Curtis Baer, OCS Honcho, posted this "State of the OCS" message July 6, 2019:

Gentlemen,

I have prepared a report regarding the State of the OCS which I am pasting below. Also attached below is the word doc of this Honcho report which I include for your use as it may be easier to read. In addition, I have included as a file below the OCS Update - Power Point slides that were presented at Consim Expo last Week.

OCS Honcho Report Curtis H. Baer, baerstine@gmail.com Chip Saltsman, csaltsman0914@gmail.com July 1, 2019

Once again, we were in Tempe, AZ last week to attend John Kranz's annual extravaganza – MonsterCon. There were a great many Gamer's games being played with the majority of those being OCS (as usual). I'd say about 40 to 45 of our guys participated during the week. I counted 54 attendees at the State of the OCS forum on Wednesday night. So, all in all a great showing.

I was particularly proud at the number of OCS games in play. Published games such as Beyond the Rhine (two of them), Smolensk, Reluctant Enemies, Sicily II, Tunisia II and GBII were all on the table. No fewer than six games in various stages of development were being playtested: The Third Winter, Bagration, Forgotten Battles, Hero City, Crimea and Hungarian Rhapsody. OCS is alive and well represented at this event.

Winterfest, in lovely Sandusky, Ohio this past February saw the unveiling of Mr. Tony Birkett's grand, east front opus, Ost Front. This is a massive portrayal of the entire east front beginning September 26, 1943 from the Karelian Peninsula of Finland all the way south to Odessa and all the Crimean Peninsula. Three complete stand-alone games (The Third Winter, The Forgotten Battles, and The Hero City (from south to north, see below, and an additional map and OoB for the Crimea)) were joined to present the entire east front at standard OCS 5-mile scale. It's a sight to behold and great experience to play. We found it plays very well operational and strategically. OCS guys seemed to dominate this little Con on Lake Erie. By my count we had 23 players involved including 8 "full time" guys.

Most of my OCS play is face-to-face. I'm fortunate in this but I realize it is the exception for game play not the rule. So, the number of Vassal OCS games reported in progress by players from all over the world is impressive and encouraging. These Vassal mods have been important in facilitating the play of OCS games which may very well have not happened otherwise. Vassal mods also greatly expand the pool of playtesters available. The importance of this for the continued development of OCS games cannot be overstated. Jeff Coyle puts in a lot of hours creating the OCS Vassal modules and Herman Wu has recently taken on the role of scenario creator and proofreader. My thanks to both for their efforts.

There continues to be steady posting about OCS games on the Consimword Forum and on Boardgame Geek (BBG appears to be a bigger group of gamers than ConSim forum). We have our OCS Facebook page which sees steady posts. I also see a really big group of gamers on the Wargamers Facebook page. We had some good coverage there of the Ost Front game last week. I believe we should continue to encourage a presence on all these forums.

So, for these reasons, it's quite fortunate for us all that I can again say; the State of the OCS is strong, in fact quite strong.

Development and Playtesting Update:

Hungarian Rhapsody. Design – Stephane Acquaviva. Developer – Curtis H. Baer. (Two maps, four countersheets, campaigns in Hungary, western Romania, 10-5-1944 to 2-12-1945, including the epic battle for Budapest, 15 scenarios). This is the next title in line for publication. Unfortunately, we have had a delay here. This game was finally completed and submitted to MMP for a preorder 1-31-2019. We were told by MMP there was an inventory management and production scheduling problem. So, I've been patiently waiting to hear when this game can be placed for preorder and even more importantly, I've asked for a reasonable date for publication after preorder has been achieved. This last point is important. OCS games

have always made their preorder number. The problem is, our current system has disincentives to preorder. Dean and I have proposed that OCS preorders should rather have, incentives for OCSers to preorder. With interesting incentives in place I can see OCS games "making their number" in possibly 60 days or even 30 days, but certainly a much shorter time frame than under the current system. However, the problem is we would then need to see a reasonable date for production after the number is made. I believe a long period of lingering, while waiting for production is even worse than an unnecessarily long preorder period. So, the timing of preorders, the method of preorders and MMP's production schedule all become important to manage. At this time, I can say that I'm working with MMP as best I can. I share your frustration; like you I want our games sooner than later. HR will provide a wide range of OCS play. This includes tank battles on the plains in Hungary, epic battles for Budapest (very Stalingrad-like), battles to force a path through the Carpathian Mountains, a small partisan suppression campaign in Slovakia, and the struggle for local air superiority. Scenarios will include the fight across the Hungarian plains, the battles on the approach to Budapest, the sieges of Budapest, and the three desperate German relief efforts for Budapest (Operations Konrad I, II and III). Soviet Front HQs and the RVGK tank and Mech corps rebuild functions are realistically portrayed. Soviet logistical difficulties (they had NO rail net) are simulated in a unique and effective OCS manner – Truck Cap. Because I'm the developer for HR it's hard to be objective, but I have played enough of this game to confidently say - HR will be a tense, and engaging experience for each player, the hallmark for each OCS game.

The Third Winter. Design – Tony Birkett. Developer – Chip Saltsman. (Four maps, seven countersheets, campaigns on the lower Dnieper river, 9-26-1943 to the mud of March-April 1944, 4-6 scenarios). TTW is now in final development and is planned for preorder - 9-1-2019. (However, the above referenced constraints concerning preorder and publication will also apply here.) This game has now been very well playtested and Chip is addressing the final issues of its development. I have been involved with playtesting this game for several years now. Accordingly, I can say it will be a tight, tough contest for each side. Supply and victory conditions seemed to be very well balanced. The lower Dnieper river crossing attempts are a great challenge for each player. There will be massive battles for control of Kiev and the very important rail junction it contains. Cherkassy and Kremenchug remain points of interest for the Soviet player, so the German player must defend these cities in strength or face the consequences. This spreads the German defense to the Soviets advantage. The question becomes, where will the German line break and when? Very tense situation for each side. Later scenarios encompass the Korsun pocket action, the German defense at the Bug river, the defense of Odessa and the Soviet drives into Romania and eastern Poland. All in all, another challenging and compelling OCS game!

The Forgotten Battles. Design – Tony Birkett. Developer – Curtis H. Baer (currently by default – volunteers?). (Four maps, four countersheets, scenarios, to be determined). This is a companion game that covers the east front north of The Third Winter. It portrays the battles faced by Army Group Center starting late September 1943 through spring 1944. Playtesting reveals this game to be another knock down, dragged out affair presenting challenges, again to both players. The combatants were going after each other tooth and nail on this "quiet front". I've learned a great deal about this underappreciated part of WWII. Truly - Forgotten Battles.

Titles In Various States Of Design (some are well along, and some are primarily a concept): More advanced stages of Design (In Playtesting or getting closer to Playtesting):

• Hero City – (Design: Tony Birkett, Developer:???) (In Playtesting). A Four-map follow on game of east front action in the Leningrad area, particularly focused on the lifting of the siege in 1943-1944. Tony Birkett is the designer, and it would link to the Forgotten Battles maps. Part of Tony's current complete east front project– Ost Front.

• Bagration – (Design: Kurt Gilles, Developer:???) (In Playtesting). The Soviet destruction of Army Group Center can be played on essentially the same map set as Forgotten Battles. This module is being designed by Kurt Gilles. The first playtest was made last week in Tempe. As expected our designer got some very good feedback and has quite a few notes. He will now reflect and refine this design. Looking to get a Vassal Mod as soon as we can. Let me know if you and your group want to help with playtesting.

• Normandy – (Design: Roland LeBlanc, Developer:???) (Working title – Cross Channel Attack.) Roland is designing a game for the Second Front invasion of occupied Europe in 1944, whose maps will link to his

earlier design Beyond the Rhine. Five maps (3.5 mile/hex scale) to include Normandy. This game has come a long way in the past six months (sorry to pester you so Roland.) Now that he is officially retired, he's has made substantial progress on all the important elements: Maps, OoB/Counters, Game Specific Rules. John Kisner is helping by preparing playtest map graphics. Accordingly. I would like to see this title in playtesting ASAP. In this regard it's not too early to line up playtesters – any volunteers? Send me an email, thanks.

• Italy – (Design: Tony Zbaraschuk, Developer???). Tony Z has been designing a game that represents the Italian Campaign. The scale he's working on at this time is 3.5 to the hex, and the maps cover from Parma and Mantua in the Po river valley in the north to Napoli and Foggia in the south. It appears we have to extend the map area in the south to encompass the Salerno landings. At this scale it 36 hexes from Anzio directly east to Pescara on the Adriatic coast. Again, substantial progress has been made on this game in the past six months. We all remember how good Avalon Hill's Anzio was. I can see where this campaign could be just as good via the OCS treatment. Can't wait to get this one into playtesting.

• Sea Lion – (Design: Marcus Watney, Developer???). Marcus is designing a hypothetical German invasion of southern England in the summer/fall of 1940. He's been a busy guy and has now produced the first draft of big three components necessary to advance to playtesting: 1.) map (sketches here, still working on a playtest version), 2.) OoB/ Counters Manifest (still working on the playtest counters), and 3.) Game Specific Rules. He has some neat ideas about how to handle specific mechanics which will be required for this game.

Less advanced stages of Design. (Not Ready for Playtesting.)

• Czechoslovakia 1938 – David Barsness is designing a game for a hypothetical war between Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1938.

• Crimea – Two separate games are in design, and our thought at this time is to publish both in a one-map package. Guy Wilde is working on the German conquest of the Crimea in 1941-1942 and Tony Birkett is designing a module for the Soviet reconquest in 1944.

• Malaya – Another potential title by Tony Zbaraschuk that covers the Japanese conquest of Malaysia in 1941-1942. This design is on the back burner. I have asked Tony to focus on Italy as a higher priority.

• Prussia 1945 – The final Soviet offensive to capture Berlin is being modeled by Tony Birkett. In addition, Roland LeBlanc has done a great deal of research on this campaign and will take up this project as soon as he can complete his Normandy game.

• Greece 1940-1941 – I'm in the initial stages of design for a module that covers the Italian invasion of Greece, and subsequent German intervention. Working now on the OoB/Counters. Cleaning up the mapping (Two maps at 5-mile scale, plus a small Crete map, same scale). Still considering how to make a compelling OCS title from this situation. It certainly would be intriguing if we could link this to DAK (and Reluctant Enemies?).

• Changsha – Several large battles took place in this region between the Japanese and Chinese forces in 1939, 1941 and 1944. Forest Webb has done the initial work on what this campaign could look like. He has preliminary OCS maps (two at 5-mile scale). He's working on the order of battle. And he has started considering the game specific rules. I will continue to encourage his efforts.

• Kursk – Following Hungarian Rhapsody, Stephane Acquaviva has been mapping out how the Axis summer of 1943 campaign (which did not need to take place at Kursk) could be modeled. In this regard, I understand his focus will be the operational possibilities presented on the eastern front during this time, rather than a recreation of the actual battle of Kursk which may require scripting and possibly not play well as an OCS title.

• Norway 1940 ??? – Just a glint in Chip Saltsman's eye at this moment. Many of us can recall what a great game Narvik was in the old Europa series. So, I'm wondering whether an OCS rendition of this campaign could be equally well done. We'll see what Chip comes up with.

• Others? – There may be other game ideas out there. If you are interested in designing an OCS game,

please reach out to me. We have a set of requirements for budding OCS designs, which are essentially to produce a playtest map, order of battle and game-specific rules/trial scenarios within a stated period of time. We are particularly interested in more one-map games to provide both variety and entry-level action. Think Smolensk, which I believe has been a great success.

OCS Series Rules:

Guderian's Blitzkrieg (first edition) was published in 1992. The 2.0 rules came in 1994 with Enemy at the Gates, the 3.0 rules in (I believe) 2000 with Sicily, and our current 4.0 rules series were first published with Case Blue in 2007. The current v4.3 ruleset is the product of 20+ years of development, is really quite stable and should not be changed lightly. Again, my thanks to John Kisner on behalf of all of us for his dedicated work on our series rules over the past ten years or so. Eventually we will get to a Version 5.0 of the Series Rules, but that is some time in the future. Our philosophy is not to jump in with overnight rules changes.

However, as we all know there are anomalies and issues concerning our rules-set which should be addressed. I wish to be clear that I would not like to see any rules changes until each specific proposal is properly vetted and thoroughly discussed in a meaningful way by experienced OCS players. Then, I would ideally like to see a significant consensus at the end of this process. Will all players agree on every aspect of each proposal? None of us should expect that. I am, however, hopeful that our collegial OCS community can arrive at a consensus for any rules changes that may be considered.

We want to advance the state of the game but not add undue "chrome" in the process. Years of play have highlighted several topics where some rules change proposals should be carefully evaluated; these topics include:

• Artillery – Every so often a "we should change the way artillery is handled" discussion erupts on the Consimworld OCS forum. Dean Essig himself suggested an alternative approach last year, and many others have made their known on this topic. Chip has drafted a "little fix" solution to our artillery issues that I would like OCS players to consider for now, which is a combination of:

a. Artillery units cannot spot for barrages. b. Pick your column to resolve barrage (with the artillery strength of that unit.) This is HR-7 (Artillery Factors) in the OCS rules, and has been in use by many players for some time now. c. HR-8 (Barrage Losses) Select any Barrage losses randomly from the steps present in the hex.

• Higher Level Headquarters – I have been puzzled for some time why, in our operational system, higher level HQs are not modeled. For instance, German Army HQs and Soviet Front HQs on the eastern front have simply been missing. Can anyone say these higher-level HQs played no significant role operationally? Are all armies in WWII, in all theaters in WWII, at all points in time in WWII, best represented operationally by just one level of headquarters? If so, then what did these higher HQs do? Why did they exist? Well, as you can surmise, I believe the higher-level HQs did have a significant operational purpose. I'm not alone in this view. The question then becomes, how best to include their effects into our system in an OCS like manner. The designs for both Hungarian Rhapsody and The Third Winter have Soviet Front HQ's which model the logistical pipelines to deliver resources (think primarily OCS SPs) to allow the military operations which we portray in the OCS. In, addition Tony Birkett has included the German army and army group HQs in his Ost Front games with attributes to begin modeling their operational role as well. The Soviet Fronts HQs in The Third Winter allow an excellent representation of how STAVKA switched these entities on and off offensive status. These Army/Front level Headquarters units can also streamline activities such as moving SP's from the map edge, marshaling Repl units, constructing airbases, bridging rivers, creating extenders, etc. As always, we will carefully evaluate your feedback concerning the application of these new higher level HQs.

• Fog of War – Players often have more information than they should about enemy forces, even with the current Fog of War rules. Is there some mechanism to better depict the fog of war effect? In DAK we have the German Kampfgruppe, Italian Raggruppa, and Commonwealth Leader counters on the map representing a particular formation of counters that are held off map and out of your opponent's sight. This might seem trivial but, in my experience playing this game, these counters simulate a rather important FOW effect. In fact, there is a DAK Special Event that takes the counters away from the players, so the actual units must then be placed back onto the map. This event shows dramatically this significant effect on FOW. It illustrates

well the point about our lack of FOW. In Hungarian Rhapsody, I have included 10 Corps makers for each player to use in the same manner as described above. They were first included to alleviate counter clutter in the Budapest area of the map. But the more I thought about it, the more I was convinced they could be used throughout the play of the game for FOW effects. Simple and effective. I believe it realistically changes the play of the game. Would this not be valid for all OCS games? I welcome feedback on this from all players of HR.

• Fueling – There is a Minimal Fueling House Rule (HR-10) that deserves consideration for adoption. An another alternative fueling rule included as a "highly recommended optional" in Hungarian Rhapsody is the "Jansen Fueling Rule". We have used this rule at our local Baltimore, Monday night gaming sessions:

Jansen Fueling Rule. A Multi Unit Formation ("MUF", such as a Soviet Mech corps or German Pz division) can fuel and move in a player's Movement Phase (not the Reaction or Exploitation Phases), for the supply cost of only 1T, with the following restrictions:

The units to be moved cannot start, move or end next to an enemy combat unit. (Note that enemy ZOCs are not an issue here.)

The units can only be in Combat Mode. No road movement bonus can be used (i.e. moving on a road at 1/2 is prohibited). Road movement costs at least 1MP (weather effects must be followed). A Road still functions to negate other terrain in the hex for movement purposes.

All units of the MUF are not required to use Jansen Fueling. Any unit or units can move normally at the cost of 1T each, if desired.

Development Note. Steve Jansen is the leader of the Baltimore NEBO Grognards, our war gaming club. He developed this house rule during our recent play of Beyond the Rhine. We have been using this rule with great results since April 2016.

Again, simple and effective. Let us know what you think.

• Others – There are plenty of other rules changes, "floated", "presented', "put out there for consideration", "insisted upon", and "desperately needed" that have seen some mention in the past year. I'm sure there will always be such. The point is our series Rules should be a dynamic, evolving ruleset, but through a process of appropriate and deliberate vetting to assure we can develop a consensus for any change.

Resources:

Chip Saltsman and I have been active on forums like Consimworld and Facebook to answer rules-related questions, and we really appreciate how often knowledgeable people jump in to help (John Kisner, Perry Andrus, Nolan Hudgens, and many others deserve special thanks). Newer players frequently tell us how impressed they are with the support level for this game system. Our intent is to provide resources to players through:

• Continued rules question-answering.

• Over time, the Gamers Archive site will phase out. We have developed an OCS website, The "OCS Depot" (http://www.ocsdepot.com) that collects as many resources specific to each game as possible. More to come on this as the site expands.

• People comment on how useful the visual displays are for game setup in Reluctant Enemies and the Vitebsk scenario which was included in Smolensk. There are some home-grown versions, such as a DAK OOA someone put together. We would like to generate visual displays for most OCS titles, at least for the initial setup and OOA. This would be a lengthy effort.

• As time may allow I think developing a periodic OCS Newsletter, like Gene Billingsley does for GMT might be useful to keep everyone up to date on OCS matters.

That's all for now. Thanks, CHB