

Skyfox

1985 Electronic Arts
Programmed by Raymond Tobey

Most text of the present article comes from the review published in the fifth issue of the British C64 magazine ZZAP!64 (September 1985).



SKYFOX

Electronic Arts/Ariolasoft, £9.95 cass, £12.95 disk, joystick with keys

Firstly, let me get something straight: this is not a flight simulation -- it's a fight simulation. Skyfox puts you in the flying seat of the latest jet fighter plane defending a land of frightened colonists from the marauding forces of invading aliens. The game takes place over the colony, or combat arena, (represented as a grid) of 25 by 25 squares (sectors) with tanks, enemy planes and motherships to contend with. All action takes place within this grid and should you leave it, a tone sounds and a warning message is given.



You are given three lives and can choose one of five difficulty levels, from the easiest (Cadet) to the hardest (Ace of the Base), to play any one of fifteen different scenarios (ranging from simple tank and enemy plane training to full scale invasions and specific enemy invasion patterns). Tank training pits you against nothing but tanks, and plane training, planes (plane training three puts you up against planes and tanks). High/low training throws tanks at you followed by planes, combo training gives you both at once. A small invasion consists of one mothership (a sort of floating city) that must be destroyed before it

launches enough planes and tanks to destroy your base. Full invasion has three motherships attacking, and the massive onslaught has six! The five different attack strategies each follow specific patterns that must be studied and understood.

SKYFOX -- THE PLANE

The Skyfox plane is fully equipped to cope with all situations that may arise (providing the pilot is up to it, of course), coming fully armed with laser cannon, heat seeking missiles and guided missiles. The laser cannon is activated by simply pressing the fire button and an unlimited number of shots are instantly at your disposal. Heat seeking and guided missiles on the other hand, are in short supply, with only five of each being provided, and they must be primed before firing. Shields surround the plane as limited protection but diminish with each direct hit against you (on higher levels, hitting the ground weakens the shield heavily). Shield strength, along with fuel, can thankfully be replenished by landing at home base.



The speed of the plane is controlled by the keyboard. Pressing numbers from nought to nine gives you respective percentage speeds (eg pressing 1 gives you ten percent of maximum speed) and slight adjustments of 100 mph can be made. Sudden bursts of speed are also possible by engaging the plane's afterburners, but this proves expensive on fuel, so careful use of this function should be made. There are indicators either side of the control panel to show fuel and shield status along with numerous other things such as speed, altitude, current compass heading (in degrees), your current X/Y coordinates, a clock (to show elapsed time since launch), number of heat seekers, guided missiles and a radar scanner display.

SKYFOX -- THE BASE COMPUTER

At any time during the game you can call up your base computer to keep track as to what's going on (provided your home base hasn't been destroyed)! The computer allows you to check on your score (plus a summary of how many colonists are living/dead, how many tanks, planes and motherships have been destroyed etc), check on shield status for each installation (and which, if any, are still functional) and plan your tactics on a tactical map (a simplified map of what is where). You can also zoom up on a particular sector to see exactly what is there.

To cut out needless and monotonous flying around in search of aliens to kill, there is an auto pilot function. When there are no enemy targets to be seen, activating the on-board computer-controlled auto pilot will speed your craft to the vicinity of the nearest enemy. If you've disposed of all the enemy, then you'll be taken back to home base instead.



Software seems to have made a sudden leap forward this month, what with Summer Games II and now Skyfox, it shows that the ever increasing quality of software on the 64 is still striving to reach its peak. Skyfox is a state-of-the-art 3D shoot-em-up. The graphics are absolutely stunning with a really convincing view-through-the-cockpit-type 3D scenario. The idea behind the game is rather a crusty one -- defend your base from the marauding invaders -- but the approach is a novel one.

Although being a flight simulator type game, there's sophisticated auto-guidance systems, missiles and a computer to help you on your tricky task of destroying the whole of the invading force single handedly. There are motherships, tanks, heat-seekers and planes to destroy, and all come towards you in stunningly realistic 3D. The plane itself has a tremendously authentic feel to it as you turn and twist to avoid oncoming hostile forces.

The sound, however, is a bit of a let down, just rather standard booms and explosions as you fight to save the base. I really liked this program and along with its wealth of options it offers a good challenge which should keep all suicidal pilots happy for months.

At last! The chance to pilot a high speed jet fighter and zoom around blasting the living daylights out of anything that moves (and anything that doesn't), thanks to Skyfox. The graphics are superb and give an excellent representation of flying at high speeds over not-so-barren terrain. The effect of the tanks, motherships and enemy fighters moving towards/away from you is ace -- it really does put the wind up to turn round and meet a rather aggressive tank poking its dirty great gun barrel through your screen.

Control of the plane is very sensitive and tricky to get to grips with at first, but with practice you soon find yourself zipping about without too much of a problem. Sound is really the only weak point about the game -- FX are few and average (although the engine roar is quite good) and the title screen tune could have been better. A great shoot-em-up of high addictive qualities, and plenty of great options and fast, furious action to keep things that way.

My first impressions of this game were that it was another flight simulation game. This couldn't have been further from the truth -- it is a simulation, a simulation of high speed, air warfare. Multitudes of tanks, motherships and high speed jet planes are just some of the things you come across, along with plenty of exciting action. Tactics vary considerably depending upon which level you have chosen -- another amazing thing about this game: the variety of levels!

Air-to-Air combat is so realistic that I began to sweat after a while (especially on higher levels) with jets whizzing about the screen at such high speeds that half the time you don't know whether you're coming or going! Low level ground attack is also startlingly realistic with menacing tanks grinding their way ominously towards you, firing constantly and uncomfortably accurately.

My overall opinion of this game is that it's very well thought out and extremely well finished. It's not only very realistic as a flying simulation, but as a tense war game. Terrific fun and worth every penny.

Presentation 96%
Graphics 94%
Sound 61%
Hookability 95%
Lastability 89%
Value For Money 90%
Overall 91%

Heaps of different attack waves and levels.
Superfast 3D as you fly around.
Rather boring boom blast noises and feeble title tune.
Once seen you'll want to keep at it.
Plenty of levels but the same old aliens may pall.
Not expensive for such a quality program.
The best 3D shoot-em-up available.