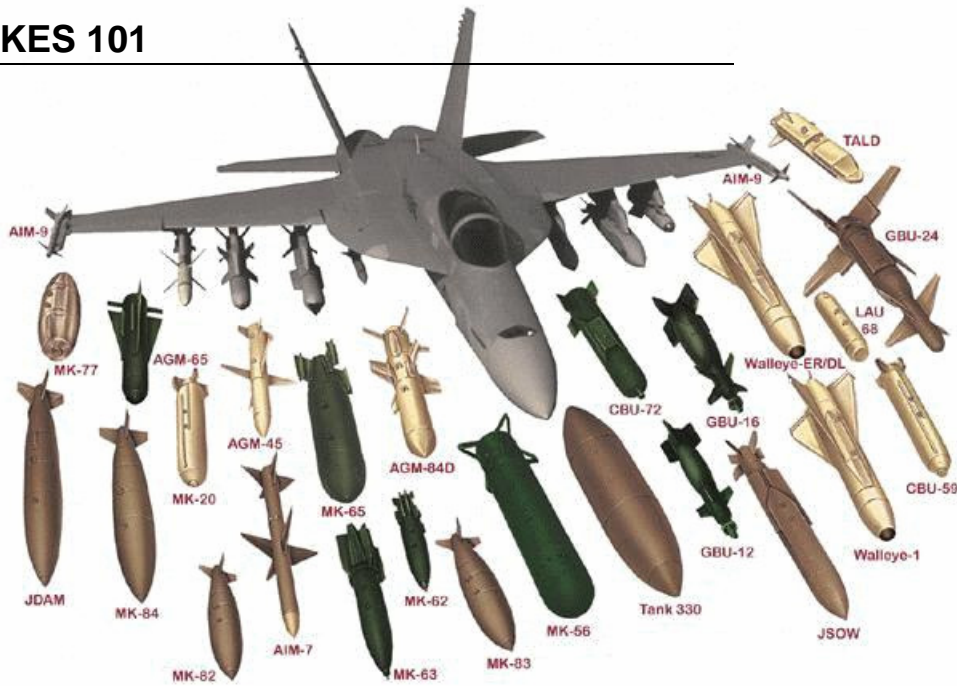


## AIR STRIKES 101



By Craig Paffhausen

The object of an air strike is to destroy either a land target or a ship. Sure, if you want to demoralize your enemy an air strike or 50 will do great, however those kind of strikes just lose you aircraft and munitions in a wargame like Harpoon. Personally, my goal in an air strike is the destruction of my enemy, not the demoralization. After all, games like Harpoon are all about winning, not taking over and dealing with those living after the fact. That being said let me cover some basics that any air strike should have. This paper is geared more toward Harpoon 3 but it should be easy for the reader to follow this method for any air/naval strategy game.

The most important thing to do in any air strike is determine what your goal is. Do you want to sink ship X? Do you want to draw off enemy patrols so another strike can hit a completely different target? Do you need to do this strike to finish the mission objectives? Without asking yourself these questions first, you cannot begin to plan an effective strike. We are going to develop a very simple air strike to sink a single ship in a formation.

There are several key components to an air strike. The first and foremost is the basic strike aircraft. This strike aircraft can carry any weapon from a normal "Iron" bomb all the way up to advanced guided missiles like Air Launched Tomahawk (never produced) or Harpoon missiles. The next component is the escort aircraft. These aircraft provide air cover for the strike and protect the vulnerable bombers from enemy aircraft. The third component is the support aircraft. These aircraft provide long-range electronic support to the strike. The final component to the strike is the Wild Weasel/Iron hand aircraft that suppress enemy air defenses. These aircraft muddle and confuse the enemy defenses. In fact, SEAD aircraft can sink a ship in their own right.

The first part of any air strike is to know the "who what and where" of your target. Who is the target? What are its defenses? Where will you strike it? Now our target is a lonely Slava-class cruiser. The Slava in this scenario has the SA-N-6 Grumble missile. This missile is capable against a wide range of targets out to about 60 miles from the ship and the Slava class carries 64 of these impressive missiles.. The next layer of defense is 40 SA-N-4 missiles fired from two twin armed launchers. These missiles have a range of about 10 nm. The last tier of defense is several AK-630 rotary auto cannon close in defense systems. The 130mm cannon on the Slava is relatively in-effective against aircraft or their weapons. Since this is a single ship with neither air cover nor any escorts the strike can be a rather straightforward attack. The same applies for where we want to strike this ship. Anywhere will work in this situation.

Here is the first spot that every air strike seems to fall apart: Choosing what weapons and what planes to use to strike the target. In my experience people want to load all their strike aircraft with Harpoons and have a go. There are several problems to this approach. The most glaring is the fact that advanced enemy defenses are easily able to destroy Harpoons! It would take about 6 to 10 waves of Harpoons to sink a ship. For our attack, our Carrier Air wing will consist of 20 F/A-18C Hornets. Since the Hornet can carry 2-4 Harpoons on a short-range mission let us do some math. Assuming 50% of all surface to air missiles launched hit missiles that would be 3 to 4 air strikes before missiles penetrate to the AK-630 Point defense systems!!!! That is to say, more missiles than a modern US Carrier carries! So as you can see you have to become sneaky in your air strike to successfully complete it. What I like to do for my air strikes is start with about 10 aircraft loaded with either HARM anti-radar missiles or missile decoys. These work to keep the target's defenses out of the picture. Along with the HARM shooters, I send several jammer aircraft. These aircraft use their own electronics to wage war with the target's electronics, further blinding the target. Finally, when chaos reigns supreme, I tend to launch a medium sized Alpha strike composed of the remaining 10 aircraft as Harpoon shooters armed with TWO Harpoons each. The defensive suppression aircraft will have at this time inundated the enemy air defenses to the point that a few missiles will easily get through and hit the ship.

The easiest way to properly do a low loss Alpha strike is to remember to layer your attacks so that you first blind the target then destroy the target. By layering your attack you cause the computer a bit of confusion. The More confusion you sew early in the scenario the greater your chances of completing the scenario with minimum losses to your own side. In a forthcoming article we will cover multi-ship engagements.