= Computer Bismarck =

Computer Bismarck is a computer wargame developed and published by Strategic Simulations , Inc . (SSI) in 1980 . The game is based on the last battle of the battleship Bismarck , in which British Armed Forces pursue the German Bismarck in 1941 . It is SSI 's first game , and features turn @-@ based gameplay and two @-@ dimensional graphics .

The development staff consisted of two programmers , Joel Billings and John Lyons , who programmed the game in BASIC . Originally developed for the TRS @-@ 80 , an Apple II version was also created two months into the process . After meeting with other wargame developers , Billings decided to publish the game as well . To help accomplish this , he hired Louis Saekow to create the box art .

The first commercially published computer war game , Computer Bismarck sold well and contributed to SSI 's success . It is also credited in part for legitimizing war games and computer games .

= = Synopsis = =

The game is a simulation of the German battleship Bismarck 's last battle in the Atlantic Ocean during World War II . On May 24 , 1941 , the Bismarck and Prinz Eugen sank the British HMS Hood and damaged the HMS Prince of Wales at the Battle of the Denmark Strait . Following the battle , British Royal Navy ships and aircraft pursued the Bismarck for two days . After being crippled by a torpedo bomber on the evening of May 26 , the Bismarck was sunk the following morning .

= = Gameplay = =

Computer Bismarck is a turn @-@ based computer wargame in which players control British forces against the battleship Bismarck and other German units . The German forces can be controlled by either a computer opponent (named " Otto von Computer ") or a second player . The game takes place on a map of the North Atlantic Ocean on which letters from the English alphabet represent military units and facilities (airfields and ports) . Units have different capabilities , as well as statistics that determine their mobility , firepower , vulnerability and other gameplay factors . Turns take the form of phases , and players alternate inputting orders to maneuver their respective units . Phases can serve different functions , such as informing players of status changes , unit movement , and battles . Players earn points by destroying their opponent 's units . After the Bismarck is sunk or a number of turns have occurred , the game ends . Depending on the number of points players have earned , either the British or German forces are declared the victor .

= = Development = =

During college , Joel Billings used computers to do econometrics , mathematical modeling and forecasting . This experience led him to believe that computers could handle war games and remove tedious paperwork from gameplay . While between his undergraduate and graduate education , Billings met an IBM programmer and discussed computers . Billings suggested starting a software company with him , but the programmer was not interested in war games , stating that they were too difficult and complicated to be popular . Billings posted flyers at hobby shops in the Santa Clara , California area to attract war @-@ game enthusiasts with a background in programming . John Lyons was the first to reply and joined Billings after quickly developing a good rapport .

Billings chose the Bismarck 's last battle because he felt it would be easier to develop than other war games . Computer Bismarck was written in BASIC and compiled to increase its processing speed . In August 1979 , Billings provided Lyons with access to a computer to write the program . Lyons began programming a simplified version similar to a fox and hounds game ? he had " hounds " search a playing field for a " fox " . At the time , the two were working full @-@ time and programmed at Billings ' apartment during the night . Lyons did the bulk of the programming , while

Billings focused on design and assisted with data entry and minor programming tasks .

The game was originally developed for the Tandy Corporation 's TRS @-@ 80 . Two months into development , Billings met with Trip Hawkins , then a marketing manager at Apple Computers , via a venture capitalist , who convinced Billings to develop the game for the Apple II ; he commented that the computer 's capacity for color graphics made it the best platform for strategy games . In October 1979 , Billings ' uncle gave him an Apple II . Billings and Lyons then converted their existing code to work on the Apple II and used a graphics software package to generate the game 's map .

After Lyons began programming , Billings started to study the video games market . He visited local game stores and attended a San Francisco gaming convention . Billings approached Tom Shaw from Avalon Hill ? the company produced many war games that Billings played as a child ? and one of the founders of Automated Simulations to share market data , but aroused no interest . The lukewarm responses made Billings believe he would have to publish SSI 's games . After Computer Bismarck was finished in January 1980 , he searched for a graphic designer to handle the game 's packaging .

Billings met Louis Saekow through a string of friends but was hesitant to hire him . Inspired by Avalon Hill 's games , Billings wanted SSI 's games to look professional and include maps , detailed manuals , and excellent box art . Two months prior , Saekow had postponed medical school to pursue his dream of becoming a graphic designer . To secure the job , Saekow told Billings that he could withhold pay if the work was unsatisfactory . In creating the box art , Saekow used a stat camera ; his roommate worked for a magazine company and helped him sneak in to use its camera after hours . Saekow 's cousin then handled printing the packaging . Without any storage for the complete products , Billings stored the first 2 @,@ 000 boxes in his bedroom . In February 1980 , he distributed 30 @,@ 000 flyers to Apple II owners , and displayed the game at the Applefest exposition a month later . SSI purchased a full @-@ page advertisement in the April 1980 BYTE which stated " Now there 's a true historical wargame for your home computer ... There 's never been anything like it " . It mentioned the ability to play against the computer or another person , and save a game in progress . The Apple II version was $ 59 @.@ 95 , and the advertisement promised future support for the TRS @-@ 80 and other computers .

= = Reception and legacy = =

BYTE 's 1980 review called Computer Bismark a " milestone in the development of commercial war games " , and approved of the quality of the documentation and the option to play against the computer , but was otherwise not favorable . Acknowledging that " it is perhaps unfair to expect the first published [computer war game] to be a fully developed prouduct " , the magazine criticized Computer Bismarck for overly faithfully copying the mechanics of the Bismarck board game , including those that worked efficiently on a board but less so on a computer . The review also noted that the computer game " perpetuates the [board game 's] irritating system of ship @-@ movement rates " , and concluded that " the failings of Computer Bismarck can be summarized by saying that it does not take advantage of the possibilities offered by the computer " .

The game was better received by other critics . Popular Mechanics that year praised the game 's detail and ability to recreate the complex maneuvering involved in the real battle . He referred to it as unique and " fantastic " . Creative Computing cautioned that the game " is probably not for everyone . The point which I probably cannot emphasize enough is that it is an extremely complex simulation ... However , for those ready for a [challenge] ... I enthusiastically recommend Computer Bismarck " . United States Navy defense researcher Peter Perla in 1990 considered war games like Computer Bismarck a step above earlier war @-@ themed video games that relied on arcade @-@ style action . He praised the addition of a computer controlled opponent that such games provide to solitaire players . Perla attributes SSI 's success to the release of its early wargames , specifically citing Computer Bismarck .

Computer Gaming World in 1988 agreed that Computer Bismarck contributed to SSI 's success , commenting that the title earned the company a good profit . He also stated that it encouraged game enthusiasts to submit their own games to SSI , which he believed helped further the company

's success . Describing it as the first " serious wargame for a microcomputer " , Proctor credited Computer Bismarck with helping to legitimize war games and computer games in general . He stated that the professional packaging demonstrated SSI 's seriousness to produce quality products ; prior to Computer Bismarck , most computer games were packaged in zipper storage bags . Saekow became a permanent SSI employee and designed artwork for most of its products .

BYTE noted the similarity of the game 's mechanics to Avalon Hill 's Bismarck , stating that " it would seem proper as a matter of courtesy to acknowledge that the game was based on an Avalon Hill design " . In 1983 , Avalon Hill took legal action against SSI for copying game mechanics from its board games ; Computer Bismarck , among other titles , was involved in the case . The two companies settled the issue out of court . The game was later re @-@ released as part of the company 's " SSI classics " line of popular games at discounted prices . One of SSI 's later games , Pursuit of the Graf Spee , uses an altered version of Computer Bismarck 's core system .

In December 2013 the International Center for the History of Electronic Games received a software donation of several SSI , including Computer Bismarck with the source code for preservation .