AO Placement – Some Basic Questions

1) Do I have supply?

Most of the time a town on the front will have 1 or 2 units in it. Infantry brigades are the primary supply, Armoured brigades are support units. HQs don't typically feature in attacks because we can't spawn offensive missions. So I'm looking to attack a town, how many links do I have to the town? Typically, the more the better because more links means more supply, more spawnables, more directions of attack. But also be aware more links also means more FBs to defend and more salami slicing attrition of the best, most prestigious units in each spawn list, eg if 3 Inf brigades face a town, you can rely on that Inf brigade being stripped of Snipers and Bazookas even if the overall dent in supply from the attack is spread across the 3 brigades. If I have 1 link, do I have more than one Inf brigade to commit? If I'm attacking with with just an Inf and supply starts to run low, how easy it for me to move either an Armoured or another Infantry brigade into the attacking towns to give me reinforcements? Look at the towns behind the attack, what movement options are there to get supply into the attack zone. It's better if the additional reinforcement brigades can come from another division altogether, as this increases your rotation options; consider the notion of supply a game of constantly rotating units, bringing them into the attack and rotating them out, aligned with the ticket resupply timer. It's use, bring back, replenish, move forward and use, and so on.

2) Will I cripple the line if I use the supply?

If you use the supply in a brigade(s) or division(s) or an area, consider that they will be depleted for hours, until the used tickets come back. So if I'm going to attack from a unit, and that unit is left frontline once used, or might become frontline before it's replenished, consider that the town it's in is at risk. When you attack, you burn supply, so try and anticipate what the enemy OiC is going to do, if he realises your supply is depleted; if you launch an AO from a solitary, isolated Inf bde against an enemy town that he is able to rotate various brigades or divisions through, if your attack is unsuccessful, you're going to be pretty sure he's going to counter you and use his ready supply advantage. The other aspect is I might be able to move units to support the AO, but what about the towns and areas I've left weaker to do so? It's risky to leave areas very weak to support an attack, so the factors that might affect that risk evaluation should be considered - overall numbers, TZ changes, pop swings etc. Try and see the line as fluid, so you're shifting supply dynamically and not leaving areas 'dry' and exposed

3) Can I engineer more supply?

The way the map works is that brigades and divisions overlap one another along sections of the front, eg at starting positions, we have three mini-fronts - the North from around Antwerp to Namur; the Centre from Anhee along the Meuse river line to Charleville and the South, from Sedan all the way to Metz and beyond. Within these mini fronts, the divisions can interlink and support one another, you'll find brigades from multiple divisions in many towns, this is flexibility and it's good. The links in the map design mean that the flexibility his lost at Namur and Sedan, because our line is too stretched so you get a natural break in the overlapping; we lose flexing options. So within these zones, it's possible to 'engineer' additional supply for any action by shifting the divisions north or south, so see the map as fluid, a constantly moving entity with strong points and weak points - in certain areas you're able to shift supply away from strong or stacked areas to provide more options for weaker areas. In some zones, we can't do this - this is why the starting map positions you'll often see Allies struggle to reinforce Sedan or Namur, because they're the areas where this shifting can't happen easily, they're blockages in the supply pipeline.

4) Do I outsupply them?

A basic notion in understanding the map is brigade/division parity, ie look at the map, how do the opposing brigades and divisions look stood off against one another? If my single Inf brigade is facing an Axis inf brigade, there's parity, we're equally supplied (assuming both brigades are fresh, which is another point!). If I have an Inf and an Arm, and I'm facing a town with an Axis HQ, I'm better supplied. If my Inf is facing 2 Infs and a HQ, I'm outsupplied so we're not to win through attrition.

5) How might they reinforce?

Brigade parity is one aspect, Divisional parity is the other - so now we're looking beyond the immediate line at the divisions supporting the line. I might have an Inf and an Arm to attack the town with only an Axis Inf in, but if I can't reinforce my 2 brigades and Axis can rotate in numerous brigades from an additional division with a simple shift, I'm not in a position to count on being able to win the attrition war. The point to make here is to look behind the line and predict what the enemy will do should they need to reinforce the defence. The fewer options they have the better for us.

6) Can I move in if we succeed?

Nothing kills morale more than the players battling for a town, being victorious and then not being in a position to move in and occupy the newly acquired town. So be sure not to throw an AO on a town that we can't move into, ie make sure your divisions and links allow to stretch out to move in if the AO is successful

7) What does the line look like if we move in?

Your consideration of 3a) above must factor in that moving in and stretching our line on may mean we're left exposed and weak in other areas, eg if I take the town and can move the Inf brigade in by allowing a HQ to hold the line, that HQ may in itself be vulnerable to attack which would then cut off the Inf brigade. A key element is to see the map as dynamic; fluid. Units should always be moving, the map is not static. As your AO progresses, an idea is to funnel supply in towards the area to give you options. The timer for front line units is 60 minutes, so try and be working on at least 60 minutes in advance, positioning your units where they may be needed an hour in the future.

8) How does the town layout affect AO selection?

When selecting a town, zoom in and look at the town layout. You may know some towns, and there's a thread in the War Room forum where players have noted attack tactics etc but let's assume you're attacking a town without knowledge of the topography - what should you look for and what impact should that have on the AO? I'd suggest:

a) Multi-AB towns are tough to take, you have more than one strong point to overcome and more than one strong point from which the enemy can spawn. So if you're looking at an AO that will give you easy momentum, avoid a multi-AB town. Large towns can be mole operations, which can draw defenders but the mole element can be hard to manage so it's often good to be sure you're in contact with the main tactical leader to ensure the comms are controlled.

b) River towns that are bisected by the river can be very good targets if the AO can follow a loose plan, for instance Andenne; it's a critical town as it links to Namur in separating the North and the Centre and it's also bisected by the Meuse, meaning the AB is north of the river and there are only two spawn CPs south of the river. If we're attacking from Namur, it's possible to capture the south of town and build traction if air can keep the bridge blown. The ability to keep a town contested is a key factor in likely success and drawing defenders - rivers allow this

c) AF and towns in the shadow of AF are key, key towns. Established doctrine on both sides is that AF are top priorities and the towns in the shadow of AF are included under this as capture can often render the AF frontline. But they are extremely tough to take as our FBs can be easily camped and our vehicles and guns picked off under the enemy's air supremacy. A attack on an AF town that bounces the air units our by capping the AF might not even need to capture the town to succeed; removing enemy air from a sector is a victory in itself.

d) Isolated CPs are the best aspect to look for and target. As mentioned before, the aim is to get the town contested, to force the enemy to commit men to watching the bunker. Isolated CPs can be captured and secured and to raise the threat level of the AO. Never under value Warp FRUs - these are a massive tool that we often don't value enough - a warp FRU to an isolated CP can be a significant obstacle the enemy must overcome. Look for that distant Sheep Farm or Brewery - although they won't allow you to spawn, they can be useful tools to keep town contested and the perceived threat level high

e) CP location. Spawnables are major elements of attacks - rightly or wrongly - and one thing to consider is the location of spawnables within a town. If our Spawn is next to the AB, we shouldn't rely on it being capped and held. CPs around the edge of town can be great Warp CPs giving us an FB's worth of supply in town, as opposed to the spawnable supply list which is subject to the CP throttle.

9) What type of AO is it? What's my objective?

This is an important question that often gets overlooked. AOs seek to achieve different things, know and accept what is it you are trying to achieve. I would give the following types of AO

a) Capture AO - straightforward attack, we want the target town, we need to get infantry into each CP to finally press on the AB, and bingo. We kill the defenders, we take the town

b) Mole AO - we're not looking to capture the town per se, we're looking to occupy defenders, to draw Axis forces from other places on the map where we don't want them to be. Suited to large cities like Liege or Luxembourg

c) Placeholder AO - sometimes we're setting up a real AO or wanting to finish activity somewhere and the system or playerbase want to place additional AOs, so we lay a placeholder AO to keep them happy, without committing real energy or focus. Such AOs are strategically irrelevant but serve a morale function so should be low maintenance AOs, eg no FB that needs defending or supply issues to worry about

d) Attrition AO - a effective tactic is to set the AO up with the target of hammering their supply - so make use of high ground overlooking AB, to camp every spawn point possible, to get cutters in and around Barracks and Vehicle spawns etc so you attrit the enemy and then capture the town (or not) in the aftermath.

e) Pinning AO - units have to move together around the map, so sometimes AOing an opposition town has the effect of stopping movement out of the town. Map OiCs are often hesitant to move supply from a town when that town is under attack, so if you think Axis is shifting divisional supply somewhere, an AO can pin units down, interfering with their plans

f) AF/Naval Bounce - sometimes all we want to do is disrupt their workings or kill their air power over a target area. In these cases it pays to contest the town and then cap the AF or Docks, bouncing the LW or KM units out

g) Feint AO - setting up an AO, pushing troops to trigger full EWS whilst allowing another AO to go dormant and then - SWITCH - try to get players to switch en masse to the dormant AO can be an effective tool. Defenders are often reluctant to switch towns and give us hard fought defensive positions and sorties.

10) What causes the Axis most difficulties?

Quite simply, you want things going your way, you want to be directing the action, not your enemy directing the action. You want to be getting them to react to you, not the other way around. So you want to attack where it's going to cause him most headaches, where you have supply and he doesn't, where you have rotation options and he doesn't, where you have advantages and he doesn't. There are two military theories to consider - the Path of Least Resistance and the OODA Loop. The former is a doctrine borne out of the cost of WW1 trench, attrition warfare - ie attack where your enemy is weakest, not where he is strongest. The latter is the Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act cycle of planning activity. The ideal scenario is where your OODA loop operates quicker than the OODA look of your enemy, so you are appraising the environment and acting in response to it quicker than your opponent, meaning he is reacting to events that have already happened and he's in full defensive, reactive mode. As a Map OiC, you want him dancing to your tune, you want him panicking to your moves, you want him spamming comms in reaction to your AO placement and brigade moves.

One strategy capable of realising stunning results is targeted attrition, where the Map OiC doesn't focus on the towns he's attacking, he only focuses on the division he's attacking. Identify an isolated division, trapped in an area without reinforcing divisional support - so usually at the end of a link line - and just attack it relentlessly. This tactic is reliant on inter-OiC communication as a single break in the attacking pressure allows the resupply tickets to replenish but it can result in brutal results. Planning is required to give supply advantage to the attacking force (eg alternating between attacking divisions) but targeted attrition can be undefendable when executed well - the defending Map OiC can either fold the area and look to cut the breakthrough or will be forced to retreat elsewhere and redraw a line with the target division reinforced for a period of time.

11) What is a snagging point and an exposed link?

The links on the map throw up anomalies - the gap at Gembloux, the Meuse complex that sees Philipville dominate the west bank and Ciney the East bank etc - and these will present Map OiCs with difficulties which should be recognised and exploited by the opposing OiC. Look for towns with lots of links, they will usually act as hubs through which lots of supply can be shifted on minimum back line timers - these make great targets. Look for towns that seem hung out on a limb, where attacking an adjacent town would cut that town off - eg if Axis own Breda and Etten-Leur, if you can attack Breda, you might force them to withdraw from E-L or face a cut. Look for towns near the map edge that can leave enemy units stranded and cut-off. Are there brigades isolated from the rest of their division? Can you attack the Axis line in a way that creates inter-divisional splits? Can you

lengthen their line? Capturing a town that has 5 links might mean 3 more links that Axis have to stretch to cover. The line is dynamic, it has to shift and contract and expand to cover the different advances and retreats - make sure your attacks have the potential to necessitate an enemy stretch, as the longer the line is, the less rotation options they have, the weaker their line is and the more likely you are to break through or force a wholesale retreat.

12) Check their fallbacks
Simply use the .ne command. There's a list of Axis units out there, their unit abbreviations are simpler than ours, eg to .ne17 Infantry Division HQ, type .ne17id. Their units are arranged methodically unlike ours, so their Infantry units are numbers kg1 and kg2, the Armoured kg3. So it would be .ne 17idkg2 for 17 ID Kampfgruppe 2. There are some anomalies around the naming of Panzer Divisions but essentially they're the same .ne 1pzd, .ne 1pdkg1 etc I will dig out a guide. But basically, you can see where their units will fall to should your AO succeed. And they will know this, so AOing a town with dodgy fallbacks can often see them react to you even though the AO may struggle to gain traction or look like succeeding. And that's one part of the Map game, putting your enemy on the back foot, getting him defensive and reactive. You want his best players and squads asking him difficult questions, wasting time guarding FBs or bunkers, dissenting on Ops or Channel 10. You want your enemy to be in chaos while you dictate the tempo of the dance.