

The red empire strikes back

Fighting the Great Patriotic War one battle at a time

Part One

Andrew Rolph begins a series of challenging scenarios aimed at the keen WWII *Ostfront* player, focusing on the early years between 1941 and 1943. He also makes suggestions about how the scenarios can be translated to other periods and theatres of war.

INTRODUCTION

I've been interested in the Eastern Front or Great Patriotic War of WWII for as long as I can remember. Something about it keeps bringing me back to scenarios for it again and again. So for no reason than that I have lots, I thought I would present a series of half a dozen scenarios for the first two years of the war. The war post-Kursk is, again for reasons which escape me, of considerably less interest to me.

There will be two scenarios for each of the years 1941, 1942 and 1943 and I originally wrote each of them having been inspired by some piece of reading on some action which actually occurred. However, I make no attempt to simulate actual Orders of Battle, unit designations or terrain. I do not purport to cover every type of action which occurred in the first two years of the campaign. Rather, these scenarios will illustrate one or two aspects of combat, types of action or pieces of equipment which played a part in what was a near unimaginably huge undertaking. Most importantly, they have proven to give interesting games.

BUT ARE THEY BALANCED?

Readers of my previous article in this magazine on points systems in wargames (see *MWBG* 376) will spot the irony here! All of the scenarios were written with a specific set of rules in mind and were constructed to be reasonably fair under that set of rules. However, they have been converted to a generic



Russian Anti-Tank guns lie in wait – a photo taken during a 15mm game staged by Loughton Strike Force at Colours a few years ago.

presentation for greater application to other readers and in so doing it is possible, or indeed probable, that the restrictions and features of the original set of rules which made them fair are not reproduced in other sets. Clearly, you will know your own rules and will therefore have to employ your common sense in modifying such things as the number of turns, what ‘high’ morale and so on actually is, how to adjust firepower within the system, whether the numbers of troops for each side are correct, and so forth. As is usually the case with my scenarios, they are based on a stand being the equivalent of a platoon and a unit representing a battalion. Again, it should be possible for you to scale this up (to say battalion/division) or down (to individual/squad or squad/company) as you require.

THE (RED) EMPIRE STRIKES BACK!

The overall impression of the early stages of Operation Barbarossa is the inexorable and largely unproblematic eastward march of the German army, encountering negligible resistance from the Soviets. Whilst a reasonable summary of the strategic picture, it doesn’t mean that there weren’t repeated counterattacks by the Soviets from the very start. Indeed, the Soviet doctrine of the time was based on a bias to offensive operations and, within a day or two of the start of the war on the eastern front, the standard orders to most units were to attack and drive the Germans out of the country. That such attacks were unsuccessful was due to a number of factors: the poverty of communications with front line units; the breakdown



of supply; the dispersal of formations over wide areas of the countryside; the lack of motorisation of supposedly motorised troops; the poor state of repair of vehicles; the failure for TO and Es ¹ to be filled out; the inexperience of a (culled) officer corps; the risk avoidance of that corps and any number of other disadvantages. Such disadvantages significantly outweighed the quality of some of the Red Army’s equipment – notably the KV and T34 tanks, but also their artillery.

Here, then, is a scenario from the earliest days of the campaign. Elements of a German Panzer Division are set to repel an assault by part of an enemy tank division. The line is held thinly at the moment, but reinforcements are on the way...

GERMAN BRIEFING

After a couple of days of Operation Barbarossa, the Panzer Divisions are already well ahead of the rest of the Army Group and are left to themselves to fend off any counterattacks organised by the enemy. One such is brewing in the area of one of your Division’s motorised infantry battalions.

Mission

Destroy any and all enemy units which attack in your sector of operations. See common briefing for victory conditions.

Available Forces

The motorised battalion has deployed and has dug in, supported by a Sturm battalion of assault guns and a FlaK battalion.

Divisional HQ is aware of the imminent attack and is despatching a *Kampfgruppe* (based around the motorised battalion’s Regimental HQ, the Divisional engineers and the Reconnaissance battalion) to counter the attack. See OOB.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

Elements of a Soviet Tank Division with supporting infantry advancing from the east. Up to the strength of a strong brigade sized formation.

Deployment

1/63rd Infantry battalion, 901st FlaK battalion and the assault gun battalion set up on table within three feet of the table’s western edge. (The map is gridded in 12" squares.) All but the assault guns may be entrenched.

The German player nominates a point of entry at the start of the game for the 63rd Regimental *Kampfgruppe* and the Reconnaissance battalion. These two points of entry may be anywhere in the northwest corner of the table, up to two feet from the northwest corner. Starting on turn 5, roll a die for each unit and continue to roll for each turn thereafter. On a roll of 3+, the unit will enter the table at its nominated point. Only one of the units will enter during a turn. If the first is successful, then do not roll for the second until the following turn.

¹ Tables of Organisation and Equipment

SOVIET BRIEFING

Your orders are as indicated before the start of the campaign. Counterattack all invading enemy forces and drive them out of the country.

Mission

HQ has identified a weakly defended part of the line in a Panzer Division’s advance. You are to drive your entire tank division through that spot and on into the enemy’s rear area. See common briefing for victory conditions.

Available Forces

What you have available is uncertain. You are unsure of the state of repair of your tanks and most of your supporting infantry are dispersed over several kilometres. You have managed to contact some of your supporting artillery battalions, but your suggestion that you reconnoitre the enemy’s positions before planning your bombardment was dismissed as being an excuse to delay carrying out your orders. You have certainly managed to order an attack by five of your subordinate units, all of which have at least some tanks or infantry available to them. See the OOBs shown on the right.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

Somewhere to your west the enemy is situated in battalion or regimental strength.

Deployment

Nominate an entry point and turn of entry (between 1 and 4 inclusive) on the eastern side of the table for each of the units on the OOB. The turn of entry can be the same for all units, if desired (this will maximise the chances of them arriving).

On each turn, roll an ‘average die’ (marked 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 5) for each unit and where the turn matches the die roll less one, the unit enters. From turn 5 onwards cease to roll for entry – if a unit has not entered in the first four turns, then it simply ran out of diesel, became lost or was dispersed by Luftwaffe attacks.

In the unlikely (but possible) event of fewer than three units entering by turn 4, then simply make the number up to three by entering the highest rolling units during turn 4.

COMMON BRIEFING

The Germans receive one victory point for each enemy battalion destroyed or routed.

The Soviets receive three victory points for each tank unit which has exited the western edge of the table as long as the town is contested. They receive two victory points for each rifle unit which has exited the table in the same fashion as the tank units. Again, this is subject to contesting control of the town at the game’s end.

Control of a town sector is defined as being occupied currently by friendly troops or having been the last side to have so occupied a currently unoccupied sector. All town sectors are German controlled at the start of the game. Contesting the town requires the Soviets to have control of at least one sector.

The table is five feet by six feet with North at the top of the map opposite. For the rules for which the game was designed, that translates as ten infantry or six or seven motorised turns of movement wide.

The game is 14–16 turns long. At the end of turn 14, roll 1D8+1D4. On a roll of 9+ the game finishes immediately. If it continues roll again at the end of turn 15 and end the game on a roll of 7+. Otherwise the game finishes on turn 16.

OOBs

Unit	Quality	Constituent stands
1/63rd Motorised Infantry	Competent	HQ, 9 rifles, 1 HMG, 1 75mm infantry gun, 1 Pak 35/6, 1 engineer – all entrenched
901st FlaK Regiment	Competent	HQ, 3 88mm FlaK, 3 20mm FlaK
81st Sturm	Competent	HQ, 4 StuG III
63rd Motorised Regt HQ KG	Competent	63rd Regt HQ, 6 combat engineers in half-tracks, 1 SMG on m/cs, 1 engineer stand, 1 self propelled 150mm heavy Infantry gun, 1 Wurfrahmen half-track and 3 Pak 38s. Also the 29th Arty Forward Artillery Observer and sufficient lorries for the non motorised elements
12th Recon (reinf)	Exceptional	HQ, 3 Sdkfz 222 a/cs, 3 rifles on m/cs, 1 Pak 35/36, 1 75mm infantry gun, 1 engineer and 3 Pzjäger Is
29th Artillery Battalion	Off Table	3 105mm guns with three turns of ammunition

Unit	Quality	Constituent stands
187th Heavy Tank Regiment	Poor	HQ, 3+IDAv T28Cs, 1+ID3 T35s, 2 T26s, 1 T34A, 1 KVI
298th Tank Regiment	Poor	HQ, 1+ID3 T26s, 2 KVI, 2 T34As, 2 KV2s
11th Mot Rifles	Poor	HQ, 2+IDAv+ID2 rifles and IDAv support stands (randomly selected from 82mm mortar, HMG, 45mm ATG, 37mm AA and 76.2mm infantry gun)
29th Mot Rifles	Poor	HQ, 2+IDAv+ID2 rifles and IDAv support stands (randomly selected from 82mm mortar, HMG, 45mm ATG, 37mm AA and 76.2mm infantry gun)
62nd Mot Rifles	Poor	HQ, 2+IDAv+ID2 rifles and IDAv support stands (randomly selected from 82mm mortar, HMG, 45mm ATG, 37mm AA and 76.2mm infantry gun)
14th and 158th Artillery battalions		Five turns of pre-planned fire by 3 122mm guns and 3 152mm guns. Prior to the first strike of each battalion roll 1D6. On a roll of 1 the entire fire plan (all five turns) for that battalion is cancelled

DESIGN NOTES - GENERAL

The following notes are provided as a set of potential mechanisms or explanatory notes which are common to all the scenarios. I have put them all here and will ask Henry to reproduce this section as a download for future scenarios so that I don’t repeat myself in every part of the series. Anything which is specific to just one scenario will be provided in the next section in each article.

Substitutes for the specific equipment mentioned should be fairly straightforward and will obviously be necessary if

the scenario is relocated in time or space. Much of it will be determined by your own collections and the relative value of different pieces in different theatres –Char Ds or Matilda IIs for KV1s and 2s, more T28s for the T35s, heavy cavalry or cataphracts for tank battalions, light troops for reconnaissance or motorcycle units and so on.

The terrain for the battle can be arranged as you see fit for your preferred rules. Some rules might not see one side or the other have any decent chance of victory without lots (or no) terrain. Use your experience/knowledge to flesh out what makes the scenario a reasonable challenge for each player.

The scale is one inch to 100 yards (about 18 inches to the mile) and 15–30 minutes to each move. Casualties are inflicted on a stand by stand basis. Firing ranges are six inches for small arms, nine for HMGs and up to twelve for tanks. Indirect fire is conducted at considerably greater ranges, but all fire is limited by spotting. Unless firing, infantry will be seen only within nine inches in the open or three if in cover. Vehicles are seen at double that. A platoon firing will be spotted at at least twelve inches regardless of cover. These numbers/space/time ratios are the sort of thing that, I would suggest, need to be maintained as far as possible in converting to another system.

The terms suppression and pinned are for you to define – essentially they amount to not being able to function as normal, whether that be a loss of firepower or movement or both.

The scenarios are predicated upon troops having morale failures resulting in enforced retreats, rallying from such retreats, and routs from which they may not rally. Such mechanisms are common in rules set in eras prior to modern warfare, but seemingly less so for those after 1900. If your preference is to have everyone fight to the last man and last bullet, then some of the scenarios may be very unbalanced – the larger Soviet forces are expected to collapse and run away in some of the earlier scenarios and if they cannot, then the Germans could face a real struggle.

The ratings for the troops are generic to fit in with whatever system you are using, but they should reflect primarily the morale and command and control of the troops rather than their equipment or competence. So, for example, I would limit the distance from their HQ within which stands might perform effectively – and make it appreciably worse for ‘poor’ troops. Such troops might also recover from suppression or pinning less quickly than other troops and have less of a chance of reacting to the enemy or being ‘activated’ in the first place. You get the picture – use your usual rules to tie the poor troops up in knots.

You may wish to consider trying the represent the extremely variable nature of Soviet morale by assigning a value randomly as they take their first fire. Many units melted away somewhat ineffectually, whilst others fought to the last man. A roll of 3 or less on 1D6 might make them respond poorly, whilst a 6 could have them act as veterans.

By 1942, however, panics and wholesale retreats had become less likely, so perhaps a roll of only 1 or 2 ought to result in the poorest morale under your rules.

Pre-planned artillery in the original set of rules made use of three inch square templates of fire at the start of the game, plotted for each battalion of artillery up to its number of turns of ammunition. Anything under the template on the turn the fire arrives is hit once.

DESIGN NOTES - SPECIFIC

This scenario can be disastrous for the Soviet player simply as a result of very bad luck with the dice rolling. I’ve deliberately put a lot of rolls in so that they even out, but that is by no means foolproof. You may want/need to increase the minimum number of Soviet units appearing to four or all five. As it stands, there will be an average of around 37 stands appearing and the distribution curve of all those rolls ought to mean that the chances of fewer than 30 or more than 47 ought to be very small, but you may not want to overly tempt fate.

I would give strong consideration to a rule where all the Soviet forces are obliged to move at their maximum speed towards the western edge of the table until they spot the enemy, to simulate the difficulties of coordination of forces which were a feature of these early attacks. Once a stand within a unit can

see an enemy stand, then that unit may deploy in a more circumspect fashion. In such a fashion, a lucky Soviet player having all his units arrive in a couple of turns is still likely to have them run into the enemy piecemeal. Certainly, the tanks should outrun the infantry – again a feature of early Soviet attacks.

The obligation to contest the town is there as another balance mechanism to ensure that a lucky Soviet player doesn’t simply leave the table with all his troops before the Germans can intervene. It also replicates the

propensity of Soviet attacks to become bogged down in fighting for a relatively unimportant geographical feature.

ALTERNATIVES

The scenario could be relocated within WWII to France 1940, with the French taking the role of the Soviets – there are elements here of de Gaulle’s counterattack at Stonne, with his declaration that he would attack with whatever had arrived by the next day. Also, perhaps representing a more competent (and smaller) attacking force, you could put together a version with the BEF and go some way towards recreating their counterattack at Arras.

Outside of WWII then, perhaps with a few tweaks, WWII suggests itself. A huge second line Warsaw Pact force of Poles, East Germans or Czechs attacking a lighter delaying NATO reconnaissance battlegroup?

Ancients and Horse and Musket scenarios do not come so readily to mind for me, but perhaps you will be more inspired. Change the town to a pass or river crossing and perhaps a large cavalry force is bearing down on an outnumbered defender, awaiting relief? Or perhaps the town could be a castle or fortress under siege?

Whatever you do with it, the bones are there for a very variable scenario.



Another shot of the inspiring Loughton Strike Force game.