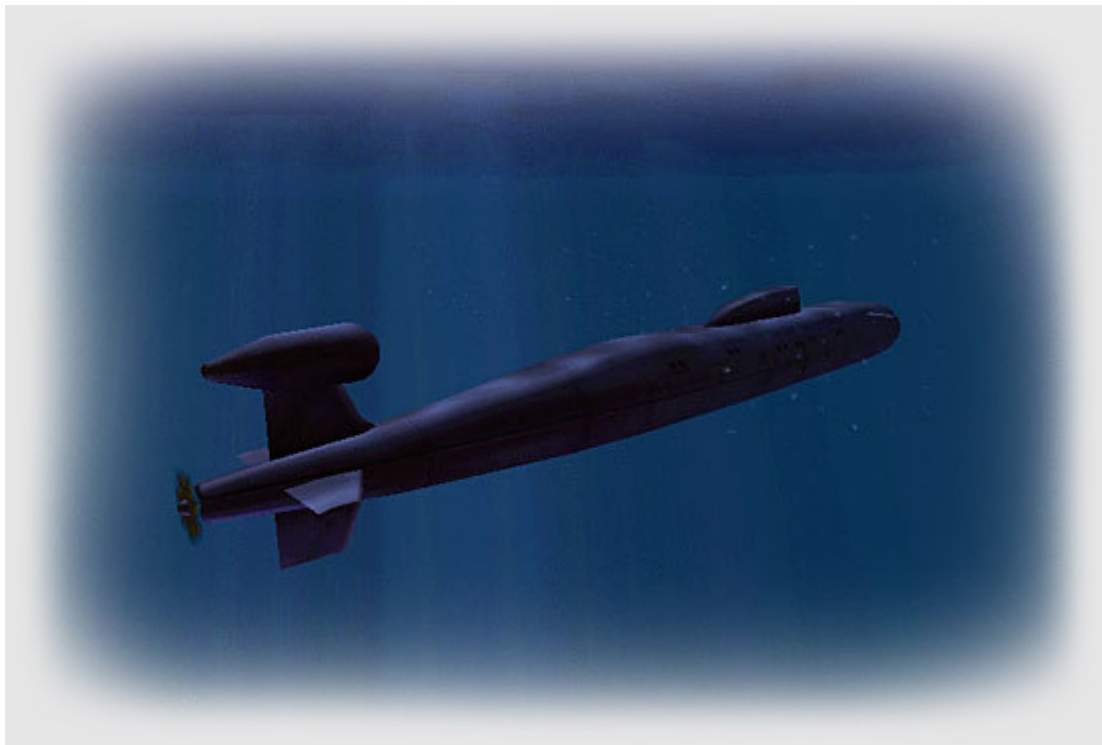


Interview

SCS - "Dangerous Waters"

Introduction

We asked Jamie Carlson, the Associate Producer and Game Designer for **SCS - "Dangerous Waters"** our readers questions about the much anticipated new Naval Combat sim. First, some background on Jamie. He's been with **Sonalysts Combat Simulations** (SCS) since 1997. Besides the Producer and Designer responsibilities, he is also responsible for the SCS-DW web site and other sundry P.R. duties. He has worked on the previous SCS sims **Jane's Fleet Command** and **Sub Command** in various capacities. Jamie has graciously provided several exclusive new screenshots for SimHQ readers.



Q. Will there be some kind of dynamic campaign?

A. The campaign is not fully dynamic but will play out in an infinite number of ways. The alliances with other countries can shift as a result of the player's actions or sometimes just randomly. The story will change with these shifting alliances and the subsequent mission objectives will vary accordingly. The only thing static about the campaigns is the mission locations, other than that, the player has the choice of multiple platforms and objectives to decide upon before starting a mission. That choice of platform is directly related to the role it plays (i.e. mission objectives) and can strategically change the flow of the campaign. The conflict will evolve and the outcome will vary significantly. The campaigns will be HIGHLY replay-able and dynamic in their repeated play.

Quick Mission mode is also available so that the player can take part in 19 objective based missions from ASW patrols, to surface escorts or intercepts, to enemy reconnaissance, or land attacks. This quick mission mode will be

entirely random and the player will have control over mission difficulty to enjoy the dynamic mission that best suits their level of expertise.

The Mission Editor has been improved significantly to allow for increased control. The mission designer has more control over the goal logic and a broader range of dynamic elements at his disposal. The quality of missions created for Sub Command was outstanding, and in my opinion the new mission editor in SCS - "Dangerous Waters" will allow for even better missions this time around (that will be highly dynamic and replay-able).

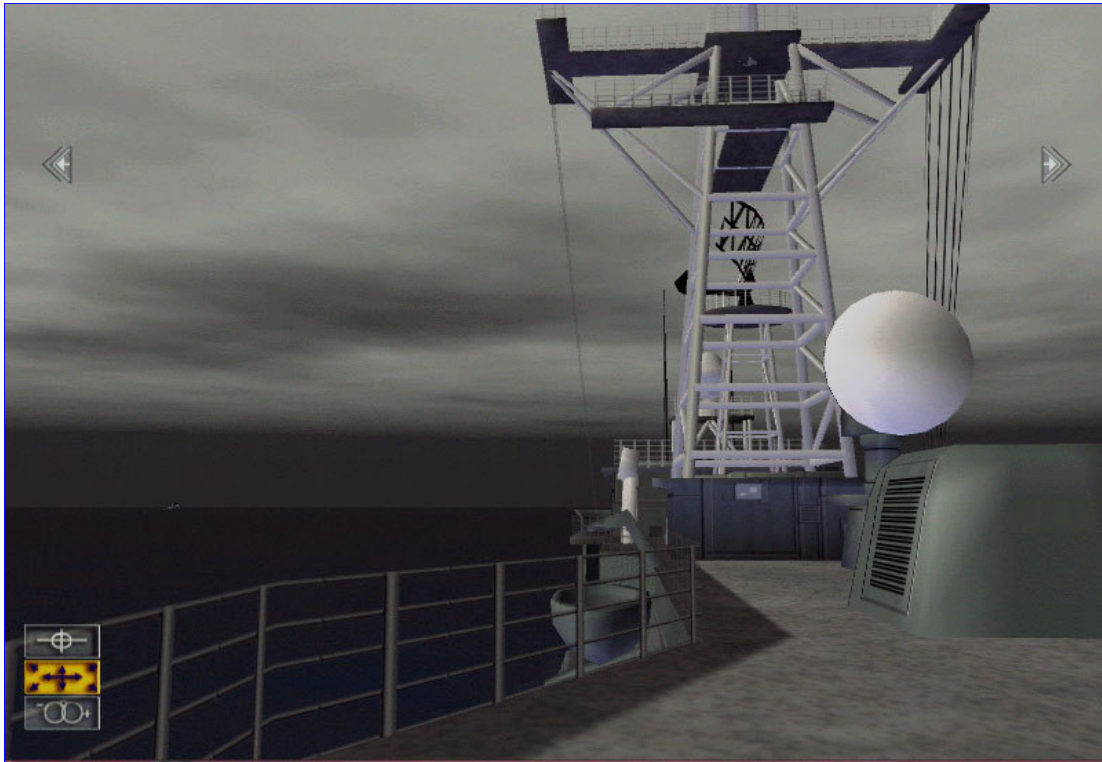
Q. How many player stations can co-op on a single ship's "team"?

A. Theoretically you can have as many players as there are stations. In practice, however, some stations are grouped together for consistency and there will be a maximum number of players for the multi-player session. As far as a maximum number of players in a multi-player session, it's hard to estimate at this point in the development.



Q. How well will "brown water navies" be represented in Dangerous Waters?

A. Littoral water operations are that much more dangerous with the inclusion of our first diesel submarine, the Kilo. The AI will utilize the same tactics as player controlled diesel captains, so when running on batteries most diesel subs will be nearly undetectable at low speeds (passively). The effective employment of the Kilo can cause some significant headaches for the opposition.



Q. When manning a specific station, how well will missile / torpedo hits be modeled when it comes to effects on ship and crew from the player's viewpoint?

A. A new damage model has been designed and implemented to allow for any portion of the playable platform to be damaged. Given that the architecture is highly flexible in that we're trying to develop all types of platforms from sub-to-surface-to-helo-to-aircraft we had to make the damage model pretty flexible to accommodate for that variety of playable platforms. The representation of damage on the "station level", in regards to your original question, will properly disable all systems and interface elements related to the recent damage.

The current implementation of the damage model submits a system, sensor, weapon launcher, etc. as a possible object to be damaged. Then when the platform is hit it performs a calculation for proximity, blast radius, and strength of the hit to determine the system(s) damaged in the blast. So then when the damage message returns to the station responsible for it, it handles the effects and displays that it is damaged. The damage effects are either for a designated period of repair or permanently damaged.

Q: In Fleet Command, the platform list was quite extensive, even including French mine hunters. Will the list be just as, or more extensive this time around?

A. SCS - "Dangerous Waters" models 18 of the world's navies to a high level. Over 200 platforms are available to fight or collaborate with (depending on mission alliances). The open architecture allows for modifications to the global order of battle as evidenced by the capable user-community for Sub Command who extended the list considerably (and that work can be quickly converted for use in SCS-DW).

Q. Will multi-player games be limited to the player-controllable platforms, or will the player be able to play "under AI supervision," so to speak, where the player is part of a SAG or CVBG?

A. The player can play as a part of any naval group. All platforms (air, surface, or subsurface — AI or player controlled) participate in an allied data "link" and are in constant contact with each other (unless their link receiver is damaged). As solutions are created and refined they can be promoted to the link for everyone else to track and act

upon. So in essence, everyone is working together to refine the sensor picture and to classify unknown contacts.

Once a contact is created and promoted to the link, the player has the capacity to act upon it (whether to classify it, engage it or just ignore it). The same applies to the AI platforms in the group, but they won't engage a platform until it is classified and designated as hostile (with high confidence). Therefore, the player has some control over his AI teammates, but once the decision is made that a platform is a threat, the AI will act accordingly.

Q. Any plans to include different languages for communication depending on the country?

A. Currently, the English voice files are the only voice packs that will ship with the game. However, it is not difficult to replace all crew responses with voices of other languages.

Q. In an MP game, will players be able to jump platforms? For example, can a player command a frigate, then launch as pilot of a helo, do ASW ops, and then return to the frigate?

A. Not currently. The player is the captain, pilot, or commander of his designated platform and must command it as if his life depends on its survival (because it does).



Q. How will we play the air assets?

A. The MH-60 and P-3 are independent entities. Of course, all platforms are working together and share data over the Link (so in that sense, they are always working together) but the player has total control over the two aircraft in SCS-DW. The MH-60 always has a tie to its FFG; there is an automatic transmission of data to the FFG (transmits sensor data — sonar or radar data) and, therefore, allows for increased sensor coverage.

The flight model takes into account all variables of flight (thrust, air density, lift, etc.) and is highly competent and believable. Full joystick support will be available for the P-3 and MH-60 — so those who want to take full control of their platforms can do so.



Q. Will the player be able to fly the air unit, or just instruct the pilot on a course?

A. Both... one of the primary features of SCS - "Dangerous Waters" is its scalability. Dependent upon the player's preferences, the game can play as a point-and-click military strategy game or a full-fledged simulation (with flight model and joystick control). The autopilot will follow ordered waypoints and maintain altitude and course if enabled, but if the player chooses to disable autopilot and take control of a landing for himself (as an example) — he is able to do so.



Q. If you can't "pilot" the air unit, how will you control it?

A. Well the player can pilot it, if he'd like to. In addition to that, the player has control over the playable platform from the Ship Control / Pilot station through a mouse-driven interface, by entering waypoints on the NAV map, or simply by entering new altitudes/depths, speeds and course in the taskbar along the bottom of the screen.

Q. How do I change stations — is it the same for online or offline?

A. Every station (or group of stations) has a corresponding icon on the pop-up station panel. However, after a few days of playing, I think most people use the function keys (F1 - F12) to get where they need to go. Everyone plays differently, so we try to provide redundant inputs wherever possible (keyboard shortcuts especially).

Q. Can we perform missions other than patrols and sub-hunts?

A. The diversity and versatility of the platforms enables dozens of potential mission types. The fact that there are 19 quick mission types (so far) is a testament to that. The submarines are still as flexible as ever — performing land attacks, Special Forces deployment, ASW, ASUW, and reconnaissance/threat assessment (to list a few). The addition of a guided missile frigate and its accompanying helicopter expands the list even further with gunfire support, helo as a forward sensor, rescue operations and surface-to-surface engagements. Lastly, the P-3 is obviously very capable at ASW and reconnaissance but can also assist in ASUW operations.

We certainly are not at a loss for mission possibilities... the seven platforms are highly capable in many situations.



Q. Can I search for survivors in my Orion, or pick them up with my Seahawk?

A. The P-3 can only request to land at allied airports, but visually identifying downed pilots and sending out an MH-60 to retrieve them is certainly within the realm of possibility. Many missions are centered on those sorts of activities and serve as a nice change of pace from the usual “detect, classify and destroy” core game play.

Q. Will there be clickable cockpits / panels, or will I have to use my keyboard?

A. All cockpits are rendered and interactive. There are some shortcut keys to certain operations but for the most part the interaction is done in the stations themselves with tangible, visual feedback. The cockpits can be hidden to see a full-screen 3D view if the player chooses to fly the aircraft, but that's provided just as an option for the sake of player preference.



Q. Will sea-state 5 influence your boats (ship) behavior in shallow water?

A. Ship (and sub) pitch and roll is now physically modeled, and is affected by waves in our new ocean surface model, as well as by wind and currents. In very shallow water it should be possible to bounce off the bottom in a severe sea-state. Subs risk unintended broaching or submerging, and the sail can even induce a rolling moment in submerged high-speed turns, potentially causing some dangerous unintended changes in depth.

Q. How will you address the multi-player lag found in other Naval Combat games when too many missiles and/or torpedoes are active?

A. This was an issue inherent to the architecture of Sub Command and has been addressed for SCS-DW. It is currently being tested as the new multi-player engine is under development.



Q. Are we able to see missile launches with radar in Dangerous Waters?

A. All the controllable platforms have conventional sweep radars, not 3D radars like on an Aegis boat, so missile launches are not going to stand out. With a little luck, the player might see a surface-to-surface skimmer like a harpoon before it settles into its low-level flight.

Q. In multi-player, can we have maps and scenarios in alphabetical order in the Game Room list?

A. The Mission Selection screen in multi-player currently allows you to sort by number of players, or mission title just by clicking the label at the top of that column in much like Windows Explorer. This was one of the requests from SC that we have implemented.



Q. Could we have the opportunity to set the use of floating wire or antenna to communicate between teams in a multi-player game.

A. Yes, the radio antenna will allow sub captains to communicate with their teammates and also to update their overall sensor picture (by retrieving the latest solution over the Link). Once a sub submerges again, he will out of contact and the Link contacts will continue to age and potentially be dropped over time. This is an option in single player and multi-player

Q. Can we have the opportunity to give ships and subs a name for multi-player games?

A. That feature is currently slated for review and possible implementation (just like dozens of features, at this stage). There is certainly a strong possibility for it to be included given the new "collaborative nature" of this game versus the more solitary play of our sub simulations in the past.

Q. How "mod friendly" will this game be?

A. We plan to accommodate the mod-making community as best we can. The quality of work generated by the community for Sub Command was outstanding and we hope to further that cause for SCS-DW. Many of the game's mechanics are accessible within the game's databases and we are trying to add more functionality that is along those lines.

The station DLL's are still unavailable for modification. So far all Sonalysts Combat Simulations have been used as a baseline for real U.S. Navy training tools. These DLLs are heavily modified and tailored for training purposes so their format cannot be released to the public, unfortunately.

Toward that end, Multi-player will verify that all player interface DLLs are consistent in an attempt to prevent some players playing with hacked interfaces while others are not. Multi-player will enforce that all players have the same interfaces, hacked or not, before starting the game. This was a request by Sub Command users.

Q. Will the game be open enough to allow community add-on makers to create new ships and aircraft, (including new models, full stations, panels, cockpits, tweaked sonar, etc.) or will they be limited to such things like making custom skins and replacement sounds?

A. All 3D Models, model textures, object databases, sensor databases, AI doctrine, ambient sounds, 3D sounds and crew responses can be modified by the community (and have been in the past, with outstanding results).

The station art can be re-skinned but the functionality of the station itself will not be readily modifiable. Assuming that the game is successful we would like to add additional platforms such as carriers, destroyers, fighter planes, etc. With the community's support, we envision SCS-DW to be the beginning of a full-scale virtual naval battlefield in which all platforms are controllable and players collaborate seamlessly above and below the ocean surface.

Thank you Jamie for taking the time to answer our questions and provide the new development screenshots. We'll look forward to more on **SCS - "Dangerous Waters"** in the upcoming months.

