

DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS



1939, a French soldier watches the line

POPULATION CYCLES

There are times in game where a side appears systematically outnumbered and outgunned; the side is consistently under-populated and consistently undermanned in HC and so consistently loses towns and struggles at the operational and tactical levels. Attacks are aimless, sloppy and universally fail, while the enemy seems able to take towns at will.

These systematic phases can be termed **High-Performance** and **Low-Performance Cycles** and can last for days or for months. The game has a bandwagon effect where a successful side is able to attract leaders and players and so breed team spirit more than a losing side, and such morale imbalances encourages side switching, which further exacerbates the imbalance. The only way out of a Low-Performance Cycle is to win, and the only way to win is to prevent the enemy achieving their objective, be it taking a certain FB, capturing a town or, when the stakes are very high, achieving a cut-off via a breakthrough.

Leadership and numbers are one of several 'combat multipliers' within the game. While a Map OiC cannot fix these immediately, a Map OiC can place Allies in the best position to fight and win despite these strategic disadvantages.

NOTE: A Low-Performance Cycle should not be confused with simply being under-pop. Under-pop might result for any number of reasons completely unrelated to leadership/number bandwagon effects; an under-pop side still in its over-pop cycle is just as dangerous as when it has the numbers. This distinction is vital to grasp in the following sections.

LOW-PERFORMANCE CYCLES: DEFENCE vs ATTACK

While in a Low-Performance Cycle, a side is consistently outnumbered by a better-organised enemy, led by motivated leaders and guided by veteran players. The best way for a side in its High-Performance Cycle to flex its muscles (and maintain the High-Performance mindset) is to attack. By logical extension, the best way for the Low-Performing side to win is to secure defensive victories.

Attacking while under-pop is not the same as attacking while in a Low-Performance Cycle; an under-pop side can actually have a greater number of organised squads and respected leaders and can still attack effectively. The 'combat multipliers' hide the lack of numbers.

In a Low-Performance Cycle, a side does not have those leaders; the players are disinterested in working as a team. The enemy is the exact opposite; their players are organised, often well led; the expectation of victory builds teamwork. Any attack the Low-Performance side tries to initiate will be at a leadership and numbers disadvantage, which increases the chances of failure, and that failure then feeds the enemy's High-Performance Cycle.

What is needed is a victory, and victories are easiest achieved on defence. An enemy in a High-Performance Cycle will attack because of the expectation of success (this is a good gauge of working out whether the enemy is in one or not), and so the best Concept of Ops for this kind of game environment is to defend robustly where they attack and win tactical battles if possible, such as defending FBs and holding towns against heavy pressure.

INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD OF DEFENSIVE SUCCESS

Tactical action determines whether the Low-Performance Cycle side is able to score critical victories but there is significant scope for a Map OiC to start operational action to increase the likelihood of the stalling the enemy advance and beginning a recovery.

Foreseeing likely enemy targets

There are various indicators that suggest an imminent attack:

The Line	<i>The enemy will look to attack at areas of perceived weakness (this can be countered using Stop Line/reserve supply strategy)</i>
Enemy Supply	<i>The enemy will typically stack Armoured Brigades rearline prior to an attack</i>
Targets	<i>Organised offensives will often have a high morale target (eg Sedan, Antwerp, Brussels))</i>
FBs	<i>Prior to an attack the FBs will be taken and then be defended. Targets also often have multiple linking Axis FBs</i>

Stop Lines

A Stop Line is simply a section of the frontline that is as short as possible, consisting of towns with multiple links. A good example is the line running south from Antwerp featuring Brussels – Charleroi – Namur – Philipville.

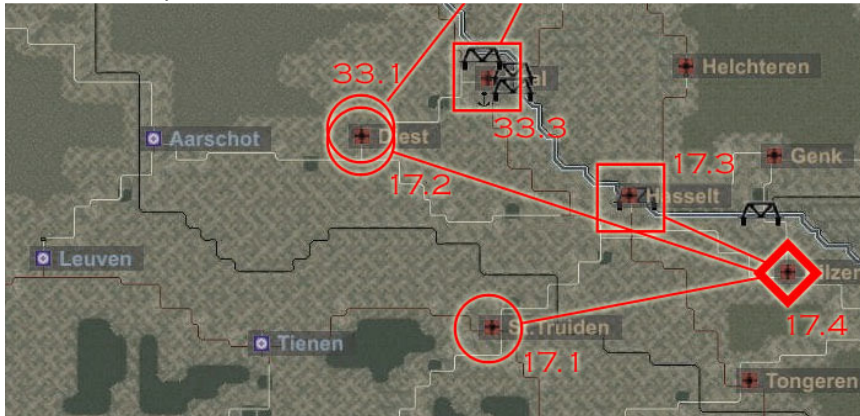
In a Low Performance Cycle, it is wise to deploy brigades to ensure that these Stop Line towns do not become under-supplied and so while peripheral towns such as Wavre, Leuven and Schilde may fall, Axis will not break through the line. Additionally, the Stop Line can be used as a supply highway to move reinforcement supply along the shortest routes.

The Stop Line should be considered the backbone of the line; towns in front of this line are non-essential; of course it is in Allies' interest to advance the line east, but towns east of the Stop Line are ultimately to be considered expendable. Such a backbone is critical to maintaining a front line and maintaining divisional integrity.

Reserve supply

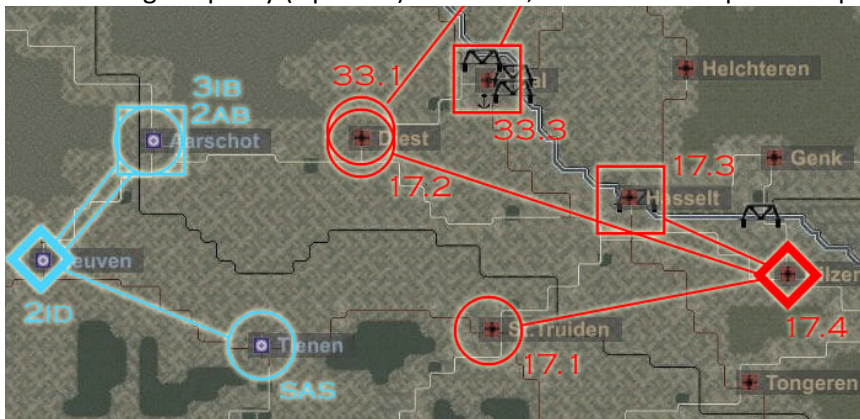
Ideally one Infantry Brigade should be deployed per frontline town when there is no immediate activity in the area, even if the enemy has more units facing it, despite the common misconception that brigade parity must be maintained (the real value comes in assessing *divisional* parity rather than *brigade* parity). The reasoning is fairly straight

forward. Imagine a scenario where Allies own Leuven, Tienen and Aarschot and Axis own Diest, Hasselt and St. Truiden. The Axis have two Infantry Brigades in Diest, with one in St. Truiden; Allies have only one Division to cover Aarschot and Tienen.



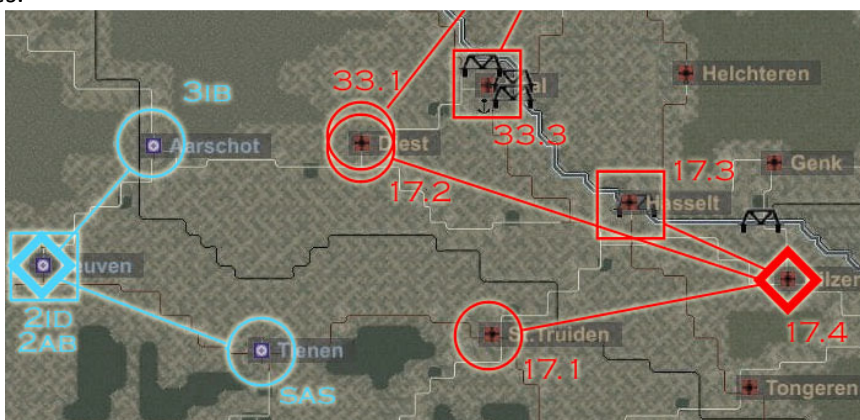
Axis deployments for 33rd and 17th Divisions east of Brussels, presenting a strong threat to Aarschot

In this scenario, it is tempting to stack Aarschot with the Infantry Brigade and the Armoured Brigade to achieve brigade parity (Option 1). However, this is not the optimal deployment.



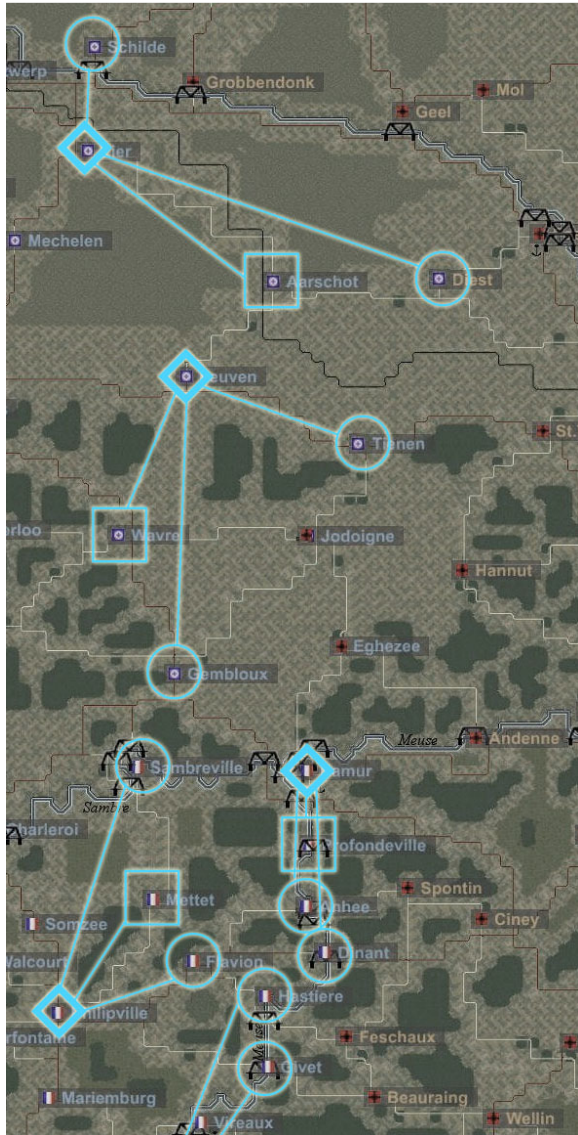
Option 1: Obvious defence at Aarschot to maintain Bde parity but sacrifice flexibility

Axis could move 17.3 Armoured Brigade from Hasselt to St. Truiden, to realise a supply advantage against Tienen. It is typically prudent to leave support brigades rearline wherever possible and in this scenario leaving the Armoured and HQ rearline in Leuven leaves them one move from supporting either Tienen or Aarschot and therefore better placed to react to Axis moves.



Option 2: A better deployment that maintains flexibility to respond to Aarschot AND Tienen

This concept of reserving supply can be developed on a larger scale and applied to Divisions covering entire sectors. In this scenario Allies have just two divisions covering from Schilde to the Meuse river at Namur.



In the north, Allies are plainly overstretched. As such, in addition to working out the internal Stop-Line spine of the line, Map OiC should also consider how quickly supply can be moved north to assist the area should it be required.

This is where 'reserve' divisions prove useful; the more supply is pulled off the line in areas distant to that under pressure, the quicker supply can be shifted to match axis offensives.

For example, an entire division is rearline in the Philipville/Sambreville area; it can be moved north to reinforce the overstretched northern sector within a few moves, but it is also in position to push through to help Anhee-Givet if need be.

The more Units are frontline, the more constrained the Map OiC's options are; a fact that will also be obvious to the enemy.

Keeping significant amounts of supply rearline gives a flexibility to respond quickly to Axis threats without the disruption typically associated with large-scale line reforming action.

CONCLUSION

It's an axiom worth repeating and remembering: the best way out of a Low-Performance Cycle is to win battles, and the easiest way to win battles is to determine the operational objectives of the enemy and then prevent them from attaining them.

If this can be executed successfully and repeatedly, the enemy playerbase will begin to lose motivation and lose confidence in their leadership while the defensive side will begin to gain motivation and confidence. At this stage the Map OiC must start to consider moving into an aggressive mindset and begin organised offensive operations.