GUADALCANAL: OCTOBER

Design: Gil Eby, Skyler Flietstra, Max Plum, & Charlie Stamm
Design Revisions and Playtesting: Walter Kunkle & Tyler Wright
VASSAL Module: Joel Toppen
Overview
In August of 1942, American troops embarked on Operation Watchtower—the first land offensive against the Empire of Japan. Largely based in and around the island of Guadalcanal north of Australia, the campaign would later be recognized as a critical threshold in the Pacific War. A small island peppered with jungles, Guadalcanal possessed one strategic asset the Americans could not afford to lose: the small air base known as Henderson Field, which they had seized from the Japanese in the first month of the operation.

Japan was intent on retaking Henderson, and shuttled thousands of troops to defensive positions on the island in preparation for an offensive. Japanese destroyers and troop transports routinely made the risky, nighttime run to Guadalcanal from Rabaul Air Base in a process that became known as the “Tokyo Express.” The Japanese launched numerous land offensives to retake Henderson Field and eliminate the Allied foothold, but none were successful. Finally, in the final months of 1942, the Japanese made the decision to evacuate their troops from the island rather than conduct a fourth assault to take Henderson.

In Guadalcanal, you'll take control of either the U.S. or Japanese forces vying for control of the island during the pivotal month of October 1942. Carefully balance your supplies, maintain secrecy, keep your transports well-defended, and try to tip the balance of forces on the island in your favor. Remember above all: time is of the essence—the decisive battle is days, or maybe even hours away.

Basics of Guadalcanal
- Hexes and Air Zones: The map in Guadalcanal is divided into small hexes, as well as larger collections of hexes, referred to hereafter as “Air Zones.” Naval units count hexes when measuring their movement—likewise, air units count air zones.
- Units: A unit represents a finite amount of military assets, represented by a unit chit. This is an example of a unit chit found within the game:
- The various **attack values** of the unit are represented by numbers on the bottom of the chit. Guadalcanal uses six-sided dice for all rolls. A higher attack value is always better than a lower one. The attack values on the Japanese heavy cruiser mean that, if it has to use its anti-air attack value, it needs to land a hit with a roll of 2 or less on a six-sided die. However, if it wants to use its anti-ship attack value, it needs to make a roll of 3 or less.

- **A unit can never use more than one of its attack values in the same combat round.** If the cruiser pictured above takes part in combat, it cannot fire both its anti-air and anti-ship capabilities in the same round—its owner has
to choose! In one round of a combat, the Japanese cruiser pictured above might want to fire its anti-air capability to deal with American planes. The following round, the Japanese cruiser can choose to use its anti-ship attack value.

- A unit chit may sometimes have an alternate side to represent that it has been damaged. Damaged units may have reduced attack values, depending on the unit. If a unit has a health value of more than 1, flip it to its damaged side when a hit is assigned to it.

- Any number of friendly or enemy units can occupy the same hex on the map. If this gets burdensome, feel free to take some unit chits off the map after conferring with your opponent, keeping note of what hex they are in.

- Task Groups: Multiple unit chits are grouped together at the start of the game under designations called Task Groups. The units comprising a Task Group are hidden to your opponent until they are revealed, either through reconnaissance, air combat, or naval combat. Once a unit is revealed, it cannot be hidden again, even if it is assigned to a different task group.

- **Task Group chits** are used to track your Task Groups on the board—when a Task Group is revealed, place the revealed unit chits comprising that task force on the board in the same hex as the Task Group chit. An example of Task Group and other special chits can be seen here:

  ![Japanese Carrier Air Wing Chit](image1)  ![US Naval Task Group Chit](image2)  ![Japanese Land-Based Air Chit](image3)

  - **Transports** are special units that ferry infantry, ammunition, and food to the island of Guadalcanal. They do so by ending their movement in a colored sea hex bordering Guadalcanal. Each transport has a carrying capacity—it can
carry two infantry, and eight ammunition/food in any combination. An empty transport must end its movement in one of the colored deployment hexes on the map (or, in the case of the Japanese, Rabaul Air Base) to pick up infantry, ammo, and food once again. If a transport is destroyed while it is carrying anything, the assets it was carrying are permanently lost.

- **APDs** are special, smaller transports. They are quick and maneuverable, and as such, they have less carrying capacity than a regular transport. APDs can carry one infantry and four ammunition/food in any combination. APDs follow the same rules for resupply as other transports.

- **Air Units** are units that fly, such as fighters and bombers. All air units have a move value equal to the number inside the black hexagon at the top left of their unit chit—this is how many air zones that unit can move to conduct reconnaissance or air combat. Air units can be flipped to an ACTIVATED side, once they do this, they cannot participate in any scouting, scrambles, or combats until they have been readied again.

- **Aircraft Carriers** are special naval units that can carry planes over the ocean. Every aircraft carrier can carry a maximum of seven squadrons of air units on board. Air units that have a black runway symbol on their unit chit are tied to an airfield and cannot accompany an aircraft carrier.
***If you are playing on VASSAL, all of the setup is already done for you. Enjoy the game!**

(1) **INITIAL SETUP.** Place the Henderson Air Field token on the yellow star in the center of the board. Place the Rabaul Air Field token on the orange star in the upper left hand side of the board. Place each respective Land-Based Air chit on top of the two Air Fields, and then place the turn marker on the first space on the turn track.

(2) **ISLAND SETUP:** The American player places 15 infantry, 10 food, and 5 ammunition on Guadalcanal. The Japanese player places 7 infantry, 5 food, and 5 ammunition on Guadalcanal.

(3) **TASK GROUP FORMATION.** Each player secretly sorts their unit chits into up to 10 task groups. Empty task groups are called “decoys.” They follow identical movement rules to the non-decoy task groups. A single task group may not contain any more than seven ships. Any transport units begin the game loaded with infantry and any combination of ammunition/food that the controlling player sees fit.

(4) **SQUADRON ASSIGNMENTS.** Each player organizes air units into the available space on each carrier or airfield.

(5) **AMERICAN SPECIAL PLACEMENT.** The American player may select one task group and deploy it in one of the two dark blue hexes next to Henderson Air Field in the Guadalcanal zone. This task group may not contain any APDs or transport units.
(6) JAPANESE SPECIAL PLACEMENT. The Japanese player may deploy up to two task groups in the two orange hexes adjacent to Rabaul Air Base. Each of these task groups may contain either 1 APD or 1 transport unit.

(6) PLACE REMAINING TASK GROUPS. One at a time, beginning with the American player, each player deploys all their task groups in the colored hexes on the map. The Japanese player must deploy in the orange hex groups marked 1-3, and the American player must deploy in the dark blue hex groups marked 1-3.

**Turn Stages**
The Japanese player completes the four stages below in their turn. The American player follows suit. At the completion of the American player’s turn, advance the turn token to the next turn square. Light squares denote daytime. Dark squares denote nighttime.

1. **READYING.** If it is nighttime, skip this step. **Ready** all activated air units by flipping them face up. Replenish one destroyed air unit of your choice to a friendly undamaged airfield or a friendly undamaged carrier with remaining capacity.

2. **RECONNAISSANCE.** If it is nighttime, skip this step. **Declare** all airborne searches being performed by air units at the same time. One airborne search may be conducted per friendly airfield or carrier. To resolve a search, select one eligible aircraft from a carrier air wing or airfield and select a hex in that aircraft’s range of movement containing one or more enemy task groups. The player conducting the search flips their aircraft to the ACTIVATED side, and then rolls a six-sided die per search, consulting the table below:

   5-6: Catastrophe! The aircraft is destroyed.
   4: Failure. The reconnaissance effort yields no information.
   2-3: Success. The number of non-air units in up to one enemy task group in the hex is revealed. If the task group is a decoy, remove it.
   1: Jackpot! Reveal all non-air units in the hex. If the hex contains a carrier, place a Carrier Air Wing token in the hex. If the task group is a decoy, remove it.

3. **AIR.** If it is nighttime, skip this step. **Declare** all airborne movements and combats being performed by any air units belonging to carrier and land-based air wings at the same time, then resolve detection and air combat. Naval task groups or enemy airfields can be selected as viable targets for air attack. Resolve each air combat by following the steps below for each combat.
(a) DETERMINE SURPRISE. The attacker rolls a 6-sided die. If the result is a 1-3, the attacker has not been detected. On a 4-6, the attacker has been detected.

(b) SCRAMBLE. If the attacker has been detected, the defender selects and reveals any amount of **ready** fighter aircraft within the same air zone to participate in air-to-air combat. The aircraft need not be on the exact same hex that is being attacked—they can come from elsewhere! If the attacker has not been detected, skip this step and proceed directly to step 3.

(c) AIR-TO-AIR. The attacking aircraft are revealed. Both sides simultaneously roll their airborne AA combat values, and apply hits as necessary. If there are any surviving attacking aircraft after one round of air-to-air combat, proceed to step d.

(d) REVEAL. If the defender is not a decoy or a SCRAMBLE has occurred. All involved ships and aircraft are revealed.

(e) TORPEDO ROUND. The attacker rolls for any torpedo combat values on their air units they wish to use, if applicable. Hits are tallied up and allocated to naval units only. The attacker selects which of the opponent’s naval units are hit. **Damage from torpedoes can be assigned to any ship in the same hex, even if that ship is part of a different task group.**

(f) ENGAGE VESSELS / AIRFIELD. The attacker rolls attack dice for each of their surviving aircraft. Defender rolls 1 die for each naval or airfield AA. Hits are tallied. Air combat lasts for 1 round only.

(g) ALLOCATE HITS & RETURN. The attacker selects which of their aircraft are hit, as well as which of the opponent’s naval units, air units, or airfields are hit. All participating aircraft return to their original carrier air wing or airfield. Flip all air unit counters (friendly and enemy) which moved or participated in combat to the ACTIVATED side.

(4) NAVAL. The player selects 5 naval task groups. For each of these task groups, the player conducts **naval movement/combat, naval bombardment, supply transfer, ship repair, and unit transfer** in any order.

**Naval Movement/Combat:** Move a task group up to the speed of the slowest ship in that task group. Destroyers and APDs may move 15 hexes in one movement, all other ships can move 7 hexes in one movement. Decoy task groups containing no actual ships may only move 7 hexes in one movement. **If a task group contains a damaged unit, it moves at half speed, rounded down.** Naval task groups and naval units must end their movement if they enter a hex containing an enemy unit, revealing any unrevealed units on both sides. If the task group was a decoy containing no actual units, the task group that was originally moving may continue its movement. If the task group contains enemy units, a combat occurs after all naval task groups have completed their moves.
**Naval combat.** After moving a set of attacking task groups onto the hex of a target, resolve these steps in order:

1. **TORPEDO ROUND.** Both attacker and defender roll for any torpedo combat values they wish to use. Hits are tallied up and allocated to naval units only. If it is day, each side chooses their own casualties. At night, Japan chooses all casualties. **Damage from torpedoes can be assigned to any ship in the same hex, even if that ship is part of a different task group.**

2. **INITIAL RETREAT STEP.** The defending player may elect to retreat after the Torpedo Round. If they do so, the attacking player resolves a single combat round against them, and then all defending ships and task groups in the hex may make a move of up to 3 hexes. **If the defender does not elect to retreat, proceed to step 3.**

3. **NAVAL COMBAT ROUNDS.** Each side rolls whichever combat values they wish for any number of ships or ready air units in the battle hex. Hits are tallied up simultaneously. If it is day, each side chooses their own casualties. At night, Japan chooses all casualties. **Damage can be assigned to any naval or air unit in the same hex that participated in the battle.**

4. **RETREAT STEP.** After each combat round, each player secretly assigns a “retreat” or “stay” token to any of their task groups involved in the combat, and then both players flip these tokens face up simultaneously. Retreating task groups move their 3 hexes while the opponent resolves a combat round against them and any other ships once again. No player can end a retreat move in a space containing enemy task groups or ships. If two players elect to retreat all their task groups in the same combat round, both of them make a 3 hex movement, beginning with the defender, and no combat round occurs. If neither side elects to retreat, resolve step 2 again.

5. **CONCLUDE COMBAT.** After 4 combat rounds have elapsed, if neither side elects to retreat, count up the number of destroyed units on each side. The side that has lost more chits must retreat 4 hexes. Damaged units that are still alive, such as battleships and cruisers, do not count as “destroyed” for the purposes of this check. In the case of a tie, the Japanese player must retreat. Flip all air units that participated in the battle to their ACTIVATED side.

**Naval Bombardment.** A unit with bombardment capability may target an island airfield if it is adjacent or within a colored supply transfer hex. The bombarding units roll for their combat value once. In order to conduct naval bombardment, the task group may not conduct **naval movement or naval combat** in the same turn. Tally hits. See the **Attacking and Damaging Air Fields** section for details on how these hits are resolved.
Supply transfer. If a task group with carrier units moves to a shaded hex in the Guadalcanal zone (orange for Japan)(dark blue for US) the player may choose to transfer supply inventories between the ships and the island or spawn area in which the task group resides. No naval movement may occur for the remainder of the turn. Exception: Japan may conduct the remainder of naval movement with its destroyer transports delivering infantry, ammunition, or food to Guadalcanal if the player elects.

Ship repair. If a damaged ship ends its move within a friendly numbered spawn area, it may be flipped over to its darker, undamaged, side.

Unit transfer. If two task groups are in the same hex (whether they have been selected for activation this turn or not), they may exchange naval units with one another. Neither task group may conduct further naval movement.

(5) PASS. After activating 5 naval task groups, the Japanese player passes to the American player, who proceeds through turn stages 1-5. The turn marker advances one position to the right, with day and night conditions shifting accordingly.

Attacking and Damaging Airfields
When bomber units or naval units are targeting an island, they must use the ground target combat value. Airfields have their own innate anti-air attack values. If successfully striking an already-damaged airfield, damage adds on to the current repair time.

1 successful hit - Destroy an aircraft unit on the airfield.
2 successful hits - Destroy an aircraft unit and damage the airfield for 24 hours. A damaged airfield is flipped to the damaged state and cannot launch aircraft on the opponent’s next day turn. Flip the airfield token right side up after a day has elapsed.
3 successful hits - Destroy an aircraft unit and damage the airfield for 48 hours. The airfield cannot launch aircraft for the opponent’s next two day turns. Flip the airfield token right side up after two days have elapsed.

Ending the Game
At the end of night on their 3rd turn, the U.S. player rolls two six-sided die. If the total of both dice is a 12, immediately proceed to the Battle for Henderson Field step. Otherwise, proceed to the next turn, with the U.S. player rolling again at the end of their turn. Each time this check is made, reduce the total needed to proceed to the Battle for Henderson Field
Example: At the end of the third turn, the U.S. player needs to roll a 12 on 2d6 for the culminating land battle to occur. However, the next turn, they need to roll a 10 or higher, then an 8 or higher, and so on and so forth.

After the end of night on the U.S. player’s 4th turn, if the Battle for Henderson Field still has not occurred, the Japanese player may choose to trigger the Battle for Henderson Field at the end of any Japanese day turn for the remainder of the game. If they decline to do so, the U.S. player still makes the roll of 2d6 at the end of each of their night turns, and continues to reduce the total value needed to trigger the battle by two each turn.

Example: It’s the start of turn 5, and The Battle for Henderson Field has not yet happened after two consecutive U.S. rolls. The U.S. player is in a strong position on the island, having deployed more infantry and ammunition to the island on turn 4, as well as sinking a Japanese transport last turn. The Japanese player can choose to trigger the battle at the end of any of his day turns going forward. At the end of his day turn, the Japanese player lands two more infantry on Guadalcanal, as well as 2 food and 6 ammunition, but this still will not give him the numbers advantage he needs, so he declines to proceed with the battle. Next turn, he’s banking on getting four more Japanese infantry to the island. He hopes the U.S. player doesn’t roll a 8 or higher to trigger the battle at the end of the American night turn.

The Battle for Henderson Field

At the end of the American player’s final turn, the Battle for Henderson Field will take place. The Japanese and American player tally up the respective numbers of food, ammunition, and infantry that they have on the island of Guadalcanal.

(1) FEED TROOPS. Each side removes infantry from the island in excess of the number of supplies available to their side, then removes their supply tokens from the island.

(2) ENGAGE. The remaining infantry for each side simultaneously roll a number of six-sided combat dice equal to the amount of ammunition available to their side, removing the ammunition tokens from the island as they do so. Infantry deal damage according to their combat value (3 or lower for Japan)(4 or lower for US).
(3) ALLOCATE HITS. Both sides allocate hits to their infantry on the island and determine their losses. After this step, count the remaining number of infantry for each side.

(4) DETERMINE VICTOR. Whichever side has more remaining infantry has won the Battle for Henderson Field, and has won the Guadalcanal Campaign.