Burma

Henry C. Robinette

Burma, the latest entry in the *OCS* series of games, is a real gem and may be the best *OCS* game ever. (OK, so I'm biased.) But what other game allows both sides to simultaneously attack and defend? And plays equally well with two, three, or four players?

Game Overview

The map area covers northern Burma and part of India from Mandalay in the south almost to Ledo in the north and from the Chinese border near Myitkyina in the east to just beyond Imphal in the west. About six percent of the hexes are clear. About a third of the map is the dark brown of mountainous, extremely close, terrain. The rest of the map is the dark green of rough terrain, or the lighter green of jungle.

The railroad from Mandalay to Myitkyina goes through a narrow valley between two ridges of mountains and rough terrain from Indaw situated in the middle of the two maps northwards; it provides trace supply to the 18th Division opposite Stilwell's Chinese-American forces. The Irrawaddy River in the east and the Chindwin River in the west also provide trace supply to the Japanese.

All-weather roads are virtually non-existent, and such as exist run from Dimapur in the northwest to just below Imphal, and another runs from Mandalay to just beyond Bhamo. These roads are connected by fair-weather roads that connect Mandalay to Imphal. Another fair-weather road parallels the railroad from Indaw to Myitkyina with a spur connecting to the Ledo Road on the north edge and another connecting to the Chindwin River. A network of tracks branches from these roads into the jungles and mountains of northern Burma.

The armored and motorized formations of the Allies are road-bound as they cannot enter jungle, rough, or mountain hexes except along a road or track. Movement costs along a track for these units are prohibitive. Infantry units, however, can move along the tracks at a cost of one movement point per track hex. (The IJA has one battalion of foot cavalry, the 22nd Recon, that has a movement allowance of 10 on its move-mode side. Fortunately, for the Allies this unit starts in the dead pile in most scenarios and only enters play through the replacement procedure.)

Supply trace differs for the Japanese from the usual series supply trace requirements. Japanese divisional headquarters can draw and throw using foot movement points and pay foot terrain costs. All IJA units possessing leg movement rates can also trace using leg movement. Additionally, a number of villages on the major rivers are designated as "ports" for trace purposes for the IJA. And it's a good thing, too, because the IJA do not possess enough trucks or wagons to make an extender! IJA units that cannot trace supply can subsist off map supplies at a rate of one token per ten or fraction of ten units. Those units that cannot eat from supply sources may subsist off the jungle using a special attrition table that allows them to ignore the first instance of step loss results.

The Allies, however, must use truck movement points for draw and throw and pay truck terrain costs. Every hex of the Ledo Road is considered a detrainable hex so trace is fairly easy on the Ledo front. The British railroad in the northwest provides trace with three detrainable hexes along its short route. But the majority of Commonwealth units will be dependent upon headquarters to provide trace supply along the few roads. Allied units subsist off map supplies at the rate of one token per two REs. The Chindits, units of the Indian Third Division, are an exception to this. Like the Japanese, Chindits can use the special table for subsistence when supplies are unavailable. Unlike the IJA, Chindits cannot recover from an unsupplied marker without expending supplies. The game as published and the errata included with it do not allow Chindits and the American Galahad units to use foot movement rates for supply trace. (However, the forthcoming errata may permit this but it is a matter of controversy as the designer said it was his intention to make these units use truck movement costs for supply draw.)

The IJA consists primarily of infantry battalions that have combat strengths of 2 and movement allowances of 3 (in combat mode). It also has some garrison troops, artillery, headquarters, and three tank battalions. About a third of the infantry battalions have ARs of 4 and 5. About a third have ARs of 3 and the rest are 2s.

The Chinese units are one-step regiments of 5 or 6 strength points with ARs that are mostly 1 or 2 with a few 3, or three-step divisions with even worse ARs. The Chinese must rely upon the three Galahad regiments for their offensive punch. However, these units have only a limited replacement capability. They start with ARs of 5 and can be returned to play with ARs of 4, but after that these units cannot be rebuilt. The Allied player is further limited by the fact that Chindits and Chinese cannot stack together or attack together.

The Commonwealth units are a mixed bag. The Chindits of the 3rd Indian Division are the best units due to their special foraging capabilities and their ARs of four and five. These units can be used on the Imphal front but at a victory point penalty. However, the Chindits are a brittle force. Unless they can capture an air base or land the 823rd Engineer Battalion to build an airstrip, they will have to rely upon airdrops for resupply. The Chindits can quickly find themselves out of supply and, after defending a time or two, without any internal supply.

The other Commonwealth units range from a few battalions with five ARs to a lot of units with three and two ARs. Many of the five AR units cannot be rebuilt. In the campaign games the bulk of the Commonwealth forces do not arrive until mid-April. This gives the IJA a few turns to gain ground on the Imphal front before the defense can stiffen.

The replacement table plays an important role for both sides. The Commonwealth receives no replacements on rolls of 7 or less. Pax replacements are for specific locations only; a pax in Ledo must rebuild Chinese or American units. On a roll of 8, 10, and 12 a Pax arrives at Silchar. On a roll of 9, 11, and 12 a Pax arrives at Ledo. Eq replacements can go either place, but arrive only on rolls of 10 or better. So the Allied player cannot expect to get Pax when and where he needs them. Indeed, he should not expect a flood of replacements to restore his combat losses.

The IJA fares marginally better on the variable reinforcement table. On rolls of 5 or less nothing is received. On rolls of 6 or 7 another die must be rolled to see if a battalion is received

(a 50% chance). On a roll of 8, 9, or 12 one battalion is received. On a roll of 10 two battalions are received. On a roll of 11 and 12 the IJA may receive an air replacement or the possibility of a headquarters, Indian National Army, armored, or artillery replacement. The IJA replacements are selected on a random basis from the dead pile, so the IJA player cannot expect to get replacements when and where he wants them. He can expect not to replace any headquarters or artillery that are lost.

Both sides start the campaign with a good stash of supplies. However, the supply table is stingy to both sides. The Commonwealth player can expect to receive typically between two or four supply points per turn which must then be allocated to both fronts. Supply allocation is further complicated by the warlord rule that causes half of all supplies sent over the Ledo Road to be lost. The Commonwealth player can do one hump diversion per turn whenever IJA units are within fourteen hexes of Imphal or Dimapur, but at a cost of two victory points each time. A hump diversion allows the player to roll one die and receive either that number of supplies which can be flown in or the number of REs of troops that may be transported by air.

On a roll of 2 or 3 the IJA receives no supplies. Although the IJA can receive up to five supply points, the likely result is one or two per turn.

Players' Notes

I will not specifically discuss the shorter scenarios as my play experience has been limited to the campaign games. However, much of what I say regarding the campaign will apply to the scenarios as well.

Campaign Scenario 1 (CS1) starts three turns before Campaign Scenario 2 begins. CS1 provides the Commonwealth player with some latitude as to where the Chindit Clearings can be placed and affords him an opportunity to capture the airfields at Indaw and Katha early on before the IJA can reinforce them to the point where capture becomes problematical. There is little likelihood that the IJA can trap the 17th Division on the Tiddim Road south of Imphal in this scenario. But even so, the Commonwealth forces are spread out and thin on the ground around Imphal early in the game, and the possibility exists for cutting them off from trace supply.

Another option instead of going for the airfields at Indaw is to place the Chindit Clearings as far north as the scenario set-up allows with the aim of blockading the IJA 18th Division from both trace supply and supply point supply from Myitkyina. The 18th is strung out along the Namibyu and unable to respond effectively to this. If the IJA has failed to garrison Myitkyina, it may be possible to take both the city and the airfield. However, leaving Indaw in Japanese hands provides an excellent base of operations for the inevitable counter-attack. The 15th Army HQ in Indaw can throw supply eighteen hexes up the road. Whereas if this HQ is forced to operate from Nankan, the next detrainable hex to the south, its throw range is effectively eviscerated by having to trace along the railroad hexes as there is no road between Nankan and Indaw.

The second campaign scenario begins with the bulk of the Chindits on the ground and in firm control of the airfield at Katha. A competent Japanese player will have garrisoned Indaw to the point where an attack against it would be suicidal. In the north, two units of Galahad are poised with two SPs on mules to make a flank march around the 18th to strike directly at Myitkyina. In my game at HomerCon, I did just this. Merrill's Marauders seized the airfield and laid siege to the city. Later, I was able to bring up two Chindit columns, and made an assault which was repulsed because I rashly attacked after repeated hip-shoots had failed to DG the defenders. However, the IJA's 18th Division was completely blockaded and eventually suffered from attrition.

For both scenarios, the Commonwealth position is essentially the same on the Imphal front, except that in the second scenario the IJA has an excellent chance to surround the 17th Division on the Tiddim Road south of Imphal. The initial positions of the Commonwealth troops are too far forward and vulnerable to being cut off by infiltrating Japanese. And you do not want units with ARs of two or three rolling on the attrition table! Withdrawal is further complicated by large supply dumps that need to be moved to safety.

The key to holding Imphal is the road from Dimapur to Imphal. The road hexes must be garrisoned with troops to prevent the IJA from occupying the road. It should not be necessary to garrison all hexes; just those that are in imminent danger of being captured. Loss of the road will put a strain on the air forces to maintain supply. If the Commonwealth player is not careful, the battle may come to resemble Dienbienphu! The Headquarters should build an airstrip in each of the hexes of Imphal to replace the capacity of the three airfields east of Imphal and the lake which are vulnerable to destruction by the IJA.

Five transports may seem like a lot, but altogether they can transport no more than ten tokens a turn. The Chindits may need six tokens a turn, so having to supply Imphal by air will result in hump diversions.

The Commonwealth's biggest advantage is air power. Compared to the meager Japanese air force, it is overwhelming. But the rule that allows air units to refuse combat makes it virtually impossible to destroy the Japanese fighter! Since the Japanese fighter cannot refuse interception, it will be necessary to waste a few fighters for CAP. (But given their low bombing factors and the terrain, this is not much of a waste.) The two B-25s and the one Vengence constitute the offensive power. Without them to soften up the Japanese, the Ledo Road front would grind to a halt. They can be used to pulverize any IJA who are careless enough to end the turn in clear terrain. Use them like free artillery and hope that the defender doesn't roll any step losses on anti-aircraft fire! The Hurricanes are probably best used for interdiction. With their GS rating of 3 they provide Serious Interdiction into any eligible hex.

The Commonwealth Player should hunker down around Imphal and play defense. Remember, the Japanese player has to beat you. Give him big stacks to attack at low odds and watch his army melt away. Unless the IJA player has foolishly allowed you to have extra trucks, you cannot attain a sudden death victory by capturing a Mandalay hex and putting it into trace supply. You can, however, lose by a sudden death victory if you allow the IJA a shot against either Imphal hex.

The Chinese-American army could possibly win the game for you as long as they can keep the Ledo Road Head moving forward. At some point, you'll have to attempt more than one road/trail hex conversion per turn or you'll come up short and not be able to complete the road all the way to hex A59.03.

The IJA player has his work cut out for him. Early in either scenario he has numerical superiority on the Imphal front. An all-out effort should be made to trap the 17th Division south of Imphal. Loss of this division would force the Commonwealth to send more troops into Imphal, troops that would be better utilized keeping the road to Dimapur open. Also, the Commonwealth would be forced to attack the IJA road block units in very close terrain which becomes problematical when these units are entrenched. The Commonwealth does not have enough 5 ER units at the beginning, and the IJA player should enjoy watching these lifted from the map and dropped into the dead pile where it is not likely they will return to play.

Infiltrate, infiltrate, infiltrate. Laugh when your opponent diverts airdrop missions to keep 2-AR units alive. Try to cut the Dimapur Road. Try to cut the railroad to Ledo. Above all, threaten Imphal. Force the Commonwealth player to defend Imphal and its air bases.

The Imphal Front for the IJA is a game of maneuver and attrition. The goal is to out-maneuver and trap the Commonwealth units. Attrit their supplies by denying them trace supply and making them live off the map. Attrit their supplies by maneuvering so that they must attack you. There's nothing more satisfying in this game than to watch the Commonwealth spend 2 SPs on an artillery barrage that completely misses! Avoid a stand-up fight against big stacks if you can. An initial odds attack of 1-2 in extremely close terrain with a six column shift does not do all that much for you. Don't bleed your army needlessly in low odds attacks, and use Banzai charges sparingly.

Still, the IJA player will come to loathe and despise the serious interdiction rule as the Commonwealth player uses his abundance of Hurricanes to hamper the Japanese advance. Well-placed SI can delay reinforcements or prevent the IJA from moving adjacent to enemy units. The bombers can also be a pain, especially if the Commonwealth player uses them in the reaction phase to blunt attacks. Actually, they're a real pain whenever they are used.

The Japanese air force, unfortunately, is a joke. When supply is tight, it is not worthwhile to refit the planes. Still, they have a certain nuisance value. My father used to tell me of the nights when "Washing Machine Charlie" buzzed him on Guadalcanal. Old "Washing Machine Charlie" never dropped a bomb or fired a shot, but he sure made a big racket and kept people awake at night. So if the Commonwealth Player neglects to put up CAP, Washing Machine Charlie can come calling; with a lot of luck you can bomb supplies or interfere with possible hump missions.

The weather is not much of a factor early in the game. It is possible to get light rain and mud but not likely in March through May. As the IJA you might relish the thought of the Allied air force being restricted to air base to air base missions or no missions at all. But mud hurts the IJA worse than it does the Commonwealth. The IJA depends on its mobility along the jungle tracks to outflank the Commonwealth early in the game. Mud neutralizes this. Also, the IJA depends more on truck, wagon, and mule transport to move its supplies, so mud hampers re-supply. As long as the planes can shuffle supplies onto the map, weather does not hamper the Commonwealth Player regardless of how much he might complain because he can't fly his bombing and interdiction missions.

Success in **Burma** requires patience. Patience to accumulate sufficient supplies. Patience to remain on the defensive for turns on end. And patience to recover from disastrous double turns that can unhinge even the strongest defensive positions.

Burma is a challenge for both sides. The momentum can shift back and forth. At times the play will seem interminable. Attacks may go awry and it will seem more like a bungle in the jungle than a blitzkrieg. Victory will hang in the balance until the very end. (Sounds kind of like an Atlanta Braves post-season play-off game—doesn't it?)

Up in the Air!

by Dean N. Essig

Much of the developmental work being done to the draft *OCS* v3.0 rules in the last few months has been devoted to polishing the air rules to give a better representation of operational air warfare. Chief among the issues being addressed is the "binary nature" of CAP (if it's there, you don't bomb, if it isn't, you do). This and a number of more minor concerns drove the work. What was an evolutionary effort to slowly correct flaws I perceived in v2.0i, might appear much more dramatic to those who only see the end points—of course, those who followed the work closely on the discussion list were driven to drink (or worse) long ago!

My purpose here is to try to bring as much of this into chronological context as possible. In this I'm constrained by a number of things. I know what did or did not work before and why, but am sometimes hard pressed to recall exactly why I did what I did in earlier versions that turned out, in hindsight, to be a mistake at some level. I've been intimately involved with this stuff since I first started working on the *OCS* in 1988 (yup, it goes back that far) and some things are too obvious to me to mention (too close to know what you want to hear about). I've seen the thing go through many, many iterations that you never had to deal with, things that changed long before any printing was done. This is one reason why some became frightened seeing the multiple drafts the v3.0 rules went through on the web site: it was their first time seeing what, for me, is normal operating procedure. This multiple iteration problem causes me two concerns as I write for you now: am I remembering a rule no one ever saw? Or is a rule people did see the result of several other failed attempts they weren't privy to. My memory not being what it used to be, here goes.

Back When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth...

OCS v1.0 and v2.0 (without options) were pretty much the same when it came to the air rules, the differences between the two being limited to straight-line air movement, two-plane limits on movement, and the infamous Put Up or Shut Up rule. In the original game (and up to and including the present

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Burma, continued