

A Playthrough of Rolling Thunder: Skyhawks - 1966

Background Notes:

The design for this game came to me in the middle of the night. While reading several books on Rolling Thunder, I was intrigued by the use of the Douglas Skyhawk and its use in the aerial campaign. I wanted to create a simple game based on the Target for Today system and other titles noted in the credits of the rules. After about four weeks, maps, counters, rules, were completed.

This is a low impact game: 1 Rule Book (15 pages), 1 Map, 1 Target Gazetteer, 9 Table Sheets (front and back printed), 1 Skyhawk Card to track damage, 1 Skyhawk Ordnance Reference Card, 1 Campaign Record Sheet, 151 counters and 2 ten-sided dice.

Historical Background:

The player pilots an A-4E Skyhawk of VA-72 while based on the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt in the Gulf of Tonkin. The player may fly a single mission or try his hand at three included campaigns:

Campaign 1: First Tour of Duty: Yankee Station: 10 August 1966 – 10 September 1966

Campaign 2: Second Tour of Duty: Yankee Station 20 October 1966 – 27 December 1966

Campaign 3: The third campaign links the two campaigns above with additional rules

Targets represented in the game are from the actual JCS 94 Target list which guided the Rolling Thunder Campaign until it ended in 1968. The list remained relatively intact, with few a few listings added as the campaign progressed.

Sample Mission:

For the purposes of this demonstration, I will fly a single mission.

9 August 1966

Narrative Intro

Lt. JG Ralph Taylor Hook arrived at his new station via helicopter. It lightly touched down on the deck of the USS Franklin Roosevelt. With the engine cut off, the rotor blades slowly came to a halt. Taylor stepped onto the deck and was greeted by a warm, tropical breeze as the Roosevelt made its way through the Gulf of Tonkin. Holding on to his cover, he made his way to the ship's officer of the day and reported in.

Hook was assigned to VA-72 and was to report to ready room at 0500. The OOD assigned him a bunk and had a seaman guide Hook to his billet. Once in the room, he unpacked his bag. When he had everything squared away, he made himself comfortable on his bunk.

In what seemed like hours, Hook was awakened within minutes when his roommate walked in. Ensign Robert "Ear" Wiig introduced himself to Hook. A conversation was soon started, and they found out

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they lived within 10 miles of each other in the great state of Texas. Wiig offered to guide Hook as he familiarized himself with the layout of the carrier.

10 August 1966

Ear and Hook reported to a crowded ready room. Standing at the front was CMD Harrison B. Southworth, VA-72 squadron commander.

“Alright, gents. Listen up. We got a new pilot this morning – LTJG Ralph Hook,” said Southworth.

Hook raised his arm to make himself known to the other pilots.

“Hook, you are hereby known as “Fish”. With a last name like Hook, it’s a natural.” That got a laugh from the other pilots.

Southworth took a serious turn. “Ok, let’s get to business. We will be launching a flight of four Skyhawks beginning at 0630. “Crack” Watson will be the lead, with “Mars” Johnson, “Ear” Wiig and “Fish” Hook filling out the division. Wiig will be a section lead with Hook as wingman. Any questions?”

LT. Carter “Mars” Johnson didn’t waste any time asking. “Where to, skipper?”

“We’ll be attacking the airfield at Vinh. This field has limited capabilities to handle jets. There is a possibility you may encounter MiGs,” said Southworth.

From the back of the ready room another pilot asked the next obvious question. “We got any help?”

“Yes,” replied Southworth. “However, it won’t be much.”

10 August 1966

Game Steps

As the player begins a game, there are several steps to perform before he launches his aircraft from the carrier. This is the planning phase. The map is laid out on a playing table of your choice. It’s small so no worries about space. Place the Skyhawk Mission Card (make copies of it so you won’t have to write on the original). On it, place an experience marker for your pilot. You’ll also note the target and other info at the bottom. In my case he’s experienced (roll of 6 on Table 1). Keep the Skyhawk Ordnance Card nearby. You’ll place the ordnance you carry on this card.

Place the other markers in piles nearby, especially the ordnance markers and the NV units. The only dice you will need are 2 D10. The Tables will tell you how many dice to use and whether it will be 1 D10 (00-9) or D10+D10 (00-19) or D100 (00-99).

The pilot rating marker (green, experienced, or veteran) is placed on the space labeled “Pilot Rating” on the Skyhawk Mission Record Card.

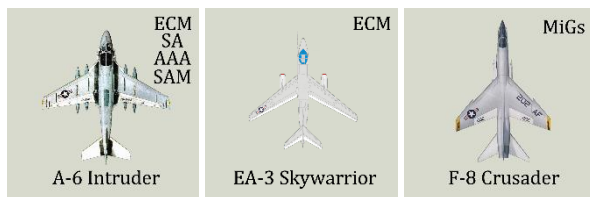
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Weather over the target is determined by rolling 1D10 on Table 2. In my case I rolled a 7 “Good”.

Target was determined by rolling D100 on the Gazetteer. I rolled a 05 – giving me the airfield at Vinh. All targets are considered to be in North Vietnam. All targets are over land, except minelaying missions, which are over water.

Before the player loads out his aircraft, he rolls 2D10 on the Planning Event table (Table 4). These are random events that could alter future missions or cancel your upcoming mission. In my case I rolled a “No Event”.

Next, I roll for my support on Table 4.1. I rolled a 2 giving me three support units for the mission. The player may choose the units he wishes to use. What a unit can attack is noted on the counter. Here are a few samples:



Each counter has a notation or notations in the upper right corner signifying what it can attack. ECM jams NV radar; SA means it can attack small arms; AAA means it can attack anti-air artillery; SAM means it can attack surface to air missile sites; and MiGs means it can attack NV MiGs. Once assigned to attack a particular NV unit, it cannot target a different one in the ensuing attack. In short he may attack only one of the noted targets on the counter.

The player places these units (with the exception of the Skywarrior) in the US Support Box on the map and before he attacks the target, he will resolve the support attacks first. The Skywarrior is placed in the ECM on the map. Those with an ECM capability are always placed in the ECM Box.

Next, the player will select the ordnance he will carry, as well as any external fuel tanks (up to three). What Skyhawk can carry is noted on the ordnance card. It is also advisable to look on the Attack tables to get an idea of the effectiveness of the variety of munitions. There are altitude restrictions on some of the ordnance. What is important to remember is that the total weight the Skyhawk carries cannot exceed 9,000 pounds.


Fuel is also important. The Skyhawk did not have the range to reach many of the targets, so refueling and external tanks were a necessity.






For this mission I have chosen the following ordnance/tanks to carry: 2 External tanks (each weighs 2,468 pounds carrying 370 gallons of fuel), 2 1,000 pound bombs, 1 2,000 lb bomb for a total weight of

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8,936 pounds. Munition counters and external tank counters are placed on the Skyhawk Ordnance Sheet.

Skyhawk Ordnance Card

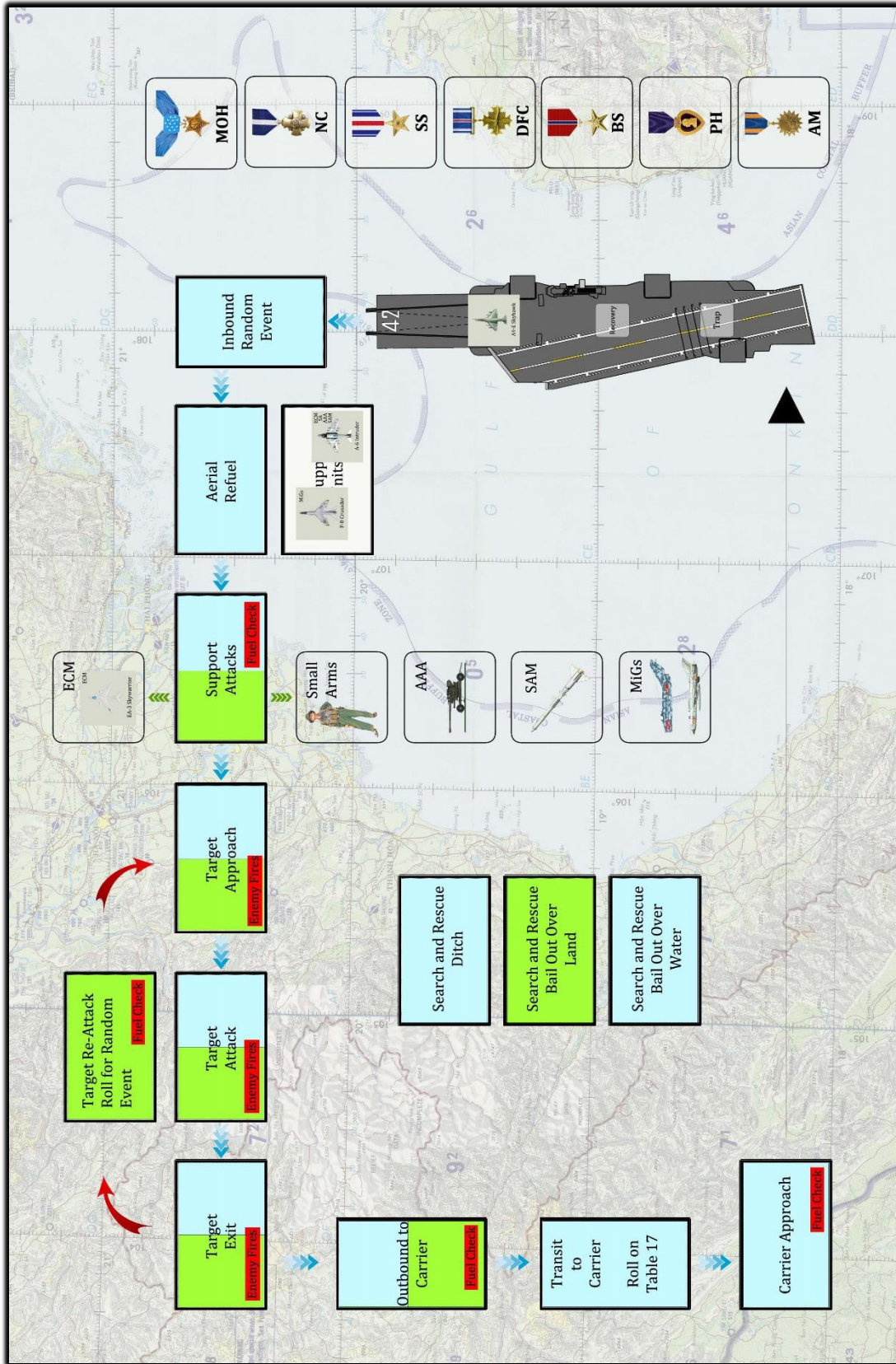


<p>The Right Outboard Station may carry the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 370 gallon fuel tank or 1 or 3 500 pound bombs or 1 1,000 pound bomb or 1 or 3 500 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 or 3 250 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 MK-36 500 lb. Mine or 1 AGM-45 Shrike or 1 LAU 3 Rocket Launcher or 1 LAU 10 Rocket Launcher 						<p>The Left Outboard Station may carry the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 370 gallon fuel tank or 1 or 3 500 pound bombs or 1 1,000 pound bomb or 1 or 3 500 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 or 3 250 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 MK-36 500 lb. Mine or 1 AGM-45 Shrike or 1 LAU 3 Rocket Launcher or 1 LAU 10 Rocket Launcher
<p>The Right Inboard Station may carry the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 or 3 500 pound bombs or 1 1,000 pound bomb or 1 or 3 500 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 or 3 250 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 MK-36 500 lb. Mine or 1 AGM-12B/C Bullpup or 1 LAU 3 Rocket Launcher or 1 LAU 10 Rocket Launcher 	<p>The Centerline Station may carry the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 370 gallon fuel tank or 1,3, or 6 500 pound bombs or 1 1,000 pound bomb or 1 2,000 pound bomb or 1,3, or 6 500 lb. Snake Eyes or 1,3, or 6 250 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 MK-36 500 lb. Mine 	<p>The Left Inboard Station may carry the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 or 3 500 pound bombs or 1 1,000 pound bomb or 1 or 3 500 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 or 3 250 lb. Snake Eyes or 1 MK-36 500 lb. Mine or 1 AGM-12B/C Bullpup or 1 LAU 3 Rocket Launcher or 1 LAU 10 Rocket Launcher 				

With everything now set, I place the Skyhawk Counter on the Roosevelt launch square located on the map. I am now ready for take off.

See opposte page for map set up.

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Narrative

Note: Only one Skyhawk is used in the game. I am adding the others to fill out the story. *There are optional rules if the player wishes to use a squadron.*

The briefing concluded. The pilots quickly left their seats and suited up. Once on the flight deck they climbed into their Skyhawks, assisted by their plane captains. The attack aircraft were quickly brought into position for launch.

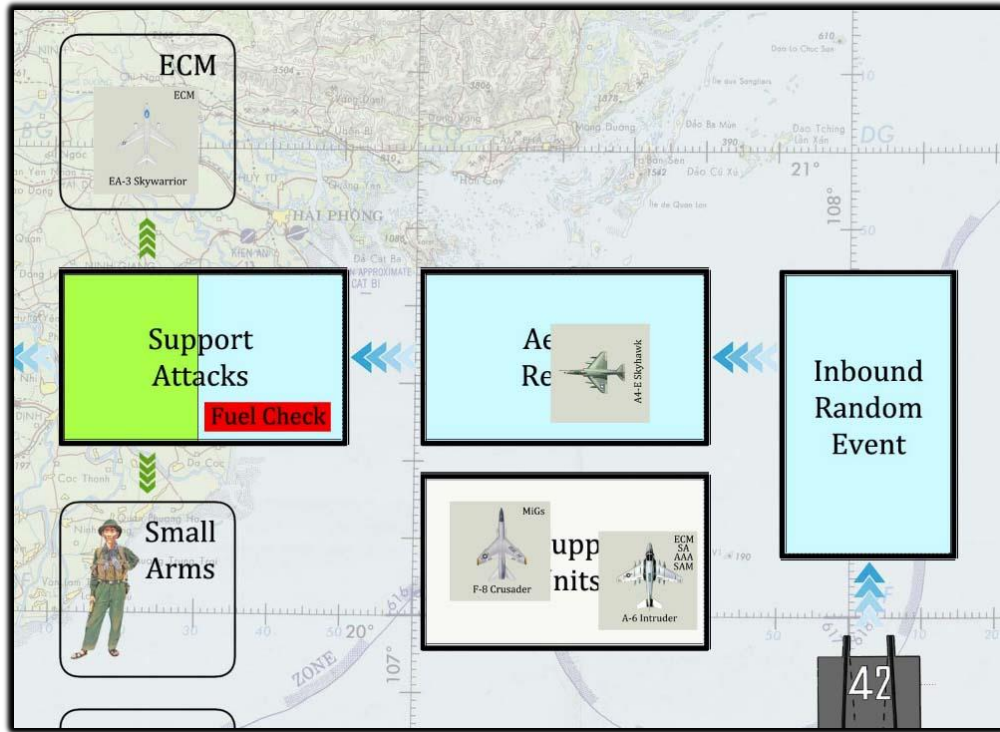
The Skyhawks piloted by Crack and Mars were hooked up first, with Ear and Fish behind them ready to be hooked up as soon as the first two were launched.

With clearance from CAG, the first two Skyhawks were launched successfully. Wiig soon followed, as did Hook (roll of 4 on Table 3).

Hook and the others formed up and began their long slow climb to meet up with the tankers before proceeding into enemy air space. (Historical note: From takeoff to meeting with the tankers, it was one long continual climb to high altitude to reach the tankers. It burned up a lot of fuel.)

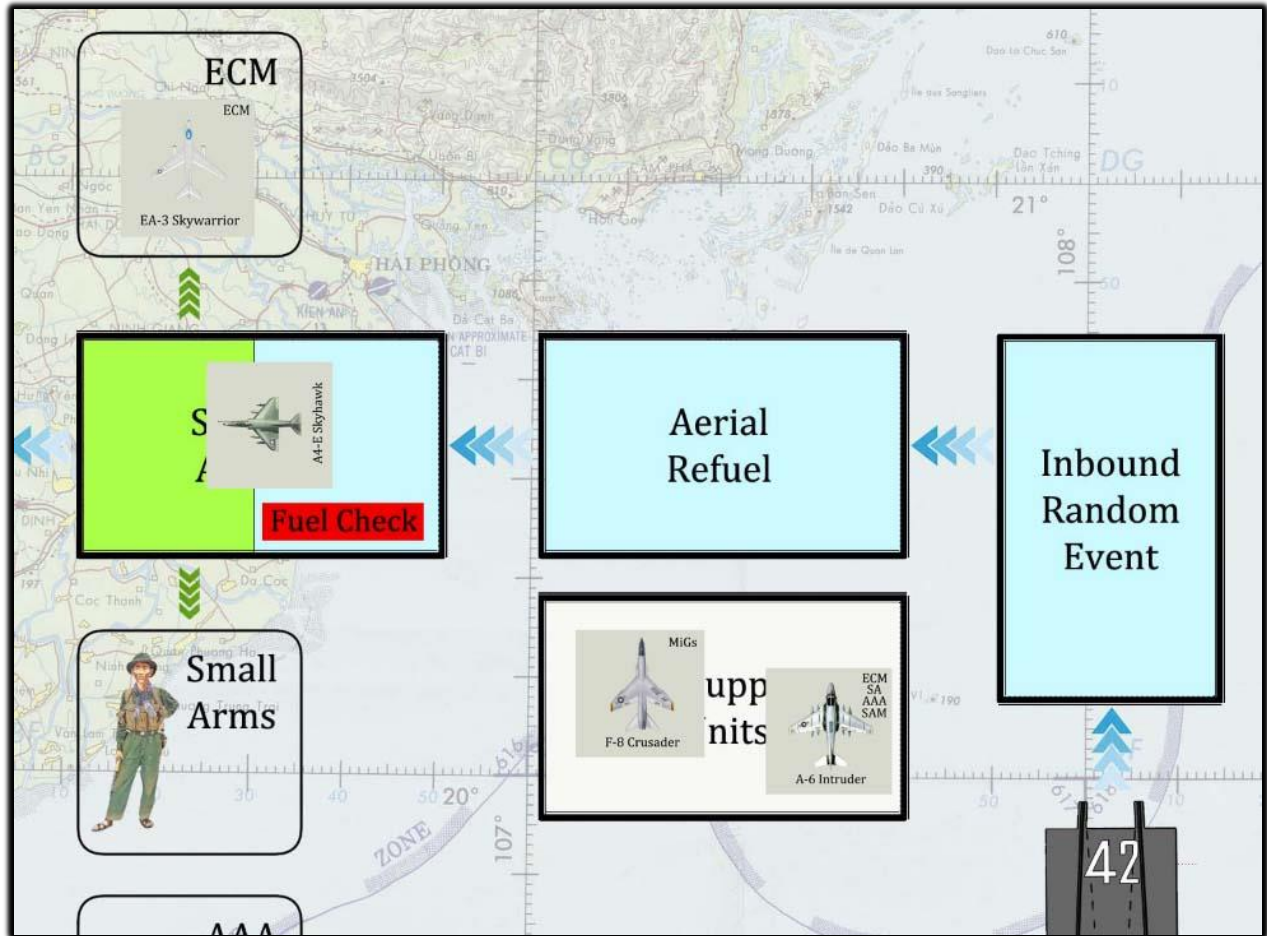
Game Steps: The player checks for a successful launch via Table 3. If successful, he moves into the box labeled Inbound Random Event and rolls on Table 6. I rolled a 2 which was a "No Event". Once finished, the player moves his counter into the Aerial Refuel Box. (see next page)

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We arrived as scheduled to refuel but for some reason the tankers did not. We will have to be careful with our fuel. Thank God for the two external fuel tanks. (A roll on Table 9 resulted in a missed rendezvous with the tankers.) Cursing, we began our run to the target.

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Our division leader got on the horn and requested we check our fuel situation. I glanced at my fuel gauge. Hook breathed a sigh of relief when he saw all was good.

Game Steps: Upon entering the Support Attack Box, the first thing the player does is check his fuel by rolling 1D10 on Table 7. He can also choose not to by expending one of his fuel tanks and mark off a box on Skyhawk Mission Record Sheet. If it had been a successful rendezvous with the tankers, no fuel check roll would have been necessary. Once he makes a decision, the support units now attack.

Fish checks his fuel. So far so good; nothing to worry about. (Rolled a 5 on Table 7). He hears chatter on the attack frequency, the support units are making their run.

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Game Steps: The units in the US Support Box are now placed in any of the NV attack boxes. No more than two units can be placed in any one box. Note that Small Arms can only fire at your aircraft if you are at Low Altitude.

So I place the Intruder in the SAM box and the Crusader in the Mig Box. Notations in the upper right corner of each unit let the player know what can be attacked by the units: SA = Small Arms; AAA=Anti-Aircraft Artillery; SAM=Surface to Air Missile; and MiGs. ECM provides electronic countermeasures when AAA and SAM sites attempt to fire on to your aircraft, as well as providing a benefit when attacking a SAM site (Ironhand Mission) or the Hanoi Receiver/Transmitter Station are attacked.

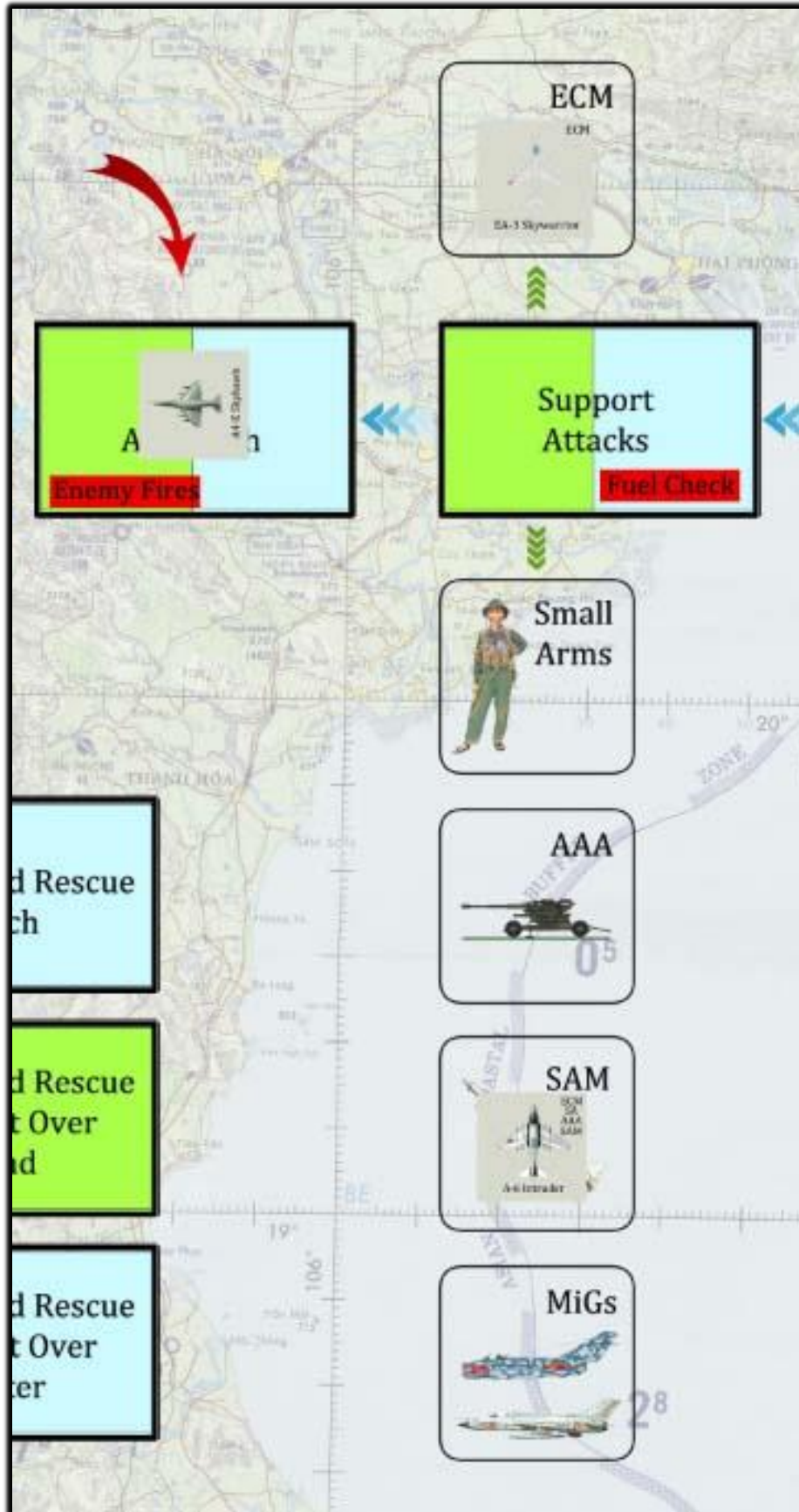
Boxes can be attacked in any order the player chooses.

Once all support units are placed, US support combat is resolved by rolling 1D10 on Table 11. Attacking the SAM site first, I roll a 4 missing the SAM site. Next, I attempt to engage the MiGs. I roll a 5 resulting in a miss.

Now the NV fire at the support units. The SAM site will fire first. One is subtracted from the dice roll due to the presence of the ECM Unit. I roll a 4 resulting in a miss. Now the MiGs will attempt to run off the Crusader unit. A 9 is rolled and the Crusaders are driven off.

The Skyhawk Counter is now moved to the Target Approach Box. See next page for current situation.

Upon entering the Target Approach Box, the player declares at what altitude he will make his first attack. I choose Medium. I'll drop the 2000 pounder first, then make another pass to drop the 1,000 pounders. I place the Medium Altitude Marker in the Altitude Box on the Skyhawk Mission Card.



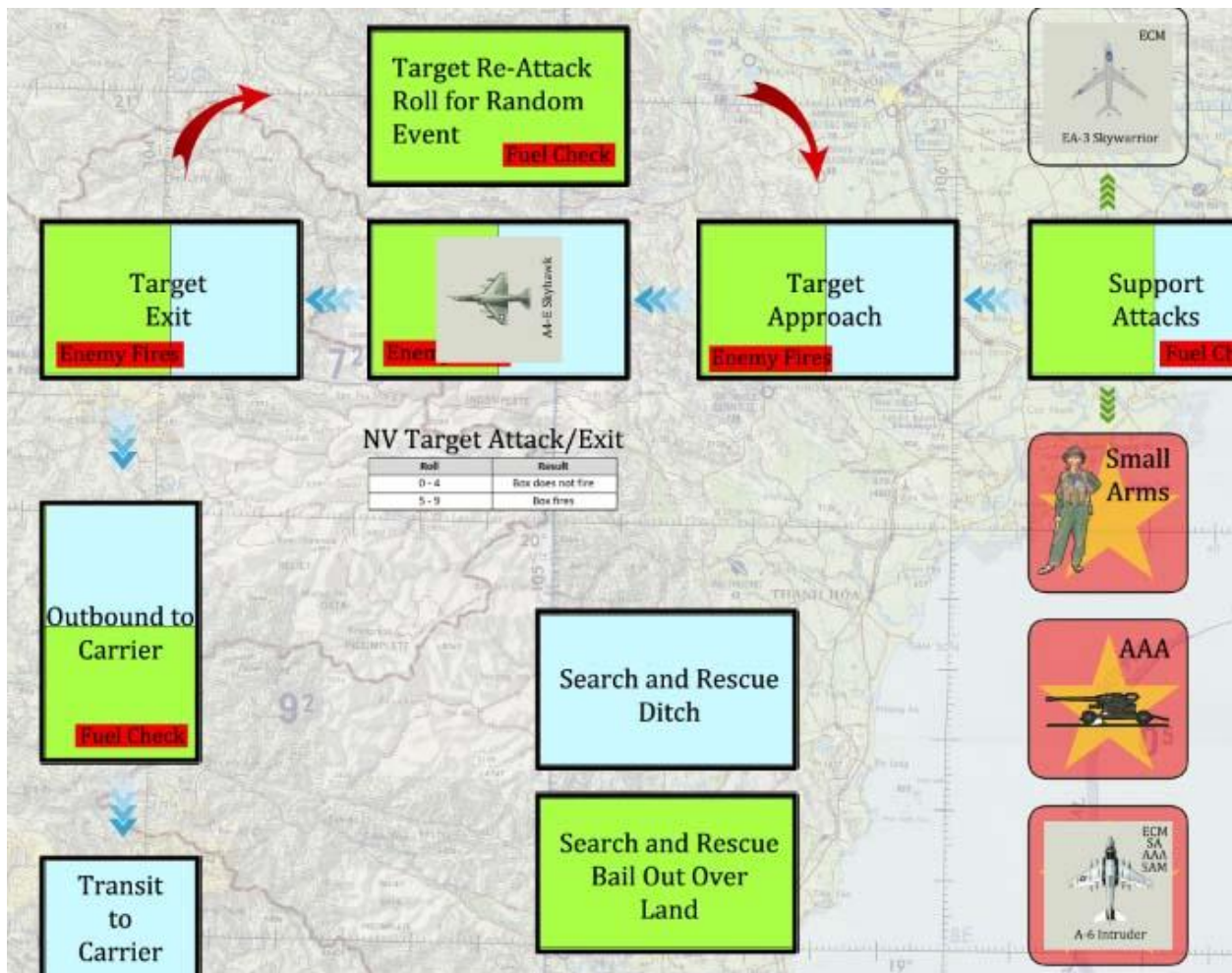
Next the player resolves support unit attacks. Since I have an A-6 Intruder in the SAM box, I attempt once again to at least suppress it. Rolling on Table 11 with a result of 1 – a miss. Next the NV fire at the support unit on Table 10, subtract 1 from the roll for the ECM unit in the ECM Box. The SAM misses with a result of 1.

Now the NV attempt to fire at your aircraft. He can use SAM and AAA if they have not been knocked out. Small Arms cannot fire since they can only fire at low altitude. MiGs do not attack your aircraft except as a result of a random event in the re-attack box, and only if there is no disengaged marker in the MIGs Box.

I choose SAM to fire first, rolling on Table 12. One is subtracted from the roll due to the ECM unit. Using the SAM Column-Med Alt. The final result was a 1, the SAM

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missed. Next on to the AAA – gain under Med Alt. and -1 from the result: final result a 2, another miss. I now move to the Target Box.



Situation as I move into the Target Box.

Before I attack the target, the player rolls the dice to see if the NV will fire at the support aircraft. The Table is found in the rule book under 6.2.1. as well as on the map. Since I only have a unit in the SAM box, I only make one roll. I roll a 9 so another SAM attack is made before an attack is made on my Skyhawk. First, however, the US Support unit attacks first. I miss once again with my Intruder. Rolling on Table 10, the NV result is 4 – another miss. Now the NV target the Skyhawk.

Since my aircraft is at medium altitude, small arms will not fire. I roll once for each of the other NV boxes that does not have a knocked out or disengaged marker. So, a roll is made for AAA, and SAM.

AAA fires first, rolling under AAA/Med. Alt. on Table 12 – 3 hits are scored. I roll on Table 12.1 for each hit to see what may have been damaged: Roll 1 a 5 (Fuselage); roll 2 a 9 (nose) and a 2 (superficial

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damage). A Fuselage Box and a Nose box is marked off – next I see if any other systems are also damaged: I roll on Table 12.2 - a 2 (superficial damage; a roll on Table 12.4 gives me a 2 – fuel system.

Now the SAM fires, rolling a 2 on Table 12, another miss. As noted previously, MiGs do not attack your aircraft except as a result of a random event in the re-attack box, and only if there is no disengaged marker in the MiGs Box.

Now I can attack the target, I will drop my 2,000 pounder first. I roll 1D10 on Table 15.8 to determine if I am On or Off target. I roll an eight, so I am On Target! Next, I roll on Table 16 to determine the percentage/points. For I roll 1D10 twice and add the results for a final percentage. I roll a 1 and a 2 so that gives a total of 90% and 90 points. I remove the 2000 pound bomb marker from the Skyhawk ordnance card. I now advance my Skyhawk to the Target Exit Box.

Opposite page: my current Skyhawk Card with damage noted:

Skyhawk Mission Record Card

The form includes a central aircraft diagram with the following callouts: N2 (nose), C1, C2 (cockpit), 20 MM (wing-mounted cannons), F2, F3, F4 (fuel tanks), L1, L2, L3, LI, LO (left wing ordnance), R1, R2, R3, RI, RO (right wing ordnance), E1, E2, E3 (engine), and T1, T2, T3 (tail). Surrounding the aircraft are various system and status boxes:

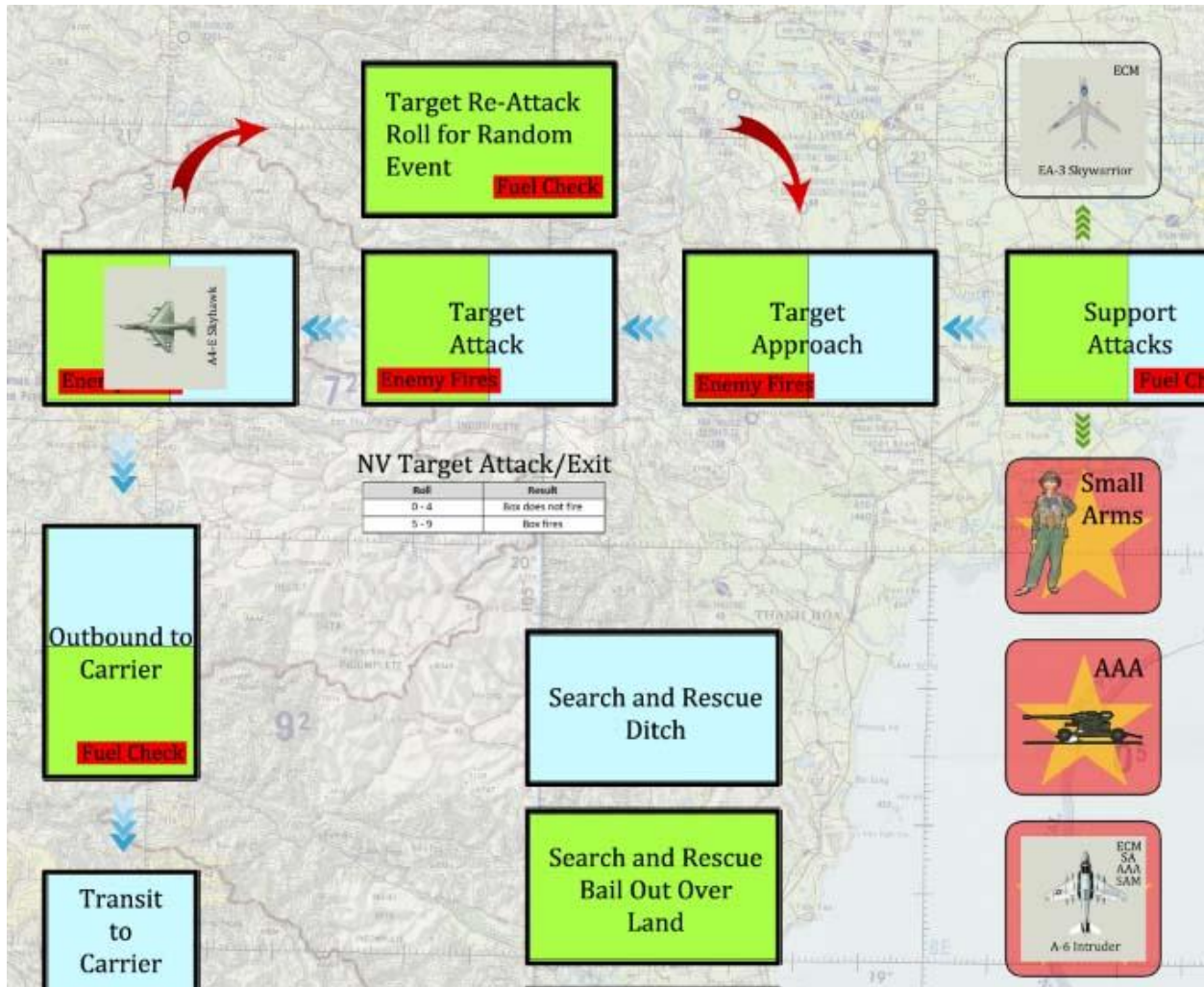
- Experienced:** (with pilot icon)
- Wounds:**
- MED Altitude:**
- 20MM Ammo:**
- Avionics:**
- Electrical System:**
- Com/Nav:**
- Landing Gear:**
- Fuel System:**
- Ordnance System:**
- Oxygen System:**
- Hydraulics System:**
- Ex. Tanks:**

Name: "FISH" HOOK Rank: LTJG
 Rating: EXPERIENCED
 Campaign No.: - Date: 10 AUG 66
 Mission No.: 1 Weather: Good/Cloud
 Target: Vinh Location: NV
 Type: Airfield
 Result: On Off Percentage: _____ Points: _____

Notes:

Opposite Page – current Skyhawk position.

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Before the NV fire, the player may change his altitude. I am going to climb to High, and swap out my marker on the Skyhawk Card.

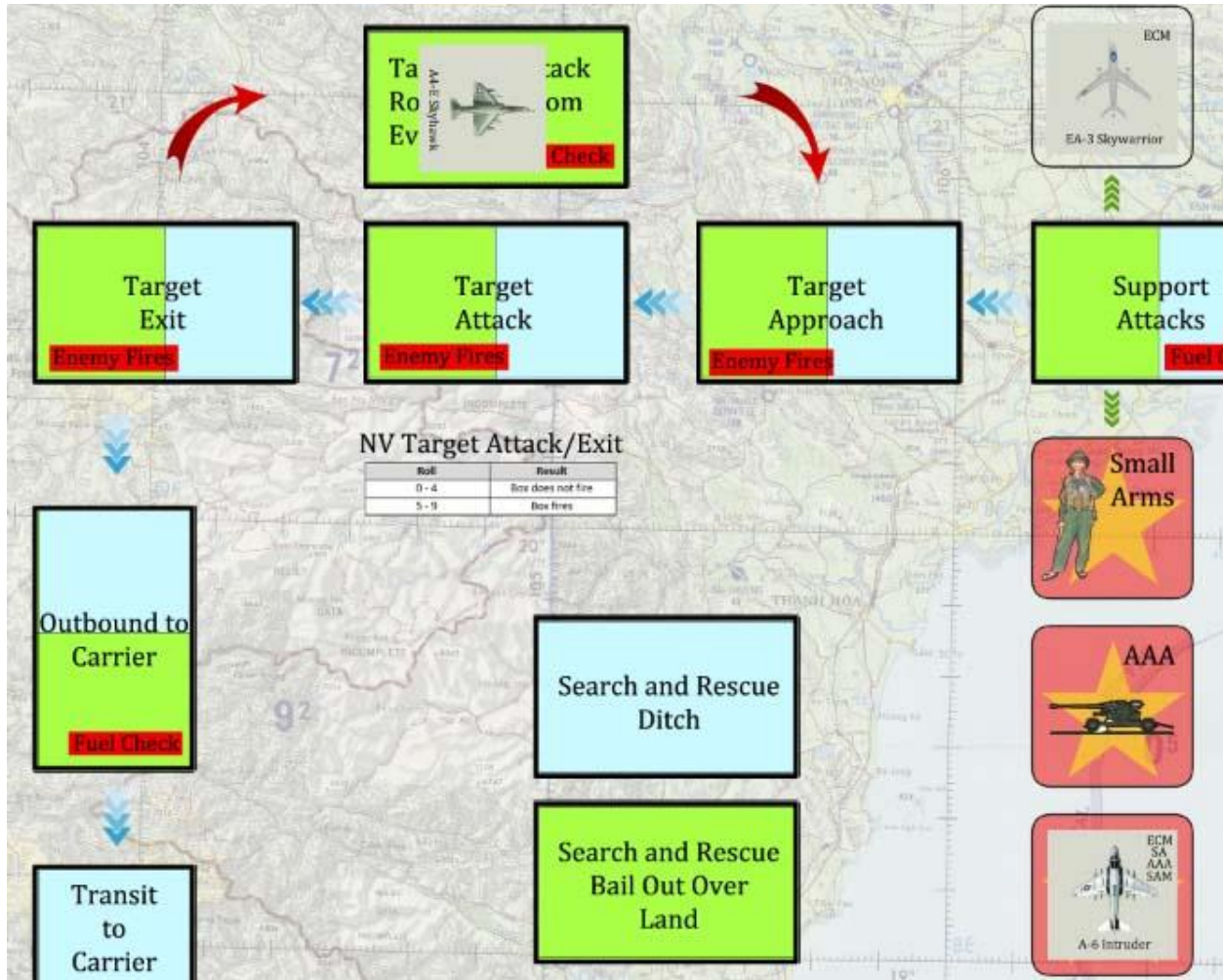
The Intruder once again attempts to hit the SAM site. I roll an eight, knocking out the SAM site. A Knocked out marker is placed in the SAM box. This greatly helps my Skyhawk!

Now the NV, attempt to hit my Skyhawk using AAA. The AAA hits my plane twice. The first hit causes superficial damage, but an engine hit is scored on the second, and no other system is damaged.

Now, the player decides to either head home or head back in to reattack the target. If heads home, he moves to the Outbound to Carrier Box. Since I have my 1,000 pounders left, I decide to reattack the target.

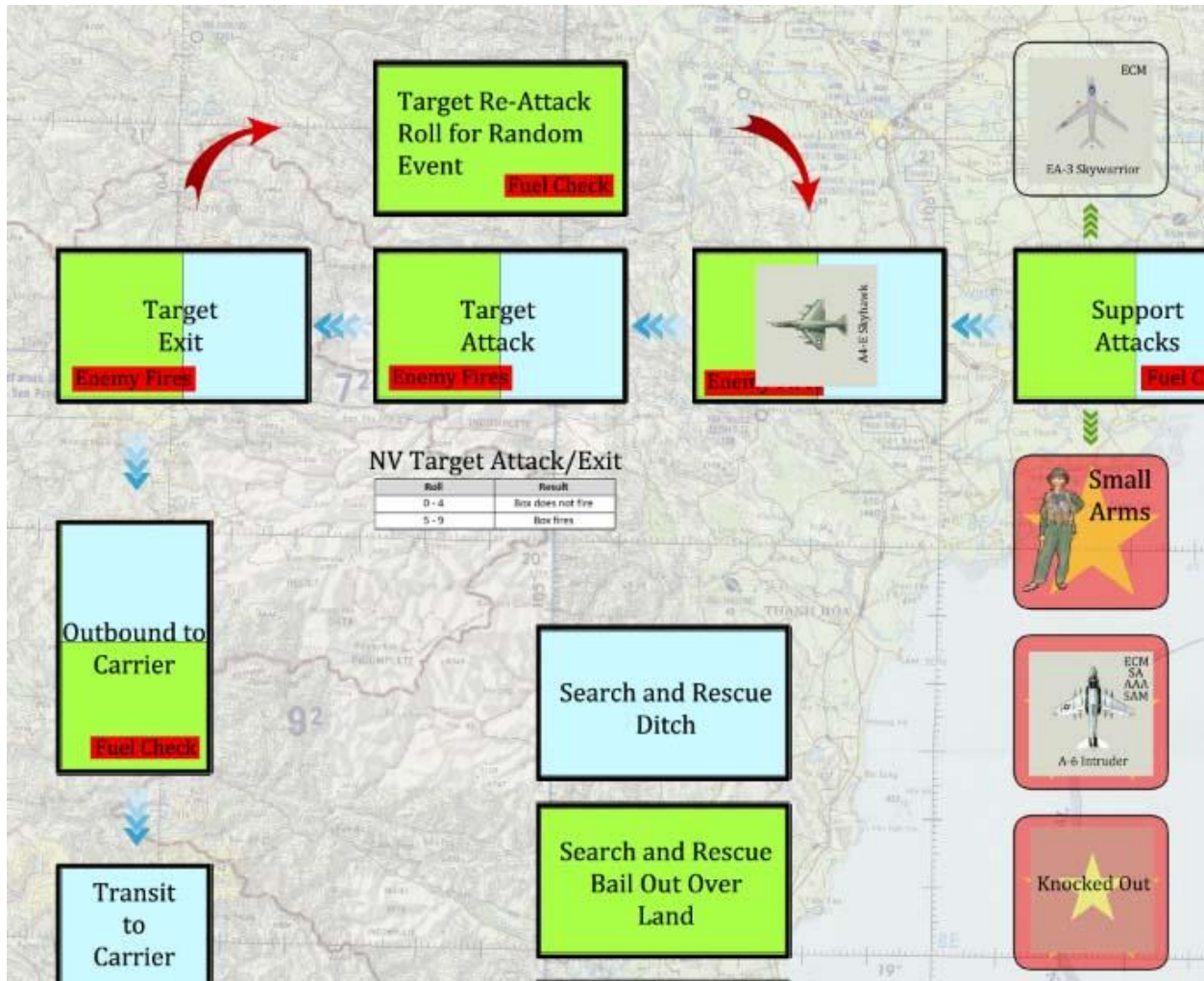
Opposite page: current situation after movement to Re-attack Box.

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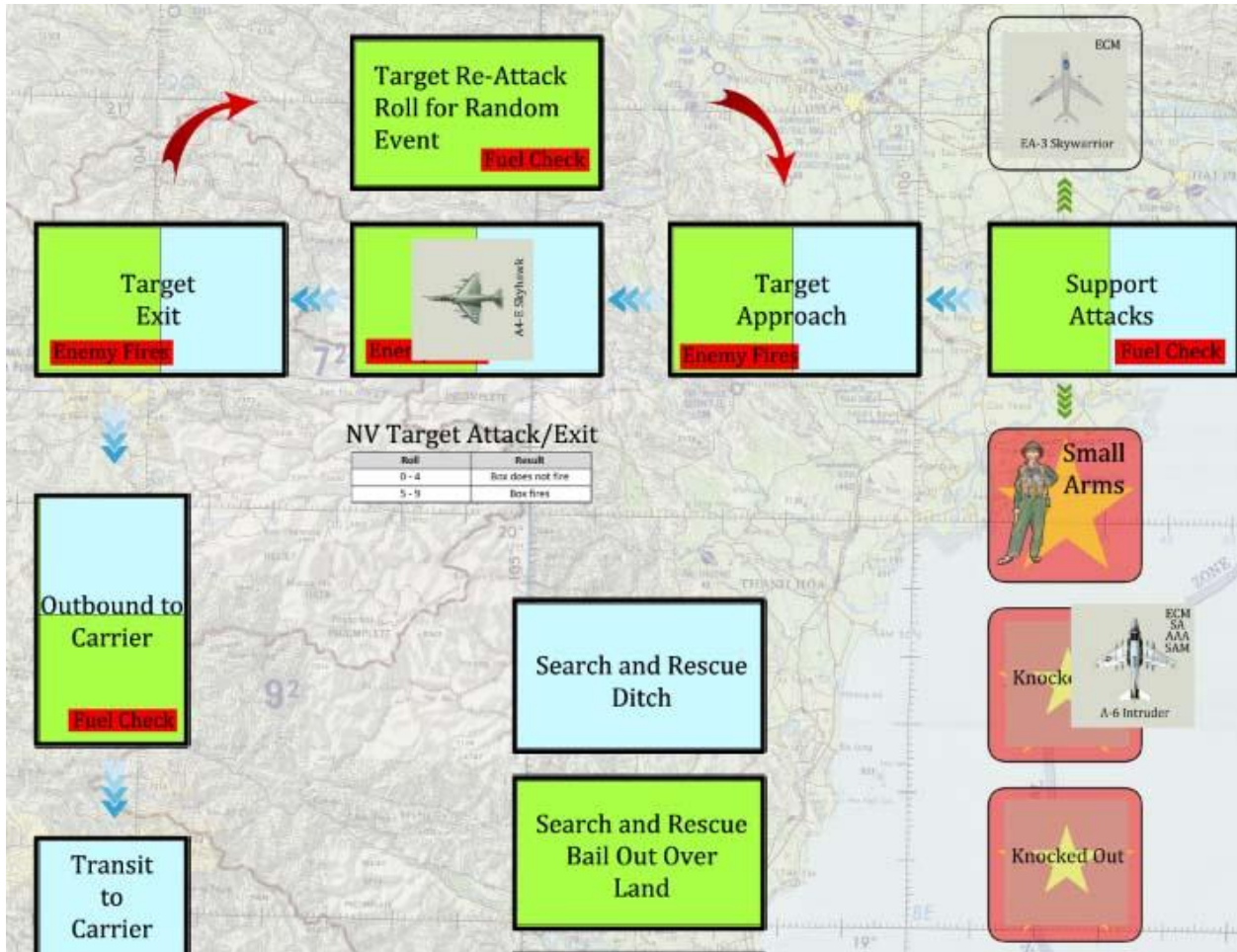
The player's first action in the re-attack box is to do a fuel check. Instead of rolling on Table 7, I am going to use up an external tank. I cross off one of the external tank boxes on the Skyhawk Card. Next, the player rolls to see if a Random event occurs by rolling first on Table 13, and if necessary, on Table 14. I roll a 7 on Table 13 so no random event occurs. I now move to the Target Approach Box.

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I decide to remain at high altitude and the attack cycle repeats itself. My support unit will attack the AAA unit. The unit is allowed to do so since it can attack AAA and his previous target was knocked out. My luck has definitely changed – the intruder knocks out the AAA. There is now no threat to my Skyhawk. I move to the Target Attack Box.

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Since the NV cannot attack, I immediately attempt to drop my 1,000 pounders. I roll a 7 on Table 15.7 and score a hit. Now to see what damage I caused. With the results from table 16, it's 100% (60%+40%) – so 100 points for this round. I remove the 1,000 lb. markers from the Skyhawk Ordnance Card.

I now average the two runs together to get a final score. 190 divided by 2 is 95%, and 95 points. Not bad for my first mission.

I will not make any strafing runs this would have to be done at low altitude. I head to the Target Exit Box. Since the NV can't fire, I move to the Outbound to carrier box. The US Support units are removed from the map.

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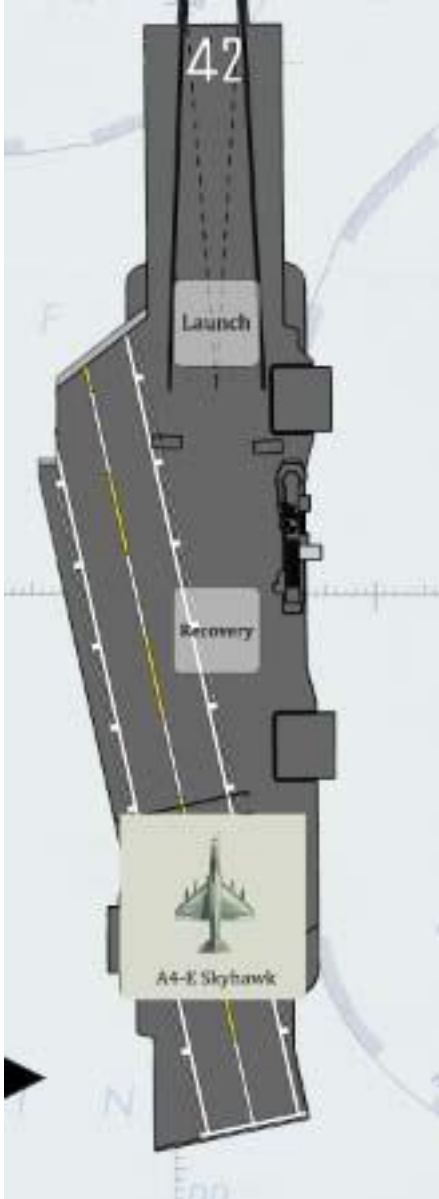
The only action the player performs in the OCB is a fuel check. I have a decision to make: do I roll on Table 7 or do I expend my last external fuel tank? I decide to roll on the Table 7. If there is an adverse result that applies to my next fuel check, I will expend my external tank and forgo the roll on the next fuel check.

Rolling on Table 7, my result is a 7 – fuel ok! The turn complete I now move to the Transit to Carrier and roll on Table 17 to see if any event occurs.

I had a possible system malfunction but, on another roll, to determine which system there was no effect! Whew!

I now move to the Approach to Carrier Box. I expend my last external tank and mark another box off on the Skyhawk Card. I now move to the trap box and attempt to land on the carrier.

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I roll on Table 18 and apply any modifiers. Weather is good and my Skyhawk is in relatively good shape. My landing is a success, and my plane moves to the recovery box on the carrier. The game concludes.

I successfully struck the target and made it home back to the carrier. I earn a victory for this mission. I now see if I may have earned a medal by rolling on Table 22. I roll a 12, none awarded.

The game is over.