

# review: A-10 Attack!

by Ron Hunt

Type: Flight Simulation

Publisher: Parsoft (214/479-1340)

Retail Price: \$79.95

Street Price: \$48.00

Requires: 68030 or later, 4MB RAM, System 7.0 or later, 13" color monitor

Protection: None

Power Mac Native: Partially accelerated for Power Macintosh

adies and Gentleman...the long anticipated wait is over. She's not the prettiest thing on the block, but I can assure you that the thought of her coming over the horizon has got every tank jockey, SAM operator, and supply ship commander on the other side shaking in their boots! She's known as the A-10 "Warthog." She's ugly, mean, and she'll pack a punch like nothing you've ever had your hands on before! A-10 Attack! is here and Mac flight simmers can experience history in the making. This flight simulation has taken the virtual flight experience on home computers a quantum step forward!

Eric Parker earned his claim to fame with the creation of Hellcats Over The Pacific. At a time when the only other Mac flight simulations were in black and white, Hellcats was a step ahead. It operated on any 68020 Macintosh and supported multiple screen sizes as well as multiple monitors, plus it was in color. The computer controlled artificial intelligence (know as AI) was very good and the missions offered some random changes keeping game playability high. Hellcats was not elaborate by any means, you could do things with the Hellcats F6F that could never be done with a real airplane. The difference was that it created the "feel" of flying. Whether you wanted to experience the shoot em up quality of the missions or just play around with the takeoffs and landings, the game was just plain fun! It remains on my hard drive today as one of my favorite games!

As flight simulation games have evolved on home computers, the cries have gone out for more realistic aircraft, flight models, and weapons. The hunger for entering that virtual "Walter Mitty" world has grown stronger with every new flight simulation game release. A-10 Attack! answers that call and immerses you in a virtual world that is beautifully rendered

and as realistic as any ever created. The attention to detail is truly incredible!

**Fueling Up.** Included with The A-10 Attack! software are two databases, two sets of missions, a training manual (on disk), a VBE PPC plug-in and various joystick files. The total hard drive space required is just over 11 MB. The databases consist of "Training", set in Arizona with four missions, and "Germany", with eight missions.

Parsoft's design concept is what makes this simulation so unique and exciting for the future. The software is built around the main simulation engine and will utilize VBE modules to add features to the program. VBE or Virtual Battlefield Environment as the phrase has been coined, will allow additional aircraft, vehicles, tanks, missions, or whatever to be added to the simulation as they become available. The manual states that future VBE software modules may include the ability to fly other aircraft, control a SAM site, command of a battalion of tanks, or operate high speed torpedo boats. The possibilities are endless!

he simulation starts out with a screen offering you various choices on how you would like to play the game. Quick Start, Missions, Pilots, and Network (not yet implemented with this release) are the choices you start with.

"Quick Start" will be very familiar to those who have tried the demo version of A-10 Attack! because it is comprised of the same two missions that were included in the demo. They start on a small island and offer the opportunity of "Fly the A-10", with no enemies, or the "Attack!" mission containing two MiGs and various ground targets that shoot back! These provide, as the name implies, a quick start with minimum planning. Choosing either of these missions places you directly in the cockpit ready to fly. The weapons in the "Attack!" version of the Quick Start mission are predetermined and cannot be selected by the user.

“Missions” will give you the choice of first choosing the theater, then selecting the missions. Germany and Training are the theaters available with this release. A map shows the general terrain layout with each theater chosen. While the missions in training involve bringing you and your Hog together as a team, the missions in Germany grow increasingly harder with enemies determined that you and your squad never return to your home field.

“Pilots” brings up a list of available flyers and supplies information for each. Name, Rank, Call Sign, Serial Number, Date of Induction, Date of Rank, and Score are shown by selecting any pilots name from the menu. Other information available include Pilot’s Ribbons, Medals, and Kills. A “Hog Heaven” high score list is also available to keep track of scores and show the status of available pilots or those long gone.

“Network” was not implemented at the time of the release of version 1.0. The manual states that soon up to four players will be allowed to play the simulation over a network in the same theater, either as wing men or adversaries.

Choosing a mission in a theater will display a large map of the mission area, a “Briefing” window, and “Tool” pallet. The Briefing window explains the mission at hand and what you must accomplish. The Tool pallet provides tools with which the waypoints are created and provides total control of the mission map. Chits (small squares) on the map show friendly and enemy aircraft, boats, tanks, and radar units, providing various information about each. The enemy Chits will come and go as each of these forces are identified visually or on radar. Friendly Chits are programmable and provide the meat and potatoes of how you will plan and accomplish the mission at hand.

The learning curve from this point on is a little steeper than some of the other games you’ve played out of the box. While it’s been said that if you give a monkey a typewriter he’ll eventually learn how to type, it wouldn’t hurt if he could read the book first. The book itself along with the Training Manual might appear to be a little thin in places to a novice flyer. For instance, the manual explains most of the weapons in a short overview but does not explain what a Rockeye cluster bomb is or how to use it. There is, however, a short description in the Training Manual. Most experienced simulation flyers will have little trouble. But to effectively learn how to program the chits and operate the Hog, the Operating Manual and Training Manual are recommended reading.

**Getting Ready.** Each available A-10 in a mission is programmable. A list of available pilots can be displayed in the Briefing window, and clicking and dragging a pilot to an A-10’s chit will place him in that particular plane. Pull down menus on each aircraft chit allow waypoints and weapon loadouts to be planned. A visiting option is also available for all identified chits, friendly and enemy alike. Visiting allows you to enter the virtual world at that unit’s location. You can slew the view around or zoom the view in and out to see the action around the area. The computer’s AI is very good. The simulation is just as fun and interesting to watch from a visitors point of view as it is playing within the game yourself. The units interact and defend themselves just as you would expect they should. The days of computer lame-brain wing men are over! You can actually program the game and visit each unit chit to watch the action take place.

The Weapon Loadout window shows a frontal view of the Hog and gives you total control over weapons, fuel, and misc. equipment while keeping track of the Hog’s diet or gross weight. Available weapons are grouped by type in pull down menus. Highlighting a weapon will display a picture of that weapon while arrows point to the stations where it is allowed to be loaded. Click on the station and the weapon chosen appears in the picture, loaded on your Hog. As each item is added. the gross weight on the Hog increases. Keep in mind that a

fat Hog cannot get it self out of trouble as quickly as a smartly loaded one!

Within most of the missions, one of the A-10's has a set of waypoints already programmed. This provides an easy overview of where the target is located. Other friendly support aircraft may also have waypoints programmed or may allow programming to offer support needed for the mission. These include F-16's, F-15's, Tornado's, and C-5's. While these other planes can have waypoints programmed and specific actions planned over the waypoints, the weapons are predetermined and unchangeable and they can only be visited, not flown.

The Waypoint window provides a list of waypoints programmed or allows new waypoints to be programmed. Each waypoint can be set by the user with altitudes, airspeeds, and targets to be addressed at that waypoint or along the way. The waypoint window has a TACAN on/off button. TACAN stands for TACTical Air Navigation and pressing the "On" button will start that aircraft on its way to follow the instructions set in the flight plan. Any A-10 can be manned by a pilot of your choice or the computer will take over for you as soon as the TACAN button is pressed. You must, however, place a pilot in each aircraft that you want to take command of. This can be done before or during the mission.

**Take-Off.** How does it fly? In a word-awesome! This is by far the most realistic flight model I've ever witnessed on a home computer. A full-motion simulator would be the only thing better. Other flight simulations on the Mac use lookup tables to create a flight model. It requires a lot of information and it's difficult to incorporate every possibility of what could happen to an aircraft in flight, let alone on the ground.

In its quest for realism, Parsoft designed an advanced physics model that accurately simulates the aerodynamic forces and moments which act on an airframe in normal flight. This makes the A-10 act and react to other objects and forces as a real pilot would expect it should. All of the control surfaces are movable, the nose gear is steerable, and each landing gear is modeled as a separate mechanical system, bending or breaking with excessive abuse. Wing tips can be broken off, tails partially ripped or shot off and the Hog still flies reacting as it really would to its new design! Also each weapon is modeled to perform as it would in the real world. Laser-guided Paveways fly to their targets, Durandals hang on their chutes before firing their rockets and blasting through runways, cluster bombs break open and spread their bomblets prior to impact, and AIM-9's growl and moan at heat sources.

I cannot say enough about how impressed I am with the flight model. It is simply the best I have ever flown on a home computer, period! For desk jet jockeys, I think this will come as somewhat of a surprise. Many of the flight simulations in the past have made flying the aircraft too easy, while some have made it too hard. All the controls in A-10 Attack! work correctly and the aircraft responds as it should. Lowering the gear or flaps, stomping on the rudder or dropping munitions off of just one side create truly believable changes in the aircraft attitude and trim. This is what it really feels like, and my hat is off to Parsoft.

The cockpit is fully interactive and a true representation of the real aircraft which was designed in the 1970's after Vietnam. Not a lot of whistles and bells, just seat of the pants, in your face, flying action! All of the instruments, including the clock, work! (I can't even say that about the last car I bought.) They are faithfully reproduced and appear very realistic. The artificial horizon is the best I've ever seen and it, along with the other instruments, work flawlessly. Many of the switches and buttons can be operated with the mouse cursor. As it moves over an interactive switch, the cursor changes to a hand or arrow showing the direction the switch will move. One click and you've rotated a knob, flipped a switch, pulled a handle or pushed a button. These switches and controls are also controllable from the keyboard.

Flight information is available on a Heads Up Display or from the analog instruments. There are two forward views of the instrument panel. A heads up view, with the HUD and important weapon and flight instruments, and a heads down view which shows the entire instrument panel and allows you to make adjustments to the armament control panel and chaff/flare control panel as well as see all the engine instruments. The flight instruments in the heads down view are easy to read compared to other simulations and make flying the Hog a snap while in this view!

The Armament Control Panel is a work of art in itself and is also a faithful reproduction of the real McCoy! Eleven stations are available to hang weapons from. Stations can be armed separately, in pairs or all at once and release modes are as follows:

SGL - releases weapons one at a time (normal start-up position)

PRS - releases pairs

JETT - jettisons armed stations

RIP PRS - Ripple pairs. - Along with this are two other controls, the Ripple Quantity and Ripple Interval. For instance, if the RIP QTY was set to 2 and the RIP INTVL was set to 25, two pairs of bombs would be dropped at 25 millisecond intervals.

RIP SGL - Ripple single (see above)

This is where the Training missions really come in handy. Each station light/arming button indicates if the station is armed, disarmed, selected or empty. It takes time to learn and understand these systems so you can quickly get what you want when you want it! As in the real world, taking the time to fiddle with these buttons a few feet off the deck or with a stream of AAA coming at you may result in a very loud boom!

Weapons available include:

AIM-9L Sidewinder Missiles

General purpose Iron bombs

Mk82

Mk83

Mk84

Retarded-

Mk82 High Drag bombs

Laser-guided Bombs

Mk82 Paveway

Mk83 Paveway

Mk84 Paveway

CBU-15 Durandal anti-runway bombs

Rockeye Cluster Bombs

## Hyper-velocity Rockets

AGM-88A HARM

AGM-114A Hellfire

AGM-65B Electro-optical Maverick

AGM-65D Infra-red Maverick

AGM-65E laser-guided Maverick

The simulation on a whole is incredible! The attention to detail is amazing and fun to watch and discover; for instance,

- Runway lights work and VASI (Visual Approach Slope Indicators) at the runway end gives you a visual "Red over White" indication of being on the correct glide slope to the runway.
- The weapons you load are visible on the wings.
- From the external view you can watch the flight controls move realistically and the nose wheel turn when taxiing.
- The stars come out at night and recognizable constellations with the proper light intensity are visible.
- The terrain is beautiful, intricate and provides real masking effects when heading to targets.
- Gun turrets turn to follow their targets, tanks lob shells and explosions vary with intensity according to what shell or bomb was dropped.
- Enemy and friendly aircraft respond to anything that enters their radar range and SAM missiles can be seen leaving the ground in a plume of white smoke.
- Cities appear complete with drive-in theaters, churches, racetracks and businesses.
- Wind can be simulated to make those takeoffs, landings and weapon deliveries a little more interesting and challenging.
- In the training area you can chase Mirage aircraft into and through a canyon. Fly past the yacht club, the capitol building, complete with fountain, through a tunnel or taxi down a winding road into a mining pit. (Watch out for the heavy equipment!)
- The wing men are intelligent and can be seen firing missiles and dropping bombs on assigned targets from your plane in the heat of battle.

You can get the most realistic control out of the simulation by using a full Thrustmaster setup; however, any Mac-supported joystick will work just fine. The keyboard and mouse also offer control of the A-10 and I must say that it's the easiest flight simulator to control using just the mouse that I can remember flying!

A host of details and preferences are allowed to best fit the simulation to your liking; for instance:

The wind can be turned on or off.

When you look at the sun it blinds you by washing out the colors, and that option can be turned on or off.

You can make your A-10 indestructible.

You can enable easy weapons hits.

You can enable unlimited cannon rounds or weapons reloading in flight.

Graphic detail can also be adjusted to help with the frame rate and optimize the program to your machine.

The program is not completely accelerated for PPC machines, but a VBE module comes with the software. If you own a PPC Mac, take the PPC file out of its folder and place it next to the A-10 Attack! program icon. They must be on the same level of the same folder to work. I tested the program on a Centris 650 with an Apple PPC card. The planning mode of the program is obviously running in emulation. It takes a few seconds longer to load the missions and switch into the simulation mode. Once in the plane, however, I could find no major frame rate difference between PPC mode and regular 68040 mode (although a few people have told me it runs like a dog on their Power Macs). This is a major, welcome change from the original demo. A fully accelerated A-10 is in the works now and promises some great new features.

on the down side there have been a few bugs reported:

Some crashes happen when switching back and forth from the simulation to map window several times.

Some monitors cause a strange effect to happen when turning off the instrument panel art.

The program crashes when viewing the impact of the Rockeye cluster bombs in the training missions.

The CCIP aiming reticle doesn't seem to work quite right during high altitude, high angle bomb runs. The target reticle is very hard to see below the instrument panel, for now you have to use the LAR method.....(Looks About Right). At low altitudes and high speeds the CCIP works well but beware of toasting yourself as well as the enemy!

The manual shows a "Save" feature but it's not included in the release of version 1.0. It's somewhat frustrating to elaborately plan a mission and lose it all after a ground maneuver mishap or being bit by a bug.

I was unable to print the Training Manual that loads from the program disk. However, included with the IMG CD is a re-release of the Training Manual from Parsoft in MS Word Text format. (Problem solved.)

While it's not really a bug some may notice that the sun actually rises in the west and sets in the east.

Some nice additions to the simulation would be some sort of replay feature, the ability to copy waypoints and weapon loads between aircraft, and definitely a "Save" feature. Parsoft knows about these and other problems and promises a quick fix for most soon.

This much realism may not be for everyone. My 9-year-old son likes to fly the plane but had difficulty getting into anything but the Quick Start missions at first. The mission planning can be involved and take a little time to learn. After spending some time with him, I'm pleased to announce that he can now get into the missions and is having as much fun as I am.

**A Must Have!** To sum it up, I must say that this is a new, magnificent, and breath-taking step forward in flight simulation on the Macintosh. If you enjoy flight simulations, this is an absolute must have!

There are many things I have not covered in this review and I'm sure many things I have yet to discover. A-10 Attack! is everything that flight simulation fanatics have wanted and more. Parsoft says the future is VBE and since this is just the beginning, I think it's safe to say that the future looks very bright! Good hunting!

#### Pros

- Incredible flight physics model
- Comprehensive mission planning abilities
- Intelligent computer AI
- Realistic Graphics
- Great attention to detail

#### Cons



- No Save feature
- No replay feature
- CCIP doesn't seem to work right
- Only 8 real missions available at this time