

# Aces High: Aerial Combat in World War 1

## Kevin White

Kevin's game was first published in Lone Warrior 159.

### Equipment

To play Aces High you will need a table overlaid with a grid (I favour hexes), three to six model aircraft or counters and two packs of normal playing cards.

### Introduction

You will notice that there is nothing about aerobatics in these rules – no Immelman turns, barrel roll, loop the loops or split S turns. When I have tried to simulate this in the past it has all become very complicated and very frustrating. As I have read about World War 1 aerial combat it has become clear to me that the pilot who has the advantage is usually the pilot who wins. The challenge before us is how to simulate “having the advantage,” and hence the differing spread of playing cards for each class of pilot (see below).

As single seat aircraft can only fire straight ahead it is important to use your turn to get into a position where you can fire, but cannot be fired upon. It is possible to survive three missions as long as you leave the table before you are shot down!

### Campaign game

You control a flight of up to 3 aircraft. Each day your flight will undertake three missions from the roster.

### Daily Mission Roster

Dawn Patrol  
Trench strafing  
Balloon bursting  
Photo Reconnaissance\*  
Bombing\*  
Dusk Patrol

\*These two missions need to be carried out by a two seat aircraft.



At the start of each mission draw a playing card to see how many turns you will be in the air. Jacks count as eleven, Queens as twelve and Kings thirteen. Ignore cards Ace to 5 for this part of the game. Turn over a playing card for every turn you are in the air. When a Jack, Queen or King is turned up you encounter the enemy. Draw another playing card and refer to the encounter table to see what you are facing.

## Encounter table

2	1 Ace
3	1 Experienced
4	1 Novice
5	1 Novice; 1 Experienced
6	1 Novice; 1 Ace
7	1 Experienced; 1 Ace
8	2 Experienced
9	2 Aces
10	1 Novice; 1 Experienced; 1 Ace
Jack	1 Novice; 2 Experienced
Queen	2 Novices; 1 Experienced
King	2 Novices; 1 Ace
Ace	1 Novice; 2 Aces

## Pilots

There are three grades of pilot

Novice

Experienced (one who has survived three missions)

Ace (one who has shot down five enemy aircraft)

Designate a playing card suit to each aircraft. You can move, manoeuvre and fire when your card is turned up.

Novice pilots draw cards	2-7
Experienced pilots draw	2-10
Ace pilots draw	whole suit

(When flying a two seat aircraft you will also need to grade your observer as novice, experienced or ace).

Draw cards from one pack for your flight and from the second pack for the enemy. Shuffle all the cards together. This is the pack that you will use for the encounter on the table.



## Movement

Single seat aircraft move eight hexes

Two seat aircraft move six hexes

Triplanes move ten hexes

A change of hex side (direction) costs one point

## Combat

Range            5 hexes

Single seat aircraft fire straight ahead. The observer in a 2 seat aircraft covers a 180 degree arc behind the wing.

## Damage

Draw cards from the pack. They all count regardless of suit.

2-10            1 point  
JQK            3 points  
Ace            5 points

## Bursts

Ace pilot has three bursts (turns up three playing cards)

Experienced pilot has two

Novice has one

Single seat planes can take 15 points worth of damage before being shot down; twin seat planes take twenty.

## Sample Game

Flight Roster 123 Squadron "A" Flight	
Name and Number	"Biggles" Bigglesworth (1)
Suit	Blue Club
Ace	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
Missions	6
Kills	7
Name and Number	"Algy" Smith (2)
Suit	Blue Diamond
Novice	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
Missions	1
Kills	
Name and Number	"Bomber" Brown (3)
Suit	Blue Heart
Experienced	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Missions	4            11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
Kills	
Observer Name	"Chalky" White
Suit	Blue Spade
Experienced	
Missions	4
Kills	3

Notes:

*Name and Number.* I like to name my characters, you don't have to. The number is the number on the plane or counter.

*Suit* is fairly self explanatory. I have two packs of playing cards, one with a red back and one with a blue. Biggles will move, fire and manoeuvre when a blue backed Club is drawn.

*Number of missions and number of kills* is self explanatory.

The numbers 1-15 and 1-20 are the damage points that each type of aircraft can sustain.

#### *Pilots and Observer*

Biggles is an Ace so he will have the whole suit of Clubs allocated to him; Algy is a Novice so he gets 2-7 of Diamonds; Bomber and Chalky are both experienced so they will receive 2-10 of Hearts and Spades respectively.

The Observer has his own skill rating and suit so that he can function independently of his pilot. The two seat aircraft will only be able to move when a Heart is turned up (the pilot's card), but if a Spade is turned up and there is a target available, the Observer will be able to fire. (Of course if there is a target available to the pilot he will fire on drawing a Heart).

#### **Campaign move**

I put all the missions on separate pieces of paper and drew one out of a box – photo reconnaissance.

I drew a card from the pack for the number of turns we would be aloft; 9.

First turn aloft            3 of Hearts and therefore no enemy.

Second turn aloft        Queen of Clubs, enemy encountered. Drew another card; a 7 which means we are facing 1 Experienced pilot and 1 Ace. Sort out all of the Clubs and the 2-10 of Diamonds from the Red pack. Shuffle all the cards (red and blue decks) together. Draw up a flight roster for the enemy.

No. 1
Suit Red Clubs    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
Ace
No. 2
Suit Red Diamonds    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
Experienced

#### **To the Table**

Turn 1            Red Club is turned up; enemy aircraft 1 moves eight hexes towards "A" flight.  
Not close enough to fire.

Turn 2 Red Club is turned up; enemy aircraft 1 moves again. He is still not close enough to fire.

Turn 3 Blue Diamond; Algy flies straight towards the enemy aircraft and closes the range to two hexes. He is a Novice and fires one burst (turns up one card), a 4. First blood to Algy, the German Ace takes one point of damage.

Turn 4 Blue Heart; Bomber pilots the two seat aircraft towards the German Ace. He can't get close enough for a shot.

Turn 5 Blue Diamond. Algy moves out of the German's field of fire. He manages to keep his aircraft pointed at the German and fires off another quick burst, a 3. Another point taken off his adversary's total.

Turn 6 Red Diamond: the second German fighter moves towards the fray, but is too far away to fire.

Turn 7 Red Club; the German Ace manoeuvres himself into a firing position against Algy and fires off three bursts, a 10, 2 and 7, so three points of damage against Algy.

Turn 8 Red Club; the German Ace retains his good position (i.e. he doesn't move) and fires again. This time he gets a 7, a Queen and a 6, five points of damage.

(If you exhaust the pack and there are still enemy aircraft to be dealt with just shuffle them and begin again).

I think you have the idea by now. This encounter finished with Algy shot down, Biggles undamaged and Bomber with three points worth of damage. Now continue with the turns aloft (i.e. turn over playing cards to see if there is another encounter before the end of the mission).

There was just one more encounter with the enemy during this mission. On the fourth turn aloft I turned up a Queen, and then a three. The two surviving members of "A" flight are up against a single Experienced German pilot. Draw up a flight roster for the German, take the requisite cards from the Red deck, and get back on the table.

"A" flight won this encounter, continued on to photograph their objective and returned to their home airfield.

That's the first mission of three. Assume that repairs are carried out upon your return to your home airfield. So when Biggles takes to the skies for his next mission he will start out with an aircraft capable of sustaining 15 points of damage before it falls out of the sky.

Try starting out as a Novice pilot and see if you can survive your first day. I have done it, but you have to be ready to cut and run when you become aware that your stock of playing cards is about to run out, especially if you have ten points damage to your plane!

### **Models or counters?**

This game works equally well with either. I like to have models on the table when I can. Check the wargaming press for manufacturers and stockists. I use Fiddlers Green card models ([www.fiddlersgreen.net](http://www.fiddlersgreen.net)). They have an excellent CD of aircraft from World War 1 and between the wars. You could field a historically accurate Richtofen's Flying Circus against the real life Top Hat Squadron (Americans), or you can make up your own squadrons.

Well, if you survive your first day I'll see you in the mess for a drink!



**Billy Bishop, Canadian Ace**