

Review: Warplanes! Modern Fighting Aircraft

by Gene Alloway

Type: Education/Entertainment

Publisher: Maris Multimedia Ltd.

Retail Price: \$65.95

Street Price: \$45.00

Requires: 256 Color Macintosh with at least 2 MB free RAM and 1 MB free HD space, though the product can be ran directly off the CD-ROM

Protection: None

It's always welcome to see a new company follow up its first success with another. Maris, the makers of the astronomy program Redshift, have done just that, creating another entertaining reference tool with the same skill and attention to features and quality which should make other companies wince. Warplanes is a new CD-ROM based introduction to the modern world of military aviation, with information on planes, helicopters, ordnance, history, and tactics. Movies, specially created animation and graphics, and maps abound in the product. It is one of the most compelling and complete approaches to this topic in any media, print or digital.

Other products have some relation, but none are as complete. For the Mac, Wild Blue Yonder by Spectrum Holobyte provides interesting period background, and includes more actual footage and discussion of instrumentation, but only covers 20 planes. Jane's All the World's Aircraft is available for the PC (though it costs a great deal) and there is a great deal of discussion of Desert Storm air activities in a number of news-based discs from Time-Warner and CNN, also for the PC. As a complete presentation on the topic, Warplanes rises even above these.

It's An Encyclopedia. The claim Warplanes makes is that the product is the ultimate encyclopedia of military aircraft and aviation. If it does not succeed entirely, it at least comes close, and shows the right way to go. On the Navigator screen, Warplanes allows the user to branch off into a number of areas. The main information sections for aviation include Aircraft Data and Weapons Data. The Aircraft Data covers approximately 530 aircraft from numerous countries including images, photos, and video clips, while the Weapons data covers over 200 systems, from bombs to gun systems. My favorite parts of this section are the aircraft images which allow you to move 360 degrees around, and choose a level view or an

overhead one, and the displays of the disposable weapons fit diagrams for many aircraft types.

The historical and topical discussions are divided into sections on the Cold War in Europe, Arab-Israeli Conflicts, and the Gulf War. Each section includes links to aircraft data on the types used in those arenas, a multimedia discussion of air combat and history, and maps showing deployment of aircraft by era (Six Day War, Yom Kippur War) or by group (U.S. naval aircraft, Coalition aircraft, etc.). Each section also has a stunning image of an actual base or carrier with multiple clickable areas linking the image to data, maps, film clips, and animations. Even the background map provides information on history back to 1976, which seems to more or less be the cutoff point for the product, with the exception of the Six Day War information.

[t's a Game](#). In addition to the multimedia reference materials, there are three well designed flight simulator exercises using aircraft appropriate to the section on missions which reflect the actual use of the aircraft. The three aircraft are the Su-27 on a training mission, an Israeli C-130 in the Peace for Galilee Campaign, and an American A-10 on a strike against an Iraqi armored column. The controls are all keyboard based, but most of the gauges are active, hydraulic, weapon, and flight control systems need to be managed, and view controls are available as well. The different aircraft also do handle differently, which pleasantly surprised me. The missions themselves are challenging and enjoyable, with graphics comparable to Flying Nightmares (all three flight sims on the CD look like they were developed by Domark although you won't find their name anywhere on the flight sims). Overall, the flight sims are entertaining and educational, but they are not to the level of dedicated applications.

Outstanding Features. Warplanes has some very special aspects which make it a product worthy of notice. The approach itself, that of a comprehensive look to military aviation, is worthy of note. It provides a good, broad based introduction into a popular and complex topic. Few products will take on such a challenge when creating a reference work. It is an enormous undertaking to gather, integrate, and present such a body of information. I especially appreciated the availability of ordinance and aircraft information, which allowed me to see what type of weapons systems are used on an aircraft and how they are fixed.

The feature which really makes this approach work is the relational organization of the material. Links are everywhere. Links to sounds, maps, images, data, and animations provide the user with a world of hyper-information in every screen. The base images provide a great interface to the linked data. If a user clicks on the control tower, they can see deployment. If they click on a bomb or aircraft in for picture, they get data on that object from the appropriate data set. It is the best use of linked multimedia information I've seen since I was introduced to Mosaic on the Internet.

Maris has also provided superb and unusual graphics throughout the program. Many of the aircraft have images made for the disc, rather than relying on stock footage from government sources. The bases, 3D aircraft models, and maps are especially striking and nicely rendered. The quality of the animations, of an A-10 strike, Israeli anti-radar missions, and Patriot defense for example, are outstanding in both their look and their illustration of particular points. I was floored when I first saw them. It was obvious they had spent some time on making them look and work right. I hope it sets a precedent.

How Does It Fly? Using Warplanes is relatively simple, though it is wise to keep the manual nearby at first, especially if going through the flight simulators. In most instances, the action of a particular link is described by a one line blurb at the bottom left of the screen. This comes up automatically when the cursor moves over an active link. It is not easy to get lost, even with multiple links. Most of the information you might want is within three clicks, which helps you keep your place in mind as you go along. The navigation screen is nicely presented, and provides you with easy access into the product. There is always a Navigator button available should you feel you are too far in to get back to where you started.

ust about every question you might want to ask is provided in the content, so a user will not come away from Warplanes with their initial expectations dashed. Searching is possible for aircraft and weapons data, so one does not have to wander around to find specific information. Major weapon systems and aircraft are very well represented, and are both informative and thorough. However, as a user gets more experienced with the system and realizes exactly what is on the disc, I think it is inevitable that they will want more information.

As with any CD-ROM product, especially has game elements, speed is a concern. However, running on a Mac IIsi with a double speed CD-ROM player, Warplanes was not slow. The simulators take some time to load, but overall both play and moving around in the application went at a good pace. Links activate with a simple click, transitions are smooth, and movies match their sound. You will not have to go for a beer while you are waiting for the screen to change.

The flight sims play very well, but there is little replay value here. Whereas many flight sims provide a number of missions that may or may not build into a campaign or story.

Wish List. It is the wealth of information and its integration in Warplanes which seem to make me want more. I was disappointed to see that discussions on Vietnam or the Falklands were not included, for these add a lot to the understanding of the role of aviation in modern combat. More sidebar information, in text and audio, on tactics, aces, or memorable combat missions would be great to see. I think these would add more to a broader history of warplanes and such information is not difficult to come by.

For the hardcore aircraft fan, engine data, more models of aircraft (and variations) and avionics information might be useful. A casual user may eventually want more historical information, aircraft models and animations. These would make a very good product more complete and are not problems. I merely believe an ultimate encyclopedia should be a little more broad in its coverage, especially of events within the last few years.

Summary. Simply put, Warplanes is the best consumer resource for military aviation information available. It presents a quality, broad based approach to a very exciting topic, relying on both original and outside resources to meet its goals. The use of multimedia is intelligent and at times even inspired. Content could be more complete from an historical standpoint, but Warplanes is an excellent reference, and one worthy of following in the footsteps of Redshift. If you are interested in military aircraft or aviation history or want to learn more than your regular flight sim provides, this is an incomparable addition to your library.

Pros

- Superb graphics and animations, many created just for this product
- Integrated information

- Good interface
- Comprehensive approach
- Interesting flight simulations

Cons

- Not comprehensive in historical content
- Much information audio only; audio with text better