

Blood Red Skies Campaign Rules



Col. Neel E. Kearby, a Medal of Honor recipient, developed aggressive tactics that exploited the strengths of the P-47 Thunderbolt. With 22 victories, he became the highest scoring Thunderbolt pilot in the Pacific Theatre. Moreover, Kearby's tactics as commander of the first P-47 unit in the Pacific Theatre led to considerable success for his 348th Fighter Group. A mission near Wewak on March 5, 1944, was Kearby's last. While attacking a Japanese formation, a Ki-43 "Oscar" fighter pilot momentarily gained position on him. Hit by heavy machine gun fire, his Thunderbolt (named Fiery Ginger IV) crashed, and Kearby was killed.

Choosing planes

You'll need to choose a starting date for your campaign to see what planes are available. During the Second World War, all sides continuously upgraded their main line fighters with better engines and guns, as well as introducing new designs. As new planes become available, you can opt to upgrade your squadron's planes to the latest available, or transfer them to an entirely new design on a month-by-month basis.

Picking a historic start date

There are a few historic start dates to pick from, although any point in the conflict is perfectly fine for a starting point. Unless bad weather or enemy action kept them grounded, fighters were constantly in action patrolling, raiding, or escorting. Here are some of my favourite periods for campaigns involving intense air-to-air combat:

- **Battle of Britain** – Starts mid 1940, ends early 1941. The Luftwaffe versus the RAF.
- **Assault on the Reich** – Starts mid 1943, ends early 1945. RAF and USAAF versus the Luftwaffe.
- **Stalingrad** – Starts late 1942, ends early 1943. Luftwaffe versus Soviet VVS
- **Kursk** – Starts and ends mid 1943. Luftwaffe versus Soviet VVS
- **The Italian Campaign** – Starts mid 1943, ends mid 1944. RAF and USAAF versus the Luftwaffe.
- **Guadalcanal** – Starts mid 1942, ends early 1943. Japan versus USA.
- **Defence of the home islands** – Starts Mid 1944, ends Mid 1945. USA versus Japan.

See the scenario rules for advice on selecting theatre and doctrine cards in a historical framework. In an open campaign players are free to select their doctrine cards each month and theatre cards should be randomly assigned for each mission.

Plane availability tables

The plane availability tables below indicate what planes (and which of their variants) are available to squadrons for four month blocks through each year of the war: "Early" for January through to April of the year, "mid" for May through to August, and "late" for September to December. Where a type of plane is definitely available during the months in question it is denoted with the word "auto."

Quite often, there were overlap periods with planes coming into and out of service. During these times, a particular type of plane might have been around, but not enough of them were available to equip every squadron for every mission. There were also maintenance and teething problems associated with new types that could make them unserviceable at just the wrong moment. These aircraft types are denoted with the word "limit" on the tables.

A squadron can have up to half of its total number aircraft be "limit" types (rounding down), but the rest of its strength must be made up of aircraft types that are automatically available ("auto") or a different type of "limit" aircraft.

Polikarpov I-16					Auto	Limit	Auto	Auto	Limit	Limit	Limit							
MiG-3					Limit	Limit	Limit											
Yak-1					Limit	Limit	Auto	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit	Auto	Auto	Limit	Limit	Limit	
Yak-3					Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	
Yak-7B								Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	
Yak-9D									Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	
Yak-9U																Limit	Limit	
LaGG-3					Limit	Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit	Limit			
Lavochkin La-5FN								Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	
P-39 Aircobra									Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit	
P-63 Kingcobra													Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit	
Hurricane II							Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit	Limit
Il-2m3 Sturmovik					Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	

United States																	
	1940			1941			1942			1943			1944			1945	
	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid
P-38E Lightning							Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit					
P-38J Lightning											Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
P-39 Aircobra					Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit		
P-40B Warhawk					Limit	Auto	Auto	Limit	Limit								
P-40E Tomahawk						Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit						
P-40N Kittyhawk										Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit		
P-47C Thunderbolt										Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit			
P-47D Thunderbolt													Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
P-51B Mustang													Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
P-51D Mustang													Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
F4F Wildcat						Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit	Limit			
F6F Hellcat													Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
F4U Corsair													Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto

Japan						
	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945

	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid	Late	Early	Mid
A6-M2 Zero			Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Limit					
A6-M5 Zero												Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
J2M Raiden													Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit
NIK1-J Shiden														Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit
NIK2-J Shiden-Kai																Limit	Limit
KI-43 Hayabusa					Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
KI-44 Shoki								Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
KI-61 Hien											Limit	Limit	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto	Auto
KI-100 Hien																Limit	Limit
KI-84 Hayate													Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit

Playing the campaign

Each campaign turn covers one month. In each month, one mission can be run by the squadron. Experience and losses are accrued for the mission, and replacement pilots arrive at the end of the month. At the end of four months, the campaign advances one block (i.e. “early” to “mid”), and new kinds of aircraft become available for future missions. It is suggested players keep a mission log to track experience and losses.

Squadron Leader monthly campaign turn summary

- i. Select new planes (if available)
- ii. Determine scenario and play game.
- iii. Record experience gains and test for pilots lost in combat.
- iv. Replacement pilots arrive, injured pilots recover
- v. End campaign turn.

Pilot Experience

Any combat flyer had to be first and foremost a good pilot. Hundreds of hours were spent in training just to be able take-off, fly, and land safely. Hundreds more were required for the intricacies of navigation, formation flying, and air gunnery. Most pilots spent up to two years in training before they even got near the battlefield. Once in an operational squadron, a pilot’s status was often reflected more by his experience more than his rank. Simply surviving over months of extended air combat made a pilot highly valued, while rookie pilots had an unenviable (but deserved) reputation for crashing, or for getting shot down in their very first encounter.

Although a continual supply of replacement pilots was generally available to squadrons, their quality varied considerably over the course of the war. From 1940 to 1942, German and Japanese pilots had a considerable edge with much greater combat experience and aggressive tactics than their opponents. Conversely, by 1944 and 1945, combat losses by the Axis meant the Allies encountered barely trained Axis fliers, with just a few dangerous “old hands” still giving them some teeth. In the dark days of the fall of the Third Reich, and of the Japanese Empire, student pilots were pressed into service with as little as forty or fifty hours of flying time. Invariably, these brave, desperate men were cut to pieces by the more numerous, and more experienced, Allied pilots they flew against.

Gaining Experience

In the campaign game, pilot advancement is measured using experience points (xp). When joining a campaign, pilots begin with starting experience points based on their Pilot skill.

Pilot skill	Starting experience points
2 (Rookie)	D6-1 xp
3 (Average)	D6+10 xp
4 (Veteran)	3D6+20 xp
5 (Ace)	D6+50 xp

Pilot skill will improve when they pass the experience point threshold to the next classification. The experience points required for each level are:

Rookie	0-9 xp
Average	10-25 xp
Veteran	26-50 xp
Ace	51+ xp

A pilot will gain experience for each mission (game) they participate in as follows.

- Survived mission +5 xp
Rookie and Average only.
- Squadron is victorious in mission +5 xp
Rookie and Average only.
- Inflicted a boom chit on the enemy during the mission +1 xp
Rookie and Average only.
- Scored a shooting hit during mission +5 xp each
Does not apply if the hit is dodged.
- Shot down an enemy plane during mission +5 xp each
This is cumulative with scoring a shooting hit.

Ace status

In a tradition dating back to the First World War, both pilots and the press paid keen attention to the number of victories that airmen achieved. The Japanese discouraged counts of individual kills and only tracked the squadron as a whole. This was due to their belief that doing so promoted team work, but it should be noted that Japanese pilots kept personal scores anyway.

Ace status (*Experte* for the Luftwaffe) is accorded to pilots with five or more confirmed enemy planes shot down.

Ace pilots are Pilot Skill 5 and gain a single Ace skill card to add to the action deck for any mission they participate in. For new Aces shuffle the available Ace skill cards and draw one at random. Make a note of which skill card the Ace has for future reference.

Named Ace Status

If an Ace achieves a total of 15 enemy planes shot down (i.e. a triple Ace) they achieve 'Named Ace' status, gaining a second Ace skill drawn at random and +1 to either Firepower or Agility at the owning player's choice. Once this bonus has been selected it is fixed and may not be changed.

Named Ace status represents the cap on progression for a pilot. With their opponent's permission players may allow long-standing Aces with many more victories to re-draw their skills at a later date to represent a further honing of their formidable capabilities.

After the mission: Coming back alive

Air combat was supremely dangerous for the combatants. One stray bullet could turn a finely-tuned masterpiece of flight engineering into a burning, uncontrollable wreck in a heartbeat. Even the engine strain or airframe stress sustained during a fight could prove fatal on the way home, and many experienced pilots were lost to malfunctions, crashes, and other accidents outside of combat.

After a mission is over, roll a D6 for any pilots that have been shot down, and apply any applicable modifiers (see below) before looking up the results on the shot down table.

Shot down table

D6 roll	Result	Effect
5-6	Forced Landing	<i>The pilot manages to shepherd his damaged plane in for a forced landing at an emergency airfield, or a patch of suitable ground. Pilot must pass a Manoeuvre test (Pilot Skill + Agility) to land without injury. If the test is failed roll on the injury table. The pilot may opt to bailout instead.</i>
3-4	Bail out	<i>The damage is fatal to the plane, but the pilot manages to "take to his silk" and bail out, hoping his parachute will save him. Roll another D6 on the bailout table.</i>
1-2	KIA	<i>The plane disintegrates in a ball of flames with no chance for the pilot to escape. The pilot is killed in the wreck of his aircraft.</i>

Pilot skill 4-5 +1

Plane has the Robust trait +1

Plane has the -Vulnerable- trait -1

Bailout table

D6 roll	Result	Effect
4-6	OK	Pilot lands unhurt.
2-3	Bad landing	The pilot is injured on landing. Roll a D6 on the injury table.
1	Chute failure	The pilot is killed when his chute fails to open.

Injury table

D6 roll	Result	Effect
5-6	Just a scratch	Pilot is uninjured, and returns to duty immediately.
3-4	Down but	The pilot is injured, and may not fly for the rest of the month.

	not out	
2	Major Injury	The pilot is injured, and may not fly for the rest of this month, and the whole of the next month.
1	Crippling injury	The pilot is no longer able to fly effectively, and retires from service.

Capture

In missions where the squadron doesn't have the Home Advantage theatre card, forced landings and bailouts will occur over enemy, or inhospitable, territory. In missions where neither player has the Home Advantage card, make an extra Maneuver test for all shot-down planes. If the test is passed, the pilot makes it back to friendly territory before having to bail out or crash land.

Injured pilots in inhospitable or enemy territory will be automatically captured or killed, so they are immediately removed from the squadron roster. If the pilot is uninjured upon landing in inhospitable or enemy territory, he can escape and return to his squadron at the end of the month on a D6 roll of a 4, 5, or 6. Pilots that fail to return are noted as MIA and may be rolled for again at the end of each subsequent month. On a roll of 1, the pilot is lost permanently, while on a roll of 6, the pilot miraculously returns.

After the mission: Damaged aircraft

In a campaign game, you'll also need to keep track of which aircraft had Boom chits inflicted on them by shooting attacks. An aircraft that suffered a Boom chit may not make it home successfully after the mission due to falling foul of low fuel or accumulated damage. Roll a D6 for each damaged aircraft, apply the appropriate modifiers (see below), and consult the table to discover the plane's fate.

Damaged aircraft table

D6 roll	Result	Effect
4-6	RTB	The pilot returns his aircraft to base successfully
2-3	Forced Landing	Pilot must pass a Manoeuvre test (Pilot Skill + Agility) to land without suffering an injury. If the test is failed, roll on the injury table. The pilot may opt to bailout instead.
1	Bail out	Roll another D6 on the bailout table.

Modifiers

Pilot skill 4-5 +1

Plane has the Robust *or* Multi-engine trait +1

Plane has the Deep Pockets trait +1

Plane has the -Vulnerable- trait -1

Bailouts and forced landings from damaged planes are always assumed to occur over friendly territory, so uninjured pilots may return directly to their squadron. Pilots that lose their aircraft to damage are assumed to automatically have them repaired or replaced in time for the next mission. The issue is always the survival of the pilot, and not his machine.

Replacement pilots

At the end of each month, a squadron receives up to four Rookie (Pilot Skill 2) replacement pilots. The maximum squadron size is still limited to twelve pilots, so any excess Rookies are

lost. Any unspent pilot skill points left over from creating the squadron can be spent on replacements to bring them up to a maximum of Experienced (Pilot Skill 3).

Through assorted miracles performed by ground crews, and constant new deliveries, there are always assumed to be enough replacement planes for surviving pilots in the squadron (even 'limit' types), including the new rookies.

Ending the campaign

The simplest way to conclude a campaign is after a pre-set number of campaign turns (four to twelve is a good number). In this case, victory goes to the player whose squadron shot down the greatest total number of enemy planes.

Alternatively, a player may feel that their squadron has fallen too far behind their opponents in skill and technology to still be fun to play before a turn limit is reached. In this case, players might decide to award overall victory to the superior squadron, and restart the campaign from scratch, or allow the underdog player to choose a new starting squadron in an effort to regain parity.

When bringing a new squadron into an existing campaign, a useful balancer is to roll a D6 and add the indicated number of Pilot Skill points to the starting squadron, increasing it to 25-30 Pilot Skill points. Another bonus to give a starting squadron is to allow them to use limited availability planes for their entire strength, potentially putting the more experienced squadron up against cutting-edge technology.