

SICILY II

LEARNING THE ROPES AT PRIMOSOLE BRIDGE

By Ric Van Dyke

In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

The battles rage across the steppes of Russia. Rommel runs wild in North Africa. Patton and Monty race for Messina. MacArthur takes the fight to North Korea. The Wehrmacht launches its opening push in the West through the Ardennes. The jungles of Burma are aflame. The Operational Combat Series (OCS) can take you across the world and through time. Where to start? What game to play? Oh, and how do I play this system anyway!?

OCS is certainly one of the greatest gaming systems I've played. But at first it can seem overwhelming. What I will do in this article is go through a half turn of a game with relatively few counters so you can have a better idea of how all the pieces come together. This isn't a grand strategy lesson on how to play this scenario. Rather this is a walk-through on how the system works.

I'll be citing rules as often as I can so you can see the interplay of mechanics as we go. The convention used will be to cite "OCS x.x" for a series rules and just "x.x" for a game-specific rule.

As in most games the turn is broken into parts—the "sequence of play" as it's commonly called. On page 26 of this journal is a Turn Checklist that you may want to look at as you read this. You can also refer to the outline sequence of play, found in OCS 2.2 (and reprinted on the OCS charts and tables). Generally in a turn one player goes and then the other. There is an exception to this: during the phasing (moving) player's turn there is a Reaction Phase. This gives the non-phasing (non-moving) guy an opportunity to shove sticks in the wheels of the phasing player. More on this later.

The scenario I'll be using is Primosole Bridge from Sicily II. This lasts just two turns, covering the 14 and 17 July 1943 turns. The British face a very hard fight for Augusta and Catania, their two objectives. Augusta should be an easy

stroll, but just getting to Catania is a long road. Then they still need to take and hold the city. And of course the Axis player gets to fight back! In the real deal Monty and the Tommies didn't make it there as quickly as they had planned. The battle swirled around Primosole Bridge, which is less than ten kilometers south of Catania, for two weeks. The British didn't actually get into Catania until 5 August.

I won't put a whole lot of thought into the Axis setup... let's just lay the counters out and get started with the Allied turn.

Having a plan in OCS is a key to success. This is not to say that things will go according to your plans, more often they will not. But with a plan you have a course of action laid out, and my personal spin on Ike's quote is that with a plan in hand you have



The Plan

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something to change; without it you're pissing in the wind. My plans aren't always as detailed as I will show here in this simple scenario; many times it's more about basic direction of units and such. But in this small situation with its massive time pressure, it's best to have a detailed plan.

Weather Determination: Many games will have charts for weather and larger games might even have different weather rolls for different parts of the play area. In *Sicily II* there is no weather roll at all (1.1).

First Turn Determination: This is where you roll to decide the turn order—high roll getting to choose to go first or second. It's common for folks who win the roll to decide to go second. This way they might be able to get two turns with little input from the opponent—they can get the second half of one turn and the first half of the next. Having a back-to-back turn can be quite impressive at the right time. Keep in mind, however, that once you take a back-to-back turn, you hand your opponent the chance to do the same at some later time. Suffice to say that going second has its advantages.

Like most scenarios, the first turn's first player is pre-determined, with the side on the offensive kicking off the game. In this case that is the British.

Aircraft Refit Phase: Here all inactive aircraft can be refit (OCS 15.1). On-map air bases refit at a cost of 1T per airfield. The 1T can refit two air units per air base level. All off-map airfields refit for "free" (1.4b), which is pretty standard for all games in the series, as do Aircraft Carriers (OCS 18.2b).

A little note about SPs and Ts. In OCS, supply is the tether. If you didn't have to worry about supply you could move every unit during every turn and also attack constantly. However, as in real life, you don't get the supply necessary to move and shoot as much as you'd like. So supply is shown in these things called SPs (supply points) and Ts (tokens). One SP equals 4T (OCS 12.1a).

After refitting the off-map and carrier planes for free, I'll burn 2T from Syracuse to refit the two Spitfires in 57.09 and the one in 55.04. This leaves 6T. The HQ at

55.06 can throw to pretty much any hex in the AO (Area of Operations); see OCS 12.3b for the mechanics of HQ-Throw. Now we have a nice patrol zone (OCS 14.4c) covering the AO.

Reinforcement Phase: None for this scenario until the end of this turn, when a special rule kicks in.

Movement Phase: This is where the bulk of the action takes place. There are three segments.

Breakout Segment. Simply put, units that are "surrounded" can try to break out (OCS 12.8e). No units qualify for this.

Mode and Movement Segment. This is the meat of an OCS turn. Here you determine the voluntary mode of a unit before it moves. The voluntary modes are Combat, Move, Strat, and Reserve. I'll use all of these to give you a sense of how they all work. The involuntary ones are DG (not something you want) and Exploit, which is fun to get.

Barrage Segment. Air and naval barrages are resolved. (Artillery fires come later in the turn.)

The first victory requirement is to take Augusta on Turn 1. I'll use the 5th Infantry Division supported by the 44th Royal Tank Regiment (RTR) to do an overrun (OCS 8.0). I put both units in Move Mode, and I'll need to fuel them (OCS 12.5) since they have Truck and Track MA (only Leg units move for free).

5th Division will take 1T to fuel, applying Case C of OCS 12.5c, which means it is fueled for this phase only. Note that Case A cannot be applied since the 5th isn't a multi-unit formation; neither does Case B work, since a multi-step unit is never "independent" per OCS 3.2f.

44th RTR could also use the 1T method for fuel, or it could use Case B if 1SP is spent to put a fuel marker on 13th Corps HQ (which could then fuel all independent units in the area. Since there are six independent units in the scenario that might need fuel, Case B seems like the smarter option because they are then fueled for the whole turn. (So if any get an Exploit combat result they will still have fuel to move in the Exploitation Phase).

I'm down to 5SP and 3T in Dump K.

The Italians have a ZOC in 55.13, so I first create a Breakdown unit from the 5th to carpet the ZOC in that hex for the Truck MA infantry. This is a difficult decision, because the 5th Infantry Division has now lost a lot of its punch. On defense it's at full strength until it has lost half its steps, but when attacking its strength is already cut in half (OCS 9.11d). Note that many players use an optional rule (OCS 21.2) that reduces combat power in proportion to the step losses. Feel free to use this instead of the standard rule.

Now I'll perform the overrun attack. The remaining infantry and tanks spend two Movement Points (MP) to reach 55.14, capturing the airfield. An air base can be used immediately once captured (OCS 9.14f). I'll move two Spitfires to here from 57.09, and they will stay Active because the rebase is within normal range (OCS 14.11). This cannot be done until I finish moving the 5th and 44th, however, since you can only move one stack at a time (OCS 6.1). I just mention it here so it doesn't get lost in the narrative.

An overrun can only be done into a hex that has an entry cost of 3MPs or less (OCS 8.1b). To move into the city from the airfield hex is a cost of just 1, since the city is in open terrain, so we're good to go. Note that in an overrun a road cannot be used to lower the cost of entering the hex being attacked (OCS 8.1c). An overrun always cost 3MPs, so we're up to 5 spent so far.

Once the attack is announced, Coastal Brigade A and Coastal Regiment 121 have to pass their loyalty tests because both are wavering units (2.6b). The loyalty rolls are a '3' and a '5', so "A" surrenders and "121" fights on. Now on to the combat (which wouldn't be needed if both units had failed their tests). First we spend supply. There are four steps doing the attack (the division has three steps) so that is 4T. This leaves 4SP and 3T in Dump K.

Supply cost is 1T for the Italians, since only 1 Regimental Equivalent (RE) is defending (OCS 4.6 covers unit sizes). This leaves 3T in Augusta.

Action Rating (OCS 3.2c) is king in combat. The 5th will lead the attack, an AR 3 unit, and the 121st Coastal Rgt has

an AR of 2. That gives the British a +1 to both the surprise and combat rolls (OCS 9.8 and 9.9, respectively). Surprise roll is a 9+1=10, with a '5' kicker roll for shifts. The defenders must have been still in their bunks! That is a nice surprise roll.

Attacking strength is 6+1.5; the infantry division is halved on attack for not being at full strength and per the Terrain Effects Chart the armor is also halved due to attacking into a city. Defense is a 5. The city is Very Close for the combat line. 7.5 to 5 is a 1.5:1 ratio, which rounds to 2:1 (using the rounding rule per OCS 4.2). Now find the 2:1 column on the Very Close row of the combat table and shift it up (to the right) 5 columns for the surprise shift. That takes us to the 12:1 column. The combat roll is an 11+1=12; man, the 5th is rolling hot! The result is **Ae3DL2o2DG**. Yeah, that's a mouth full. Let's break it down.

Ae3. Attacker gains exploit for units with AR 3 or higher, but this is an overrun so ignore it (OCS 9.13b).

DL2. Defender loses two steps. This eliminates the 121st, which only has one step.

o2. Defender has two options. This must be in retreat hexes and/or step losses. Because the unit is eliminated this doesn't matter.

DG. Any defending units enter DG mode. Again, doesn't apply here.

Advancing into the port of Augusta is mandatory, but doesn't cost any MPs (they were spent for the overrun). There are 3T in the Italian supply dump. Check their fate on the Capture Table: a '5' is rolled, which is a 50%, or 1.5T, which rounds to 2T. The other 1T is destroyed.

With movement points remaining and a slight case of victory fever, the 5th and 44th decide to swing north. They zoom along the rail line and overrun the Schmaltz Assault Gun battalion in 53.15, which should be easy pickings in the open ground. Movement cost is 2 for the approach (1 per hex), then 3 more for the over-run. They have used a total of 10 MPs so far.

Attack supply draws another 4T from the Dump K, which is now down to 3SP and 3T. Defense supply is 1T from 51.15, so 3T left on the ground there. This time it's a -1 for the AR because attack is an

AR 3 and defense is an AR 4. Surprise roll is 7-1=6 for defender surprise, with a kicker of '3'. Not so lucky for the 5th this time—they must have walked into an ambush. Attack factors are 10.5; attacking armor is normally doubled in the open, but this is reduced to x1.5 due to AT Effects (OCS 9.4e). Defense is 3, and a 10.5 to 3 just barely rounds to odds of 4:1. The odds column is shifted down 3 columns (to the left) for the surprise to the 1:1 column. Combat roll 9-1=8, AL1Do1. The 5th takes a step loss, and I flip its loss marker to show it is down 2 steps. Now the defender can take a loss, which would destroy the unit, or retreat one hex. Discretion is the better part of valor, so the Assault Guns retreat to 52.15 to join the Fallschirmjäger behind the Lentini River.

The 5th and the 44th advance into 53.15 after the Assault Guns vacate the hex. They still have a few MPs remaining, but I'll hold here and setup for an attack over the river in the Combat Phase. The DUKW joins them (loaded with 2 SP), because it might be important to have some supply adjacent to the river for later.

Now I fire up the 50th Infantry Division and the 3rd Yeomanry to test the defenses at Lentini. I fuel the 50th with 1T (like I did with the 5th); the tanks are independent, so they're covered by the Fuel marker on the HQ. (That leaves 3SP and 2T in Dump K.) The stack takes off down the trail. To get to 52.13 costs 2MPs, then 3 more for the overrun. The ARs are even this time. Surprise roll is 11! Dang! And the kicker is a '6'! Luck is with the British today.

Attack supply is 5T from Dump K, which now has 9T left. Defending supply is 1T from 51.15 leaving 2T there.

Overrun is into the village of Lentini, so it's close terrain. 14 to 5 rounds up to 3:1, on close, shift up 6 columns to the 15:1 column. Combat roll is a 4, not a great roll. That shift sure helped. Result is Ao1DL1o1. The defender is eliminated (115 KG of Schmaltz). As the attacker I have an option: I could retreat but the stack would be done (OCS 8.1f) and I want to attack over the river, so I'll lose a step of infantry and advance into the vacated hex. Supply is getting very tight.

I'll fuel up the 23rd Armored Brigade for 1SP and put them into reserve (OCS 5.7). They can now move ¼ their MPs (OCS 5.7a). The units flip to their move side so I can move out and hopefully get to Catania in the Exploitation Phase. The slowest unit in move mode is the tanks at 12 MP, 12/4=3 MPs. They can move 6 hexes on the road, because road costs are ½ MP per hex. That gets them up to 55.12.

I'm down to 5T in Dump K.

The 13th Corps artillery (two arty and one anti-tank unit) are put in Move Mode and head north to positions where they can lend some artillery support if needed. The artillery units were already fueled as independents back at the beginning of the turn.

The two Royal Marine companies way back at 53.05 need to get up to the fight. I'll put them in Strat mode (OCS 5.8). This gives them 12 MPs. They are Leg even in Move Mode, so no fuel needed. Strat mode is precarious. Think of the units in a total "admin" mode. They are moving out as fast as possible, no scouts. All weapons in travel configuration, maybe even partially disassembled (like machine guns or mortars). They are very vulnerable to attacks so make sure they aren't likely to get hit. I can move them up to 53.14 just behind the 5th and 50th. This isn't ideal but I think the Germans will have bigger issues to worry about rather than sending in someone to hit these guys.

I'll also put the Glider troopers into Reserve Mode (on their move side) and move them to stack with 23rd Armor. This gives me an AR 5 unit to lead an attack on Catania (if the road is clear).

All the ships I'll move to 54.15. (I put the carriers next to the stack of destroyers just to make it easier to work with. They are all really in the same hex.) This likely isn't a big deal in this scenario but it's nice to have lots of flak protection for the carriers (OCS 18.3f).

Now it's time for some air movement. My plan is to drop as much of 1st Airborne division as I can just behind the Simeto River. Let's see how they do.

I need transport planes for airdrops. But I also want to move supply forward with my transport planes. Transport planes have "Tpt" in the upper left, with

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End of Movement Phase



Scatter is a major issue in **Sicily II**. There were a lot of issues with the airdrops in the real deal and this is simulated in the game. Each unit has to roll for drift, direction, and then success. Picking your mission hex should be done with scatter in mind. For example, a mission hex right on the coast would likely be a bad idea. If a unit scatters into an all-sea hex, it's a failure and you lose the unit. A really good mission hex is an enemy air base with no enemy units on it. This way once the airbase is taken by the airborne, more units and/or supply can be flown in during the Exploitation or Reaction Phase.

Let's see what happens. The first BG uses parachutes, rolls a '2' and '3', so they scatter from 50.16 over to 52.16, which is a clear hex. Air Landing Table roll is 7-1=6, which is success in a clear enemy hex. (Note the -1 is for an Allied air drop before August 1944. This is on the air transport success table.) They are in move orientation, because it is an Air Transport requirement (OCS 14.9c). They landed in a great spot — they could "attack empties" (3.3f) but are fine right here!

The second BG uses gliders, which gives them a bit better chance to land safely. But first comes scatter, rolls of a '6' and '4' shift them to in 49.16. An Italian artillery unit is there, so the BG is eliminated.

Not that I'm complaining! A 50% success rate is ok, especially since it was kind of risky near two lines of enemy units. My surviving BG will get to "attack empties" in the Combat Phase—this is normally a series option (OCS 21.8c) but is standard in this game—but I'm probably good here. It really can't do much this turn anyway except block a retreat, but they are in trace supply for this turn so don't need to worry about attrition even though there is no real supply path (OCS 14.10b).

My plan also includes an amphibious landing (OCS 18.5). The 2nd Special Air Service (SAS) and the 3rd Commandos will be loaded on a Landing Craft (LC) and come ashore just north of Primosole Bridge. There is no port, so this is resolved on the amphibious landing table (ALT). Any use of the ALT must be in the Movement Phase, so we need to do this now. An LC Point has a

the transport capacity in tokens (1T, 2T) below the plane on the right. I start the scenario with two C-47 counters (each with 1T capacity), and one Halifax+Gldr counter (with 1T of capacity). I decide to use two for airdrops and one to ferry in some supply. Fortunately, the distance from the airplane's base to the drop area is less than half the ranges of these planes, so all of my transports can carry double capacity (OCS 14.9e), or 2T each.

Moving supply from one friendly airbase to another is an Air Transport mission (OCS 14.9c). A C-47 flies 2T in from Tunisia to 57.09.

Air drops are covered in OCS 14.10. We are free from having to do prior planning

(3.3b). I need to figure how many units can be loaded onto each transport plane. Each battle group (BG) is equivalent to 1RE for size (1.7c), which is normally 1 transport point or 1SP. However, since the move side of the unit is 6MPs or less then they count as half (OCS 4.7b). So for transport, each airborne BG is ½RE or 2T in size.

I'll fly a C-47 and the Halifax to 50.16. The transports will return to Tunisia and be Inactive after the drops. They each carry a BG from the 1st. No interception (the Germans have no Active fighters), and the mission hex is not in an enemy PZ so there is no flak roll. Now we roll for scatter (3.3e).

capacity of 1 SP/RE, and that is treated just like any other transport capacity in OCS. The SAS and commandos are both companies and so ¼RE each. On their movement side they are leg movement (white print) and less than 6 MP, and so count half for transport purposes. That means together they count as just ¼ RE of transport capacity, so they are an easy cargo load.

The landing is in the clear but it is within 2 of an Italian coastal defense unit and also in an enemy ZOC. Each of those is a -1 DRM. But I have Destroyers in the area and a Commando load, which are each +1, for a net +0. My ALT roll is a 3. Rats! That is a Mixed. The LC is lost. The commandos land ok but are DG and in combat mode orientation.

The commandos are out of supply trace, and I also want to use them to attack. I can't get SP ashore without a port, but I can have an LC loiter next to the landing hex and then direct draw from it (OCS 18.5e). I do this with the other LC in Syracuse, loading it with 4T (leaving 2T in the dump).

Air missions providing ground support are flown at the end of the various movement segments. I'll have the Boston and the Hurricane hit Catania, and the two carrier Tac planes will hit 51.15. The Wellingtons can only do a facilities barrage (1.9c, an optional rule). I'll put one Wellington on each of the big air bases (49.18, 49.16 and 51.17).

Let's resolve the air and ship barrages.

The flak rolls on the Wellingtons all miss, even with the +2 for air base level. The barrage roll on 49.18 is a 3, nothing. On 49.16 the barrage roll is a 4, no hit on the airfield but there is '(6)' result. That means I roll one die for each enemy air unit at the base and a 6 will damage the aircraft at the air base. Roll for the two aircraft a 2 and a 6, bottom one takes a hit (a Bf.109g). On 51.17 the barrage roll is a 5; gets a hit on the air base and a '(5)' on aircraft. Three aircraft here, and the rolls are 4, 2, and 5 hit the bottom one again (an MC.202). The hit on the airfield reduces it from Level-2. Now that it's at Level-1 it cannot be reduced further (OCS 15.0c).

On to the air barrage on Catania! Flak is a 9, no hit. Barrage strength is 19, no shifts for size, down one column

for very close terrain, so roll on the 12-16 column. Roll a 10, which is a [1/2], which means for air it's just a DG.

For the air barrage on the stack in 51.15, the flak is an 8, no hit. No shift for size and none for terrain either, but 1 to the right for close range. On the 12-16 column roll a 7. A straight up DG. Note that all aircraft fly back to base and are Inactive at the end of a mission.

All the destroyers will fire on 52.15. There are 4 ships at 12 points each, 48 points. No shifts, resolve on the 41-68 column, the roll is another 11! The table reads the result as '1', but also note on the barrage table that a ship-to-shore barrage downgrades the results, with a '1' becoming a '1/2'. Roll one die, get a 4, so I get the step loss after all. The defender has the choice of the loss (OCS 10.0a), and decide the assault guns are toasted. The surviving Fallschirmjäger are now DG.

Supply Phase: Here I check to make sure everyone is in supply trace (OCS 12.6). The only British units that can't trace are the commando companies (the airborne is good for the turn it lands). So it's kind of expensive but they eat the 1T to stay in trace (1T can supply up to 2REs, per OCS 12.6c). I guess they had some good eats!

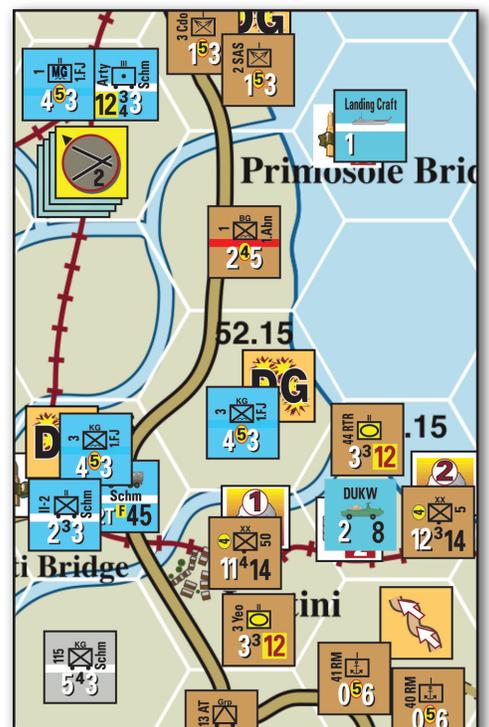
Reaction Phase: Now the other player (in this case the German player) can react (OCS 7.0). No units can setup in Reserve Mode, so the only thing they have to use are the three Ju.88 units in South Italy. There is a pretty strong aluminum umbrella over the AO, with the three Spitfires on the island and two more on the Carriers. But let's give it a go, shall we? If they can DG that reserve stack (the 23rd Armored) that will really slow down the British.

The British can throw up one aircraft for Intercept (OCS 14.5), a Spitfire from 55.14, to head off the Ju.88s. The air ratings are 5 vs 2, so +3 on the air combat rolls. The first engagement roll 9+3 = 12, kicker of '3', so a defender abort with no loss. Second roll is a 2+3=5 kicker is '1' (rolled three 1's there, hum). So it's an attacker abort and no loss. The Spitfire flies home and is Inactive. So two of the Ju.88s get through! Flak roll is a +2 because of the patrol zone; flak roll is 7+2=9, no hit. It's an 18 point barrage,

down 3 for no spotter and down one more for terrain, all the way to the 3-4 column. Roll is a '5', no hit. A noble try, but all fly home and are Inactive.

Combat Phase: Odd as this may seem to newcomers to OCS, not much may happen here. In some turns the phasing player might not attack at all in this phase. Then of course you might then have a turn with combat all across the front. Here I think I'll just have one on 52.15.

Before the attack I could do artillery barrage, but the unit in 52.15 is already DG so not much sense in burning supply for what will most likely be another DG. The 50th Division and 3 Yeomanry will charge over the river, and I decide to also send in the 1st Abn BG. The attack burns up 1T on the LC, the 2T that were just flown in, plus the 2T captured in Augusta; the defenders draw their 1T from the adjacent hex. AR is 4 to 4, since the Fallschirmjäger's AR is reduced due to its DG (OCS 5.10b). Surprise roll is 8 = no surprise. Attacker has 11 points which is then halved for the river and halved again for the step loss to 2.75; the tank battalion adds another 1.5 and the paras add 2, for a total of 6.25. The



Combat Phase

