

Preview

Pacific Fighters

by Thomas "WKLINK" Cofield



How deep is the well? And how many times can someone go to it?

Pretty pertinent questions when you look at a flight simulation that is now going on three years old. It is hard to believe but the IL2 engine is now almost three years old. In its life span it has developed from a primarily Eastern Front simulation to a game that encompasses many of the western planes, and lately, with the Aces Expansion Disk, some aircraft from the Empire of Japan. These additional aircraft, campaigns and visual improvements have added longevity to a game that should be coming close to its practical life span.

Not to rest on its laurels, Maddox Games, with the help of such notable people as Ilya Shevchenko (aka Luthier) have put together what may finally be the crowning achievement of the series. *Pacific Fighters* looks to be more than just another add on to the venerable IL2 franchise, it looks to build upon the title to create a simulation of massive appeal.

One of the biggest problems with the IL2 franchise has been simple name recognition. While considered one of the best combat flight simulations ever made, IL2 has generally flown under the radar of many mainstream gamers. Flight simulator fanatics generally acknowledge the brilliance of the series which has resulted in decent sales and a cottage industry of add on skins, missions, campaigns, and utilities. *Pacific Fighters* will continue this trend for sure.



Air War in the Pacific... *Finally*

Ok, *Pacific Fighters* is not the first flight simulation that simulates the fighting over the Pacific Theatre. It isn't even the first in recent history, Microsoft's *Combat Flight Simulator II* holds that honor. CFS2 was a decent game, an adequate simulation and in many respects filled the void that many of us wanted when looking for a simulation of the combat over the Pacific.

Unfortunately, in many ways it didn't accomplish what many of us wanted. The scripted game play turned a lot of folks off. The flight models were suspect on some of the aircraft. While the game looked good, it just seemed to miss some of the soul that people expected from the game. It was a decent attempt, but for many it didn't eclipse the two simulations that are considered the gold standard of Pacific War simulations — *Aces of the Pacific* and *Pacific Air War*.

Does this game finally take the place of games like PAW and AOTP? Well that will be to each individual to decide but the game does go a long way to finally combine the thrill of the older sims with the graphic and flight model fidelity that we want for modern times. It may not thrill everyone, people that don't like the IL2 series probably will find that this feels much the same but for those of us that have loved the game will certainly enjoy the new features.



What is New (and what isn't)

Most of you have seen the pics of the Lexington cruising on the virtual screen. I have a personal attachment to that particular carrier, my grandfather served aboard her in 1941 and was there when she met her untimely demise. Seeing her cruise, even if it is only virtually, I think would have made him smile and probably would have brought a tear to his eye.

The most notable change for *Pacific Fighters* is the addition of carrier operations. The addition of carrier ops had to be a must for any Pacific simulation. Carriers takeoffs and landings will be available as well as the typical ground base operations that some folks will opt for.



US pilots will have the opportunity to fly from the Lexington Class carriers (Lexington and Saratoga), the Yorktown class (Enterprise, Hornet, Yorktown) or the Essex class carriers (too many to list). You will also be able to take off from the 'baby flattops'; the CVEs that did yeoman service in the war. The beta version that I have has only the Lexington class currently in place but the others are to be released with the final version.

Japanese players will have the option to fly from the Akagi, Kaga, the Zuikaku class carriers and the Shinano class carriers. The Akagi is the only carrier currently available in my beta so we will see what carriers make it into the final version but I do seriously hope that these ships make it in. It will be cool to see a Japanese battle line like this at sea.

Brits get the Illustrious class carrier for operations. In addition the game will ship with many of the heavy and light capital ships that fought in the war. Interestingly, most of the battlewagons are early war ships, like the Arizona and Haruna. Noticeably absent, later model ships like the New Jersey class and the Yamato are not represented (yet) in the game. A wide variety of ships are available though and you should be able to make a pretty impressive task force with what is shipping in the game.

Aircraft that are added to the game are literally a 'who's who' list of aircraft that fought in the war. Americans will get to fly the F4U Corsair, the F6F Hellcat, F4F Wildcat, SBD Dauntless, Brewster F2A Buffalo, B-25 Mitchell and A-20 Havoc; all with various sub models. In addition some of the more important aircraft will be represented in AI format, like the TBD Devastator, the B-29 Super fortress, the B-24 Liberator and the TBF Avenger. The Brits will get their Seafire to fly. I am hoping the Gladiator will get an update since many of those flew off carriers early in the war.





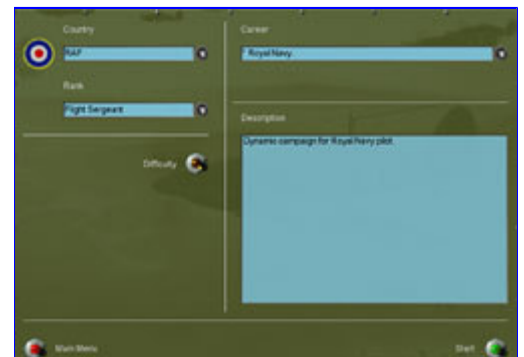
The Japanese get to fly several aircraft as well, to include several models of the A6M, D3A Val, KI 61, 43, 84, and the G4M Betty. Other notable aircraft like the N1K1-J Oscar and the B5N Kate will be part of the Japanese arsenal of AI aircraft. In general, most of the major aircraft that fought in the war are represented in this game.



As I said, if you liked the campaign and single player setup of *IL-2:Forgotten Battles* then you probably will like *Pacific Fighters*. The games are essentially identical in setup, as a major add on should be. The campaign will be dynamic, like in IL2:FB and players will have the chance to fly campaigns as a pilot for the USN, USMC, or USAAF. Japanese can fly for the Imperial Navy or the Imperial Army and the RAAF, RAF, RN look to be represented in the game for campaigns. Just like campaigns in earlier versions pilots will also get the opportunity to select from various times, bomber vs. fighter positions, and location to start the fight.

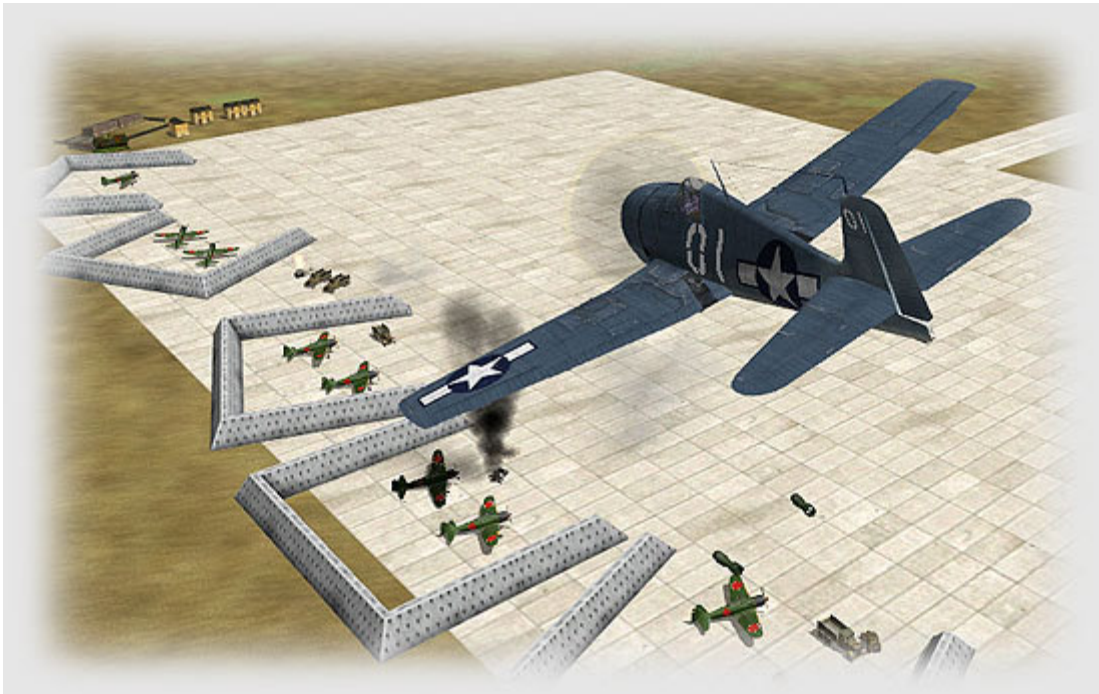
The Mission editor is also in place and I look to see some decent user made scenarios on the scene within hours of release. New maps (I have seen in the game) include the Hawaiian Islands (and Pearl Harbor), Midway, Wake, the Coral Sea, Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Okinawa. Planned are New Guinea (probably for a Port Moresby related scenario), Burma, Singapore, Rabaul, Rangoon and Luzon among others. Most of the areas of battle are in the game.

Graphically the game looks as good as ever. For those folks with the latest Nvidia based cards you will have water effects that will make everyone drool. For those of us with less than the latest hardware (like a Radeon 9800 Pro is anything to sniff at) you will get decent graphics, if not top of the line stuff anymore. No complaints, as you can see from the screenies the game looks pretty good. It runs pretty smooth on my 2.8 gig PV (ht) box as well. I suspect that those folks with lower end computers will find it harder to play this game. Like all of the IL2 series user made skins are useable in the game and can be used both offline as well as online. Online play



is essentially unchanged (from what I understand), which is fine by me.

The game plans to ship in two forms. For those folks with IL2:FB; *Pacific Fighters* will install in your game directory and you will be able to use all the planes in both games. In addition there will be a stand alone version which will only install the planes in the *Pacific Fighters* directory. I am not sure if some IL2:FB planes will make it into the *Pacific Fighters* directory. Some, like the P-40E, the Hurricane II, the P-51 and the P-38 were used extensively in the Pacific Theatre but they aren't listed directly on the list of planes seen on *Pacific Fighters*. This could be because changes aren't going to occur to these planes. I really do hope that they do include these aircraft, they are needed in the game.

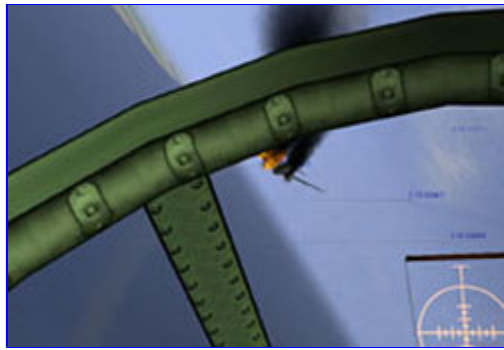


Ok, how does it feel?

Well, I have found out quickly that I can't land on a carrier to save my life. All that practice in Warbirds and Aces High probably helped some but I still tend to plant my aircraft into the back end of the ship a lot. I suspect a lot of people will eat the back end of a carrier several times in the game. In addition I suspect a lot of people will torque themselves off of the carriers. This game is going to be hard, very hard for the realistic minded. Of course, like the original series, everything is scalable. You can turn off the cockpit, remove the torque and crash much less often. In addition you will also get the opportunity to move your seat up in planes like the Wildcat and the Zero, which will make landing a little bit easier. This feature hasn't been enabled yet but will be welcomed.

Flight models feel a lot like other IL2 games. The F4U is a beast, fast, tough and capable of carrying a LOT of weaponry. The Zero is nimble, very sweet to fly and falls apart easily. The F6F is probably the most fun aircraft in the game. I absolutely love flying it, it is fast, maneuverable and accelerates wonderfully. The aircraft that I have flown feel roughly equivalent to their real world contemporaries but I am sure there will be some arguments when the game comes out.

The game shows the stability of the series, I have had no crashes or any other unusual problems with the game. Of course all the features of this game aren't present yet but right now the game has more features and more solid game play than any other Pacific based flight simulation.



The game really looks to show potential shine in multiplayer. Ubisoft has recently announced that support for up to 128 players in dogfight arenas may be possible. Theoretically it is possible to put together some rather large aircraft carrier based air battles. If (and this is a big if) the game runs decently with that many players it will be a large leap forward in online play. It won't take the place of dedicated online simulations like Warbirds or Aces High but it might show them some increased cause for concern. We shall see about that.

Overall it feels like a worthy add on to IL2:FB. It doesn't feel like a new game, more of an updated add on but in reality that is what it is. I loved the series so I will of course love this game. I suspect the carrier heads will get off on trying to land on some of these ships. I imagine some of the more memorable battles will be recreated on Hyperlobby. I think a lot of people will enjoy this game, even more if some of the ships and aircraft promised make it into the game. Look for this title real soon.

Test System Specs

- Dell Dimension 4600
- Pentium 4, 2.8 GHz (HT)
- 1GB 400MHz DDR RAM
- 80 GB Ultra ATA 100 HD
- ATi Radeon 9800 Pro video card
- Creative Audigy 2 sound card
- USB 2.0 (for TrackIR3 interface)
- Cable modem connection