

Prelude to Kursk

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

Andrew Rolph concludes his series of Ostfront scenarios with the Germans making a brave bid to pinch out one of the Russian salients near Kursk. Photos courtesy of Mark Freeth of the Wargames Holiday Centre.

INTRODUCTION

The war on the eastern front ground to a halt in the spring of 1943 as mud took its hold and both sides took the opportunity to recover from the damage inflicted and received since the onset of the previous winter. Hitler had his heart set upon another summer offensive at Kursk. That it was significantly smaller in scope than Operation Blue the year before, or Barbarossa the year before that, indicates the extent to which German ambitions had been scaled back. Even if successful, Kursk would achieve no strategic aim – its sole purpose was to wound an enemy who seemed to be increasing in strength regardless of his losses.

Stalin too wanted to continue the offensives which had rolled the front back thousands of kilometres since November 1942. However, he was persuaded that the precious Tank and Mechanised Corps which were in the process of being rebuilt would be better husbanded into a counterattacking role once the enemy had ground themselves down against Soviet defences. Those mobile corps of the Red Army had been painstakingly re-constructed through a process of trial and error, and at the cost of many lives, since the first months of the war when the

Right: German infantry with assault guns and Jagdpanters advance.

Inset: Soviet infantry advance in waves.

old tank and motorised divisions had been disbanded. Now they were beginning to mature and could hold their own against the best of the corresponding forces of the German Army.

GERMAN BRIEFING

May 1943 sees the line stabilised and the bulge around Kursk inviting assault. However, prior to that, it is time to iron out kinks in the front from the previous campaign.

Mission

At the end of the last campaign, a small salient was left in the front line. Your force will penetrate the defence at the tip of that salient creating a hole for follow-on units to pass through and straighten the line. See common briefing for victory conditions.

Available Forces

A regiment of the Grossdeutschland motorised infantry division with its reinforced tank battalion. The four stands of each of the Regimental HQs are to be allocated to their respective component battalions as you see fit. See OOB.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

The reason for committing the elite German Army unit is the nature of the enemy opposite you. After breaking through originally, the Soviets inserted a mechanised corps to hold the breach open. A mechanised brigade remains as the main defence reinforced by self propelled guns and artillery.

Deployment

Prior to your deployment, the Soviet player will show you the approximate locations of his battalion HQs. Enter the table



from the west from turn 1 onwards. A single battalion may enter from the northern or southern edge up to halfway along the table. All the battalions' identities, points of entry and turns of entry are determined before the first turn. The turn of entry for any flanking force may be no earlier than turn 6. On the designated turn of entry, a flanking force will enter on a roll of 2 or more on a D6. If it fails to enter, continue to roll for it each turn thereafter. The entry of units from the western edge is guaranteed to be on the turn designated for them.

SOVIET BRIEFING

The front is stable and minor actions only are being undertaken – local assaults to straighten out the lines and such like.

Mission

Maintain the integrity of the front line against any assaults.

Available Forces

Your mechanised brigade with associated HQ support has been here since the last campaign petered out. It is due to be relieved and the remainder of its parent corps has been withdrawn for refitting. You have inherited most of the corps' equipment and benefit from engineering works undertaken over the last few weeks. An infantry unit will relieve you in the next few days. The 24 stands of the Brigade

HQ and assault gun regiments are to be allocated to the three mechanised battalions as you see fit.

Anticipated Enemy Forces

Intelligence reveals that the enemy may have moved the elite Grossdeutschland division into the area west of your position. It is possible the enemy is planning an assault before you are relieved.

Deployment

Set up the HQs for each of the mechanised battalions and allow the German player to see them. After the German has made his plan, the HQs may be moved by up to six inches and the remaining Soviet forces deployed. All Soviet units set up on table no closer than two feet to the western edge of the table. All off-board artillery fire must be pre-plotted before the start of the game. Everyone may be entrenched.

Common Briefing

Victory is determined by the number of units each side still has in good order at the end of play. Count these (the Germans will start with five and the Soviets three), double the Soviets' number and whichever is the higher wins. At the start of the game, therefore, the Soviets are winning (five versus six). The loss of a single unit, as long as the Germans lose none, will lose them the game (five versus four). If each side loses a unit, the result is a draw.

Effect on Movement		
AT Ditch	Tracked Vehicles	Impassable
	Wheeled Vehicles	Impassable
	Foot	Stop upon meeting. Cross next turn with rear of stand touching far side of wire.

The table is six feet by four feet. For the rules for which the game was designed, that translates as twelve or so infantry, or around six to eight motorised, turns of movement wide.

The game lasts 14-16 turns. 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.



German halftracks, infantry and StuGs advance.



OOPS

Unit	Quality	Constituent stands
Pz battalion	Exceptional	HQ, 6 PzIIIMs, 3 PzIVF2s & 3 PzVIs
1st battalion GD Grenadier Regt.	Exceptional	HQ, 9 Rifles in halftracks, 1 HMG, 1 Marder III, 1 StuG IIIF, 1 engineer
2nd battalion GD Grenadier Regt	Competent	HQ, 9 Rifles, 1 HMG, 1 Pak 40, 1 75mm light infantry gun, 1 engineer
Grenadier Regt HQ		HQ, engineer, SMG on motorcycles, 150mm heavy infantry gun
2nd battalion GD Fusilier Regt	Exceptional	HQ, 9 Rifles, 1 HMG, 1 Pak 40, 1 75mm light infantry gun, 1 engineer
3rd battalion GD Fusilier Regt	Competent	HQ, 9 Rifles, 1 HMG, 1 Pak 40, 1 75mm light infantry gun, 1 engineer
Fusilier Regt HQ		HQ, engineer, SMG on motorcycles, 150mm heavy infantry gun
Three Forward Observers controlling the fire of six 105mm stands, two 150mm stands and and one 100mm stand. Each stand has six turns of ammunition.		

Unit	Quality	Constituent Stands
1/4th Mech Battalion	Exceptional	HQ, 9 Rifles, 1 HMG, 1 82mm Mortar, 1 45mm (long barrelled) ATG,
2/4th Mech Battalion	Competent	HQ, 9 Rifles, 1 HMG, 1 82mm Mortar, 1 45mm (long barrelled) ATG
3/4th Mech Battalion	Competent	HQ, 9 Rifles, 1 HMG, 1 82mm Mortar, 1 45mm (long barrelled) ATG
4th Mech Brigade HQ		3 SMGs, 2 AA Lorries (with mounted quad maxim HMGs), 120mm and 2 82mm mortars SMG in halftrack, 2 Jeeps with mounted 50 calibre HMGs, BA10 armoured car, 3 76.2mm field guns, Brigade HQ
Light Assault Gun Regiment		4 SU76ms
Heavy Assault Gun Regiment		4 SU122s
		20 inches of AT ditches

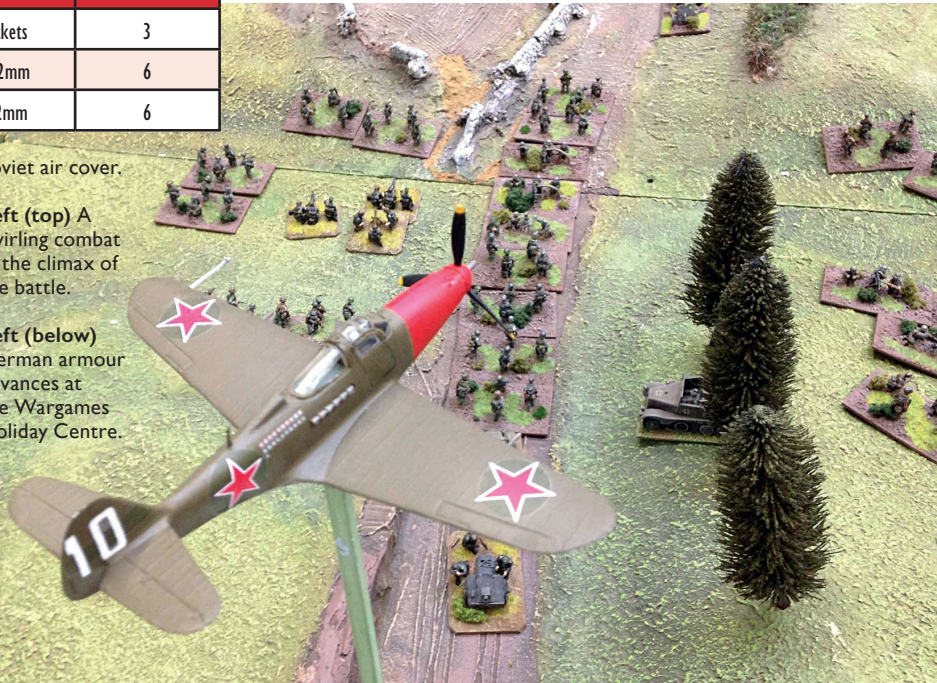
Off-Board Artillery/Air Support	No of batteries/ flights	Type	Missions
Guards Mortar Btn	2	Rockets	3
Light Arty	5	76.2mm	6
Army Heavy Arty	3	152mm	6



Soviet air cover.

Left (top) A swirling combat at the climax of the battle.

Left (below) German armour advances at the Wargames Holiday Centre.



Design Notes – Specific
None.

Alternatives

There is nothing here which prevents a relocation of this scenario to almost anywhere at any time. It is a straightforward attack/defend scenario, with two very well equipped, motivated and competent opponents. Its interest lies in the specific location and the matching of the best units and equipment of two well honed armies at what might be described as the exact tipping point in the progression of a campaign. So, pick any campaign from history which you like and have figures for, work out where the exact balance of abilities is and pitch the best each side has to offer against each other over whatever might be typical ground for a battle. That’s a recreation of this scenario.

AND FINALLY...

I hope you have enjoyed this series and found some useful inspiration for your own games. I do have more stored away on my PC so if you have been particularly enthralled by them (it seems unlikely, but...) get in touch with the editor and I may be able to produce some more.

In the meantime you can, of course, fight all six of them as a loose campaign – just keep a running total of each side’s victory points. Enjoy yourselves!