

Designer's

NOTES

SITUATION 7:

A SCENARIO IN SERIOUS NEED OF UPDATING

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Back when PanzerBlitz first came out, Situation 7 was hailed as a great armored battle scenario. It certainly was for the beginner. But as players grew more experienced, they began to notice flaws in the scenario. In the original version of Situation 7 in the first print run of PanzerBlitz, both players merely entered the board on their respective sides. There were no rules about sticking to roads, no set speed for the units, no rules about non-vehicular units having to be mounted on trucks and half-tracks, nor were there instructions on what to do once contact was made. It was if both sides knew that the other was coming. Each would scramble to get the best possible terrain on Board 2. It soon became apparent where the best entrance hexes were.

For the German player there were two, the most obvious being Hex 1Q10. From there the Germans could follow the road that swung around the south side of Hill 135. The speed-10 units (Panthers and half-tracks) could get as far as hex 1R3 on the first turn and be poised to move onto Hill 132 on the next turn. The other favorite German entrance hex was 1AA10 at Uschas. From there, units could follow the road going north and then swing east near the top of the board. The

speed-10 units could make it as far as 1GG1 on the first turn and be poised to enter Board 2 on the next.

But the real ace-in-the-hole for the German player was the armored car unit. With a speed of 14 it could reach hex 2U4 if it came in on the southern entrance hex; if it came in on the northern entrance hex it could reach hexes 2C4 or 2D4. The advantages to both ways were obvious: in the former case it could spot hex 2U5 in Bednost, thus allowing the German heavy artillery, if stationed on Hill 135, to blast any Russian unit that dared to place itself there; in the latter case the armored car could get a foothold in the town of Golod. On turn 2 it would be poised either to race off and capture a strategically important hex on Board 2, such as 2O5, or any of the three wooded hexes on top of Hill 129. But it would be very isolated no matter where it went and even with

the fast-moving Panthers coming up to support, it would most likely be attacked and destroyed by the Russians on their part of turn 2. The fast Panthers and half-tracks would be poised to move onto Hill 132 from the southern route on turn 2, but since the Russians would have by then occupied most of the important cover terrain hexes, the German units would find themselves under attack very quickly. From the northern route, Panthers could reach as far as hex 2O5 and even hexes 2E6 and 2F7 on Hill 129, but again would find themselves under attack from the Russians. Thus the safest course of action for the German player was to capture as much of the covering terrain in the low ground as possible.

For the Russian player there were also two prime entrance hexes. The most obvious one was hex 3Q1. From there Russian units had a fast lane up to Hill 132. They could occupy all of Bednost by the end of the first turn (although hex 2U5 could be dangerous if that pesky armored car was spotting on 2U4). They could capture hexes 2Q4 and 2R5 with infantry transported by trucks, not to mention most of the woods southeast of Bednost as well. On turn 2 the Russian player could consolidate his position on Hill 132



PanzerBlitz Situation #7

MEETING ENGAGEMENT DURING THE GERMAN RELIEF OF KIEV (23/11/43). The Russians had just liberated Kiev and were continuing their advance. The Germans made a desperate attempt to drive them back. Armored units of the 6th Guards Tank Army meet elements of the 19th Pz Div (elements of 27th Pz Rgt, 74th PG Rgt, 19th Recon Bn, 19th AT Bn, 19th Arty Rgt.)

Map Configuration

1

2

3

RUSSIAN FORCES

Enter East edge of No. 3 board on road, unstacked, infantry and guns in trucks and HT, moving at 12 hexes per turn until lead unit comes within three hexes of enemy. Units may then leave road and move full speed. Units unable to enter immediately set-up in road-march-order off board, and enter in that order.

15 A 8 12 A 6 8 1 7 A 3 12 A 5 3 1 6 1 6 A 8

10 11 9 11 12 11 1 3 14 2 0 4 12 11

x5 x12 x6 x3 x2 x2 x2

0 C 0 2 C (1) 40 H 10

1 12 2 10 16 7

x12 x2 x2

VICTORY CONDITIONS:
Marginal = have more than the Germans on the No. 2 board at end of game. Tactical = have two times as many units there. Decisive = three times as many.

GERMAN FORCES

Enter West edge of No. 1 board on road, unstacked, infantry and guns in trucks and HT, moving at 12 Hexes per turn until lead unit comes within three hexes of enemy. Units may then leave road and move full speed. Units unable to enter immediately set-up in road-march-order off board, and enter in that order.

14 A 8 16 A 12 12 A 8 3 1 6 13 A 8 15 H 20 13 A 6 40 H 32

8 11 12 10 12 10 8 1 3 14 2 0 2 0 5 8 8

x6 x5 x4 x4 x2

60 H 24 2 C (1) 4

6 8 4 10 7

x7

VICTORY CONDITIONS:
Marginal = have as many units as the Russians on the No. 2 board at end of game. Tactical = have twice as many units there. Decisive = three times as many.

Ger moves first

Turn

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END

by bringing up more forces to occupy the rest of the covering terrain hexes, if the Germans ceded the hill to them, or attack any German units who challenged possession of the hill.

The other favorite entrance hex was 3AAI. From there, Russian units could make a beeline straight across the AA hex row onto Board 2, positioning themselves in the woods, gully, and road hexes east of Hill 129 (assuming they were using T-34s carrying infantry). From there they would be poised on turn 2 to assault Hill 129 and they were safe from German overruns and artillery fire due to the blocking presence of Hill 129. On turn 2 they could attack Hill 129 and usually capture it by turn 3. After that they would probably capture a few woods hexes on the east side of Board 2 but leave the majority of the low ground to the Germans. Thus the prime course of action for the Russians was to capture the high ground.

After both sides made these initial gains, play would then stagnate,

both sides waiting for the other side to attack. Why did both sides adopt this game strategy? It had to do with the victory conditions for the scenario. Victory was determined by the ratio of friendly to enemy units on Board 2 at the end of the game. The Russian player had to have twice as many units on the board as the German for a Marginal Victory, three times as many for a Tactical Victory, and four times as many for a Decisive Victory. The Germans had to have as many units on the board as the Russians for a Marginal Victory, twice as many for a Tactical Victory, and three times as many for a Decisive Victory. If the Russians had more, but not twice as many units on Board 2 at the end of the game than the Germans, then the game was a draw. Now, as it turns out the Russians have 50 units in their order of battle and the Germans have 32, so if both sides do nothing more than simply occupy Board 2 with all of their units the game is a draw. Thus someone has to attack if he (or she) wants

to have a chance to win. And that was the crux of the matter, someone had to attack so it might as well be the other guy, because whoever did attack first was going to be shot at first, with his spotting units being prime targets for destruction.

Now, one would think that the Russians could afford to attack as their numerical counter advantage would give them some leeway for losses. After all, with 18 extra units they could lose 17 and still force a draw. However, since the Germans only have to lose seven units and the Russians win, assuming they took no losses, the Russian player would wait for the Germans attack. This became the prime gaming strategy for the more experienced gamers, especially the professional ones whose games are recorded for national rating systems such as AREA or the scenario is part of a tournament. In other words, the scenario became boring as hell.

The cry went up to Avalon Hill to correct the deficiencies in this scenario as well as others, which they did, and about a year after Panzer-Blitz was first published, the corrected version of Situation 7 came out. One of the new movement concepts they introduced was the concept of "road march order." This is where one or both sides enter the board in a single file of unstacked counters, moving along the road at a set rate of speed, which was in this case twelve hexes per turn. Units which could not enter the board on the first turn were set up in road march order off the board and entered in that order in future turns. Non-vehicular units could only enter on trucks or half-tracks. The respective columns could only move along the road in a given di-

rection, thus ensuring a meeting, which occurred when the lead units got within three hexes of each other. Upon meeting the special rules said that units on both sides were then free to shoot and move off road with their full movement factors.

The actual meeting would occur in the Russian turn 2 when the column had moved eleven hexes. Since the Russians had $\frac{1}{2}$ of a movement point left, the common assumption, based on how the special rules were written, was that they now immediately had their movement factors fully restored and could move the remainder of them with all of their units. This led to the Russians occupying every critical hex on top of Hill 132 by the end of turn 2.

This placed the German units in even worse shape than they were in the original version of Situation 7. They would have to assault a fully prepared Russian defense. The cry again went up to Avalon Hill for a clarification and it was answered in a Question Box in *The General* magazine shortly thereafter. It stated that as soon as the meeting occurs, turn 2 ends and turn 3 begins with both sides free to shoot and maneuver at full speed. The situation changed dramatically: now the Germans could in their turn overrun five Russian units strung out along the road on top of Hill 132 in hexes 2T4, 2U4, 2V5, 2U7, and 2U8 (providing that the first five units in the German march order were three Panthers, the armored car, and then another Panther). Not only that, two of the overrunning units could then exit-move into Bednost at hex 2U5, thus getting a foothold in the town. Following-up units could occupy the other empty hex in Bednost at 2U6 and the three

woods hexes at 2R5, 2R6, and 2R7. Now a full fledged meeting engagement would occur as the original designers had intended. But alas, it wouldn't.



The other big problem with Situation 7 was the Draw result in the victory conditions. Avalon Hill eliminated it by simply moving back the Russian victory levels by one. Thus the Russian Marginal Victory became simply having more units on Board 2 than the German at the end of the Game. The Tactical Victory became having twice as many

and the Decisive Victory became having three times as many. While this certainly eliminated the Draw result, it also made the scenario into a forgone Russian Marginal Victory. Since the Russians have 50 units in their order of battle and the Germans have 32, all the Russian player had to do was simply occupy Board 2. Once the expert players realized this, Russian play became very stereotyped. After taking their lumps from the German overruns on top of Hill 132 on the German half of turn 3, they would just pull back to the south and set up a perimeter around the wooded area on the southern part of Board 2. Loosing five units to overruns wasn't going to hurt the Russians; they still had a 13-unit numerical advantage. In fact, two of the overrunning German units on the east side of Hill 132 often ended up getting overrun themselves as the Russians pulled back, resulting in a 15-unit advantage.

Of course the pull back wasn't usually so massive; the Russian player would usually line the southern slope hexes of Hill 132 with mobile units to stop the Germans from rushing down after them into the woods, giving time for the follow-up units to get down there before pulling back into it themselves. It seemed that every PanzerBlitz player had his own individual plan for the Russian withdrawal. By turn 4 the perimeter would be set up and by turn 5 all of the Russian units would be inside it. The Germans were then left in a quandary. If they attacked the Russian perimeter they themselves lost units, further hurting their chances of getting a Marginal Victory. If they moved to attack a perceived weak point in the Russian perimeter, the Rus-

sians would simply shift units from within the perimeter to cover or eliminate the weak spot before the Germans could attack it. In short, Situation 7 became a stalemate resulting in a Russian Marginal Victory. Because of this, expert players shunned this scenario except in tournament play because whoever was awarded the Russian side in the random determination that occurs in tournaments was automatically the winner; playing the scenario out was only a formality as the same thing always happened. Indeed, the primary Russian game play philosophy became, "When winning, risk nothing."

Perhaps the best example of what Situation 7 had become was the final game in the 1998 Avaloncon PanzerBlitz tournament. It was played between Dave Giordano, the defending champion, and Chuck Leonard. Both agreed to play Situation 7 and the random side determination awarded Chuck the Russians. Seeing his first place plaque slipping away from him, Dave managed to get a concession out of Chuck for game balance purposes, namely that the twelve truck counters in the Russian OOB would not count toward the Russian unit count on Board 2 for victory condition purposes, thus reducing Chuck's 18-counter advantage to six.

The game started about 8:00 PM and the first two turns went quickly enough, being the standard road movement march order for both sides. On the German half of turn 3 Dave performed the standard overrun attacks on the five exposed Russian units on the road on top of Hill 132, killing four and dispersing the other (which was destroyed on turn 4 anyway): Chuck's counter



advantage was down to one. During his half of turn 3, Chuck began his withdrawal down the woods south of Hill 132, overrunning and killing two of Dave's exposed units on the eastern side of the hill. Now Chuck's counter advantage was up to three. By turn 5 Chuck had his perimeter set up and all of his units inside of it, managing to keep them away from Dave's marauding Panther and half-track units who were desperately trying to overrun them or trap them against uncrossable terrain hex sides before they got inside the perimeter. It was now about 10:00 PM and Dave found that he was going to have to attack the perimeter.

Throughout the night, Dave maneuvered his units in order to set up an attack where he would lose the minimal number and eliminate the



maximum number of Chuck's units. Chuck, however, was able to move his units around inside his perimeter to cover any weak spot that Dave found, thus thwarting Dave's plans. Finally at about 10:00 AM the next morning, at the end of the German half of turn 9, Dave threw in the towel and conceded the game, giving Chuck the championship.

Having witnessed this marathon display of gamesmanship (well, at least the first five turns and then the conclusion the following morning), I figured that there had to be a better way to play this scenario. The following year during the PanzerBlitz tournament at the 1999 World Board game Championships (Avaloncon's new name), I introduced a tournament victory condition for Situation 7: award each side one victory point for each friendly unit on Board 2 at the end of the game and ten victory points each for control of the towns of Bednost and Golod on Board 2 at the end of the game. This gives both sides have something to fight for, especially the Russians as the Germans at the end of turn 3 could have units in Bednost challenging the Russians for control along with other units racing north towards Golod, arriving before the Russian could and thus securing control of it.

The players all agreed that this would indeed balance out the game and finally make a good battle out of it, but none of them would use it in the tournament. When I asked why, they all had the same answer: "Why should we have to *fight* for our victory when we have a 50 per cent chance of having it handed to us in the random side determination." With that, I gave up on Situation 7 for a number of years.



Finally, a few months ago, I took another look at Situation 7 to see if anything could be salvaged from it. I had already publish alternate order of battles and victory conditions for it in the *Board gamer Special PanzerBlitz Issue* back in 2002, but they did not seem to solve the basic issues with the scenario. So I took a look at the original battle that the scenario is based on. Yes, on 23 November 1943, there was a meeting engagement west of Kiev between the German 19th Panzer Division and the Russian 5th Guards Tank Corps (not the 6th Guards Tank Army as that organization would not be formed up until the spring of 1944). The battle occurred on the open steppe, with a few towns, wood copses, and collective farms. Most of the fighting occurred in the open as there were few places to hide, and resulted in the Germans stopping the westward advance of the Russians, inflicted heavy losses upon them, although not without suffering losses of their own.

Now, open steppe is not at all like the terrain on Board 2. There are 82

covering hexes on Board 2, enough for every counter in the combined oobs of both sides to hide in unstacked. Board 2 doesn't encourage one to fight, it encourages one to hide. I decided that what were needed were more open boards to simulate the actual terrain that the battle was fought on. While Board 3 was a good choice, two more boards were needed. Along came Ward McBurney and his variant map sheets to the rescue.

A few years ago, Ward started making variant boards for PanzerBlitz and later for Panzer Leader also. I looked through them for boards that would represent the wide open steppe terrain of Russia. One board that I found was 6, which has flat terrain with a few hill masses composed of slope hexes only, four towns or collective farms, about eight woods copses of three-to-eight hexes in size, and a railroad running in a north-south direction on the board. I felt that it was perfect to replace Board 1 in the scenario's board configuration. For the center board I chose Board

11. Again it was flat, with only four hill masses composed of slope hexes only, one town and two collective farms totaling five hexes, and four woods copses totaling sixteen hexes. With a total of 21 covering terrain hexes, Board 11 has just over a quarter of the covering terrain hexes of Board 2.

Having settled the map board problem, the next item to tackle was the oobs. I thought that the best way to handle this was to use the historical corrections from the *Board gamer Special PanzerBlitz Issue* on the orders of battle from the original scenario. That done, I decided to go a step further and include the oobs from earlier periods of the war that I had published in another article in that same special issue. I further decided to create new late-war oobs, so now all periods can be covered by this scenario.

The next problem was the set up for both sides. In the original scenario, the first two turns are largely wasted as both sides are essentially moving up towards each other at a given rate, along a prescribed route. The individual players have no real control except in the placement of their units in their respective march orders in order to carry out a prescribed plan when they are released on the third turn. Why not start the scenario at the moment contact is made, with both sides still strung out in their respective march orders? This way two turns that used to be wasted for movement to contact are now added to the actual battle time; the players are still free to determine the placement of their units within their respective march orders in order to carry out their prescribed plans upon release. Also, in the way that the game is set up,

Lastly, I decided that the victory conditions in the revised scenario were still valid, but instead of using the number of units on the

middle board as the criteria for victory, I used the number of victory points earned by both sides at the end of the game. The victory points of course come from the number of units on the middle board and from the number of town hexes controlled by each player at the end of the game.

These changes will, I hope, satisfy two broad “types” of players: for the tournament players and those who vie for position in the various national rating schemes, those, in short, to whom winning is everything, the use of victory points

gives them the sure means of telling who won the scenario. For the other type of player, to whom the game is a test of skill against their opponent, the use of victory levels gives the ability to gauge their performance. Not least, for PanzerBlitz devotees who want to play the classic version of this board game of board games, Situation 7 has now been renovated but not replaced; rejuvenated but not rejected. Surely the future of the hobby lies in this practice, or respecting the past while at the same time realizing that changes must be made.

