

# The Israeli War of Independence, 1948-49

## A DOWN IN FLAMES Campaign

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The 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli conflict involved a number of factors that make it an interesting topic for a *DOWN IN FLAMES* campaign. It was the last major war in which no jet aircraft were employed. More significantly, a wide variety of aircraft were employed by the combatants. The Israelis employed British, American and Czech aircraft. The Arabs flew British, American and a handful of Italian airplanes.

An international arms embargo prevented the newly established Jewish state from gaining weapons from any of the world's major powers, so the Israelis were forced to equip their fledgling air force by clandestine means. The Israelis succeeded in obtaining a wide variety of aircraft types, but could get only a handful of any given design—a logistical nightmare.

The first aircraft acquired by the *Cheyl Cha'Avir*, the Israeli air force, were light observation aircraft of limited military utility such as the Piper Cub and the Taylorcraft Auster. In late April 1948, however, Czechoslovakia, needing hard currency, offered to sell Israel all of its remaining Avia 5.199's (a variant of the Messerschmitt Bf109 built in Prague). Because it had an engine originally designed for bombers, the S.199 performed poorly (the Czechs nicknamed it the *Mezek* or mule) but it bore the brunt of the fighting in the early days of the war, primarily as a fighter and ground attack aircraft.

The S.199's were delivered to Israel in Curtiss C-46 Commando transports, which had been acquired earlier by the Israelis and were later pressed into service as makeshift bombers. The Israelis also had a number of other cargo aircraft, mostly Douglas Dakotas (ex-RAF C-47 Skytrains), which were also used for bombing missions. Of course, these converted transports lacked bombsights and bomb racks, so their crews simply rolled the bombs out of the cargo

During the ceasefire of the summer of 1948, the Israelis renewed their efforts to acquire more combat aircraft. The scrap yards of the former RAF airfields in Israel provided enough parts for the Israelis to build several Supermarine Spitfires of various marks. A few more Spitfires were built out of the wreckage of Egyptian machines shot down during the early part of the conflict. In mid-July, the Israelis managed to add three B-17G Flying Fortresses to their inventory. These airplanes had been smuggled out of the United States in haste and were missing important equipment such as gun turrets, bombsights and oxygen tanks. But the single most significant addition to the *Cheyl Cha'Avir* in the ceasefire period was a couple of squadrons of Spitfire IX's purchased from Czechoslovakia. The first of these were delivered in June. The rest arrived in Israel on an irregular schedule over the next few months.

As the war progressed, the Israelis acquired a few more types of combat aircraft, most notably North American P-51D Mustangs, Bristol Beaufighters and North American Harvards (ex-RAF T-6 Texans). The Israelis usually got just three or four of each, so they would assign one to be a source of spare parts and use the rest in combat.

Other aircraft operated by the Israelis include the Noorduyn C-64 Norseman, Lockheed Hudson, Douglas C-54 Skymaster and deHavilland Dragon Rapide. They also made arrangements to buy some P-40 Warhawks and A-20 Havocs. These deals fell through, however, and none of the aircraft ever reached Israel. A small force of deHavilland Mosquito bombers arrived too late to see action in the war.

The various Arab nations had much less colorful air arms. As former British outposts, most were equipped with castoff RAF aircraft. The Egyptians had the largest air force, flying Spitfire V's and IX's, Westland

Lysanders and Douglas Dakotas. Like the Israelis, the Egyptians used their transports as bombers. They also operated the only type of non-RAF aircraft to serve with an Arab state during the conflict—the Macchi M.C. 205.<sup>2</sup> The Syrians and Iraqis were less well equipped, fighting with nothing more advanced than a couple of squadrons of Harvards. Yet, they were better off than the Jordanians and Lebanese, who had no modern aircraft at all.

Despite the limited number of aircraft involved, the air war was quite intense. The majority of the activity was in support of the ground war. Both sides accorded high priority to missions against enemy troops, supply routes and other tactical targets. However, a number of strategic missions were attempted as well—Tel Aviv, Cairo, Damascus and Amman were all bombed during the conflict, although little material damage was done. Several bombers were shot down on these raids, but for the most part, air-to-air combat was a relatively rare occurrence. Neither the Arabs nor Israelis had very many airplanes, so encounters between aircraft were usually accidental. A number of Israeli pilots did, however, score multiple aerial victories during the conflict. These include Modi Alon, Joseph Doyle (whose four kills made him the highest-scoring airman of the war), Rudolph Augarten and Joseph McElroy. McElroy's victory total is rather unusual in that two of his three kills were British, not Arab, aircraft.

Britain's Royal Air Force was involved in the fighting throughout the war. Israel had been controlled by the British until independence was declared on May 15, 1948 and the British maintained a presence in Israel even after the Arab invasion. In

1. The Israelis referred to them as "messers" (knives). "Messerschmitt" is German for knifemaker.

2. The identity of these aircraft is disputed; some sources describe them as Fiat G.55's.

# Israeli War: DOWN IN FLAMES Campaign

late May, a number of RAF aircraft at Ramat David airfield in central Israel were bombed and strafed by Egyptian aircraft. The British withdrew from Israel soon thereafter. They did, however, continue to look after their interests in the Middle East, relying primarily on their bomber and fighter squadrons based in Egypt. These aircraft saw considerable action. In the latter part of the war, as the Israelis penetrated into Egyptian territory, the British became concerned that the Suez Canal might be threatened. To demonstrate their displeasure, the British made several penetrations into Israeli airspace in January 1949. These intrusions were met with force and a number of British aircraft (including Spitfires, Tempests and Mosquitoes) were shot down by the Israelis.

This campaign will provide the *DOWN IN FLAMES* player with an unusual challenge-combat between two perfectly matched aircraft. Players will have the opportunity to pit two aircraft of the same type against each other, depending on their skill and luck, instead of their aircraft's performance, for victory. It should be an interesting experience.

## RULES

This campaign is to be played according to current *DiF* usage (*RotL* campaign and resource rules, *SAF* dogfighting and bomber rules). In addition to the aircraft cards included with this campaign, players will need the following aircraft cards from earlier *DiF* games:

- From *SAF*: 3x B-17G, 2x Spitfire XIV, 2x Spitfire IX, 2x P-51D
- From *RotL*: 2x Spitfire V

This campaign requires targets from both *RotL* and *SAF*.

## Hand-Held Bombing

*Both the Arabs and the Israelis flew bombing missions with aircraft not designed for the role. These ranged from light observation types (the pilots of which dropped bombs by hand from the cockpit) to converted transport aircraft (from which bombs were simply rolled out of the cargo doors) to interceptors modified in the field to carry a small number of light bombs. These desperate measures enabled both sides to conduct missions against ground targets despite the unsuitability of the aircraft available to them.*

Hand-held bombing may be performed only by aircraft at Very Low or Low Altitude. When hand-held bombing takes place, draw a number of action cards equal to the bombing airplane's bomb rating. If the airplane is at Very Low Altitude, draw an additional card. Refer to the Strafing Results section of the Action card. Results will be either a "Hit"

or a "Miss." A hit inflicts one point of damage on the target; a miss does no damage. Should the controlling player so desire, an airplane that has performed hand-held bombing may also Strafe the target (if otherwise qualified to do so). Note: Target Flak is increased by one against bombing aircraft flying at Very Low Altitude.

## New Resources

**British Intervention.** Draw one random Action card and refer to its color. Consult the following table to determine its effect:

- Red-Bordered card:** Disregard the mission/target drawn and play mission #12 instead. The Israeli player defends with one element of (RAF) Spitfire XIV's. The Israeli player scores no VPs for damage done by the RAF aircraft.
- Any other card:** Play mission/target as drawn. The Israeli player receives one element of Avia S.199's.

**British Overflight.** Draw one random Action card and refer to its color. Consult the following table to determine its effect:

- Red-Bordered card:** Disregard the mission/target drawn and play mission #18 instead. The Arab player controls the element of (RAF) Spitfire XIV's. The Arab player scores no Victory Points for damage done by the RAF aircraft.
- Any other card:** Play mission/target as drawn. The Arab player receives one element of Spitfire IX's.

**Fighter-Bombers.** Your fighters may start the mission carrying bombs.

**Mistaken Identity.** The player choosing this resource ("Player A") receives an element of the aircraft type indicated bearing the markings of his opponent ("Player B"). Player A may operate these aircraft as his own, without any restrictions (he must abide by the rules, of course), until his opponent, Player B, reestablishes control of the element. Player B draws one action card at the beginning of his turn, starting with turn two, to determine if he reestablishes control over the element. If the card has a blue border, control of the element is transferred to Player B. When control of the element changes hands, all surviving aircraft in the element immediately become neutral (not engaged) in relation to ALL other aircraft in the game. They do not change altitude. Player A passes any cards remaining in the hand of the element leader, if any, to player B. Any damage inflicted by or on the aircraft of the element remain as is. For Victory Point purposes, the element is considered to belong to Player B throughout the game, no matter which player controls it at games' end.

## Special Rules: Aircraft

**B-17G's.** To represent the missing turrets, bombsights and oxygen tanks, the following rules apply to the Israeli B 17G's in this campaign:

- The Norden Bombsight bonus may not be used.
- Turret Defense is reduced to 1.
- Turret Support is reduced to 1.
- The B-17 may not fly at High or Very High altitude (remember it may bomb only from Low or Very Low Altitude).

**C-47 Dakota.** The Dakota cards provided with this campaign have neutral (American) markings because both the Arab and Israeli player can use them. The Dakotas in missions 1, 11, and 13 are Arab (Egyptian).

The Dakotas in missions 15, 16, and 19 are Israeli. Transport missions involving the C-47 Dakota take place at Low or Medium altitude. Bombing missions involving the C-47 may take place at Low or Very Low Altitude.

**T-6 Harvard.** The Harvard cards provided with this campaign have neutral (American) markings because both the Arab and Israeli player can use them. The Harvards in missions 10 and 13 are Arab (Syrian). The Harvards in missions 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 17 are Israeli.

**Spitfire IX.** The Israeli and Egyptian Spitfire IX cards provided with this campaign differ from the Spitfire IX cards from *SAF*. Use the Spitfire IX cards from this campaign whenever possible.

However, there will be times that the Egyptian player will need two elements of Spitfire IX's-one pair assigned as mission assets, the other made available as resources. In this case, the Egyptian player should use the Spitfire IX cards from *SAF*, which do NOT carry bombs, as his resource aircraft.

**Aircraft Classes.** Because the Arabs and Israelis both used aircraft for purposes for which they were not originally designed, players may not be able to identify the roles in which the various aircraft are being used in this campaign. For the purposes of calculating Victory Points for aircraft damage and destruction, use the following guidelines:

**FIGHTERS:** Avia S.199, all Spitfires (when used as fighters)

**LIGHT BOMBERS:** Harvard, Lysander, Auster

**MEDIUM BOMBERS:** Dakota (when used for bombing)

**HEAVY BOMBERS:** B-17G

**TRANSPORT:** Dakota (when used for transport)

**PATROL:** Spitfire XIV (when used for patrol)

## MISSION NOTES

In mission # 18, the patrol aircraft are British Spitfire XIV's operated by the RAF. They are controlled by the Arab player. The Israeli player is the defender. He employs whatever resource aircraft (if any) he receives as result of an option.

The writer acknowledges that the bombers in this campaign carry too few bombs to do any substantial damage to the "City" target in mission #15, but wanted to include it to convey the flavor of the campaign. When *ZERO!* is published, the "Small City" target from that game may be substituted for the *SAF* "City" target in mission #15, if both players agree.

