

OCS 101: Fog of War and Enemy Stacks (v2, 30 Sept 2020)

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There was a recent Consimworld discussion about Fog of War, and what units an enemy player is allowed to “see” when looking at stack. We will be using the OCS v4.3 rules. Let’s start with the actual rule, 4.9a: “A player can never look through an enemy stack. However, the enemy player may always see the hedgehog, top Combat Mode Attack-Capable unit (or top combat unit if none have a ZOC), and top Active plane in any hex. While the player will know if the top unit is Strat Mode, DG, or Out of Supply, he is not entitled to know about internal stocks status or steps lost.”

There are also some pertinent points in 4.8b Order of Stacking:

- A) Mode and Out of Supply markers should always be placed on top of all such units in the hex. Except where another such marker comes between them, the markers imply that all units beneath them in the stack are in that mode (or Out of Supply). Some units can never be in a certain mode or status, and those units simply ignore any such marker above them in the stack. For example, SP and Inactive air units under a DG marker are not in Disorganized Mode.
- B) Put Low, Exhausted, or Step Loss markers beneath each and every affected unit.
- C) If a unit with a ZOC is in a hex, it should be the top combat unit (to make ZOCs obvious).
- D) An HQ can be the top combat unit in the hex when no enemy ground units are adjacent (to help the owning player see his logistical net). The enemy player must be told if the hex has a ZOC.
- E) Active planes are put on top of any ground units, but on request the enemy player can also see the top combat unit and any hedgehog. If an Active fighter is in the stack, it should be the top air unit (to make Patrol Zones obvious).
- F) If a hedgehog is present, it should be the top ground unit (to make Hogs obvious). Again, the enemy player can see the top combat unit on request.

And one final rule is hiding in 13.7 Formation Markers. “At least one of the Formation’s units must be stacked with the marker or the marker cannot be on the map (except as a reminder of Fueling).” Also, “Unless using option 13.7b, players should take pains not to use these markers to “hide” formations from one another.” 13.7b is an “Option” placed here instead of in the Optional Rule section (21) and states: “Fog of War Option. If players agree, the Formation markers can be used to heighten the fog of war. Players are allowed to “hide” a tank corps or panzer division by putting its Formation marker under other combat units in a stack. Any such trickery must conform to 4.8b and 4.9a—the Formation needs to be on top if it contains the stack’s only ground units with a ZOC (and one of its units needs to be revealed).” Many players use this option, and it is an important point to agree on before play.

All of which gives us these general principles:

- You get to see the Hedgehog if one is present.

- You get to see the top active plane (which must be a Fighter, if there is one, so you can identify a Patrol Zone).
- You get to see the top combat unit, which must be a Combat Mode Attack-Capable unit if one is present to indicate a ZOC.
- If no Combat Mode Attack-Capable unit is present, then a Move Mode unit or parenthesized unit in either Combat or Move Mode must be on top. This isn't stated explicitly in the rules, but units in DG, Strat Move, Reserve or Exploit Modes would have to be under a marker versus units in Move Mode which don't (4.8b note A).
- You get to see the top combat unit, regardless of what marker is on top of it—OCS 4.9a should say "While the player will know if the top unit is, for example, Strat Mode, DG, or Out of Supply, etc." This includes Out of Supply, Exploit, Reserve, DG or Strat Mode. You can't use a mode marker to hide the top unit, but you can use a unit to hide mode markers affecting other units in the stack.
- You don't get to see markers that are beneath that top combat unit (step loss, Low/Exhausted).
- Other than Hedgehogs, non-combat units (Supply Points, Air Bases, Transport Points, LST ports) cannot be the top unit if there are any combat units at all in the hex. Regular ports are non-combat units but are printed on the map.
- An HQ can be the top combat unit in a stack. If the enemy has NO units adjacent, you need only reveal whether there is a ZOC in the hex (from a unit other than the HQ). If the enemy HAS units adjacent, you must show your opponent the top combat unit as if the HQ were not there.
- If Formation Markers are being used, they need to be indicated to your opponent (unless you agree to use the "Fog of War" option). If a unit that isn't from the Formation is the "top" unit, you need only show that the Formation Marker is present.

With all that, what would be legal, illegal or gamey?

- Hiding two Panzer Divisions in Reserve under a dinky little parenthesized combat unit, using the Formation Markers so that the stack is only 4 units high (Dinky combat unit, Reserve Marker, and two Formation Markers). Legal. If you are not using 13.7 b, then you need to show that the Formation Markers are present, but because they are in Reserve the dinky parenthesized combat unit can still be the top unit.
- Hiding the two Panzer Divisions in Reserve under a Wagon Point, again using the Formation Markers. Illegal, as a combat unit must be the top combat unit and you would need to show your opponent one of the units that is in Reserve. If you aren't using 13.7b, then you would need to show the top combat unit from one of the formations.
- Hiding two Panzer Divisions in Reserve under the Organic Truck from one of them. Illegal, same as the Wagon Point, as an Organic Truck is a special form of Transport Point.
- Making sure a Formation Marker is pointed out, but knowing it contains only one unit and most of the formation's combat power is elsewhere. Legal and well-done misdirection.
- Dropping 1T in each hex of a front line so that the stacks appear one unit taller and disguises the Pontoon hiding under one of the units. Legal.

- Moving an HQ up to a river and hiding it under a unit so that it can use its bridging capability next turn and catch your opponent unawares. Legal. HQs are often placed on top of a stack to assist in seeing your supply net, but it is not required.
- Spinning off several Breakdown units that stay in the same hex as the parent infantry division, so the stack looks tall. Illegal, as Breakdowns must be absorbed, per 20.0d. (In fact, read 20.0d carefully—a division in a hex with a higher AR Breakdown unit MUST absorb it!)
- Building an air base up to Level 3 beneath some units, and even flying air units to the hex which go inactive, and they all stay beneath a combat unit until at least one of the air units become active. Legal.
- Building an air base up to Level 3 beneath some units, adding a hidden HQ, and then showing an Active air unit hoping to attract an air mission that you can hit with a +4 flak DRM. Approved level of “sneaky” and perfectly legal.
- Hiding an Extender under combat units. Legal.
- Hiding combat units under an Extender. Illegal (top unit must be a combat unit if present).
- Having a stack that contains a unit which is DG, another in Strat Mode, and a third in Reserve, and getting to decide which is “top” to be shown to your opponent. Legal.
- Having a stack that contains a unit which is DG, another in Strat Mode, a third in Reserve, and a fourth in Move Mode and getting to decide which is “top” to be shown to your opponent. Not legal. The Move Mode unit must be the one on top per above.
- Sticking random markers under a combat unit (a few fueled markers and an Exploit marker for example) so the stack looks taller. Not specifically prohibited in the rules, but on the smellier side of gamey.
- Build a Level 2 Hedgehog and keep the marker at the bottom of the stack and hope you aren’t asked about it until the hex is attacked. Illegal.
- Conducting a Barrage on a stack to discover approximately the number of RE which might be present (due to the Density shift). Dean says gamey, Curtis says Legal. It isn’t illegal. You should never do an important operation without gathering as much intel as possible and interrogating your opponent about his stacks!
- Having a group of Move Mode units in a stack and putting an artillery unit on top to disguise their presence. Legal. If NONE of the units have a ZOC, then you get to decide what is the “top combat unit.” Again, if there is a mix of units in Move Mode and modes that require a marker, then the Move Mode units need to be above the units with markers.
- Hiding an HQ that has a Fueled Marker (which must be placed on top of the HQ per OCS 12.5c). It’s Legal to hide the HQ and its Fueled Marker under a Combat or Move Mode combat unit. If the HQ is the only Combat unit in the hex, then it must be on top.
- Insisting that because 4.9a didn’t specifically reference Reserve Markers, that you don’t have to show your opponent ANY unit under a Reserve Marker if that is on top. Illegal. You must show them the top combat unit.
- Having a multi-unit Formation Marker on the map but refusing to show the actual unit within if a unit of this Formation is indeed supposed to be the top unit. Illegal, as 13.7 note C says: “Just remember to think of the off-map units as stacked where the Formation marker is located.”
- Squinting carefully at your opponent’s stack to see how many units there are. Is that possibly an orange Strat Mode marker peeking out? Are there a lot of stacks in an area versus few in another? Does it look like an attack might be brewing? Legal to view the stack from the side,

encouraged for your opponent to try and fake you out, gamey if you are trying to sniff out intel like Strat Mode markers. I have even seen players snap a photo of an opponent's position before the move to compare it with later, a form of aerial reconnaissance. This is where some of the "fog of war" isn't as foggy as it might be.