

MODUS POCUS

MODE SELECTION IN OCS

By Jim Kuchar

OCS provides the players with a delicious mix of decisions, and one of the most important and, possibly, challenging choices is what mode to place units in. Unlike many games in which a unit only has one state (or mode), in OCS the player can voluntarily choose to put a unit into one of four distinct modes, with two additional modes occasionally imposed by events in the game. While one could perhaps play OCS without ever taking units out of Combat Mode, much of the richness in the experience (as well as possibility for success) would be lost. This article provides a little structure behind the factors that come into play when selecting a mode and hopefully helps kick-start new players on the road to the most efficient use of their units.

We'll start with a quick review of the various Modes along with their advantages, disadvantages, and key considerations. Then we'll explore how to think of using your units in one of three main patterns, and how the modes support those patterns of use.

Modes in OCS

There are five voluntary modes:

Combat Mode represents the unit as deployed for battle; this maximizes the unit's combat strength and enables it to exert a Zone of Control (if Attack Capable) and perform special functions such as building a Hedgehog or making an amphibious landing.



Move Mode places the unit into a mobile stance while still somewhat ready for combat. This typically cuts the combat strength in half but may double (or more) the unit's Movement Allowance (MA). Move Mode is required for units to take advantage of air transport, shipping, or rail. A motorized unit like the one pictured can have its MA quadrupled when placed in Move Mode, though the unit's subsequent reliance on trucks requires the use of fuel to move. Note that the unit's all-important AR isn't usually affected (Soviet tanks are a notable exception), which means that the reduction in combat effectiveness



isn't really as great as one might fear just by looking at the strength alone.

Reserve Mode puts the unit into a flexible, reactive stance in which it will later be able to act either (1) in the friendly Exploit Phase to take advantage of any holes that may have been opened in the enemy line during the Combat Phase—before the enemy has a chance to react, or (2) in the middle of the opponent's turn (during the enemy Reaction Phase). While in Reserve Mode, the unit's actions are quite limited—its MA in the Movement Phase is quartered, the unit cannot attack, its defensive strength is halved, and the unit cannot remain in Reserve in a hedgehog. Because of these restrictions, you won't want Reserve Mode units on the front line (in fact a unit cannot be put in Reserve Mode if in an enemy ZOC). But the whole reason for going into Reserve Mode is that, unlike any other mode, the unit can be released at two key points in the game to move or attack. When released, the Reserve Marker is removed and the unit instantly takes on the mode it was in when the marker was originally placed.

There are actually two **Reserve Mode** stances—signified by placing a Reserve Marker on top of the unit while having the unit itself placed in either Combat or Move orientation underneath. A unit such as the British armored unit above (in Reserve/Move Mode) will be in Move Mode once released. It cannot be placed into Combat Mode until the player's next Movement Phase. Likewise, the U.S. mechanized infantry unit above (in Reserve/Combat Mode) will be stuck in Combat Mode once released and perhaps unable to move as far as desired at that time. For this reason, it is important to think ahead as to the mode you want the unit in once it is released. The choice depends on balancing the need for combat strength (for example to perform an attack or barrage) versus flexibility in movement (such as when the unit is needed to penetrate deep into enemy lines and cut trace supply or move laterally to fill in a gap in your own lines).



The final voluntary mode is **Strat Mode**. This allows the unit (which must be in Move stance under the Strat marker) to double its MA with the constraints that the unit has 0 combat strength, an AR of 0, must end its turn in trace supply, incurs a 3 column shift to the right under barrage, and is eliminated if it is forced into an enemy ZOC. For these reasons, going into Strat Mode should only be done when you are confident the unit will not be encountering enemy units or barrages. Since you can't change the mode until your Movement Phase, this may require waiting through as many as two enemy half-turns (should they take a double-turn initiative).



Since the focus of this article is on the issues and decisions made when selecting modes, the final two modes in OCS—**Exploit** and **DG**—which are involuntary, are not covered here.

Turn Sequence Patterns

The mode selection that is made during the Movement Phase has repercussions throughout the entire game turn (and perhaps beyond). In particular, the mode that a unit is placed in leads to three natural patterns or sequences of action. We'll term these three patterns *Conventional*, *Exploit*, and *React*.

The *Conventional* pattern is typical to many wargames, involving three linked steps: Movement, Combat, and Exploitation. The *Conventional* unit moves up to a weak point in the enemy line, attacks through combat, and then potentially follows through with additional exploitation if the main combat action goes particularly well. Putting units into Combat Mode allows for the strongest firepower but may restrict how far the units can move prior to (or after) combat. Using units in Move Mode provides more flexibility in getting farther into position, or enabling an overrun, or making deeper thrusts in the Exploit Phase, but with correspondingly lower combat strength and therefore more risk both during and after the player turn. Note that while the *Conventional* pattern is straightforward

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and provides typically the greatest combat punch, this choice completely ends the unit's actions until your next player turn—there is nothing that unit can do in the enemy turn (or *turns*, should your opponent get a double-turn) except take whatever the enemy throws at it.

One could play an entire game only using the *Conventional* pattern, but the experience would fall flat—it is by using the next two patterns that OCS really shines. In the *Exploit* pattern, units are placed into Reserve Mode in the Movement Phase and perhaps moved $\frac{1}{4}$ of their MA in that phase. But this is only preparatory to their main event: taking action in the Exploit Phase. After patiently waiting out the enemy Reaction and friendly Combat Phases, the *Exploit* pattern unit takes center stage in the Exploit Phase: the unit is released from Reserve and can then move its *full* MA, perhaps to perform an overrun, and can also either barrage or engage in combat. Because this action is occurring after enemy reaction and friendly combat, the *Exploit* pattern unit is more apt to hit the weakest enemy units or make the deepest drive into the rear. The *Exploit* pattern unit in fact has essentially the same capabilities as the *Conventional* pattern unit (minus the ability to perform follow-on exploitation) but its actions are simply deferred until after the Combat Phase.

React pattern units must be even more patient. Going into Reserve Mode in the Movement Phase and perhaps moving $\frac{1}{4}$ MA at that time, this unit stands idly by during friendly Combat and the Exploit Phases. However, after the enemy Movement Phase, the unit can be released from reserve in the Reaction Phase (with $\frac{1}{2}$ MA) to respond immediately to whatever has just transpired. *React* pattern units are your long-term investments. They provide the most direct counterbalance to an enemy *Conventional* pattern by disrupting their plan between their Movement and Combat phases. Your reaction can take the form of artillery or air performing barrages to DG threatening stacks, bolstering weak points by moving additional units into your line, or full-out overruns as part of a counterattack. Note, however, that released ground units wishing to attack

in the opponent's Reaction Phase can only perform overruns (normal combat has to wait until your own player turn) and, with only $\frac{1}{2}$ MA, this can generally only be performed by units that are released into a Move Mode stance.

Turn order also plays a role in mode selection. When you are going second in the turn, you have the luxury of seeing your opponent move first. Release your reserve units during the enemy Reaction Phase and move them into key positions where they are ready to move yet again for the main assault in your turn. You have great visibility into your opponent's ability to react, since they'll have already committed units to reserve (or not!) This is a nice way to set up an attack and shows that you shouldn't always think of the Reaction Phase as purely reactionary after your turn—you can use it *before* your turn to prepare for your main event.

Another advantage to *Exploit* and *React* pattern units is that they do not need to satisfy trace supply requirements immediately after their main movement action—they can thrust deeply into enemy territory beyond trace and will have their next friendly Movement

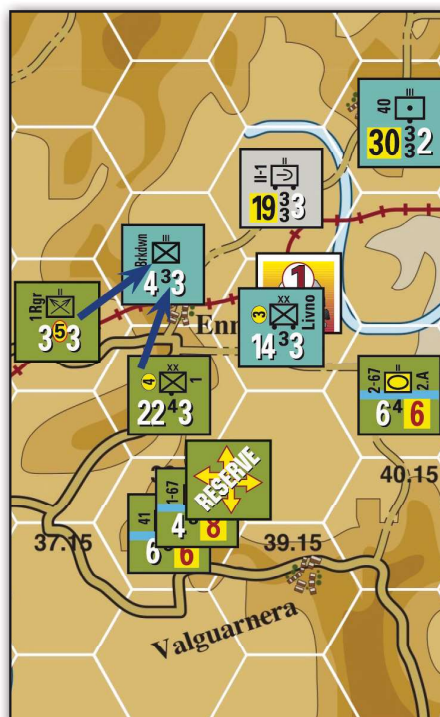
Phase to adjust and reestablish supply lines as necessary before needing to check for attrition.

Maximizing Movement

A final consideration in mode selection comes up in some theaters (**Burma**, in particular) where terrain is especially difficult. Because of the 1-hex minimum move rule (6.1c), having $\frac{1}{4}$ MA can sometimes be just as good as having full MA. Consider the situation from **Sicily II** below: the German *nebelwerfer* battalion wishes to move across the mountain range and escape along the track to the northeast. In Combat Mode, the unit would have to use its full MA to move into the mountain hex, and then would have to wait until its next Movement Phase to complete its hike over the mountains. If, instead, the German unit were put in Reserve (which is possible, since the U.S. division is in Move Mode and therefore has no ZOC), it could move into the mountain during its Movement Phase (using rule 6.1c), and then release from Reserve in the upcoming Exploit Phase and move along the trail as desired, saving a whole turn. In mountainous terrain



Maximizing Reserve Movement



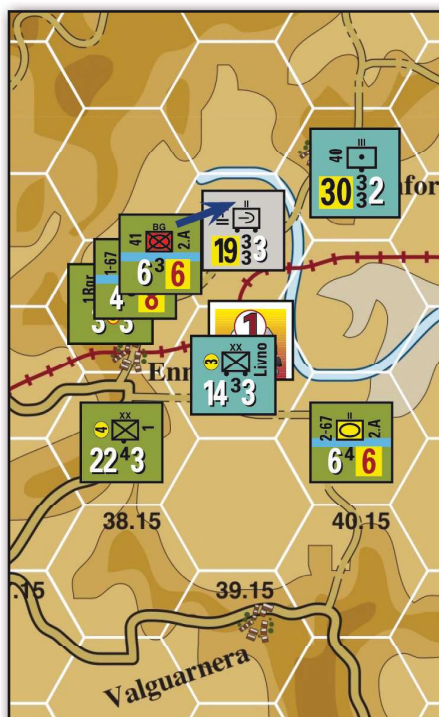
Step 1: Combat Phase

(or when river crossings are necessary), using Reserve markers to enable this type of extra mobility is essential for infiltration.

Putting It All Together

Let's look at a fairly conventional example of the power of Reserve Mode. As shown in the sequence of three images above, the Americans hope to make a push north through Enna (hex 38.17), but are being screened by an Italian rear-guard. The Allied player senses an opportunity, and sets up two units in Reserve Mode south of the front lines. The reinforced 1st Infantry Division moves forward to attack the Italian breakdown regiment. The Axis player is unable to respond since he has no units in reserve and his planes are busy elsewhere! The combat will be resolved at 6:1 odds with a +2 AR advantage—with an average roll, the outcome will be Ao1DL1o1, eliminating the defenders.

Since the Allied player planned ahead, he has reserves to release in the Exploitation Phase. They will advance through Enna to attack the nebelwerfer unit in the backfield (the



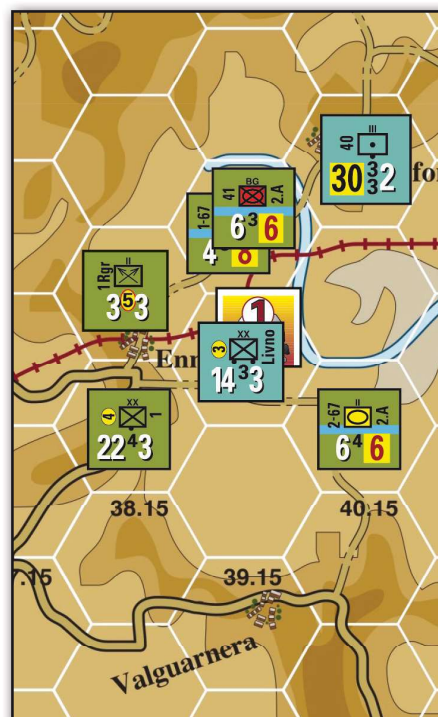
Step 2: Exploitation Phase

one that thought it had escaped danger by using that Reserve movement trick). Use of what I have dubbed the *Exploit* pattern has resulted in a strong push right through the immobilized Italian defense, and it ends with the Livorno Division in a pickle.

Note that had the Allied player not put his units in reserve, then he would have been unable to exploit the hole in the enemy line that was opened up in combat. On the other hand, had the Axis player been more careful to use Reserve Mode—he could have put part of Livorno behind the line to be released in the Reaction Phase to shore up the front line, or maybe used the 40th Artillery Regiment to possibly disrupt the Big Red One's attack.

Summing Up

You need to employ a mix of modes to extract the most from OCS. If you're overly reliant on the *Conventional* pattern of Move-Combat-Exploit (as most beginners are), your plans will be disrupted by an enemy using *React* pattern units that disorganize your leading combat units or fill into gaps just before you planned to strike. The



Step 3: Cleanup Phase

Exploit pattern in many ways allows the best control over your attacks, since you get full MA and combat strength after the enemy has already reacted to your main move and you need not check for supply on your extended units until your next turn. *React* pattern units are best used as disruptive forces—and often just the threat of what they could do in the Reaction Phase is worth more than their *Conventional* pattern strength.

Although it is often tempting to keep units in Combat Mode and press on in a conventional manner, the next time you play keep a close eye on your pile of spare Reserve markers. Each marker represents a limited and valuable resource for your forces that lays dormant if it isn't actively used. If you have a few Reserve markers sitting by idly, think carefully about deferring some units' actions until Exploit or Reaction phases to keep your lines from becoming frozen and make your opponent worry about what might happen unexpectedly. Even if you don't plan on making any major moves, a set of units under Reserve nearby can force your opponent to use caution and perhaps expend supply reacting to your feigned threat.