands. The unskilled Bf 109 wingman climbs 1 hex ahead and then flies right and turns to avoid the initial 2 VP cost of flying off the board, with his energy falling from 5 to 1. His skilled leader with energy 9 flies 1 hex ahead and then weaves 2 hexes right and turns in a board corner hex, with his energy falling to 7 due to the extra drag. The unskilled Hurricane wingman can now climb straight ahead for 2 of his 4 energy points and gain 2 VPs by damaging the 109 wingman in a same hex deflection attack. (Despite his climb, he cannot turn right for a 3 VP tail attack because he is unskilled and also because he is 1 energy point short.) The VP gain stops the game ending, and next round the 109 leader can climb to avoid flying off the board, make 2 more right weaves and turn to face the Hurricane, with his energy dropping by 5 to 2. This allows him to avenge his wingman by engaging the British plane and gaining 1 VP, though if he had been unskilled and his enemy skilled rather than *vice versa*, engagement at this angle would have been prohibited. The 109s gain 1 further VP when the unskilled Hurricane pilot flies off the board, creating a 2-2 draw when the game ends after the British round.