

To the next river!

Fighting the Great Patriotic War one battle at a time (Part Five)

Andrew Rolph delivers another Ostfront scenario: a desperate defence of a river line by a hastily cobbled-together *kampfgruppe* in danger of being overwhelmed. Photos courtesy of Mark Freeth of the Wargames Holiday Centre.

INTRODUCTION

1943 opened with the continued Soviet offensive across the Caucasus following the encirclement of Stalingrad at the end of 1942. The Red Army digested the pocket it had created, drove the Germans into the Kuban (the western extremity of the Caucasus) and crashed over the Don River, liberating Rostov. By March, Soviet Spearheads were dangerously close (as far as the Germans were concerned) to the next major river

in Ukraine, the Dnieper. Fortunately, Manstein was allowed sufficient operational freedom to conduct the last successful German offensive of the war and the stage was set for the battle of Kursk.

Part of the Soviet approach to ensure that the momentum of the offensive was maintained was to try to establish a bridgehead over the next major river barrier just as the current offensive was beginning to peter out. In such a fashion, the next stage of the offensive would start from a bridgehead rather than with a river assault. They proved adept at crossing rivers with very little of the logistical support thought necessary by their enemy – using anything to hand which floated as assistance in the crossing. The Germans learned to despise such bridgeheads and recommended that they be counterattacked immediately with whatever was at hand. To leave them overnight was to guarantee they would never be eliminated.



Left: A mighty opponent – the German FlaK battery in action.

Below: German Krupp trucks disgorge their infantry.



TO THE NEXT RIVER!

GERMAN BRIEFING

1943 so far has been a series of unending retreats and holding actions, as wave after wave of Soviet units have shattered our defence lines. The front has not been stable for around three months and the enemy are beginning to master the art of mobile warfare.

Mission

An enemy *kampfgruppe* of the remaining tank battalions and motorised infantry from the most advanced Soviet Tank and Mechanised Corps has broken through the front to your east and is heading to the twin bridges of the river you are defending. Deny the enemy any bridgehead over the river. See common briefing for victory conditions.

Available Forces

The current bridge defence is limited to a FlaK battalion. Other troops in regimental strength from the Divisional engineer and anti tank battalions are racing to the scene to intervene. A poorly armed/motivated rear security battalion has also been summoned. See OOB.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

Information is sketchy but past experience suggests there will be four or five battalion sized units, all of which will be motorised and up to fifty per cent of which will be armoured. They will be approaching from the east.

Deployment

The FlaK Battalion sets up within eight inches of the centre of the road bridge. The Dragons' Teeth may be set up anywhere which does not prevent use of the railway line or block vehicular entry to the bridge (the river crossing is used by the Germans). The obstacles may be placed on the roads and placed close to the bridges so that it is awkward to move around them. The Security battalion enters from the western table edge on a 1D6 die roll as follows: turn 3 – 5+, turn 4 – 3+, turn 5 – automatic. The remaining three units enter on turn 5 or any thereafter from the north or south along the hatched line. They all enter in the north or the south and cannot be split between the two edges. Their points and turns of entry are specified before the first turn.

SOVIET BRIEFING

The winter offensives are progressing well. The latest has reached its logistical limits and the remaining fuel and motor transport has been pooled for one final leap forward in preparation for the start of the next offensive.

Mission

Take the bridges over the river ahead of you deep in enemy territory and establish a secure bridgehead on the far side. See common briefing for victory conditions.

Available Forces

You have two tank brigades, a reinforced motorcycle battalion and a light assault gun regiment. This force is beyond the range of our artillery support, but an Air Ground Controller is in place to call in Sturmovik air strikes.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

The bridges are only lightly held by Luftwaffe units. Other forces will no doubt be thrown together to counterattack from all around you.

Deployment

All Soviet units enter from the east on Turn 1 or later as they decide.



Russian troops approach the town.



A Sturmovik flies over the battlefield littered with knocked-out armour.

COMMON BRIEFING

The river is largely impassable other than at the bridges and marshy areas are shown on the map in the north and south. Soviet rifles, HMGs and mortars only may attempt to cross the river anywhere along its length. Such troops must halt at the eastern bank and then may attempt to cross on the following turn. Roll 1D6 for each stand. On a roll of 6, the stand is lost. A result of 3–5 leaves the stand suppressed in the river and 1 or 2 delivers it safely to the opposite bank. On subsequent turns, those stands which rolled 3–5 may roll again. Two (or more) failures do not result in a loss of the stand – they merely keep rolling. Motorcyclists may cross in exactly the same fashion as long as they leave their transport on the eastern bank and thus become ordinary infantry.

Effect on Movement		
Dragons' Teeth	Vehicles	Impassable
	Foot and motorcycles	Stop upon meeting. Cross next turn with rear of stand touching far side of obstacle.

Outright victory is awarded at the game's end to either side if they have troops in good order on both banks of the river whilst the enemy has similarly ordered troops on only a single bank or neither. Troops in good order are not currently routing or retreating as a result of a morale failure.

Otherwise, victory is determined by awarding a victory point to the side which controls the town and a victory point for each surviving battalion in good order. Additionally, the Soviets earn a bonus victory point if at least one of their ‘good order’ battalion HQs is on the western bank of the river and they control the town.

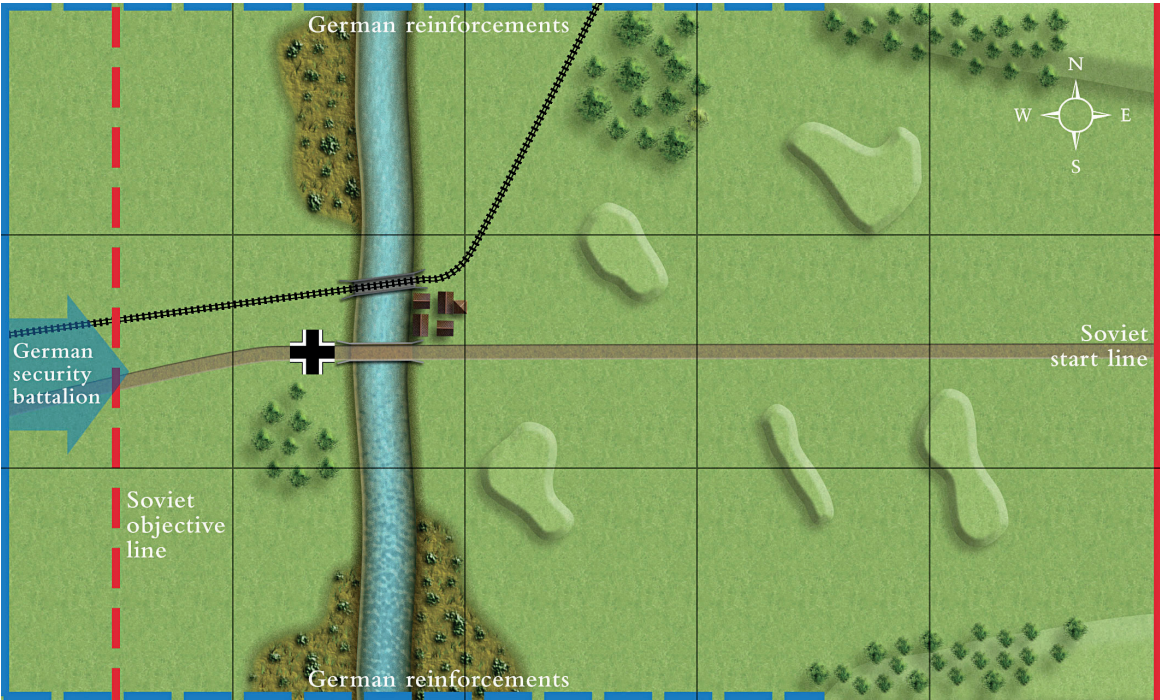
The table is six feet eight inches by four feet. For the rules for which the game was designed, that translates as thirteen or so infantry or around seven to nine motorised turns of movement wide. The river is around nine infantry/five motorised turns from the eastern edge of the table. The motorcyclists could reach the bridge at road speed (very much in a column of march, however) in around three turns.

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
Flak Battalion	Poor	HQ, 88mm FlaK, 2 20mm FlaK, 3 Rifles
10th Security Battalion	Poor	HQ, 6 Rifles, 1 HMG
45th Regt HQ kampfguppe	Competent	HQ, 6 engineers in halftracks, 1 SMG M/c, 1 Wurfrahmen halftrack,
81st Sturm battalion	Exceptional	HQ, 4 StuG IIIs
1/12th Infantry	Competent	HQ, 6 Rifles, 2 HMGs, 1 81mm mortar
1/67th Pzjäger battalion	Exceptional	3 Marder IIIs (to be attached to 63rd, 81st or 12th)
The FlaK battalion may be entrenched and further protected by ten inches of Dragons’ Teeth.		

Unit	Quality	Constituent stands
11th Tank Brigade	Competent	HQ, 4 T34cs 4 T70s, 3 SMG Tank Riders
59th Tank Brigade	Competent	HQ, 4 T34cs 4 T70s, 3 SMG Tank Riders
Mechanised Rifles of 11th Tank Brigade	Competent	HQ, 6 Rifles, 1 HMG, 1 82mm mortar, 1 45mm ATG (long barrelled), 1 engineer (all in lorries), 1 SMG riding motorcycles
Mechanised Rifles of 59th Tank Brigade	Competent	HQ, 6 Rifles, 1 HMG, 1 82mm mortar, 1 45mm ATG (long barrelled), 1 engineer (all in lorries), 1 SMG riding motorcycles
99th M/c Btn	Competent	HQ, 6 SMGs riding motorcycles, 3 SMGs in halftracks, 45mm (long barrelled) ATG, 82mm Mortar, 4 M3 Stuarts
Light Assault Gun Btn	Competent	4 SU 76s (to be attached to any one unit above)
Air Ground Controller		To be attached to any one unit above. Controls two IL-2 Sturmovik sorties



Above: North is at the top. Gridlines are 16 inches apart on this map.



The ubiquitous T-34, here with 76mm gun.

DESIGN NOTES – SPECIFIC

None.

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

ALTERNATIVES

Ignore the railway and this can be adapted to almost any era – crossing points of rivers have always been desirable military objectives. Again WWII comes to mind as a very straightforward conversion, as there are many rivers which Soviet invasion plans had to account for. Specialist bridge building units could be an addition to such a conversion and perhaps a wider table and more delaying troops for the defenders.

For horse and musket battles, light cavalry and dragoons can substitute for the Soviet units with, perhaps, rifle armed light troops as the bridges’ initial defenders. More light troops and cavalry, meanwhile, rush to the defenders’ aid. The Ancients equivalent is perhaps the situation faced by Horatio or the Vikings at Stamford Bridge. A small knot of troops defends the bridge buying time for their parent army to ready itself just over the river.