Burma Designer's Preview

by Dave Friedrichs

When I turned **Hube's Pocket** into Dean, I asked what project he'd like me to work on next. His immediate reply—Burma. The first thing which came to my mind was the old Monty Python sketch where Graham Chapman yells "BURMA!" and John Cleese asks "Why'd you say Burma?", whereupon Chapman says "I Panicked!". Since the Pythons were in drag doing their old crone routine, I thought Dean might not see the humor in such a response. So, I gave Dean the benefit of the doubt and started digging into the project. As usual, Dean was right, there was indeed a game in Burma.

The Game

The game covers the operations in 1944 from March to August. The battles pit a depleted, yet powerful, Imperial Japanese Army against a mixed bag of Indian, Chinese, British, and American forces (and some Nepalese, Burmese, et al. thrown in for fun).

The operations include the Japanese offensive on Imphal, the second Chindit campaign and Stillwell's Chinese/Marauder operations along the Ledo Road. All three of these operations were being conducted at the same time. From a gaming standpoint, this leads to interesting challenges as both sides have the burden of attack in at least one arena. Each of the operational areas is somewhat isolated but can influence, either directly or indirectly, neighboring battles. Because of this, there tend to be far more strategic decisions than is typical in most *OCS* games.

The Imphal operations pit three excellent Japanese divisions of the 15th Army against the Commonwealth 4th Corps. Initially, the IJA forces are in good positions to dislodge the equal-sized but less flexible Allied forces. As the campaign progresses, the Commonwealth reinforcements begin to turn the tide to the Allies, but the struggle is still desperate and tense. Early success by the IJA can spell doom to the Allies at Imphal.

In the center, Orde Wingate's Chindits are executing the world's first large-scale air landing operation. These forces, inserted well behind the front, were expected to operate for extended periods supplied only from the air. When viewed in today's modern capabilities in communications, intelligence, and logistics support, landing five brigades of infantry behind enemy lines may not seem that big a deal. However, this was revolutionary stuff for WW2, and pulling it off with C-47s can be a challenge for players.

In the west, Stillwell's Chinese Army faces the elite IJA 18th Infantry Division. The backbone of this Allied force is of course the 5307 Composite Unit (Provisional), better known as Merrill's Marauders. These forces are battering their way down the Ledo Road against a very determined resistance.

The game is quite a departure from a typical *OCS* game in many respects. Past *OCS* offerings have featured games with sweeping, swirling armored battles. The Japanese have a grand total of three armored battalions, and they stink! However, there are still plenty of opportunities for daring strikes as flying columns march through hidden mountain passes. The excitement is still there, it's just a bit more sedate.

This is a two-map game covering the area from Mandalay in the far south to Imphal in the northwest and Myitkyina in the northeast. Most of the action, however, is on the northern map. For the space-challenged players, most of the five scenarios are actually played on less than a full map.

The terrain in this part of the world makes the northern map of **Tunisia** look like Kansas. However, the action isn't hindered by this as there are many isolated paths making this mountainous rainforest remarkably porous. A common tactic is to "jump a mountain" and steal a march on a parallel path. This can lead to some tense moments. It takes careful planning and skillful play to avoid disaster—a hallmark of the *OCS*.

The Design

The design presented many challenges. Remarkably, there is not a great deal of need for special rules. I credit most of this to the rigorous model presented by the *OCS*, rather than any particular cleverness on my part.

The chief problem was modeling the character of the IJA. We wargamers tend to talk a lot about the differences between the European armies, but these differences are nothing compared to the IJA.

There was no army in WW2 which could sustain the incredible loss levels the IJA did and still maintain any semblance of combat power. Units involved in this theater typically, that's *typically*, took 50-60% losses and still had fight in them. Another major problem was the amount of terrain these guys could cover. The IJA had only about five divisions engaged in this area. However, they were able to project these forces over the entire area. Fortunately both of these problems had the same solution. The IJA forces have been broken down into battalions, including the artillery, which is pretty pathetic, but can hold ground reasonably well. This means that each IJA division has 13 steps at full strength. This makes for some substantial staying power as well as an ability to cover a lot of ground.

The other major problem was simulating the incredibly insufficient, yet strangely flexible supply system. In *OCS* terms, the IJA forces could subsist on nearly nothing, but suffered horribly from lack of ammunition. The basic problem became how to allow the IJA to do their historical operations of infiltration while limiting their ability to fight. The solution came from the introduction of some new unit types: Mules and Infantry HQs. The mules and Infantry HQs use leg movement and so are able to traverse the mountain paths. This in essence allows the IJA to operate in the mountains, which are denied to the road-bound Allied forces.

Odds and Ends

If you enjoy odd units, this is your game. Already mentioned were the mule units. However, the fun doesn't stop there. When was the last time you got to drive cattle into the mountains. Yes, **EatG** did indeed have meals á la hoof, but here, you've actually got water buffalo to herd behind your army. On top of this, some of the worst soldiers to take up arms, the Indian National Army, are in this game. But seriously, the

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Choosing Your Options for the OCS

by Rod Miller with Dave Demko

A while back Rod Miller circulated an email to several of us asking our opinions about combat results against singleton units. He suggested a house rule that made sense when I first read it and plenty of sense once I sat down with the *OCS* combat results table and a calculator. Optional rules work the same way: gamers who play *OCS* together evaluate the options and agree on what makes sense to them.

Roll-your-own house rules aside, you can find "official" *OCS* optionals in several places: embedded in the series rules (e.g. 15.3, 20.0f), appended to the end of the 2.0i rules, and new series optionals appended to the **DAK** game-specific rules. From among these optionals, Rod has summarized which ones are used and which ones omitted during play in his circle of *OCS* opponents (including Dean and the guys we usually play *OCS* with at HomerCon when we're not playing **Air Combat Maneuver**). In a few places Rod recommends changing or removing a non-optional rule. Here they are, along with some summaries and comments from either Rod or Dave, as marked.

The rule paraphrases here are intended only to remind you of each rule. In case you see a contradiction between these reminders and the rules, you should of course follow the rule book.

Each rule falls into one of three categories:

Must These are must-use rules, highly recommended.

Yes We play with these, but are willing to drop them.

No We don't use these.

Changes & Options in the Main Rules

Singletons (9.10b) (attacking or defending side consists of only one single-step unit): **No.** Delete the part of rule 9.10b that reads: "if either side is destroyed before taking its option, the other side is exempt from its option."

Rod's comments: This represents a non-trivial change in the way we do business in the *OCS*, but would seem to put the singleton back at a level that is pretty close to the 2+ unit hex (given that it has fewer steps, less combat strength, etc.), as one thinks through the possible situations.

Under the suggested change, Ao1/DL1o1 kills the singleton, but forces the attacker to take his option result. In a regular combat he'll retreat if the hex isn't important, or he'll take the loss to occupy it if it is important. In an overrun, this forces the attacker to retreat and stop his movement, and either be DG if adjacent to an enemy, or not even be adjacent to an enemy and so unable to attack in the Combat Phase. To avoid those outcomes, the overrunning attacker takes a loss to keep moving.

Recon By Force (6.5) By paying the off-road movement cost plus 3 MP, a moving unit can "recon" an enemy stack, allowing the moving player to examine the stack and remove its Reserve marker, if any. If the highest AR unit making the recon fails to roll less than or equal to it AR (on one die), the stack losing its reserve marker can attack it immediately with barrage and regular combat. **No,** we eliminate this! Dave kinda likes the recon rule but recognizes how it can slow play and be abused.

Divisional Markers (12.7) Units of a division with a marker may move into the marker and be held off map. Qualified **No:** usually we don't use these. If they are used, they must have the entire division in the marker, and the units must be splayed out to the side or off map. Dave says: The idea here is to avoid stupid deception tricks, like hiding an entire panzer division under an alert battalion, or having a single motorcycle running around in a divisional marker pretending to be the entire GrossDeutchland. And if you eliminate the recon rule (6.5), it's important to neutralize divisional markers as hiding holes.

Air Base Cards (15.3) Keep air units at a base on an off-map display, as shown on the back page of the 2.0i series rules. **No.** We put the air units adjacent to the air base and splayed out, orienting the nose to indicate status, e.g. nose north is active, nose south is inactive. Dave finds that having air units and elements of a multi-unit division spread out in available space eases play: no more picking through stacks. Unless you play against guys who abuse this sort of *glasnost*, it works very well.

Rail Transport (13.0d) Leg units pay 2T (rather than the standard 1 SP) per RE for rail transport. **Yes,** if we remember.

Rail Repair Costs (12.3f) RR units pay 2T per repaired rail hex. **No.** Don't require this expenditure

Breakdown Regiments (20.f) When a division with breakdown regiments deployed dies, replace one of the breakdowns with the division unit. **Yes,** if we remember.

Series Rules 2.0i Optionals

Opt. 1 Combined Arms Defending armor, mech, and anti-tank units can decrease the combat strength of attacking armor and mech attacking in Open terrain. **Must,** and we multiply by 1.5 (although Dean likes the 1.0 multiplier too). Dave points out that this is a key rule for getting no-hassle detail out of the combat system. Reducing the multiplier to 1.0 seems a bit harsh, and using 1.5 and rounding feels quite easy. Remember also that **Tunisia, Hube's,** and **DAK,** which have a fair number of AT units in the mix, were developed with this rule in mind.

Opt. 2 Hard Targets Other and then Mech units die before Armor if a barrage attack inflicts step losses. Some aircraft get

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OoB in this game has a rich texture and the multitude of nationalities is remarkable (and you can't beat the Commonwealth for goofy unit names).

One of the more common comments from playtesters (other than Dave Powell's infamous "Quirky" comment uttered after Stillwell's Army was cut off by a flying IJA column) were statements like "This game is fun." This, of course, was music to my ears. On a more serious note, it said something about the *OCS* and this game in particular. Many players tend to shy from *OCS* because it is *tense*. Some players simply do not enjoy living life on the knife's edge hour after gaming hour.

This game, although it can be hairy at times, does not have that burdensome foreboding of imminent disaster that permeates most of the other *OCS* titles. The pace is slower and the terrain more constrained, which tends to reward careful planning and play more than daring deeds. If one were to compare this game to say **Hube's Pocket, Hube's** would be a fist fight and **Burma** a fencing match. Because of this players who stayed away from *OCS* might want to consider this tense but more gentle offering.