

strategy & Tactics: **Operation Crusader**

by Scott Love

Operation Crusader is the latest World War II game from Atomic Games — and is unquestioningly one of their best games, if not the best. The game's level of complexity sustains challenge and the interface has been markedly improved over the V for Victory series.

To better understand the following column, please read the manual of Operation Crusader: I've written this column under the assumption that you're familiar with the terms and operations of the game. You may also wish to read my column on V for Victory in the June issue of Inside Mac Games. That column was written as a general overview, supplements this column well, and is not duplicated here. There are many tactics in it which will help win Operation Crusader.

Winning Operation Crusader is a difficult trick. Game play has been well-balanced and the computer's A.I. demands much more from players than many other war games. Volumes could be written about World War II tactics (and have been) and Operation Crusader, as a game, offers literally hundreds of tactical situations. Rather than attempting a full overview, this article will follow one scenario as an example and offers it as a tutorial for the overall game itself.

[II Duce's Finest](#)

The first scenario, seventeen turns long, presents a good look at the overall game of Operation Crusader. Troops are fairly well balanced, with a slight advantage on the Italian side, and a successful battle includes a delicate orchestration of movement, supply, defense, and offense. The Allied side must play a more dynamic role to win than the Axis troops and thus serves well as the side to follow in this tutorial. For the Allies, the scenario contains a crucial turning point where they must move from a defensive, holding posture into an offensive strike. Attacking too early costs too dearly in troops and supplies, waiting until too late prevents the Allies from taking their objectives.

[The First, Critical Dawn](#)

Supplies are vital to Operation Crusader. Be sure always to consciously assign supply levels and HQ attachments on the mornings of every game. In this scenario, the 1st South African

Infantry is fairly well supplied; however, the 22nd British Tank Brigade is severely under-supplied and cannot provide much offensive strength.

The goals for the opening few hours are simple for both sides: capture, in descending order of importance, el Gueitinat, Point 118, and Point 180.

The 22nd British Tank Brigade, with well plotted movement, can take both el Gueitinat and Point 180 quickly, provided reinforcements from the 1st SA Infantry arrive as soon as possible. The 1st SA Infantry, then, must do three things: take Point 118, set its artillery in an advantageous position, and reinforce the 22nd Brigade's defense of Point 180.

Supplies must reflect these goals. The 22nd Brigade can handle only defensive supply levels — otherwise they will run out of supplies in the later stages of the battle and will prove worthless. Hopefully defensive supplies will suffice and they will be able to capture el Gueitinat and Point 180 by movement rather than force.

The 1st SA Infantry, on the other hand, has enough supplies to provide a few turns of attack level supply, provided attacks are quickly resolved and don't drag out over a number of turns. It will be extremely lucky for the Allies and for the 1st SA Infantry if they are able to capture Point 118 before the Italian 132nd Ariete RECo N C Mechanized Reconnaissance battalion beats them to it. Therefore, expect to have to take Point 118 by force. Go ahead and set the 1st SA Infantry to attack level supply for this first turn.

Supply will play a critical role later in the battle: the 22nd Brigade's HQ won't be able to support all of its troops and some of them will have to be transferred to the 1st SA Infantry's command. Plan for this. Move the HQ to el Gueitinat and plan to support those troops with it. The troops which take Point 180 will probably be cut off from the HQ and thus will naturally need to be reattached to the 1st SA Infantry.

he above screen shot is the best possible position for the 22nd to take in the first turn's execution. Expect the Italians to move toward both objectives as well, so plot movement

which brings the British troops into these objectives from the East — otherwise they'll stall in hexes adjacent to Italian troops.

Notice the positions of 2RGH and 4CLY Battalions. Both are in supportive positions and will help prevent the Italians from surrounding the main objectives.

The key to this entire battle for the Allies lies in taking and holding these two positions. Don't allow your troops to be surrounded and cut off from supply routes. If Point 180 must be cut off (superior Italian forces make that a necessity) allow the cut-off to come from the North — the 22nd HQ can support the two units designated to hold el Gueitinat while 3 CLY and 4 CLY can be attached to the 1st SA Infantry later in the game — provided they're not surrounded.

bove are the corresponding opening moves by the 1st SA Infantry. It's three companies of motorized anti-tank units have moved to support the 22nd Brigade's defense of Point 180. The 1st Regiment has moved to maintain supply lines from Point 180 and Point 118 and to defend the three artillery battalions which, in this schematic, are positioned 11 hexes away from Bir el Gubi; oddly enough their effective maximum range happens to be 11 hexes.

The 5th Regiment, 11 H recon, and the Motorized Machine Gun Infantry battalion have all joined the 1st HQ in an attack on Point 118. Before attacking point 118, wait one turn for artillery to get set-up. Artillery significantly affects the odds for victory in any battle. Use

them as much as possible.

Last — use your two available air squadrons to hinder Italian troop movement into Point 118.

The Defensive Turns

Take Point 118 and expect to face some serious Italian strength. Try to prevent being surrounded by using the 5th Regiment to guard your flank, but press no risky attacks. Allow the Italians to tire themselves first. Dig in the 1st Regiment, the troops holding Point 180, and el Gueitinat. Your 1st SA Infantry troops are green and won't do well in assaults. Every time you plan an attack, check the odds. Don't bother attacking with less than 4:1 odds. Be sure to use your two air squadrons for serious assaults — don't waste them in interdiction attacks.

All of the action in the first four turns will most likely be in the South, around Point 118. Play defense. The Italians will lose too many troops attacking — just as you would if you were to play the offensive at this stage in the battle.

In the North, you may have to pull 2RGH back to help defend el Gueitinat, but that will effectively cut your two tank battalions off from supply. Don't allow Point 180 to get surrounded. The 22nd Brigade HQ can take care of itself in el Gueitinat, but you've got to keep an open line to the south from Point 180.

When night falls, allow your troops to rest. The single most damaging mistake a player can make is giving in to the temptation to squeeze in an extra move or finish an attack at night. Your troops will be zombies in the morning. Their supplies will be further depleted. Let them rest. Watch the Italians move troops and get tired. Then attack them with fresh troops in the morning.

Two Turning Points

Two things will happen in fairly quick succession during turns five through seven or eight: the Italians will have (hopefully) been weakened in the South and will (definitely) receive reinforcements in the North.

Now is the time to attach the two tank divisions defending Point 180 from the 22nd to the 1st Infantry. The 1st Infantry can probably maintain attack level supply for one more day, but this depends on how heavy the fighting was the day before. The 22nd will probably have no recourse but minimum or defensive supply.

It is also the time for a counter-attack. Gauge your southern counter-attack carefully. The Italian southern battalions may be out of supply and will definitely be fatigued. If they're out of supply, wait a turn or two to maximize your advantage. Move the 1st Regiment east, if possible, to further cut off supply. If they're fatigued but supplied, attack quickly to take advantage of their poor condition. Plan an all-out assault to the east. Try to pin their forces between the 1st and 5th Regiments or push them to the south of both — which cuts off their supply. The 1st Regiment can push either west or north depending on how besieged Point 180 is.

To insure that supply lines are maintained, move the 1st HQ to near its centrally located artillery units as the 5th Regiment cuts a path for it. It is critical in these middle turns that the 1st HQ have an open line from Point 180 to Point 118.

In the north, Point 180 will most likely be under siege. Maintain supply lines into the area. Consider bringing one or two battalions from the 1st Regiment forward to help with defense. Use your artillery and air squadrons to support the area. At this point you should be on your way to a substantial Allied victory — but being dislodged from Point 180 will sour your party plans. This is where your fortifications will pay off. Don't be seduced from your stronghold to attack a weak and tired Italian unit... there are more out there waiting in the sand.

Mopping Up

Provided that the thrust from the South was successful and that Point 180 was defended, your troops may now push northwest. Bir el Gubi is most likely defended by one strong battalion and some HQ units. Unless you've won every attack in the battle, you don't have enough resources to take both Point 181 and Bir el Gubi. Concentrate on the weaker of the two.

In a battle where you were told to hold the Italian troops at bay, you should have been able to turn it into a successful counter-stroke. In the campaign game, be careful: you'll need these troops again. Don't go overboard pushing toward the last two objectives or you'll lose more troops than you can afford.

The Campaign Game

This scenario should have prepared you well for what lies ahead. Patience pays off in this scenario as it does in the full campaign: wait for your opportunities, don't try to force them. The area around Tobruk offers a significant terrain advantage to the Allies — don't forget it. Afrika Korps packs a serious bite. Hell Fire Pass depends on movement — your troops will fatigue themselves trying to move and attack. Concentrate on out-flanking your enemy and attack after resting at least a turn. The hardest part in the game is managing the western counter-thrust of Afrika Korps. They may be tired, but they ain't dead yet.

With tanks, remember the over-run attack option. Plot tactical movement through a hex which is under attack. If your attack succeeds, your tanks may then blow through and obliterate what little is left of your opponent.

Last, when the Fog of War option is selected use your strong, fast recon units to find the enemy before blindly pushing forward.

Good luck with Operation Crusader. Both sides are worth playing, though overall the Allies have a slight edge. If you play against a friend, watch out! I found out the hard way that I had gotten used to the computer's predictability (it tends to focus too much on objectives).

Please feel free to contact Scott Love with questions or comments.

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