Down by the sea

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

Andrew Rolph continues his series of Ostfront scenarios with an unusual confrontation in the Crimea, with German defenders suddenly beset by Soviets on all sides.

INTRODUCTION

In Parts One and Two, I presented a couple of battles typical of the first part of Barbarossa with the Germans in the strategic ascendancy. I will now move onto the winter of 1941 and early '42 when the Soviets tried, prematurely, to launch a strategic counteroffensive and drive the Germans out of the country. The assaults comprising this counteroffensive featured a number of elements which can make for an interesting game. Around

Moscow, the Soviets started to experiment with paratroop drops. They were not overly successful, but did teach STAVKA some lessons. Unfortunately, similar future operations merely demonstrated that STAVKA's memory was somewhat impaired.

Cavalry regiments, divisions and corps made their appearance in the absence of motorised forces, which could not be built because of the removal of the factories to the east. That lack of vehicles was partly made good by the use of Lend Lease equipment, which, as far as tanks were concerned, was almost universally despised by Soviet troops. Almost equally despised were the home produced light tanks, which were manufactured largely because the machines required to do so were still available, rather than for their practical utility.

Finally, in terms of novel changes to the way the war was being waged, the Red Army conducted amphibious invasions far away from Moscow on the Crimean coastline. Now I wonder what a scenario combining all those features might look like…
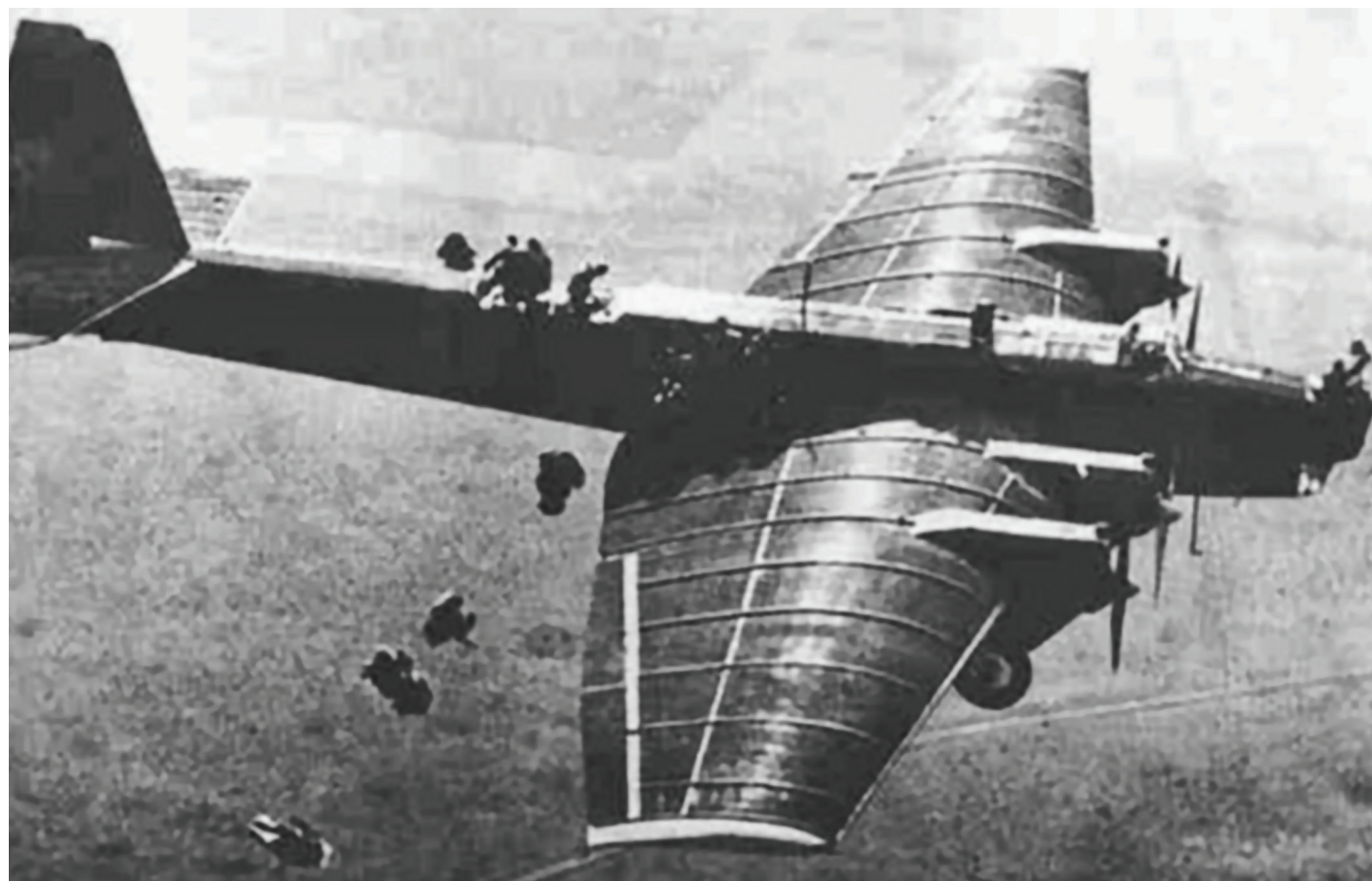
Soviet paratroopers begin their perilous descent from the wing of a Tupolev TB-3. (Public domain.)

DOWN BY THE SEA

GERMAN BRIEFING

The winter is extremely harsh even in the traditional Soviet holiday resorts in the Crimea. Also the incessant Soviet attacks are wearing the men down. Roll on spring when the army can drive east again…

Mission

Hold the front line, protect the airfield and the supply head in the rear. See common briefing overleaf for victory conditions.

Available Forces

The main line is held by a single infantry battalion and part of its Regimental Headquarters. Besides this force, other troops are in the vicinity but form part of the defence of the coast and the airfield. There is also a panzer battalion resting and refitting after taking severe losses. There is a military hospital in the coastal town which is also a significant supply head. See the Order Of Battle (OOB) overleaf.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

There is no reason to anticipate any attack by the Soviets. They must be cold and exhausted as well, surely…?

Deployment

- The 1st battalion of the 10th Regiment and its HQ troops may set up to the west of the barbed wire and AT ditch. If desired, the stands may be split into two different units with the RHQ acting as the HQ of the second unit.
- The Luftwaffe Airfield Defence Company sets up in the brown village which represents the airfield installation.
- The Coastal Defence Teams set up anywhere not on the beach or in the town in the southern half of the table to the west of the barbed wire and AT ditch.
- 1/17th Panzer sets up anywhere to the west of the barbed wire and AT ditch.
- The ad hoc unit is created from hospital and leave comb-outs in the black town. It will appear in that location when a running total of die rolls (1D6) made at the start of each German turn reaches 9. Until that time, it simply doesn't exist and if the town is overrun by the enemy it will not come into being.

Refer to the map overleaf for the locations mentioned.

SOVIET BRIEFING

As the tide of the war begins to turn in our favour, it is important that we strike the enemy wherever we can, whenever we can, with whatever we can, as often as we can. That way we will drive him out of the country all the sooner.

Mission

Execute a combined arms assault to pierce the enemy's line and wreck his rear installations. See common briefing for victory conditions.

Available Forces

In total, your forces will be around the strength of a brigade. The main assault will be made by a tank and a cavalry regiment. These will be supported by a Naval rifle battalion in an amphibious assault and a paratroop drop in the enemy's rear. See OOB overleaf.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

The front line opposite you is held by a battalion of infantry. Further to the rear there will no doubt be some second rate supporting troops.

German infantry supported by a Panzer IV defend a village at the Wargames Holiday Centre. Photo by Mark Freeth.

Deployment

- The cavalry and tank regiments may enter the eastern edge of the table on any pre determined turn from the first onwards.
- The amphibious forces must be split into two equal (as far as possible) sized waves. The first wave will arrive on the southern beach edge on the first turn where the Soviet player rolls 3 or higher on 1D6 at the start of the turn. The second wave arrives on the first subsequent turn where a 2 or higher is rolled.
- The Soviet player rolls a die at the start of each turn for the paratroops' arrival starting on turn 3. The unit will enter on a roll of 4 or higher. For their entry, you can use whatever method you like for their dispersal or use the following:

1. Before the game, the Soviet player decides a point anywhere on the table where he wants the paratroops to enter. During the movement phase of the turn of entry, place the Paratroop HQ on that point and surround it with the rest of the unit's bases forming as close to a square as possible.

2. For each stand, roll 2D6. Treat a score of 7 as being on target, a roll under that as being short (arriving closer to the eastern edge of the table) and a roll over as long (closer to the western edge). Move each stand along the east/west axis a number of inches equivalent to the magnitude by which its die roll was greater or less than seven. So, a roll of 3 indicates four inches to the east (7–3=4) and a roll of 9 indicates a drop two inches to the west of the place it currently occupies.

3. At this point, the unit is spread along the direction of its transport approach with some planes having released early and some late. The procedure is now repeated for each platoon in line with the wind direction, which is assumed to be coming off the coast and driving the drop northwards. In this case, a roll of up to 7 is treated as on target and a roll over that a number of inches off target downwind. The combination of these two rolls (at 2 and 3) determines the actual point of landing by each stand.

4. All stands are at least suppressed/pinned upon landing. Roll now to determine if they are in fact so hopelessly dispersed or have landed in such hostile terrain that they count as eliminated. Roll 1D6 and a roll of 6 eliminates the stand. Add 1 to the roll if the platoon has landed with any part of its base touching another stand or any terrain other than a hill. Automatically eliminate any stand touching any enemy stand. Separate by the smallest amount possible any stands which remain touching after this, mark all stands as suppressed and turn them to face their planned HQ dropping point. They are deemed to have moved the whole of their movement allowance for this turn.

5. If the Battalion HQ is killed during the drop, the first rifle stand to reach the planned dropping point immediately becomes suppressed and once it has successfully become
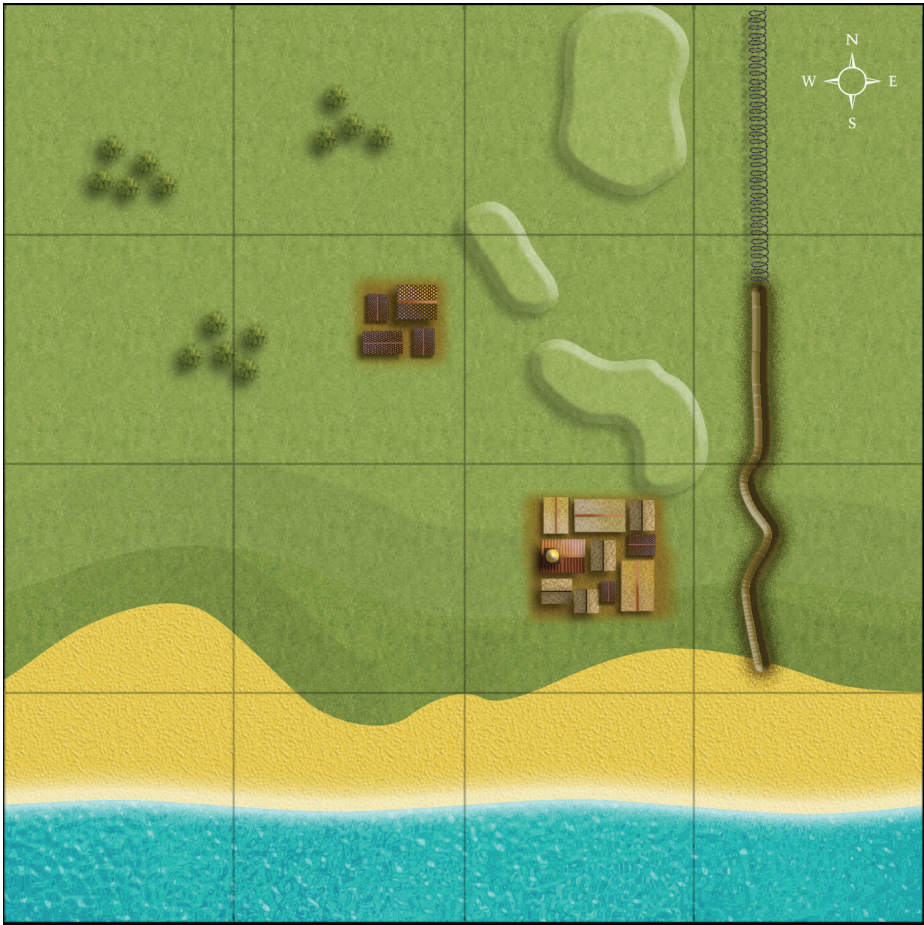
Map HH

unsuppressed, it becomes the HQ. If a base lands off table, it is hopelessly lost and treated as eliminated.

Artillery and naval support fire is pre-planned for the turns and locations of impact before the game begins.

COMMON BRIEFING

The effect of the German fortifications is as follows

Obstacle	Effect on Movement	
Barbed wire	Tracked Vehicles	No effect
	Wheeled Vehicles	Impassable
	Foot	Stop upon meeting. Cross next turn with rear of stand touching far side of wire.
AT Ditch	Tracked Vehicles	Impassable
	Wheeled Vehicles	Impassable
	Foot	As barbed wire

For the rules for which this game is designed (*Spearhead*), they are placed at effective rifle range from the edge of the two main hills in the east.

One victory point is awarded for control of each sector of the town and for control of the airfield (five in total). Control of a town sector/airfield 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 and the airfield are German controlled at the start of the game.

The table is four feet by four. For the rules for which the game was designed, that translates as eight infantry or five and a bit 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
1/10th Infantry	Competent	HQ, 9 Rifles, 2 HMGs, 81mm Mortar. All entrenched.
10th Regt HQ	Competent	Regt HQ, PAK 38, 75mm infantry gun. All entrenched.
1/17th Pz	Competent	HQ, 3 PzIIIJs
Coastal Defence Team 1	Poor	3 Rifles, 1 Pak 38, 81mm Mortar, HMG. All at least entrenched but with a single stand in a blockhouse.
Coastal Defence Team 2	Poor	3 Rifles, 1 Pak 38, 81mm Mortar, HMG. All at least entrenched but with a single stand in a blockhouse.
Ad Hoc Btn	Competent	HQ, 6 Rifles
Luftwaffe airfield defence	Poor	3 Rifles, Artillery Support. Three batteries of 105mm field guns off table with a Forward Observer attached to each Coastal Defence Team and 1/10th Infantry. The guns have four turns of ammunition.

Unit	Quality	Constituent stands
50th Independent Tank Regiment (Reinf.)	Poor	HQ, 4 T34bs, 4 Valentine IIIs, 3 SMGs
1/11th Cavalry Regiment	Poor	HQ, 9 Mounted Rifles, 1 Mounted HMG (*tatchanka*), 1 82mm Mortar, 1 45mm ATG, 2 AAMG Lorries, BA 10 armoured car, engineer (3 lorries)
1/29th Paras	Competent	HQ, engineer (with flamethrowers), 9 Rifles, HMG, 82mm Mortar, 45mm ATG, 3 SMGs
1/62nd Naval Rifle Btn	Poor	HQ, engineer, 9 Rifles, HMG, 82mm Mortar, 45mm ATG, 3 SMGs, 4 T40s
Artillery Support	n/a	Four stands of 152mm field guns off table. Five turns of fire.
Naval Support	n/a	Four stands of 203mm Howitzers (equivalent) off table. Five turns of fire.

DESIGN NOTES – SPECIFIC

The paratroops should be exempt from the random morale conventions if you use them (or only have the possibility of being veteran) as they were amongst the best troops that the Red Army fielded at the time.

The German panzer unit ought to be immobile until any German unit spots the enemy.

It may strike readers that this scenario is a tricky one for the Germans. They are outnumbered three to two, are facing two significant surprises behind their lines and their troops are not even exceptional. It might be worthwhile clarifying three things in the original rules for which the scenario was designed which even things up and which you may need to replicate or compensate for.

Firstly, dug in Germans are remarkably tough. Secondly, tank

The T34-76, workhorse of the Soviet army. Photo by Mark Freeth of the Wargames Holiday Centre.

German troops direct their anti-aircraft fire at the incoming Soviet paratroops. Photo by Mark Freeth of the Wargames Holiday Centre.

Soviet infantry advance into the town with armour support. Photo by Mark Freeth of the Wargames Holiday Centre.

The ubiquitous halftrack, a common sight in WWII. This is a SdKfz11. Photo by Mark Freeth of the Wargames Holiday Centre.

assaults into towns particularly, but also to a lesser extent into fixed infantry positions, usually end badly for the tanks. Finally, the Germans are more 'agile' than the Soviets and can turn to face a new threat far more quickly than the Soviets can generate one. If your rules favour tanks over infantry, you may wish to give the German front line an additional company of PaK 38s. If you can't replicate the German agility, then a larger reserve might be a useful addition for them.

And of course, the Soviets may have the numbers, but the coordination of their attacks has been (deliberately) hampered with the randomness of the die rolls for the air and seaborne assaults. This should make it a tricky proposition to plan an effective artillery assault which softens the defenders up at the right time i.e. immediately before the assault goes in. All in all, the game ought to replicate the Soviet failure (at this stage of the war) to bring their forces to bear effectively, whilst the Germans dance around them firefighting each threat as it appears.

There are a number of esoteric units in the scenario which might be a stretch for players' collections. A lack of cavalry in your collection can be overcome simply by designating that unit as the motorised infantry component of a tank brigade. Alternatively, mounted units usually fought on foot anyway, so perhaps use your usual models but allow them some extra movement allowance until they dismount (which will probably be quite swiftly). I have included the T40s in the naval assault because they were amphibious vehicles – feel free to substitute the marginally more effective T60s or T70s. Similarly, Matilda IIs may fill in for the Valentines.

As it is winter, all movement should be curtailed. If you really want to challenge everyone, make it in blizzard conditions and reduce everybody's ability to spot.

An alternative paradrop mechanism which is quicker than the one presented here is to write the stand designation on numerous scraps of paper around one inch square. Screw them into balls and place them in an upturned hand above the drop location. Throw them at least one foot into the air and where they drop is where the stands are placed. Then proceed to suppress them/remove them as suggested. The German player may employ a fan in this instance. Whatever method you use, it is worth noting that Soviet paratroop drops were generally very scattered.

The Naval support ought to produce bigger impacts over a wider area than the artillery support – which is the reason for suggesting 203mm howitzers as their approximate equivalent. Within the rules originally used, each two stands of pre-planned fire support earns a three inch square template within the fire plan for each round of fire. You will need to tweak the support according to your rules so that it is not overwhelming.

Remember that the general design notes can be downloaded as a PDF from the *MWBG* website at *http://bit.ly/1YfYxnQ*

ALTERNATIVES

This one is a struggle because of the mix of types of combatant and method of entry. To be honest, it is not even spectacularly realistic for WWII, as the level of simulation is really too low to see all of these types functioning together. This is a scenario which would be more realistic if it were to be scaled up to battalion/division level.

Perhaps WWIII is a possibility, with a combined amphibious/airborne assault into some part of Denmark or Iceland. Or perhaps Vietnam, with a helicopter insertion and a brown water navy assault on a suspected NVA base? However, I really can't think what a horse and musket or ancients equivalent of a paratrooper is!

[*Maybe substitute bands of guerillas/partisans popping up unexpectedly?* Ed.]

Soviet infantry and armour surge forward into the attack. Urrah! Photo by Mark Freeth of the Wargames Holiday Centre.

Scenario: Down by the sea