

OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS



US troops land in Normandy, June 1944

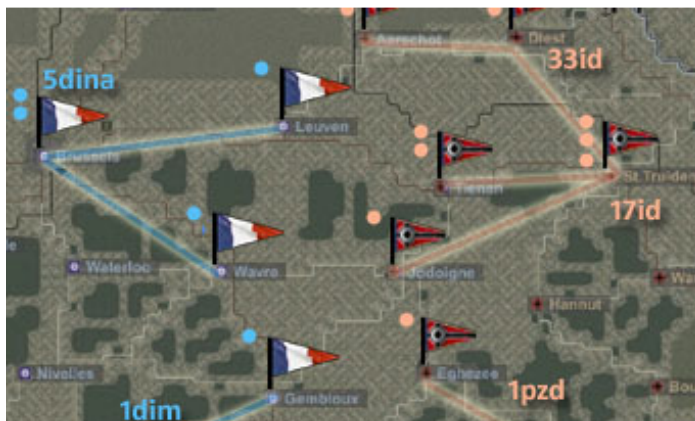
Introduction

Offensive Operations are undoubtedly the most fascinating aspect of WWIIOL HC play. Since the introduction of TOEs in 2007, there have been several methodologies proposed and executed by Map OICs. All of these have their own individual merits, and this is evidenced by the favoured method of ‘moving the map’ we see today; the breakthrough. Yet, to simply focus on breakthroughs and to divide offensive operations into static and fluid scenarios would be very short sighted. There are so many subtle elements that it has morphed into an art, and the works of the masters are of terrifying beauty.

Throughout these guides, an underlying theme has been that of economy of force. This section will continue the trend, underlining some common philosophies, their drawbacks and their strengths, before proposing a philosophy of its own that can be taken into every day Map OIC play. While this guide will not (and does not claim to) make you a strong Map OIC, hopefully it will encourage some thoughts and ideas that will help you on the way.

Crude Supply Advantage

Before TOEs, offensive operations were a much simpler game. Essentially, it boiled down to having more army bases, and therefore supply, than the other side. This made it very easy for a Map OIC to do the mathematics and then make an attack choice; if our town had 2 ABs, and they had 1, it was a good choice for an attack. With the introduction of TOEs in 1.27, this manifested itself by substituting brigades in place of ABs; “if we have more brigades than them, it’s a good attack choice”.



Axis deployments have given Axis a 2:1 divisional supply advantage against 5dina.

The obvious choice for the Axis Map OIC would be to use this divisional advantage to AO Leuven.

This crude method ignores potential supply options the Allied Map OIC might have with 1dim to the south or any divisions to the north and relies on simply overpowering Leuven using immediately available supply.

The method has obvious benefits; it is easy to understand and very low risk. Any HC, regardless of strategic depth, can pick it up, and it will rarely result in being cut off or being broken through. It is well liked by tactical leaders who know in advance how much supply they have at hand, where it is coming from, and can plan accordingly; it is rigid.

However, the low risk reveals the obvious downside; by stacking supply, you are predictable and obvious; you arm your opponent with the knowledge of where you will attack. You also make it harder for your own attackers by relying on sheer weight of supply. If you have a supply advantage, then the rational defending Map OIC will move supply towards you. That means your players have to kill more supply, and by trying to outmatch each other the supply becomes essentially infinite; without a good tactical situation the attacker will wear themselves out and log off, both in the short-term and the long-term.

Adjust your end to your means – don't bite off more than you can chew. Face facts while preserving faith and confidence. Confidence is like a current in a battery, don't exhaust it in vain effort.

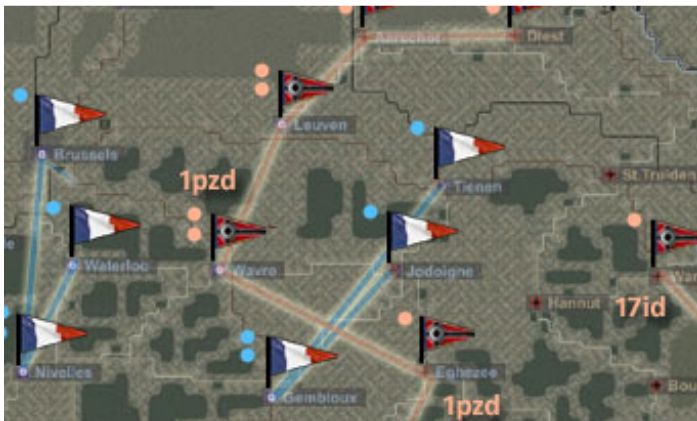
Ensure both plan and dispositions are flexible – adaptable to circumstances. The plan should foresee and provide a next step in the case of success or failure, or partial success. Dispositions should be such as to allow this exploitation or adaptation in the shortest possible time.

A side made up completely of crude Map OICs will go a long way to burning down their side's morale and interest. This means that unless it can be made up by good squad level teamwork on a consistent daily basis, it will not deliver map-winning results.

The Snake

This method came to light fairly early in the TOEs era and reached its apogee in 2008. The underlying philosophy was purely mathematical, and was summed up very neatly in the belief that “breakouts are a race, not a fight”. Put simply, it seeks to create a ‘wall’ between the defender and his factories by pushing through a small hole in the lines. It is a rigid philosophy because its goal should be obvious to the defender, though to a lesser extent than the crude supply advantage method.

The snake is the simplest form of breakthrough. Created by chance, or by spotting an area of the lines with limited amounts of supply, it pushes a single town, creates a hole of limited size, and then proceeds to move as many brigades as possible through the small gap. These brigades then manoeuvre their way to the edge of the map by the shortest possible route in order to cut off the defender's brigades that are ‘imprisoned’ by the wall.



Allies have broken 1pzd and are snaking through the ruptured line and are funnelling units into the hole via Gembloux to exploit the gap.

The Axis Map OIC, predicting the probable path of the snake, has moved 17id in an attempt to block at St Truiden before Allies can extend further.

Allied units funnelled into the snake are vulnerable to the cut off should Axis succeed in recapturing Gembloux or taking Jodoigne.

Certainly it is a very efficient way of picking up towns very quickly if the defender is not alert. As the time from the initial hole to the supply cut is usually below 6 hours, it can be achieved in one time zone of play. As it also is able to cut off large numbers of divisions in one manoeuvre, it has the ability to make morale swing very quickly from one side to the other.

The snake philosophy is therefore very dangerous if the conditions are right. However, it is also a very simple philosophy to defeat. As the objective is obvious (usually the edge of the map), all the defender need do is move his own brigades in front of the snake and the breakthrough ends. The attacker is then in a very weak position; having committed large numbers of brigades to the snake, his lines are perilously weak and vulnerable to counter attack. Morale can easily swing in favour of the snake if it succeeds... it can swing against it even more quickly if it fails and it's head cut off.

Choose the line of least expectation – Try to put yourself in the enemy's shoes and think what course it is least probable he will foresee and forestall.

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The Salient

A further evolution in breakthrough thinking came with the search for a low-risk method of breaking through, but with the same dramatic consequences to the defender. The result was a more fluid philosophy, where the attacker would look to push an enemy division until it was totally attrited and continue to do so until a wider gap appeared in the enemy's lines. This would then be pushed, while maintaining a wide salient, until the defender gave up attempts to cut off the salient off and pulled back to reform a straight line.



Allies have smashed 1pzd forcing it to retreat back into Bertrix. Allies have a salient in the Axis lines at Wellin-Bievre.

Typically the Allied Map OiC would seek to exploit the hole using 5dina to either push north-east towards the crossroads town of Marche or south-east to pressure and encircle Bertrix from the north.

This was the most effective strategy to come out of the early TOEs years. Being lower risk than the snake method, it was less likely to be cut off. Also, it relied more on fighting the enemy and explicitly rejected any notion that fighting was bad for breakthroughs; on the contrary, it realised that engaging the enemy head on was key to weakening the defender's

position by making it harder for them to stop the flood as their containment units would have been victims of **targeted attrition**. Also, as the breakthroughs were wide, it meant that the objective was never clear to the defender, as the attacker could go north, south, or continue in the same direction. This made it very hard to stop without a wholesale pull back.

Take a line of operation which offers alternative objectives – This puts the opponent on the horns of a dilemma, which means you will achieve one objective or the other – whichever he guards least, and may enable you to gain one after the other. There is no more common a mistake than to have one single objective.

Exploit the line of least resistance – so long as it can lead you to any objective that will contribute to your underlying object.

A New Approach

“It’s not about towns, it’s about divisions” was the mantra in the run up to the introduction of TOEs in 2007. While it was commonly used to simply describe the move of supply from towns to brigades, there is a lot of truth in the statement today.

The rigid philosophies described above have town capture as their end. The goal is to capture towns, either slowly in the crude method or quickly in the snake method. However, the philosophy we will describe in this section sees it in a different light. Its aim is not to capture towns, but instead its only objective is to make the enemy’s defensive lines as weak and as fragile as possible, and it tries to do everything possible to prolong the pain.

How do we do this?

The key is to see elements of the map as ‘combat multipliers’, or put simply, assets that make taking towns easier. Airfields, multi-link towns, link loops, splits in the enemy lines and zones of elongated, stretched enemy lines are such examples.

By concentrating on accumulating these assets, attacks become progressively easier. This puts less of a strain on morale and numbers on your side, and even an underpop side can begin to dominate an overpop side and switch the numbers balance.

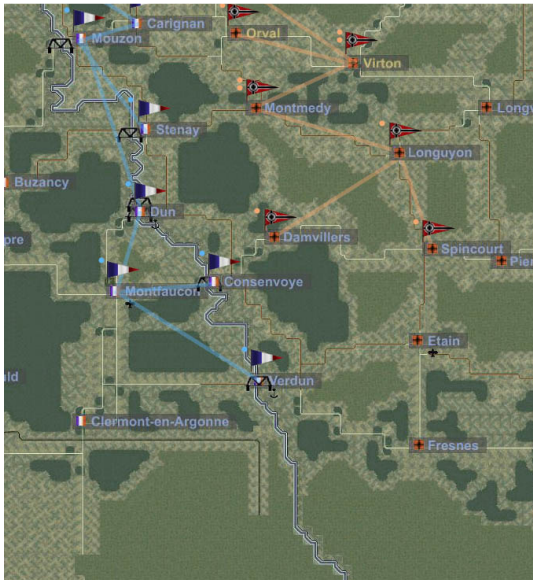
Should a breakthrough be achieved, again, this new philosophy doesn’t see this as an end. It is yet another combat multiplier asset to be preserved at all costs. By splitting their lines, the enemy fights at a consistent 1-2 division disadvantage in whatever theatre we choose to fight. Naturally, the attacker should do everything possible to keep this advantage alive.

Cutting off divisions is therefore seen as a negative. If you have a permanent 1-2 division advantage, why would you want to cut off divisions and allow the enemy to ‘teleport’ these divisions to a stronger position 12 hours down the line? This highlights the long-term view of the philosophy. The strategy is made up of individual concepts of ops over a several day and even several week period, rather than focussing on the ultra-short term.

How does this work in practice?

We will start in the static warfare scenario where two sides are simply staring at each other with no advantage over the other. The attacker must start ‘rocking the boat’ in order to get the map fluid again, but do so in a subtle fashion. This can start by a limited move on the flank to get a tactical advantage onto the edge-most town of their lines.

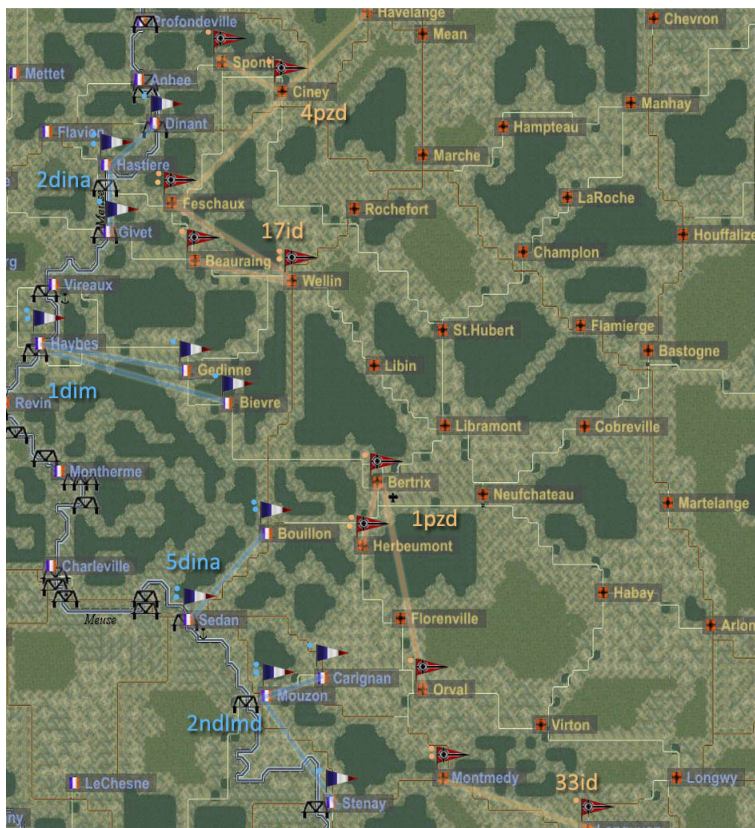
Map OiC: Offensive Operations



In the far south, Allies stretch out deliberately to attack Etain (a high value target), hoping to draw the Axis line out. In this example, the attack on Etain would draw the Longuyon division south which in turn would pull the Virton division south and so on. This line shift south will potentially create areas of weakness further north.

The objective is to force their brigades to move in a particular direction, and thus open up weak spots elsewhere in the line. The town attack selection should be such that their lines slowly get extended and so less brigades are available to defend each town. This can take many days; the key is patience by all involved.

Sooner or later, it is likely that a weak point will eventuate. This can be a single division isolated for a period that allows the attacker a ‘free hit’ on the division.



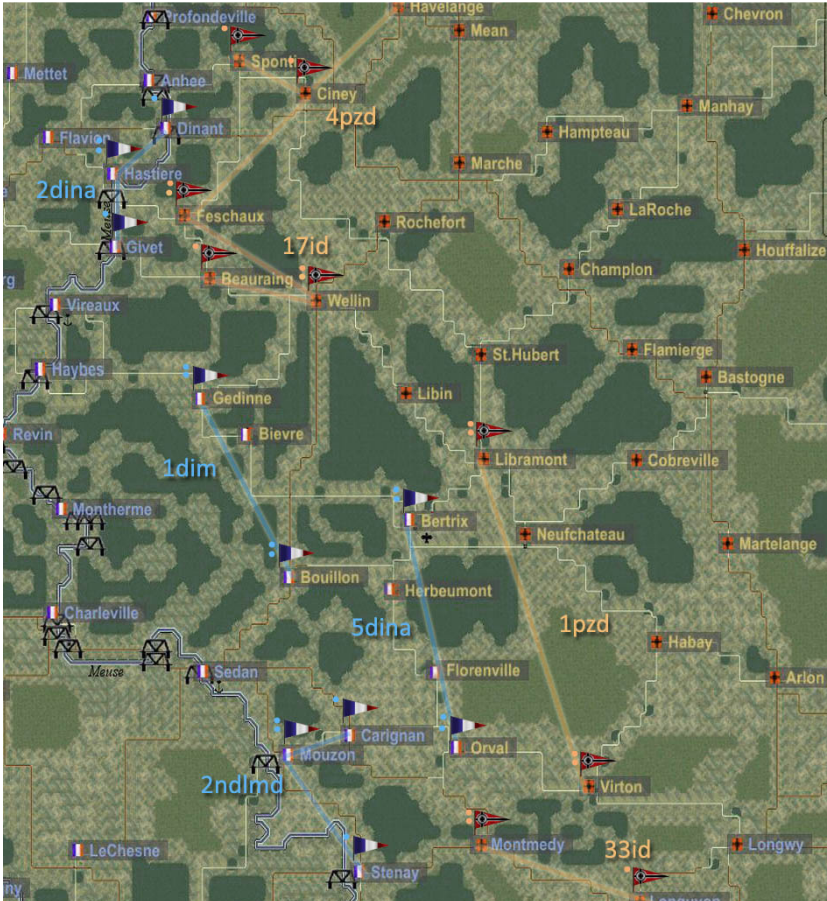
Drawing Axis supply towards the far south has worked the way the Allied Map OiC planned. The Axis Map OiC has been forced to stretch 1pzd and it becomes a weak point in the line, vulnerable to attacks from Bouillon, Bievre and Carignan.

The Axis weak spot also allows targeted focus on 17id.

This is similar in style to the salient method described earlier. However, the salient isn't the goal. By splitting their divisions, we effectively increase our available supply by the order of 2-3 divisions. The divisions in the salient can gang up on the units to the north OR the south

of them. This means that whatever direction is chosen, there is a divisional advantage in that area and there is nothing the defender can do to counter.

This is then used as a means to either increase the damage already created, by pushing further, and/or pushing onto other combat multipliers, such as 'big towns', or airfields, or in the best case, a factory.



The situation seen above has developed. The Allied attacks on the attrited 1pzd at Herbeumont, Bertrix and Orval have gained Allied territory, allowing units to move into the salient and continue to press 1pzd, forcing holes in the line. Rather than pushing 1dim and 5dina on for a traditional encirclement/routing breakthrough, Allies are focusing on widening the salient, by placing divisions in the salient. 1dim is able to support 2dina in pressing 17id at the north mouth of the salient while 5dina can support 2ndlmd by attacking 1pzd and 33id at the southern mouth.

The key element of this set-up is that what Axis actually need to do is reform the line, which may be best achieved by retreating back from the entire sector and establishing a static line, possibly by pulling 17id back and establishing a Ciney-Bastogne-Arlon line. Although ceding considerable territory, the stability would interrupt the Allied momentum and lay the foundations for an Axis recovery. However the decision to pull the line back is a bold one and if Allies can succeed in widening the hole, the decision becomes harder and harder to make, as the more territory Allied take, the more difficult redrawing the Axis line becomes.

The enemy may choose to cut their losses and reform a line. This makes it important to progressively widen the salient as you move deeper and deeper by continuing to fight. The wider and deeper the hole, the longer it takes for the enemy to redraw the line. Paradoxically, the longer the defender waits make this decision, the more reason he has not to do it. If it takes him 6 hours to redraw the lines, he may choose not to bother and try a counter with limited hope of success, thus making the situation even worse.

What can the enemy do to counter this?

Simply put, it has to try to make the situation static again. In the event that its brigades get cut off, it can do this easily by forcing the enemy to rout them thus slowing the attacker's progress, and then taking a short penalty in the training grounds. Then, it can teleport the divisions to wherever they are needed most and static warfare is resumed.

Counter-intuitively, cutting off brigades can be seen as hurting the attacker. If the attacker has to waste time and resources to routing them, and then gets punished by the defender placing the divisions wherever he likes, so why bother? Why limit your options by cementing the cut off?

This is the subtle art of creating 'incentives' for the opponent. Like carrots, the attacker should seek to make certain choices more appealing than others. If you are threatening to cut him off, you are encouraging him to pull back. By avoiding even hinting at the chance of a cut off, the defender may not see his lines as fundamentally weak.

It cannot be stressed enough; the goal of this very fluid method is to create a situation where the attacker is dictating where the enemy's units are placed, and taking advantage where the enemy is weak. **Its method is its goal, its goal is its method.** By reverting to a static warfare scenario by cutting units off or failing to preserve the split in their lines, you lose all the advantages created by the fluid scenario.

CONCLUSION

What has been described here is not a template; a template can never be created because of the changes in rule sets and the unique qualities of every scenario. However, hopefully it describes the essence of successful offensive operations. You must seek to mould the map to favour your attacks, and you try to give yourselves as many advantages as possible; doing this can make up for deficiencies in teamwork, numbers and morale.

Is it about towns or divisions? The answer is neither; it is about people.

If the mission of the Map OIC is to give his players the tools to win maps, the philosophy described here is the ultimate fulfilment of that mission. Towns and divisions are simply assets to help them along the way, and as a Map OIC you have the ability to decide what affect those assets have on the campaign as a whole.

*'A leader is best when people barely know he exists
when his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
they will say: we did it ourselves'*

Laozi