

Avalon Hill Philosophy_Part 28 DESIGN & DOCUMENTATION (LUFTWAFFE)

The most oft-asked question has been, “how do you design a game?”

The General is not going to give away any trade secrets, but is at liberty to repeat in this column the trials and tribulations of obtaining historical data. And this area of game production is the hardest part; the actual designing of the game is somewhat secondary and often comes quite easily to the imaginative and creative mind.

But getting accurate data is bullwork; work that often is short-cut for the sake of turning out a product. Avalon Hill avoids this short-cut pitfall, preferring instead to “publish when ready” instead of rushing a new game into print simply to maintain a seasonal schedule.

A typical case in point deals with our latest effort, LUFTWAFFE. This game is approximately 2.5 years late. Originally scheduled to follow 1914, dissatisfaction in many areas of both design and research heaped delay upon delay. At one point three different, and competing, Luftwaffe games were making the rounds among testers.

Our game is a successor to “12-O’clock High” which was released by The Simulations Corporation (S&T Magazine) in the Fall of 1970. Designed by S/Sgt. Lou Zocchi several years prior, his attempts to sell it to Avalon Hill met with considerable opposition mainly on the strength of its original design weakness. Mechanically it moved with lead-foot speed. We had too many of these already in the line. Meanwhile, the Simulations Corporation had, themselves, designed a game on the LUFTWAFFE. This they developed as a Test Series Game. Then redeveloped and sold as “Flying Fortress”, then re-revised as “Flying Fortress II,” a kit for expanding upon FF1. This game was a strategic game; Zocchi’s was on a tactical scale.

But Simulations’ attempts to sell theirs to Avalon Hill also met with opposition. Neither game was historically accurate as we shall point up later. But both games were now developed to the playability stage and outstanding games within their particular concepts.

How did we choose one over the other?

Simple, we held a “contest. Both games were play-tested by the same people, Zocchi’s version scored higher. Still, Zocchi’s was far from optimum. It is to the credit of Simulations Corporation that they helped us reach optimum with Zocchi’s version. They agreed to publish it, as “12 O’clock High”, for the express purpose of using their customers as a sounding board for further debugging the game.

Historical Accuracy

Avalon Hill’s major preoccupation has been with historical accuracy. Not content to believe what is written in text matter, it

has been customary for AH to go to “live” sources such as heroes and/or witnesses to the events for corroboration of data.

Early versions of Simulations’ LUFTWAFFE Game included B29s which never even flew in Europe. You also played with P80s and P51Hs which never flew in World War II. Yet there they were in the game, big as life. Apparently these planes belonged in the “What If” versions of the game. Suppose 25,000 games would have been printed commercially before discovery of the omission. Egad.

This resulted in Avalon Hill’s insistence that Zocchi place his research under closer scrutiny, double checking all material against all reliable sources, and then some. The “then some” appeared in the person of Paul J. Vercammen, editor and publisher of AIR COMBAT Magazine.

A three-way rapport was established between Avalon Hill, Zocchi and Vercammen. Vercammen took more than just a cursory interest in the project. He presented historical data that, in a few cases, corrected Zocchi’s research data which in itself had been exhaustive and derived from rather un-impeachable sources. Vercammen also furnished Avalon Hill with all aerial photos used in the Manual. He also questioned and re-wrote portions of the manuscript that now appears as background material in the Manual. At various points in the preparation of the manuscript, Vercammen and Zocchi had differences of opinion. So it went, back and forth between Vercammen, Zocchi and Avalon Hill until we had what we considered the “finished” manuscript.

Some of Vercammen’s correspondence to Zocchi and Avalon Hill was more verbose than the actual manuscript, as if he had a personal interest at stake. Some of the exchanges went like this, (Zocchi’s text in *italic*; Vercammen’s in **bold face**):

Vercammen to AH:

Mr. Zocchi wrote me a long letter defending some of his viewpoints. In general I think Mr. Zocchi has done a fine job. His viewpoints differ from mine, well that seems to be the general problem with “historians.” However I do feel it is somewhat stereotyped, the viewpoint found in most postwar publications. The corrections I made are views based on reports only come to light in the past few years. I think by correcting here and there, a better perspective will be presented.

Zocchi to Vercammen:

I am particularly grateful for your comments on my historical summary. Your comments have enabled me to rewrite the summary with a much better perspective. When I look at the considerable number of corrections you’ve made, I feel called upon to discuss further with you my reasoning for a few points which you’ve indicated are wrong. For instance, if the British and French had attacked promptly Hitler’s western wall would have crumbled and the blood bath might have been averted, your comment, “I doubt this”, leaves me wondering,

Vercammen to Zocchi:

I agree with the political aspect which you described so well. Militarily and technologically, it would have been impossible for both France and England to do much about Germany's interference in Poland. Germany's motorized divisions were far superior to France's and England's. Germany's supply lines were far superior. Britain at that time had little to offer in motorized equipment. Type for type, Germany's tanks and artillery were far superior to what France and England (and Poland) had to offer. And we haven't even mentioned the Luftwaffe which, as you know, at that time was far superior to what England or France or the Low Countries had to offer. Because of these points I doubt if the western wall would have crumbled, or a major war averted. For this reason I feel the sentence should be altered.

For Vercammen to have gone to such great length to check out but one sentence of historical opinion, readily gives the reader an idea of to what lengths he went in helping Zocchi and Avalon Hill present a properly researched game. We have only quoted the highlights of his western wall opinion; his actual text on this subject ran 340 words.

Zocchi to Vercammen:

Why have you deleted my reference to the German Pilot training program? Hitler made no effort to increase pilot training until 1944.

Vercammen to Zocchi:

Hitler foresaw a short war. Numerically during the Battle of Britain period it was hardly necessary to increase fighter pilot training. The impression I got from reading your text was that the "battle" was lost as a result of pilot shortage. Actually, the bomber threat of U.S. aircraft over Germany became realistic near the end of 1943. Night-fighter training was increased effective 1940.

Zocchi to Vercammen:

Thanks for telling me that the losses I had for the Luftwaffe also included its land army units. I did not know this was the case and am most grateful for your calling it to my attention.

I wish I had known of your academic achievements before. I had a hell of a time deciding which aircraft was better than which. I'm beginning to feel as though the only time I open my mouth is when I want to change feet. I'd like to have your opinions on the ratings given to each plane.

Vercammen to Zocchi:

The "number rating" for each aircraft is very interesting. I think the numbers given to the planes you listed are realistic enough and do not warrant any changes. I do have some comments on a few aircraft; I am not sure what part they play in your game.

Ju88 "0"; is this as a daylight fighter? I so, your "0" seems correct if fighter opposition is encountered. As a nightfighter

however, I would guess a "3" would be in place; as an attack bomber at least a "2".

He162 "5"; this one is strictly theoretical. Some sources claim that the 162 never made an operational flight, I talked to an ex He162 pilot who did claim a few operational missions. I have my doubts about entering this plane in the game.

The Me262 did have its own starter unit and was therefore independent from ground carts. The starter consisted of a Reidel two-stroke engine which had its own fuel supply, B4 fuel in a small tank of approximately four gallons. There would not have been any problem starting up the engines. The aircraft fuel used by the Me262 was basically J2 diesel oil. I believe, but I may be wrong, that there was not a serious problem obtaining this fuel. A large percentage of German army equipment used this fuel. In addition, it is a crude form of fuel which did not have the refinement of the higher octane conventional aircraft fuels. J2 storage facilities were well dispersed. So I don't feel there was the problem of "having the stuff available." I question whether it was feasible for the German transport network to distribute this fuel to the bases from which the Me262 operated. The bases were, as you understand, a network of small wooded areas near large highways from which the planes took off.

Fw190 versus P51: I would say the aircraft were equal. This of course is a generalization. Some subtypes were better than others, and combat conditions varied from low to high altitudes, etc. In general, yes, they were just about equal.

While I think of it, to start the small Reidel engine a 20 volt battery was required. These batteries were standard military hardware, found in heavy trucks, tanks, etc. Therefore no problem would be encountered if the Me262 had to land at other bases or highway stretches.

Mr. Zocchi, I am not trying to be over-critical, merely trying to express some feelings and bring out some points. The main objection I had was the "toning down" of German equipment. I am not a German, far from that, lived under occupation during the war years as a young boy in Holland about two miles from a large Luftwaffe base. The villa of my parents was taken over and used as Staff HQ. Consequently, I was able to make several trips to the base. In defending some of the equipment used I am not putting in personal feelings. Sure, I have seen Me110s downing P51s, Me110s downing Mosquitos. This is beside the point. I am looking mainly at the facts and figures from Luftwaffe reports, U.S. reports, factory reports, test reports, etc. The Me110 was a great aircraft. And, in a way, so was the Stuka [Ju87]. I have done a lot of research on enemy equipment. I understand design philosophy, being an Aeronautical Engineer by profession, plus flight test experience.

Your article gives me the impression that the Luftwaffe was an easy victim. It wasn't. It was an outstanding organization using top personnel and equipment. This makes the victory so much sweeter, doesn't it?

Your research was well done, the statistics are impressive. But I do feel more objectivity is required in the Manual, and the Avalon Hill people do need this in their games which, after all are conducted by a professional "customer."

It is impossible to reproduce here every word that passed between Vercammen and Zocchi, an entire issue of *The General* would be required. We have summed up the highlights to give you an inkling of what transpired during the various development stages of a new game. In one of his literary exchanges with Zocchi, Vercammen details his eyewitness accounts of an RAF raid on the airfield of Gilze-Rijen.

The day was September 3, 1944, about 5 P.M. on a Sunday. 200 plus Lancasters blew up the entire base. The formation included several Halifaxes. One of them was shot down and a Do217 became the victim of a Spitfire. With this I will close my letter; it turned out to be much longer than I anticipated. I can only congratulate you on the research done. On your article, as I said before: The Luftwaffe, too much blame on Hitler and Goring, not considering other factors such as numerical advantage of the Allies. You undersell the RAF's effort in the war in the air. You have the USAAF just about right. On the Russian Air Force, no comment. I do not have sufficient material which could make me agree or disagree. On your statistics, great job.

The "great job" is Vercammen's, for taking the time, trouble, and effort to play the part he did in the capacity of Technical Advisor. We must assume that as editor and publisher of *AIR COMBAT*, the same attention to accuracy goes into the pages of this fine magazine.

Actually titled *AIR COMBAT 1939-1945*, it is distributed by Eagle Aviation, P. O. Box 82, Rockaway, New Jersey 07866 for \$6.00 per year, \$1.00 per issue. Photos that appear in this bi-monthly magazine are not of models, but almost impossible to come by, black and white and color shots of actual planes, many with the war-aces who flew them. All photos appearing in the game Manual were supplied by *AIR COMBAT*.

Authentication of the research material thus cleared the way for the final phase in the design of the game. With proper data on hand, the "number ratings" were properly adjusted although, as Vercammen stated, Zocchi had pretty much nailed this aspect down in its proper perspective.

Nevertheless, it was Avalon Hill's job to coordinate with Zocchi the relationship of the number ratings to the actual game mechanics. At this juncture, the game was already being distributed through *S&T Magazine* as "12 O'CLOCK HIGH."

But at Avalon Hill's insistence, Zocchi effected many rule changes and clarifications. R & D people at AH always take a controlling hand in some phase of design, regardless of who the original work is consigned to. Even with *PANZERBLITZ*, AH found it expedient to effect last-minute changes for the sake of production and instructional clarity.

So it was with *LUFTWAFFE*. During the Trade Show phase *LUFTWAFFE* was still being tested, even after the Box, Board, and Plane Counters had been printed.

And by the time this final testing procedure was finished, Luftwaffe resembled very little its predecessor, "12 O'CLOCK HIGH."

Designing a new game is not all "peaches and cream," nor is the procedure so cut and dried as many amateur designers contend.

And without touching the design procedures and problems in the above text, we hope that the above has been sufficiently exacting to make one stop and think twice before embarking on the long and winding road of game designing.

At the very least, we hope this column has answered some of your inquiries by shedding light on a very important phase design and documentation, in the many-phased procedure of publishing a Wargame from scratch.