MarkShot's Top Tips for COTA Players

By Mark "MarkShot" Kratzer (beta tester)

1. Before Beginning

    1.1. Read the tutorial and the manual. If you are already a veteran HTTR (Highway to the Reich, the previous game release) player, then, at least, take a look at the "What's New" Section.
    1.2. Bookmark the www.matrixgames.com forums for help and in depth discussion of COTA.
    1.3. Consider visiting the HTTR forum and view my two game mini-guide threads. A good deal of information there will be of aid to the COTA player, too.
    1.4. If you enjoy COTA and do not own HTTR, consider purchasing HTTR which also has great game play, but with different forces and different terrain.
    1.5. For even more detailed game play tips and strategy, consider purchasing the HTTR Strategy Guide. The game play section (about 50% of the publication) will also be an aid to the COTA player.

2. Getting Started

    2.1. Turn off order delays when experimenting with the interface and commands to see immediately how things work.
    2.2. Turn order delays on when you start playing seriously as it adds a whole additional dimension to the game.
    2.3. Order delays does not make the game easier or harder; it simply amplifies the results. Mistakes will be more costly, and successes will be more substantial.
    2.4. To ease the learning process start with the scenarios of shorter duration and fewer units. (Note: short duration does not mean that they are easy; just less complex)
    2.5. Pause the game as needed if you feel things are happening too fast.
    2.6. Use the function keys F1-F7 to get a quick overview of the current state of combat. They display key information for every unit on the map. Thus, giving you the big picture. Use the side bar panel and tabs for detailed information about one particular unit.
    2.7. Use the number keys 1-0,-, = to quickly filter your units and allow you to rapidly find the units you want.
    2.8. Use the arrow keys (dynamic reporting structure) and/or OOB tab (organic reporting structure) to quickly navigate through the chain of command. Observe the lines linking units to see the dynamic reporting structure.
    2.9. The game's AI is your friend and not just your computer opponent. Use your AI commanders to form plans and transmit commands to their subordinates based on your orders. Let the AI work out the path to take when moving units and do not get overly bogged down with plotting waypoints.
    2.10.   Use the mouse and unit selection to form task forces for specific purposes during the battle.

2.11.   For your first games, keep it simple and just play with MOVE, DEFEND, ATTACK, and PAUSE/CONTINUE. When your experience grows, practice with other commands while learning how to adjust the parameters of the commands you give in order to fine tune the behavior of your subordinates.

3. Interface

3.1. Macro-managing on the attack is essential, since the AI will coordinate the timing and movement of individual attacking units. The player has no such capability to finely coordinate the timing of individual units.

3.2. Micro-managing on the defense can be an effective approach and really depends on the particulars of the situation.

3.3. Artillery (and mortars) are preset by the AI to bombard with ROF (rate of fire) = SLOW. If you want something else, then you must call the fire mission in yourself with the BOMBARD command.

3.4. Artillery units when part of a force moving to a final waypoint will halt when they bring that waypoint into range. If you want to move your artillery to a specific location, you will have to move each unit individually.

3.5. You can use the display toolbar at the bottom of the screen to display range circles (direct fire anti-personal/anti-armor and bombard min/max range) in order to see capabilities of the unit and their weapons.

3.6. Use the LOS and the LOS area tools to determine where to position units such that they have a good field of fire or to keep them from enemy observation.

3.7. Use the Win Meter to get an overall sense of how you are progressing with the scenario.

3.8. F4 - Combat Power: use it when you have artillery or an airstrike available and you want to find a worthy target to hit.

3.9. F2 - Rout Status: use it to see if your forces are advancing, stalled, falling back, or running in terror. Aside from the Win Meter, this is probably the best facility available to gauge how the fight is going.

3.10.   F1 – Task: use it to see how far your orders have propagated. Use it to see what state an attack is in.

3.11.   F5 – Deployment: use it to see how prepared your defenses are or how prepared the enemy is.

3.12.   F6 – Fatigue: use it to see how much more you can ask of a force or whether you need to give them some time off the line.

3.13.   The Engagement Status on the counters (bottom right corner) will quickly tell you if your forces are in heavy contact with the enemy and who is delivering more damage.

3.14.   Use the "units with orders" filter and the mouse to drag select all units on the map to see your entire plan for the battle. This displays all the orders that you have given.

3.15.   Use the "HQ" filter to quickly find the units which are the heads of your task forces in order to readjust their orders.

3.16.   Right click on the map to get detailed information about particular terrain locations.

3.17.   Turn on grid lines on the map so that you can estimate distances.

3.18.   When in doubt, use the pathing tools to test what path the AI would construct before issuing orders so that you can eliminate any surprises.

3.19.   Set your message filter to urgent as opposed to routine. With routine critical messages (like air strikes and reinforcements) will easily be lost in a torrent of routine supply related messages.

3.20.   You cannot drop arty on your own troops as the game has a fail safe mechanism to suspend the barrage if your troops are too close. However, you can call in an air strike on your own troops.

4. Tactics (General)

4.1. A good plan is a much more important in determining the outcome of a scenario than tremendous finesse with the little details of the interface. Do not forget to include your reinforcements in your planning process. Your plan should include both actions and a corresponding time table.

4.2. Study the objectives for a scenario. Remember they may have different point values, activation windows, perimeters, scoring for occupation/conclusion/exit, etc.. Keep in mind that points may also be awarded for casualties inflicted. You need not achieve everything to win the contest, but simply achieve the right point spread compared to the enemy.

4.3. Keep your eye on the scenario clock while playing. Is your plan on schedule? If you are falling behind, then perhaps some alterations are necessary.

4.4. Artillery represents a major portion of your total fire power. Also, it has the greatest reach and most rapid redeployment of fire of all your units. Make sure to get it in range of the enemy. Then, use it to support your attacks or break attacks by the enemy.

4.5. Use the appropriate units for the terrain involved. Tanks fight best when they can use ranged fire from their main guns in open terrain. Infantry with their short range weapons are most effective in closed terrain like woods and towns.

4.6. Off road movement (vehicle or on foot) is much slower and, in particular, will tire infantry on foot very rapidly. Where practical, use roads.

4.7. If you aggregate your artillery (and/or mortar) units into a fire base, make sure that you provide a security force to protect it.

4.8. Sometimes the best protection for a force is simply not to be seen. This can be accomplished by putting hills, woods, towns between you and the enemy, or moving under cover of darkness.

4.9. Just because you cannot see the enemy does not mean that he cannot see you. Dug-in units at higher elevations with low profiles will spot your units moving in the open without giving away their own positions.

4.10.   You can use the REST command and the DEFEND command to have artillery stand down or go on-call. Do this with individual artillery units and you can meter your artillery ammunition stocks.

4.11.   Visibility changes greatly during day/night. Infiltration of your lines can happen easily at night.

4.12. Engineers are needed to prime a bridge. Engineers will accelerate the unpriming of a bridge. Any unit can blow a bridge, but engineers will improve the chances of success.

4.13. Using more bridge building units will accelerate the rate at which a bridge is constructed.

4.14. Air strikes will time out after 20 minutes. Use it or lose it. If you have no worthwhile contacts to hit, then drop it near an objective that is occupied by the enemy.

4.15. Protect your supply lines (the roads running between line units, bases, and SEPs). Cut the enemy's supply lines. This will have the biggest impact in longer scenarios with high demand supplies like artillery and mortar shells.

4.16. Position direct fire support weapons (machine guns, anti-tank guns, infantry field guns, anti-aircraft guns, …) where they can use their superior reach to hit targets like infantry units that cannot effectively counter-fire at such range.

5. Tactics (Order Delays)

5.1. Do not add or remove units from a force that is in the middle of a critical action. Doing so will result in the AI replanning (re-evaluating and generating new orders). Which will most likely result in major delays, disorganization, and significant losses of men and material.

5.2. If you are playing with order delays, then you must plan ahead when issuing orders. You need to issue your orders in anticipation of what things will be hours into the future as opposed to waiting until everything is crystal clear.

5.3. Excessive micromanagement will increase order delays by overloading your head quarters staff.

5.4. Keeping subordinates in relative proximity to their head quarters will reduce order delays.

5.5. In many scenarios order delays are waived for the first 59 minutes (to simulate a pre-existing plan). Make the most of this window to expedite your strategy for the battle.

5.6. Order delays are waived for the first 59 minutes for reinforcing units. Make the most of this window to expedite your strategy for the battle.

6. Tactics (Attacking)

6.1. Use single units, typically light tank or armored car, to conduct rapid recon in advance of a major task force to find a clear route and determine the enemy's disposition.

6.2. Attack from more than one direction. Thus, increasing the shock effect and dislocation of the enemy's defenses.

6.3. Find a good FUP (jump off point for the attack). Make it as close as possible such that you are not observed by the enemy.

6.4. As you initiate your attack to secure a primed bridge, use artillery to apply a barrage to the area around the bridge even if you have no intel on enemy

presence. Failure to suppress the enemy while attacking is often the reason why a bridge gets blown before you can take it.

6.5. Sometime a hasty attack (issuing aggressive movement orders) can be more effective than a deliberate attack (issuing attack orders) when the enemy has yet to prepare their defense or reinforce the objective.

7. Tactics (Defending)

7.1. Use road blocks (in combination with artillery) to slow down an advancing enemy. You don't always have to stop an enemy cold, sometimes it is enough to simply run him out of time.

7.2. Conduct your defense in multiple locations such that the first units to make contact slow the enemy down while other units dig-in and prepare their position. Dug-in units will perform much better when they engage the enemy.

7.3. When you want the AI to flexibly respond to attacks from multiple directions, then leave the defense to the AI. When you have good knowledge of how the enemy will attack, then take greater charge of the defense and issue multiple orders.

7.4. In non-homogeneous terrain with a few good defensive features, you may do better by micro-managing. The AI is more focused on foot print, then exploiting advantageous terrain.

7.5. If you like the current deployment of your units, then give them a DEFEND command with the in-situ parameter so that they stay put.

7.6. Layer your defense so that the enemy is forced to FUP farther away and attack over a longer distance. The enemy's attack will lose cohesion this way, and it will provide your artillery with more time to grind the enemy down.

7.7. Review the deployment status of your units when constructing your plan. Consider how you might build a plan around already entrenched or fortified units rather than moving them and forfeiting their defensive preparations.