

Low Level Hell - 2

By John Treadaway & Graham Green

Introduction

Low Level Hell was a Vietnam War period Helicopter ground attack style game originally designed for Salute 97 and this has been added to for Salute 98. It uses a hexed based movement system, the 150mm hexes being drawn by hand on a baize cloth, and features 1/72 scale plastic kit choppers and 20mm scale metal miniatures for the VC. Last year's programme featured an article on the construction and modelling aspects of the game and following on from the game's success, many people have asked for more information on how the game was devised - what rule's we had used, what scenarios had been set up and such like.

In this follow-up article, we have attempted to give people a taste of what we had generated for the game. Unfortunately, producing the entire body of background, scenario and rule information is beyond the scope of this article because of space limitations and, realistically, we keep adding bits to it on a continuous basis - recent examples of this being rules for fixed wing aircraft.

The Rules

We are great believers in not reinventing the wheel, so the first thing to say is this: if you don't already own a set, go and buy a copy of **Silent Death**, by **Iron Crown Enterprises**. Silent Death (SD from now on) is what we have based these rules on and has been in production since 1990 or thereabouts and features, in our opinion, one of the most elegant combat systems ever devised in a table top game.

It was designed for simple space ship fighter combat on a hex grid in two dimensions, without "realistic" vectored movement - it's a fairly 'Hollywood' kind of space ship combat, really - but achieves, we think, an optimum trade off of complexity and 'feel' versus ease of use.

So - as we've said - for Low Level Hell, we didn't actually start off writing the rules from scratch... Anyway, 'plug' over but, to understand what we have done here, you will *need* to purchase a set.

What've we modified?

Choppers have to be different from space ships, right? Well yes: the first changes that the swap of environment forced upon us - the change from the fairly featureless (and, indeed, rather abstract) vacuum of space to the paddy fields of the Mekong Delta - was to introduce more than two dimensions: contradiction in terms though it seemed, we needed, *with helicopters*, to incorporate a *third* degree of movement that wasn't featured in the spaceship game... This was because the opponents of the US forces would be entirely ground based (the VC not having an airforce to engage in dog-fighting) and so the helicopters would have to move up and down a bit.

To reduce complexity somewhat, however, we decided that our choppers would operate on one of three 'levels':

- High** - this would be the height used in some instances to travel from location to location, usually at speed and where distance covered was of prime importance; i.e. that's the bit the players would do *before* they got to the game area... At height the VC had few weapons that could seriously threaten helicopters. Our conclusion was, therefore, that - despite what we've just said - this 'High Level' need not be modelled within the game system.
- Low** - this would be the height at which the choppers would actually fly during the game. Other than some small changes to the rules, this would be enacted pretty much in the standard SD, two dimensional way.
- Landed** - Helicopters would have to land during the game, as scenarios and misfortune dictated. Although we would not be featuring extensive crew or passenger ground movement, they would have to interact whilst flying and whilst landed with other forces on this level; i.e. the VC would shoot at them and move about a bit. This meant inventing rules for ground movement for both infantry groups and trucks, for cover and for take-off, landing - and crashing - procedures.

As we said above, space within this article precludes us detailing all of the rules changes that we made to the SD system - and we certainly wouldn't want to detail too heavily the SD system which wouldn't be fair in any way to Iron Crown Enterprises (we'll just say one more time - go out and pay *money* for their rules system...). However, what can be done, we hope is give you a flavour of what we did.

The Phased System

Movement and weapons fire are dealt with during the game in a phased order - see *table below*. We rarely run more than 10 aircraft in a game (for the players, at any rate) and so 10 cards (numbered one to ten) are shuffled and dealt out giving order to movement. At the start of a game, VC units are usually hidden on the table and the players fly in from one or more directions.

In order, then, in **Phase One**, players move their helicopters. Dependent on scenario, in later game turns, revealed VC units may move in this phase.

In **Phase Two**, rockets are fired from Helicopters fitted with Rocket pods. This is a line of sight weapon - i.e. they come out of the front hex that the helicopter is facing and travel down a single line of hexes. Each Weapon pod (if more than one is available - they usually start out with two or more) targets separately and a marker is placed on the intended hexes, so each pod can have its own target hex along its line of site, within the boundaries of the range limitations (2-12 hexes). This represents the operator trying to walk fire onto a target. A number of rockets can be selected - up to ten per pod - to be fired in this phase and a D10 is used as a marker on the table, with the number side showing how many rockets were fired. Note that, although they are fired in this phase, rockets don't hit until the last phase - *Phase Five*. This means that targets can fire back (although they can't move fast enough to get out of the blast area).

In **Phase Three** any VC that are holed up and haven't revealed themselves may open fire. This gets them the drop on the helicopters and is a chance to get a first shot in. These, if the VC force is split up between a number of players, are (highest first) which is a number generated on a D10 dice and noted on their play sheets. If the VC are all run by one player, this fire is performed in any order that is convenient.

Phase Four is when other weapons fire. This is usually performed in three sub phases. Firstly all of the Gunners (door gunners, gunners with turrets etc. in Cobras and the like, even grunts leaning out of the side and spraying with their M16s) fire first, again in order of their Gunnery Skill. Then, in order, all exposed VC that didn't fire in Phase Three fire in GS order. Lastly all Pilots, who are busy doing other things (like flying) fire any weapons that they have in GS order. Where a Gunner or pilot has a choice of two weapons (other than rockets which were fired in Phase Two) they may only chose ONE system to fire.

In **Phase Five** the Rockets are tested for result. A D4 is bowled and added to the Gunnery skill of the Pilot or Gunner firing the rockets determining where the ordinance falls. Note that a score of 10 plus is required to hit the target bang on - so a good gunnery skill is useful here...

PHASE CHART	
Phase 1)	Movement Phase All Declared Movement
Phase 2)	Rocket Launch Phase Declare Launch Rockets (how many launched and what target)
Phase 3)	Hidden Weapon Fire Phase Fire Weapons from hidden units in order of their Gunnery Skill
Phase 4)	Fire Other Weapon Phase Fire Weapons from all other units in order of their Gunnery Skill and then their Pilot Gunnery Skill
Phase 5)	Rocket Result Phase Determine where Rockets fell and work out who copped what

Movement

Choppers Movement for helicopters are pretty much as for standard SD rule systems. Choppers have a number of movement points that are allocated in a turn and these are expended on both forward movement, side slipping and turning to face.

Landing & Take Off

Choppers may hover at any time or land, or take off straight up or down (i.e. in one hex) providing they can expend half of their original engine power (expressed as a Drive Number). For example, a Chinook (original Drive Number 8) can hover, or take off or land in one hex providing it's DN is 4 or higher. This reduces it's defensive ability some what (def val 5 as opposed to 8).

To save power and make themselves less of a target Helicopters may "Flare" to land - this requires one quarter of their original engine power and takes a straight run of at least 2 hexes of clear terrain (i.e. no houses or trees). A similar affair - called "transitional lift" - can be used to takeoff, also requiring a clearing of at least 2 hexes. Neither of these manoeuvres offers the vehicle up as a sitting target like hovering does so the defensive value remains the same.

VC	These units can move one hex in any direction with no turning or terrain restrictions.
Trucks & Other Vehicles	These move between 2 and 3 hexes a turn, depending on what they are and what state their engines are in or how heavily loaded they are: for example the truck that has a quad heavy machine gun in back only travels at speed 2. No distinction is made for terrain but wheeled vehicles tend to keep to the roads. There are no turn costs.
Fixed Wing Aircraft	These move and turn in a different way to standard helicopters - i.e. not in the regular SD method. They have what's called a Turn Mode based on their speed. Basically the faster they go the greater the number of hexes travelled before they can execute a turn or a side slip. This makes them hard to line up for bomb runs and means that they usually enter at one end of a table and leave at the other, or, if they can't turn quickly enough, through one of the sides. If they leave the game area they come back in a random number of turns and on a random table edge.

Combat Systems

SD uses a three dice system. Each weapon system - with few exceptions - requires throwing two dice of the same type (two six sided [2D6], two eight sided [2D8] and so on) to which is added a third dice which varies depending on the skill of the gunner(s). These three dice are called the Attack Dice and, adding them up, and allowing for range (plus or minus one for short or long) and cover (see below), a player has to achieve a score equal to or greater than the target's defensive value. We added a further modifier for target and firer's speed. The net result of this is that hitting moving VC from a moving chopper with an M16 is damn near impossible but the odds get better when more effective weapons are used; better quality gunners are employed; or one's target is standing in the open and not moving (or hovering above the treetops in a chopper).

When one has thrown these three Attack Dice, the beauty of the SD system is that the player, rather than scooping them up, looks at them in a different way to see what damage is scored: Low (the lowest die or dice), Mid (the middle die or dice), High (the highest die or dice), or All (all of the dice) and this is the damage that, with a deduction for Damage Reduction (armour and such like) chips away at the Damage Track. This degrades the vehicle or unit by knocking out systems or by causing critical damage by knocking off a Critical Hit box, requiring a further role and consulting a chart on the play sheet which is particular to that unit or vehicle or, in the case of some bigger helicopters, even directionally dependent. This is largely the same as in standard Silent Death so check this out in your copy for more details.

Weapons Systems

What we've changed from SD for **Low Level Hell** is:

1. We have some smaller weapons using D4's - assault rifles and such. Assault rifles are always collected into a "battery" - essentially all effective troops are training their weapons on the same target, whether from a vehicle or from the ground so four AK47s = 2D4+ADB+3 to - count +3 bonus for **HIT** and **DAMAGE on all weapons** These - and larger calibre machine guns - have no ammo blips indicating use of ammunition, but most other weapons do.

2. We have weapons that fire with D12's and D20's - **Auto Grenade Launchers** and **20MM Vulcan cannon's**.
3. **Underwing rockets** fire somewhat like regular missiles in SD but only in line of sight. A maximum of can10 fired per turn from each 'pod'. Unlike standard SD rules there is no 'lock on' required but, instead, there is a Randomised impact area (see below)
4. **RPG's** use only one D12 plus the Gunnery Skill Dice for the Attack Dice because of their erratic nature. RPG's can only be used at Short and Medium range unless firer in tree tops or looking down at enemy.
5. **Sniping**. Some VC units are simply a lone sniper. He - or she - is usually highly skilled, hard to hit and a good shot. If a sniper hits a chopper, the only damage is the next critical hit box on the chart.

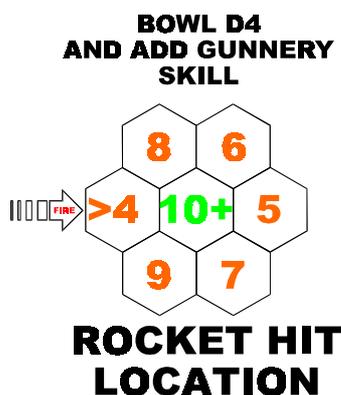
Weapons

WEAPON	ATTACK DICE	RANGE INCREMENTS			TARGET SPEED	FIRING SPEED	DAMAGE
		SHORT (+1)	MED	HIGH (-1)			
M16/Ak47s	2D4*	1	2-3	4-5			LOW
Medium Machine Guns (M60 etc)	2D6*	1-2	3-6	7-9			LOW
Heavy Machine Guns (50 cal etc)	2D8*	1-3	4-6	7-12			MID
7.62 Mini Guns	2D10*	1-3	4-6	7-12			MID
Auto Grenade Launchers	2D12*	1-2	3-6	7-9			HIGH
20MM Vulcan	2D20*	1-4	5-9	10-16			HIGH
RPGs	1D12*	1	2-3	4-5			ALL
Underwing Rockets**	1D6	1-3	4-6	7-12			ALL HIGHEST
250lb Bomb	5D12***	1D12***		SPEED			ALL
500lb Bomb	6D12***	3D12***	1D12***	SPEED			ALL
Additions							
-1 for each hex of trees or other cover fired through - <i>typically when firing at enemy in trees from treetop height, or when firing at chopper hovering at tree top height from within trees - minus one</i>							
** Dice for impact							
*** See Play sheet for damage							

Speed Chart - cross reference for modifier to hit target							
		Target's Speed					
Firer's Speed		0	1-2	3-4	5-8	9-12	12+
	0	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5
	1-2	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6
	3-4	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7
	5-8	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8
	9-12	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8	-9
	12+	-5	-6	-7	-8	-9	-10

Rockets dice for Random Impact

Rockets (bowl each salvo)			Results				
Bowl D4 and add Skill & Range	>4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
Where?	One Short	One Over	One Left Over	One Right Over	One Left Short	One Right Short	On Target



Special rules for Fixed Wing Aircraft weapons

Underwing Rockets - must be fired in pairs up to 12 at once - dice, as usual, for Impact. Special Damage - Damage equals sum of highest AND lowest scores.

Bombs. The note SPEED in the chart above means that bombs will fall the at HALF of the aircraft's forward speed + 2D4 hexes in a direct line from the aircraft's drop point. They are dropped in the Rocket Launch Phase of one turn and land in the Rocket Launch Phase of the NEXT turn. Each Bomb's impact point is bowled for SEPARATELY. 250lb bombs do 5D12 damage in that hex, 1D12 in the six hexes adjacent to that and 500lb bombs do 6D12 damage in that hex, 3D12 in the six hexes adjacent to that and 1D12 in the 12 hexes around those.

Other Rule additions

Bigger Choppers

In Silent Death, bigger ships than fighters have multiple damage tracks - usually four in number. For big helicopters - the Super Jolly or the double rotor Chinook - we give them six smaller damage tracks which are directional: that is they take damage depending on where they are receiving fire from (see play sheet). Further damage that gets through this Primary Damage Track is taken on a Main Damage Track, as per other choppers, but critical hits are also dependent on direction so there are separate critical hit charts too.

The Play Sheets

The Play Sheets we have supplied with this article have been generated in the SD style, but wholly by ourselves. They feature "ready rolled" characteristic scores and may be copied freely for use but note that we've steered clear of providing a key to

determine what the play sheet symbols mean: as these are all pretty much as per SD, we will have to re-emphasise (yet again) that you'll have to buy a set of pukka rules from **Iron Crown** to use these sheets (unless you're a professional code breaker, of course...)

Scenarios

We decided to have varying types of scenarios for ***Low Level Hell*** to give some impression of the different ways in which helicopters were employed during the Vietnam war, some of the incidents are taken from real life, some from Hollywood and a couple are purely 'What ifs'. We also wanted to be able to use as many of the different types of helicopters as we could, another advantage of this was that we can play through several games during a show without having to repeat any incidents, so that players can play a couple of games without any problems of knowing what's going on beforehand.

We also made a decision to limit the games to no more than ten 'turns', this means that we could play through as many scenarios as possible during the day, it also gave us a definite ending to a game rather than keeping going until everyone was either shot down or died of boredom, to 'qualify' this decision we looked to reality in so much as the helo's in Vietnam were limited in the time they could remain over their target by their fuel requirements. This was known in the vernacular of the period as 'Loiter time'. The other limitation we set was on the number of players: though he can run ten or more, for open days we set this at eight as this gave us a nice flexibility for using different aircraft but still made sure we could keep 'control' of the game.

We have listed here some of the scenarios that we have developed during the running of the game: this is so that if you are either watching or playing you have at least a vague notion of what's going on, or, if you are intending to play something similar at your own club or home it might help to give you some inspiration.

SCENARIO 1; "Sweep and Clear"

This scenario is based on the sort of action portrayed in the helicopter assault sequence in the film 'Apocalypse Now', this is an assault on a enemy held village during the earlier part of the war.

The aircraft involved are 'Slicks', early Gunships and scouts facing a well equipped and dug in enemy.

U.S. FORCES

3 x UH1D Huey 'Slicks' each with a full load of infantry.

3 x UH1B/C Huey 'Guns' (1 x basic gunship, 1 x Hog, 1 x ARA)

2 x OH6A Cayuse 'Loach'

V.C. FORCES

A number of units (between 10 and 20 depending how good the players are and how tough we want to make it for them...) with HMGs, MMGs or LMGs and other small arms or rockets.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

The American forces have the usual ten 'turns' during which they must clear out as many VC as possible and then land their infantry in three positions surrounding the village, each enemy unit wiped out is worth a points total and points are also awarded for successful placement of the troops, points are taken away for any helicopters or infantry units lost.

At the end of the ten turns the points are added up and the total decides if the mission was either a Victory, a stalemate or a failure.

VC OBJECTIVES (umpire controlled)

These are obviously to shoot down as many choppers as possible.

('Sweep and Clear' was a phrase introduced by the U.S. military to replace 'Search and Destroy' as they felt it would sound a bit more acceptable to the American public.)

SCENARIO 2; 'A Bridge Du Long'

This scenario is entirely fictitious, but, is based around a mission to take out a bridge on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In reality this sort of mission would probably have been conducted by fixed wing aircraft but what the hell.

U.S. FORCES

4 x AH1 Cobras

3 x OH6A Cayuses

1 x OH58 Kiowa

Above aircraft arranged in 4 x Pink teams of 1 Cobra + 1 Scout each.

Camio appearance of 2 x Skyriders (independent umpire controlled)

V.C. UNITS

As scenario 1

U.S. OBJECTIVES

Destroy the old pontoon bridge spanning the 'Du Long' river.

V.C. OBJECTIVES (Umpire controlled)

To prevent the U.S. objectives

SCENARIO 3; 'Guns a Go Go' or 'Keep on Trucking'

This scenario is also entirely fictitious, and is similar to number two in that it is set along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Again in reality this sort of mission would probably have been conducted by fixed wing aircraft.

U.S. FORCES

4 x AH1 Cobras

3 x UH1B/C Huey 'Guns' (1 x basic gunship, 1 x Hog, 1 x ARA)

1 x ACH47 Chinook Gunship

V.C. UNITS

Mobile units with various weapons and a convoy of trucks loaded with equipment, troops or A.A. weaponry.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

Destroy all the trucks or prevent them from reaching their destination, however this time they are NOT allowed to destroy the old pontoon bridge spanning the 'Du Long' river.

V.C. OBJECTIVES (Umpire controlled)

To get at least 1 truck into the village.

SCENARIO 4; 'Duster'

Although fictitious this scenario is based on the sort of operations that Medevac units conducted ('Duster' was a generic call sign for medevac aircraft). For the purpose of 'playability' the players are forming an escort for the unarmed medevac helicopter.

U.S. FORCES

3 x UH1D Huey 'Slicks' each with a full load of infantry.

3 x UH1B/C Huey 'Guns' (1 x basic gunship, 1 x Hog, 1 x ARA)

2 x OH6A Cayuse 'Loach'

1 x UH1D Huey Medevac (independent umpire controlled)

V.C. UNITS

Mobile units with various weapons

U.S. OBJECTIVES

A Huey carrying a high ranking U.S. officer has crashed in hostile territory, the players have to secure a Landing Zone (LZ) for the medevac ship to land and pick up the wounded man, whilst doing this they must also keep back the tightening ring of enemy troops.

V.C. OBJECTIVES (Umpire controlled)

To move in and capture the U.S. officer in the crashed helicopter, they have learnt of his identity by listening in on U.S. radio transmissions on a captured radio.

SCENARIO 5; 'Ho Ho Ho'

This scenario is based on the sort of operations that U.S.A.F. Air Rescue units conducted. Again for the purpose of 'playability' some of the players are forming an escort for the rescue helicopter, when in reality this task was allotted to Skyraiders (known as Sandys).

U.S. FORCES

4 x AH1 Cobra

3 x UH1B/C Huey 'Guns' (1 x basic gunship, 1 x Hog, 1 x ARA)

1 x CH53 Super Jolly Green Giant

V.C. UNITS

Mobile units with various weapons

U.S. OBJECTIVES

A U.S. aircraft has gone down in North Vietnam, the players have to locate the 2 aircrew and rescue them, this is done by the CH53 hovering over each man for one entire turn, whilst it is doing this the rest of the players must keep back the enemy troops advancing on them.

V.C. OBJECTIVES (Umpire controlled)

To move in and capture the pilots or at least prevent their rescue.

SCENARIO 6; 'SEMPER FI'

U.S. Marine use of helicopters was totally different to how the army utilised them, however their pilots were every bit as brave as their army equivalents, and, would risk everything to reach heavily engaged Marine ground units.

During the early years of the Vietnam war the Marine Corps had yet to procure suitable gunships and as such their troop carriers were often escorted by gunships from the army.

U.S. FORCES

2 x UH34D 'Sea Horses'

1 x CH46 'Sea Knight'

3 x UH1B/C Huey 'Guns' (1 x basic gunship, 1 x Hog, 1 x ARA)

1 x OH13 Sioux
1 x OH6A Loach

V.C. UNITS

Mobile units with various weapons

U.S. OBJECTIVES

A U.S.M.C. unit holding an isolated bridge is about to be over run, the players have to evacuate the survivors, this can be achieved by landing at least any TWO of the three Marine aircraft.

V.C. OBJECTIVES (Umpire controlled)

To move in and capture the bridge and prevent the rescue of the Marines.

SCENARIO 7; 'You aint nothin' but a Hound Dog' Part 1

This one is 100% fictitious, but we wanted an excuse to use a B52.

U.S. FORCES

4 x AH1 Cobras
3 x UH1D Huey Slicks
1 x OH58 Kiowa
1 x CH54 Sky Crane (Umpire Controlled)

V.C. UNITS

Mobile units with various weapons

U.S. OBJECTIVES

A U.S.A.F. B52 on a covert operation over Cambodian territory has developed problems and gone down. The problem however is that it was carrying two Hound dog Nuclear missiles (the fore runner of the cruise missile)and it is known that it made a soft landing and is mostly intact, if the North Vietnamese/Cambodians get hold of either the pilots or any evidence of the aircraft it would be so politically embarrassing it could topple the current administration, if they got hold of one of the missile warhead the repercussions don't bear thinking about, therefore a special forces unit operating in the area was sent in to locate the aircraft and secure any survivors and the nuclear warheads, this it has done and it is now up to the players to evacuate the special forces unit and pilots and the two warheads.

V.C. OBJECTIVES (Umpire controlled)

To move in and capture the nuclear missiles and the pilots if possible.

SCENARIO 8; 'You aint nothin' but a Hound Dog' Part 2

U.S. FORCES

4 x AH1 Cobras

3 x UH1B/C Huey 'Guns' (1 x basic gunship, 1 x Hog, 1 x ARA)

1 x ACH47 Chinook Gunship

V.C. FORCES

Large heavily armed units and trucks.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

The pilots and warheads have been secured, however the wreckage of the B52 is still there and is recognisable as a 'G' a model built specifically to carry the hound dog, if evidence of this gets out it could still prove to be politically embarrassing, the players mission therefore is to destroy all evidence of the aircraft, also 2 covert operations Skyraiders are en route to the area to assist in the destruction of the wreck.

V.C. OBJECTIVES

To prevent the destruction of the aircraft long enough to remove evidence and to photograph the wreck (strangely enough this will take ten turns).

Conclusions

As we said, space permits further detail but please feel free to speak to us at the game at Salute 98. It will be positioned in the newest section of the hall, which gives enough space for a 22 foot long table (to get those Skyraider bomb runs on!).