



STORMING SMOLENSK VIA THE POSTAL ROUTE

PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN By Mail

By Jim Lutz

PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN employs some different gaming concepts for conflict on the Eastern Front in World War II. The possibility of overruns during movement that are not automatic victories is an integral part of the game for the German player. The untried status of the Soviet armored and infantry divisions is another intriguing aspect of the game that greatly influences tactics. Until tested in battle, the reliability and value of some of these units is uncertain, and a vital Russian defensive position could collapse at the first sound of approaching German panzers if manned by zero-value divisions. Even though the large scale tactical scope of the game and the fact that individual hexes are numbered are factors making the game appropriate for play by mail, the possibility of overruns and the untried status of Soviet units (plus the fact that combat results can be either step losses or retreats) would initially give the impression that playing the game by mail is going to be difficult—if not impossible. In actuality, the game does not require a face-to-face confrontation for play, even when most parts of the game system are used.

OVERRUNS

The tactic of overrunning enemy units during movement could complicate PBM games. The phasing player might have to send out sequential mailings at times as movement progresses. If there are constant overruns, a single Movement Phase could take months! Fortunately, such is not the case.

Soviet overrun attempts will be few in the game, although they may be critical to the final outcome. As a result, few additional mailings will be required during Soviet movement. The German player must use overruns more frequently if he is going to have a chance to win the game, but he cannot do so indiscriminately. A negative result ends all movement for that phase, and retreats by the attacker (routes determined by the defending player) could leave units isolated and vulnerable to counterattacks. During the regular German Movement Phase such overrun attempts will be limited; and if they are at different sectors of the front (for example, one north of Smolensk and another near Roslavl), the results can be checked simultaneously. The remainder of the movement can then take place. It should be noted

that, under this type of system, units may be moving simultaneously for part of their movement allowance, overruns can occur, and the movement of several units is finished. It is *not* necessary for one unit to use all of its movement points before a second unit moves, as would be the case in FTF play. Such joint movement is realistic and will speed up the game. Units may even attempt multiple overruns in a Movement Phase, but the cost in movement points will limit the number of such attempts. Other overrun attempts will come at the end of the Movement Phase, permitting all the results to be checked with one mailing.

Thus, in the Movement Phase, the German player will often move some of his units, mark the overrun attempts, list stocks and choose a future CTD, and then mail the *partial* move to the Russian player—much as he would in the case of first impulse movement in *RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN* or *FORTRESS EUROPA*. Having checked the results of these attempts from the stock page on the appropriate CTD, the German player then continues with his movement, which may include additional overrun attempts. If there are no additional overruns, the German player will then undertake regular combat. A regular Movement Phase might take a week to complete in some cases, although in many turns there will be no overrun attempts by German units. Units attempting overruns have their combat factors halved, the attacking units must begin movement in the same hex, and the defending units must all be attacked from one hex—all of which limit the odds that can be achieved. These limitations on the strength of the overrun attempt usually make it more worthwhile for the German player to wait to attack during the Combat Phase at full strength and from multiple hexes. Overruns may still be attempted, however, since such attempts—if successful—will open holes in the opposing line and permit defending units to be surrounded in the Combat Phase.

Overrun attempts will be more frequent in the German Mechanized Movement Phase, but generally most of those attempts occur at the end of the phase. The Mechanized Movement Phase is typically used to surround Russian units, placing them out of supply and cutting off retreat routes. The overruns against these isolated units will then

effectively attrition the Soviet forces. While the German units attempting these overruns still face the same disabilities as in the regular Movement Phase, there is no following Combat Phase in which better attacks can be mounted. The German player can also hope that the Russian defenses have been weakened in the preceding Combat Phase, thus permitting better odds on any overruns that are attempted. As a consequence, in the Mechanized Movement Phase, often all the overrun attacks can be taken at the same time by listing stocks, a CTD, and mailing the material to the opposing player. If there are overrun attempts prior to other movement, this phase will of course require extra mailings.

While overrun attempts will lengthen the game somewhat (given the need for additional mailings), the time involved will not be prohibitive, particularly since the game itself is only twelve turns long. There is no rule of thumb on the number of extra mailings that may be necessary on a given turn. At times the overrun will be so critical that all other movement will have to wait until the result is checked; but players can usually keep the number of mailings within reasonable bounds if they try.

STEP LOSS OR RETREAT

The fact that there is a choice between step losses or retreats on the CRT introduces another problem for PBM gamers. This combat results table is not a bloody one, and retreats are the most likely choice when they are possible. Since retreats are decided upon by the opposing player, within certain limitations, there can be additional problems if the attacker should be the one to retreat and his movement is not over. Russian overrun attempts are most likely against German units that cannot retreat. In the Combat Phase (since there is no Russian Mechanized Movement Phase), the German player can check the results of combat and decide whether or not he wishes to retreat or take a step loss for each battle. He can also allocate the paths of retreat for the Russian units if his opponent has indicated that a retreat is in order.

German retreats during the various phases of his move will normally not present any major difficulties. For overrun attempts in the regular Movement Phase, the German player can usually

determine the least preferable retreats for his attacking units. Infantry divisions will retreat to undoubted terrain and away from the Russian lines, limiting their ability to join in future attacks. Mechanized divisions and units will not be retreated to favorable positions on roads; they definitely will not be positioned to flank Russian lines. If possible, they will be moved to locations where they begin the Mechanized Movement Phase out of supply. Mechanized divisions will be split up so that they cannot combine for overruns during the Mechanized Movement Phase. In addition, the restrictions on retreat routes limit the options available to the opposing player; therefore, the chances of using the "wrong" retreat route are somewhat limited. The Russian player will have the option of disagreeing with the suggested retreats the German player lists for his overrunning units. When he gets the mailing, he can check and send back an alternative that will be used if the German player actually got a retreat result on his overrun attempt.

In the German Combat Phase, much the same situation will be present. The German player can specify his assumptions about the retreat routes for attacking units, aware of what are the least useful final positions. If the Russian player has the option of advancing after combat, the German player might also list the assumptions that he is making for them—"advance" or "stand firm". If the Russian player disagrees, he can again send alternatives when he receives the mailing, sending back a change of orders that the German must implement if the retreat actually occurs as a result of combat. The German player may then have to redo his Mechanized Movement Phase if it is already in the mail, but this type of occurrence is unlikely.

The German Mechanized Movement Phase will have fewer problems of this sort since most of the overruns will occur at the end. There is no advance after combat, and the Russian player will have the option of retreating German units to positions he desires. The obvious points to consider are preventing the occupation of doubling terrain and dividing the German mechanized divisions so that they will not have the advantage of divisional integrity for defensive purposes or for conducting overruns during the next German regular Movement Phase. The Russian player will also be able to make any choices necessary in terms of retreat routes for his own units and whether or not he desires to retreat or lose a step when that option is present.

The Soviet defending units in combat or those occupying hexes during overruns will usually have an obvious choice as to whether they should retreat or take step losses. Surrounded units must take step losses. A single Russian unit (all Russian units have but one step) will of course retreat if it can. Stacks of multiple divisions may at times create some ambiguities for overruns in the regular Movement Phase or for particular combat situations. The German will normally have to note that he will assume either step losses or retreats in his mailings in terms of whichever seems less preferable to him. If it is not obvious what the Russian player would prefer in the event of certain results, the German player will simply specify his best guess as to what action the Russian opponent would choose in that situation. He may pick a CTD a couple of days further ahead in time than normal to give his opponent an opportunity to reflect upon what his choice would be and to respond if it is different. When the Russian player gets that mailing, he can specify any areas where he disagrees and send that information to the German player.

From the above, while there may be occasional problems in terms of choices between step losses or retreats, they should not prove numerous. The Russian player will have to be careful to look at the board and the situation while the German partial moves come in, and he will have to let his opponent

know if he is going to be unavailable for particular periods of time. With good will on both sides, however, all these situations can be resolved. The Russian player will obviously be less active in the game, just as he would be in a FTF situation, but he will at least know that his German opponent has to buy more stamps and envelopes to play the other side! Seriously, the smaller amount of gaming activity for the Russian side in this game suggests that PBM opponents play one and then switch sides for a second simultaneous game. They might even decide that whoever has the most victory points as the German in the two games wins the overall match (say, for AREA considerations).

UNTRIED DIVISIONS

The fact that all the Russian divisions are initially untried is an integral part of *PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN*. The divisions first enter the game in an untried state, and additional divisions that appear late in the game will be drawn from the eliminated unit pile—also in an untried state. This process can create obvious difficulties for PBM gamers. The problems, however, are definitely not insurmountable. If the German player is attacking or overrunning an untried division or divisions, he simply provides stocks for determination of which Soviet units are actually present as well as a stock for the overrun attempt or for combat. For example, if the Russian division is armored (tank or motorized), he chooses a stock and divides the sales in hundreds by "20" to identify the unit that is present according to the ID number given in my Table 1. (Alternatively, he could simply use the last two digits of the sales in hundreds to ascertain the identity of the armored division that is present according to the ranges listed in this table.) If the Russian division is an infantry unit, Table 2 provides the means of identifying it. The sales in hundreds is simply divided by "78" to determine which one is actually in place. (Again, alternatively, the last two digits of the sales in hundreds figure can be used to find the appropriate ID, with any results that are in the 79+ range are ignored and a backup stock used.)

TABLE 1: IDENTIFICATION FOR UNTRIED SOVIET ARMORED DIVISIONS

ID	Number Division	Strength	Similar Units	Range
01	3 Tank	7-10	1	01-05
02	4 Tank	0-10	3	06-10
03	7 Tank	3-10	3	11-15
04	22 Tank	0-10	3	16-20
05	26 Tank	5-10	3	21-25
06	27 Tank	4-10	4	26-30
07	29 Tank	3-10	3	31-35
08	30 Tank	3-10	3	36-40
09	31 Tank	5-10	3	41-45
10	33 Tank	0-10	3	46-50
11	4 Motorized	2-10	1	51-55
12	22 Motorized	6-10	2	56-60
13	29 Motorized	6-10	2	61-65
14	82 Motorized	8-10	3	66-70
15	103 Motorized	8-10	3	71-75
16	204 Motorized	5-10	3	76-80
17	205 Motorized	4-10	4	81-85
18	208 Motorized	4-10	4	86-90
19	210 Motorized	4-10	4	91-95
20	PrGd Motorized	8-10	3	96-00

Difficulties with this procedure could occur if the chosen division is already in play, or has been eliminated in earlier turns while there are still divisions in the unused reinforcement pool. If either of these

two situations is present, there are a number of ways to resolve the problem. One possibility is simply to list enough additional stocks so that if the division selected is not available, a second division is chosen by using the next stock. In Figure 1, a sample of two attacks against untried infantry divisions in the Combat Phase is given. IBM is used to select the first untried infantry division (which turns out to be the 25th Infantry). ATT provides the second untried "7-6", but the 93rd Infantry has been previously eliminated. The third stock is then used to identify the 42nd Infantry, which is available and is then placed on the board. The remaining division is then selected by the use of as many additional stocks as are necessary.

There is a second method that may ultimately prove to be more convenient to use. If the division in question is not available (already on the board or previously eliminated), an equivalent unit appears. If, say, the 93rd Infantry is unavailable, any other 0-0-6 infantry division is taken in its place. Table 1 indicates how many armored units of different strengths are available, while Table 2 has a listing of all the infantry divisions by offensive and defensive strengths. (Note that Table 2 does not agree with the summary on Page 11 of the rules booklet, which is somewhat incorrect; the values for Table 2 were taken directly from the counters themselves.) Even if the method of equivalent strength unit substitution is desired, it may be possible that no substitute unit is available. In these rare situations, the easiest way to determine which division appears on the board is to select the next available unit by moving *up* the ID number list if the stock is *even* and *down* the list if the stock is *odd*. Say the 93rd Division is not available. All other 0-0-6 units have already appeared and been eliminated. Since the sales in hundreds was 1743, the player moves down the ID number list on Table 2. The 91st Infantry is chosen if it is available. If it is already in play, then the 89th Infantry comes in, and so forth. Again as an example, if the 276th Infantry and all other 4-5-6 divisions are not available, and since the sales in hundreds was even, the player moves up Table 2 until the listed unit is available. (For purposes of moving up and down the numbers on Table 2, "78" follows "01" when moving up the table and "01" follows "78" when moving down.) Perhaps an even simpler procedure would be for the players to decide to take the next available units with a higher ID number in the table even when equivalent units are available. [In all cases, note that care should be taken to ensure that the correct 172nd Infantry Division is put in play.]

TABLE 2: IDENTIFICATION FOR UNTRIED SOVIET INFANTRY DIVISIONS

ID	Number Division	Strength	Similar Units
01	2 Inf	0-0-6	8
02	6 Inf	2-4-6	4
03	13 Inf	1-1-6	3
04	17 Inf	4-4-6	2
05	18 Inf	1-3-6	5
06	19 Inf	3-5-6	3
07	24 Inf	3-4-6	6
08	27 Inf	0-0-6	8
09	37 Inf	3-4-6	6
10	38 Inf	2-2-6	3
11	42 Inf	3-4-6	6
12	46 Inf	2-1-6	2
13	49 Inf	0-1-6	1
14	50 Inf	9-8-6	1
15	53 Inf	5-5-6	3
16	55 Inf	3-3-6	3
17	56 Inf	4-3-6	1
18	60 Inf	0-0-6	8
19	61 Inf	6-5-6	1
20	64 Inf	2-6-6	1
21	73 Inf	2-4-6	4

22	75 Inf	1-5-6	1
23	85 Inf	1-2-6	1
24	86 Inf	5-4-6	1
25	89 Inf	5-8-6	3
26	91 Inf	2-2-6	3
27	93 Inf	0-0-6	8
28	98 Inf	1-4-6	1
29	100 Inf	6-6-6	1
30	102 Inf	2-3-6	4
31	108 Inf	1-1-6	3
32	110 Inf	1-1-6	3
33	111 Inf	7-6-6	2
34	112 Inf	4-6-6	2
35	117 Inf	3-7-6	1
36	118 Inf	4-4-6	2
37	121 Inf	1-3-6	5
38	127 Inf	5-8-6	3
39	132 Inf	3-3-6	3
40	133 Inf	8-8-6	2
41	134 Inf	3-3-6	3
42	137 Inf	5-5-6	3
43	138 Inf	3-5-6	3
44	143 Inf	1-3-6	5
45	144 Inf	2-3-6	4
46	145 Inf	0-0-6	8
47	148 Inf	5-5-6	3
48	151 Inf	3-4-6	6
49	152 Inf	1-3-6	5
50	153 Inf	4-5-6	6
51	154 Inf	4-7-6	1
52	155 Inf	7-7-6	2
53	158 Inf	2-3-6	4
54	160 Inf	4-5-6	6
55	161 Inf	8-8-6	2
56	162 Inf	2-5-6	3
57	167 Inf	2-2-6	3
58	171 Inf	3-8-6	1
59	172 Inf (a)	1-3-6	5
60	172 Inf (b)	2-3-6	4
61	174 Inf	6-7-6	1
62	178 Inf	2-5-6	3
63	187 Inf	3-5-6	3
64	191 Inf	4-5-6	6
65	232 Inf	4-5-6	6
66	258 Inf	6-8-6	1
67	260 Inf	4-5-6	6
68	276 Inf	4-5-6	6
69	300 Inf	0-0-6	8
70	303 Inf	2-5-6	3
71	1 Mos Res	5-8-6	3
72	2 Mos Res	0-0-6	8
73	5 Mos Res	2-1-6	2
74	7 Mos Res	0-0-6	8
75	8 Mos Res	2-4-6	4
76	9 Mos Res	3-4-6	6
77	13 Mos Res	2-4-6	4
78	17 Mos Res	3-4-6	6

FIGURE 1:

Attackers	Defenders	Odds	CTD	Stock	Retreats
1. 12 Pz (16) 20 Mot (10) 6 Inf (9)	?-6 ^a ?-6 ^b			GTE	
2. 7 Pz (16) 14 Mot (12)	?-6 ^c 30 Tank (3)			AMAX	
Stocks for Untried Divisions:					
IBM	3206/78=8	(a)—27 Inf			
ATT	1743/78=27	(b)—Inf 0-0-6 (not available)			
GMC	869/78=11	(b)—42 Inf			
Gulf	1550/78=68	(c)—276 Inf			
Shell	972				
Ford	2051				

Thus, Attack 1 odds become 7-1 (assuming no terrain modifications and Russian units in supply). Attack 2 odds are 3-1 (assuming same).

divisions in the reinforcement pool and those that have been previously eliminated in the same group for selection. I would advise against this method in the interest of fairness; the 0-0-6 infantry divisions and other weak units will come into play all too often if this method is used.

Another "rule", if you will, should be mentioned. In any given player's turn, Russian or German, no Russian unit is added to the eliminated pile until the end of that player's turn. Thus, any unit eliminated in the German Movement Phase by an overrun cannot reappear until the Russian Movement or Combat Phase; and it can only appear then if all the untried units have been entered onto the board already. Thus, the players will have to have three groups of Russian units offboard. There will be the initial pool of untried units, infantry divisions eliminated in the present player turn (all phases), and infantry divisions previously eliminated. (Since there are more armored divisions than needed, they will never reappear.) Once all the infantry divisions have entered the game for the first time (by Turn 7, even if the Southwest Front reinforcements are not taken), the process will be even simpler.

Admittedly, it will be a bit awkward to check the identities of untried infantry divisions when so many of them may already be face down on the board, and before specific units have been placed in hexes. (The armored divisions are so few in number that there will be little difficulty in keeping track of them.) Blank counters could be used for untried units that have not been revealed, or even counters from another game. The actual units are placed when they come into play, and there will be little difficulty as a result. At least with PBM, there is no danger of accidentally turning over a counter in the course of movement as can happen in FTF play. If a player lacks blank counters or other counters from a different game, he can at least bring the Russian units on the board according to the order in which the units are listed in Table 2. It will at least be easier to find the divisions in question when they do appear.

TO THE POST OFFICE

The above suggestions should make it much easier to play *PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN* by mail. In a day of PCs and copies, the players can make their own OOBs for the game. The Russian OOB should contain a number of "?-6" and "?-10" entries, as well as all specific unit designations. It will also be necessary for the Russian player to indicate *both* starting and ending hexes so that the German can confirm that untried units moved correctly. The players will find too that such an OOB or a copy of Table 2 will be useful in determining which units are exposed, which ones have been eliminated, and which divisions have yet to appear on the board. Such an OOB could even be used to distinguish

between untried units that entered from the reinforcement pool and those that came back into the game from the eliminated unit pile if such a complication is desired.

In this system, there will be multiple mailings required for the German player (and occasionally by the Russian opponent), but the number will not be overwhelming—particularly in a 12-turn game. A typical game can be played in a reasonable period of time, comparable to many of the other games that are normally played by mail. For players who like the idea of untried units and the "fog of war", the above methods will be a little different from FTF play but the random nature of unit appearances will be present. Thus, an opponent across the tabletop is not necessary for playing *PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN*.



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Of course, much the same procedure for identifying untried divisions can be accomplished with a random number table (including digits from "1" to "0", not just from "1" to "6"). The stock identifies the starting point on the table and two digits are selected to identify the division. If the division is unavailable or the digits are between "79" and "00" on the infantry table, the players simply move on to the next pair of numbers in the table to determine which untried unit is present. Alternatively, after the first unit is checked, the equivalent unit method can be used or players can decide to move up or down the table.

There will be times when all but five or six of the Russian infantry divisions have either been revealed or have been eliminated. Both players will know which units remain available. At this point, the player who is forcing the unit to reveal itself may simply assign each unit left an ID number and list a stock. If five divisions remain, the sales in hundreds figure is divided by "5"; if four are left to enter, the figure is divided by "4"; and so forth. It might also appear to be easier to place the