



• Bet this German antitank crew wishes it had some uniforms with brown pants right about now.



• Two Marder III tank-killers watch over my Panzergrenadiers as they repair a disabled armored car.



• The Commonwealth's Canadian Artillery Regiment brings some serious pain from long range...



• ...which is perfect for blunting an infantry rush and sending Jerry into a state of disarray.

COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS

We don't oppose

PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Relic Entertainment GENRE: Real-Time Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail, E-tail (www.direct2drive.com) ESRB RATING: Mature
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz CPU, 512MB RAM (1GB for Windows Vista), 10GB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER: 2-8 players VERSION REVIEWED: Gold Master

REVIEW



When subordinates asked him for a word of advice, Erwin Rommel commonly offered: "Never fight a battle you have nothing to gain by winning." Updated for us gamers, the Generalfeldmarschall's adage might run: "Never buy an expansion you have nothing to gain by installing." *Company of Heroes* was arguably the best game of 2006. Why slap an annex on the Taj Mahal, right? Well, with stand-alone add-on *Opposing Fronts*, developer Relic proves the old plastic surgeons' adage: Even perfection can benefit from the right kind of augmentations.

TOM AND JERRY

The first of these augmentations is *OF*'s two new playable factions: the Commonwealth (i.e., British/Canadians) and the semifiictional Kampfgruppe Lehr Panzer Elite (SS Panzer Corps/Luftwaffe Paratroopers). Each new faction has a corresponding single-player campaign; the Brits struggle to seize the French town of Caen during Operation Goodwood, while the SS must prevent Operation Market Garden from punching through German defenses in Holland. Both campaigns feature the perfectly paced, subtly varied mission design that Relic is known for...but alas, both—like those in the original *COH*—end too quickly.

Of course, RTS games are as much about schooling scrubs as they are about new campaigns—and if you can find a multiplayer RTS you prefer to *OF*, you must work for Blizzard. Far from unbalancing the online game, the expansion's new factions add unique twists to multiplayer matches while leaving the classic, move-countermove tactical shifts untouched, which isn't to say the differences between the new factions and the original ones are minor. The Tommies, for example, focus primarily on the strength of their officers: Unlike other factions, their units don't level up with combat experience. But attach a veteran Lieutenant or Captain, and British infantry becomes tougher to break than a Lance Armstrong winning streak. Conversely, the Panzer Elite rely on versatility. Their basic infantry units are smaller and weaker than the other factions', but they can equip a wide range of gear, suitable for everything from tank-killing to sniping. Additionally, the SS soldiers deal out some serious whuppage in the form of their vehicles, including the Marder III tank destroyer and the imposing Tiger II tank. Truck up one of those



• As in the original *COH*, missions are laid out History Channel-style, complete with Madden-esque telestrator swatches.

bad boys in an online match, and the Allied players might as well start breaking out the Purple Hearts.

THE BAD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

New units, new maps, new campaigns—even this well-done—are all standard stuff. But *OF* takes expansion beyond merely piling new content on the old foundation. The whole game engine gets a face-lift, and now features real-time weather effects and day/night cycles. Additionally, fire and smoke now play a crucial role, alternatively illuminating and obscuring crucial views as you play. The result of all this: *COH*'s year-old Essence Engine is still the most beautiful, realistic RTS powerhouse on the market.

Like most beautiful things, though, *OF*'s improvements come at a price. The expansion is an even bigger system succubus than its parent, and the loading times are longer than the barrel of an 88mm flak gun. If you don't have at least 2GB of RAM or a multicore processor, you'll want to detune this particular engine. Plus, the literal price: *OF* runs you 40 simoleons—about twice as much as most other expansions. Yeah, it's a stand-alone...but if you bought *COH* a year ago, you'll feel like you just jumped in line with the early adopters of the iPhone. On the other hand, *OF* bears another characteristic of beautiful things: It's worth every penny. •Eric Neiger

VERDICT

■ **Cleverly designed new armies; great multiplayer.**
■ **Requires more muscle than a BALCO convention; \$40 is a lot for even a stand-alone expansion.**

9/10

EXCELLENT

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RUNNING WITH THE DEVIL



Opposing Fronts addresses a common complaint against the original *Company of Heroes*—the lack of a German single-player campaign—by letting players take on the role of SS tank division commanders. But nowhere does *OF* mention what the SS is. Nowhere do we see a swastika or the SS runic lightning bolts or death's head. While Relic deserves credit for manning up more than, say, the *Call of Duty* series, it's troubling that the Nazis we control are largely "whitewashed." Maybe it's because THQ wants to sell the game in Germany (where Nazi symbology is strictly forbidden), but if you're giving a generation of kids a chance to "be" in the SS, you owe it to them (and to history) to make one thing clear: Every laudable act of courage and skill by the Germans meant more people liquidated in the camps. It may not be "fun" to remember such stuff when we're playing a game, but it's worth remembering, nevertheless.

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