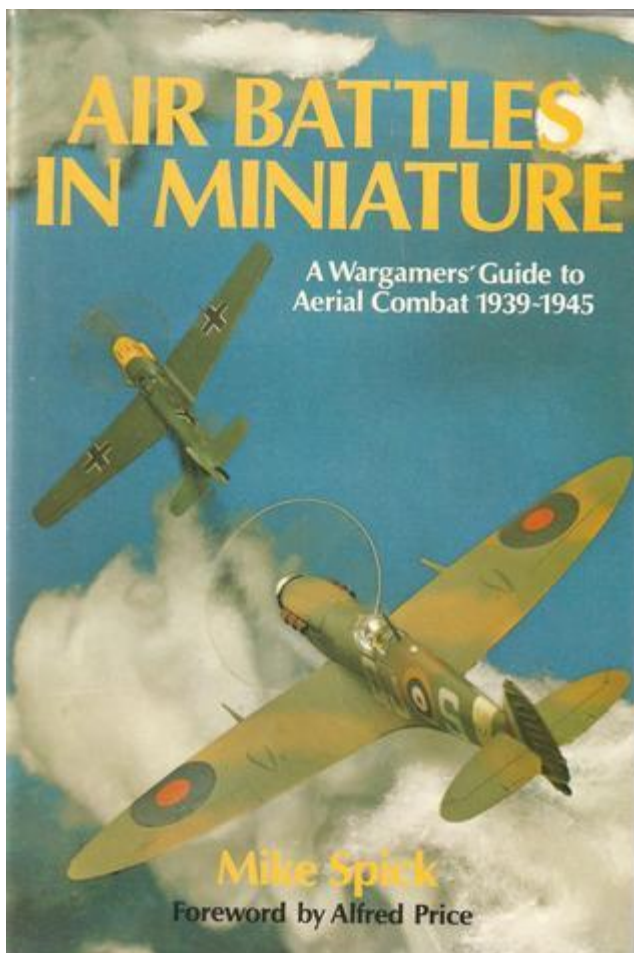


'Air Battles in Miniature: A Wargamers' Guide to Aerial Combat 1939-1945'

By Mike Spick

Review by Paul Le Long

I am not keen on this book; best to come right out and say it. It does have its good points and I am sure some wargamers will enjoy it. There is a lot of detail here and the author has clearly done a lot of research and really understands the subject inside out. If you are interested in flight, combat flying, technical details of planes and so on, then there is much of value here. My problem is the complexity of the book is chock-full of graphs, equations and the like of if you have a degree in aeronautical engineering, physics or applied mathematics you will be fine. If not, like me, you will be wondering how on earth to apply all this stuff to the wargames table.



Let's kick off with what you actually get in the book. First up, we have a short discussion on pre-war attitudes and developments in air combat, then we have a chapter on the mechanics of flight of sort of a 'how to pilot an aircraft' chapter before going on to a chapter on aerial combat. For a book on wargaming, the content of these chapters is insanely complicated. Then we move to a chapter on wargaming of how to reproduce flight on the table with discussions on speed, climb, dives, model planes and creating the third dimension of this by the way is done in two dimensions with the bottom of the playing board being the ground of movement is horizontal (backwards & forwards) and vertical (climbing & diving) of so you are looking side-on as it were. Aircraft on a collision course on the horizontal axis would simply pass each other giving the impression of depth.

Then we have chapters on observation, aerial gunnery, air-to-ground and ground-to-air attacks, including bombing, attacking ships, AA fire and strafing. The chapter on tabletop rules (chapter 8) is mainly a list of aircraft and their performance of speed, climb rate, armament and so on. This is valuable in its own right as a data source and is pretty comprehensive, as well as pretty

detailed. The playing rules themselves boil down to players writing orders for each aircraft, moving the planes then rolling percentile dice to hit. That's what it boils down to but it's *much* more complicated than that! I found myself thinking that this would be impossible to reproduce on the tabletop and the last thing I want to do in my hobby time is break out a protractor and ruler and consult a great many tables and graphs, measuring angles and the like.

There are two chapters on campaign gaming which are interesting. The first is general advice on a wide range of things like weather, searches, carrier strikes, fuel, navigation and much else. The second campaign chapter focuses more tightly on two particular campaigns - Battle of Britain and Malta - with advice on how to reproduce them. Both chapters are excellent and provide a great deal of interesting advice and information. The final chapter is a boardgame really, all about night fighting.

Ok, I've said what I don't like about this book - in short, it's way too complicated and I can't imagine fighting a battle in this way - it would just be too technical and make my brain hurt. Yes, air combat is a technical subject but wargaming is a hobby not a degree programme in engineering or physics. I remember reading Donald Featherstone's book on air wargaming and thinking the same about that - too technical, too dry, too complicated to reproduce. Who wants to dangle models from the ceiling or mount them on extendable rods or saw them in half to play on a 2D representation of a 3D world; and who wants to do applied math for a hobby?! I suspect that's why air warfare has been the poor relation in the wargames family until the release of *Wings of War* a few years ago went back to basics with a game that anyone could play easily without all the angst and technical expertise.

Nevertheless, there are good things in this book. There is lots of technical data on aircraft - detailed and comprehensive - if you're into that, then it's here. There are also good, if technical, discussions on flight and aerial combat - too complex for my taste but again, if that's your thing, then you'll find it here. For me though, the chapters on campaigns are the best, providing you with bags of ideas and advice. And air campaigns are a subject that you do not come across in the wargaming canon very often - C S Grant's *Wargame Campaigns* has a very short section but that's about it. This book has everything you need if you are thinking of setting up an aerial campaign.

Would I recommend this book? For fighting aerial battles, no. For someone interested in the mechanics of aerial warfare, yes. For someone interested in setting up a campaign, definitely.

Details:

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