

The Stalin Line

Fighting the Great Patriotic War one battle at a time Part Two

Andrew Rolph continues his series of Ostfront scenarios with a classic situation of a small, elite, mobile force taking on a big, lumbering enemy in fixed positions.

INTRODUCTION

In Part One, I presented an uncoordinated Soviet counterattack which was typical of the first few days of Operation Barbarossa. After such border battles, the Germans pushed into the Soviet Union, breaking the Dvina River after four days and heading to the 1939 borders of the country where, prior to the Soviet invasion of Poland, the frontier had been fortified in anticipation of a German attack.

Unfortunately the 'Stalin Line' had been largely stripped of its armaments when the Soviets moved their border to the west and, when the Germans did attack, it was in a poor state of repair. This scenario covers a typical German attack of the time against what ought to have been a major obstacle to their progress but which was largely an irrelevance by July 1941.

Again, the scale presented is based on a stand being the equivalent of a platoon and a unit representing a battalion, but readers ought to be able to scale this up (to say battalion/division) or down (to individual/squad or squad/company) as required. I have included some scenario specific notes to assist with maintaining a fair game for both players.

THE STALIN LINE

GERMAN BRIEFING

After initial border battles, advanced elements of your Panzer Division are to continue the drive into the heart of the enemy.



Stuka's eye view. Ju87 dive-bombers size up the massed Russian armour below during action at the Wargames Holiday Centre. Photo courtesy of Mark Freeth.

Mission

Scatter the enemy before you, prevent their retreat and penetrate beyond the river in order to maintain the attack’s momentum. See common briefing for victory conditions.

Available Forces

The spearhead of your division comprises one of its panzer battalions, its first motorised battalion with the division’s halftracks and the division’s motorcycle battalion. See OOB.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

Ahead lies a Soviet rifle brigade with a few tanks behind some scattered fortifications.

Deployment

Enter on Turn 1 from the western edge of the table. If desired, one battalion may enter from the northern or southern edge of the table no further than halfway towards the eastern edge. Such a flank assault must be decided upon after the German player sees the Soviet HQ and fortifications set-up, but before he deploys any troops. The assault must have a nominated point of entry, may not be planned to arrive before Turn 5 and will arrive on a die roll of 2 or more on 1D6. If it fails to arrive, continue to roll on each turn thereafter.

Your engineer detachment is the bridging engineer company from your division, rather than combat engineers. If forced to fight, they will do so as ordinary rifle stands. They must be attached to one of your battalions and will function as part of that battalion. They can build a vehicle capable bridge across the river as follows.

Up to four engineer stands (including at least one of the bridging company) can be involved in building the bridge. The

stands must be adjacent to each other, adjacent to the riverbank, directly opposite one another (if building a bridge from both sides of the river), stationary, not suppressed or pinned and not firing. For each engineer stand achieving these conditions, one tenth of the bridge will be built. So if two stands (including at least one stand from the bridge building company) achieve these conditions for five consecutive turns, the bridge will be complete. On any turn where neither of the bridging company stands achieves these conditions, no progress is made at all, regardless of how many other engineers are assisting. On any turn where no engineers can meet these conditions, the bridge deteriorates by one tenth – so once started, it needs to be continually worked on if it is not to deteriorate. Engineers can join and leave the operation as you see fit. Use a D10 or chart to keep track of progress.

SOVIET BRIEFING

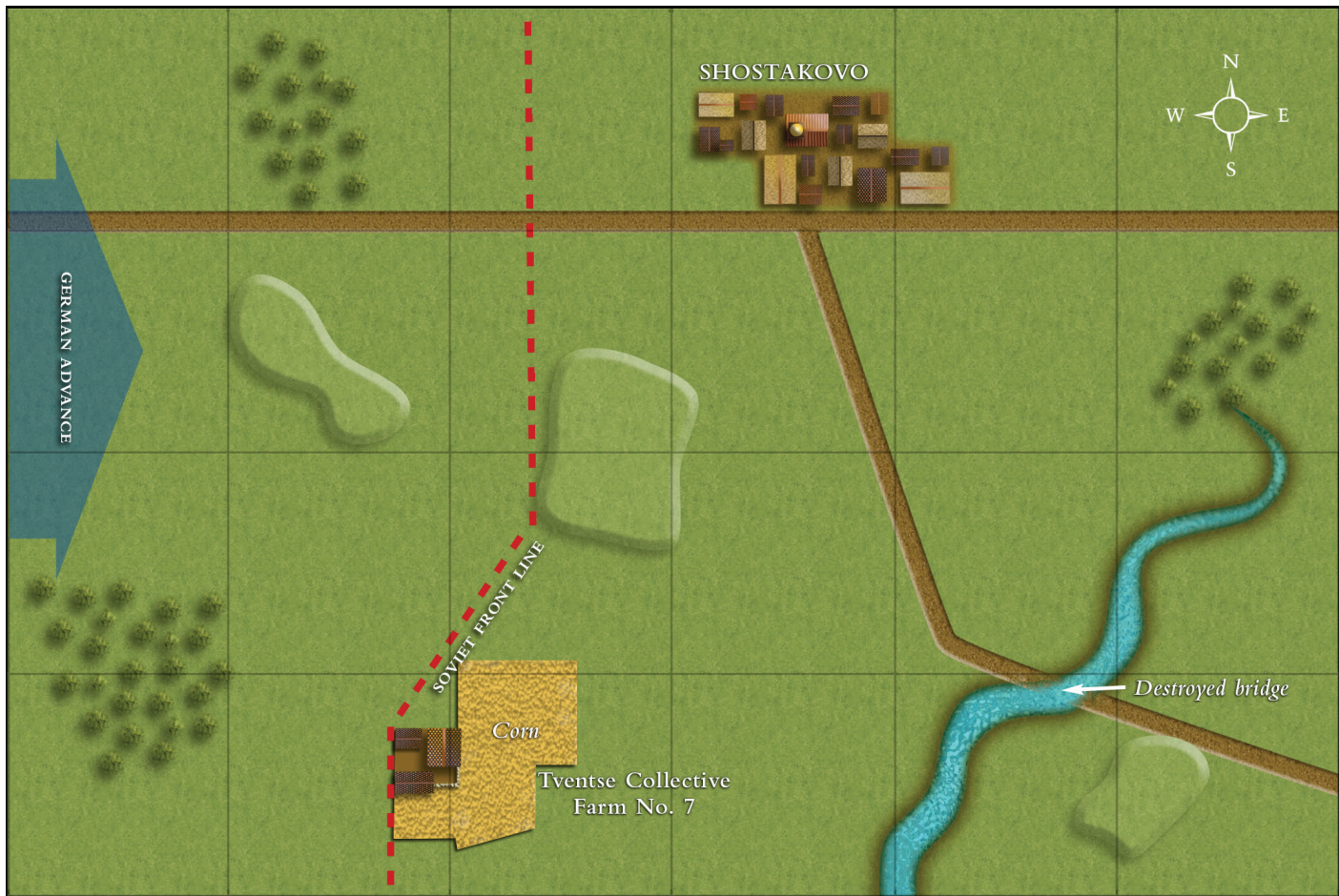
The front line has suffered horrific losses as the German spearheads have sliced up the Soviet defences. You have now fallen back onto the poorly maintained Stalin Line which must form a breakwater against the continued assaults.

Mission

Prevent the Germans from breaking through your lines and driving behind the river in your sector. Retreat only if absolutely necessary to save your command. See common briefing for victory conditions.

Available Forces

Your rifle brigade has suffered losses and you lack artillery – much of it having been lost in the first stage of the war. You have been allocated a mortar battalion to make up this deficit and a battalion of tanks is available as infantry support. See OOB.



Map HH



1/35 scale Panzer IIIs and IVs advance towards the Russians at the Wargames Holiday Centre. Photo courtesy of Mark Freeth.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

Reconnaissance is something of a luxury at the moment and it is almost impossible to tell what German forces will turn up where. However their attacks usually have mobile formations in the van.

Deployment

Deploy your fortifications and the headquarters of your units (four rifle battalions, a mortar battalion and, possibly, a tank battalion – see below) on the table to the east of the red dashed line on the map and allow the German player to see them before he makes his plan – his reconnaissance is considerably better than yours!

The Brigade HQ stands and the KV2 must be attached to a rifle battalion (all with the same one or not as desired). The T26 battalion may also be parcelled out in this fashion, or may be deployed as an independent unit.

To represent the dilapidated state of the Stalin Line, the placement of your fortifications (block houses, barbed wire, mines and dragons’ teeth) is restricted as follows:

- **Blockhouses** – no restriction. They represent whatever ‘best defence’ option your rules permit and may protect a single stand.
- No more than ten continuous inches of **barbed wire** may be deployed. Sections of wire must be deployed with at least a foot between them.
- No more than five continuous inches of **dragons’ teeth** or **mines** may be deployed. Sections of dragons’ teeth or mines must be deployed at least a foot away from each other.
- The mines may be **anti personnel**, **anti tank** or **mixed**. See common briefing for suggested effects. The mines are known to the German player and, regardless of type, one third of them are not there. When a German stand enters a minefield, roll 1D6 and on 5 or more, his path through that section is clear.

COMMON BRIEFING

The river is impassable to vehicles and crossable to infantry as poor going. The bridge is down.

The effect of the Soviet fortifications is as follows:

Obstacle	Unit	Effect on Movement	Combat Effect
Barbed wire	Tracked Vehicles	No effect	None
	Wheeled Vehicles	Impassable	None
	Foot	Stop upon meeting. Cross next turn with rear of stand touching far side of wire.	None
Dragons’ Teeth	Tracked Vehicles	Impassable	None
	Wheeled Vehicles	Impassable	None
	Foot	As barbed wire	None
Mines	Tracked Vehicles	Stop upon reaching if attacked by mine – move off next turn. If not attacked continue movement.	Attacked by anti tank and mixed minefields (at a lesser chance) upon entering and leaving
	Wheeled Vehicles	Stop upon reaching if attacked by mine – move off next turn. If not attacked continue movement.	Attacked by all minefields upon entering and leaving.
	Foot	Stop upon reaching if attacked by mine – move off next turn. If not attacked continue movement.	Attacked by anti infantry and mixed minefields (at a lesser chance) upon entering and leaving.

Two victory points are awarded at the end of the game to the German player for each unit which has exited the table through

the solid green line. One point is awarded for each unit which remains on table south east of the river. These points are earned only if the unit has maintained at least half its starting strength.

The Soviet player earns a single victory point at the end of the game for each of his units which has exited the table through the solid green line. These points are earned only if the unit has maintained at least half its starting strength and only if it has been subject to direct fire at least once in the game (the Soviet player cannot earn points simply by running away!). Additionally, the Soviet player earns a point for every six stands of German casualties.

The table is six feet by four. For the rules for which the game was designed, that translates as twelve infantry or eight 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
1/4th Pz btn	Exceptional	HQ, 1 PzIIIf, 6 PzIIIEs, 3 PzIVEs
1/52nd Motorised btn (Gepanzerte)	Exceptional	HQ, 3 Rifles in halftracks, 6 rifles, 1 HMG in a half track, 1 Engineer, 1 75mm infantry gun, 1 Pzjäger I (sufficient lorries for the non motorised troops)
23rd M/c btn	Competent	HQ, 9 Rifles on motorcycles, 1 M/c HMG, 1 engineer, 1 75mm infantry gun, 1 PaK 35/6, 1 81mm mortar (sufficient lorries for the non motorised troops)
Engineer Detachment	Competent	2 Bridging Engineers (with lorries)
Air Support	n/a	3 Stuka missions, the fire of which is directed by a roaming Air Ground Controller or the HQs of fighting battalions

Unit	Quality	Constituent stands
1/47th Rifle btn	Poor	HQ, 6+1D3 Rifles, 1 HMG
2/47th Rifle btn	Poor	HQ, 6+1D3 Rifles, 1 HMG
3/47th Rifle btn	Poor	HQ, 6+1D3 Rifles, 1 HMG
4/47th Rifle btn	Poor	HQ, 6+1D3 Rifles, 1 HMG
47th Brigade HQ	Poor	HQ, 1 82mm Mortar, 1 45mm ATG, 1 76.2mm infantry gun
51st Mortar Btn	Poor	HQ, 2 120mm Mortars
1st Independent Hvy Tank Regt	Poor	1 KV2
57th Tank Btn	Poor	HQ, 4 T26s
Fortifications	n/a	20 inches of barbed wire, 10 inches of mines, 15 inches of dragons' teeth, 4 blockhouses. All troops not in blockhouses may be entrenched.

DESIGN NOTES – SPECIFIC

In the Soviets’ case, I would tie their stands to acting within a command radius of their HQ and then make their HQs



1/35 scale 88mm FlaK crew at work at the Wargames Holiday Centre. Photo courtesy of Mark Freeth.

immobile other than upon receiving a change of orders. Such a change of orders ought to be difficult – say, a 6 on 1D6. You could take this one step further and prevent any order changes if units are engaged in, or subject to, direct fire. Exceptional units could be an exception(!).

To even things up for the Soviet player, permit him a single pre-nominated reserve battalion which may freely move once any Soviet battalion has seen an enemy stand.

Don’t forget that you can download the general design notes from the MWBG/TTG website at <https://www.tabletopgaming.co.uk/historical-games/information/downloads/>

ALTERNATIVES

Here we have a nimble, small and powerful force (but potentially fragile because of its size), punching above its weight against a lumbering, static colossus. It might be possible to move the basics of this one to the ’67 Arab-Israeli war with a small, better coordinated Israeli force driving to the Suez Canal through some shocked Egyptians? For the Ancients era, it seems to me that Alexandrian Macedonians and Romans were almost routinely outnumbered by most of their enemies, so there may be some mileage there in re-staging this scenario. For Horse and Musket fans, Wellesley’s Indian campaigns offer the possibility of two armies which are broadly trained to fight in the same fashion, but where one tends to be larger and less well articulated.