

# THE QUAGMIRE DEFENSE

## Playing the Reds in PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN

By Brett Murrell

Few wargamers who have played *PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN* would probably admit that they enjoy playing the Russian forces against the German war machine. Factors in the game just seem to pile up against the Russians; they require purely defensive thought and are allowed very little offensive action, their supply system is fragile at best and easily disrupted, and even after well-played games the Russian player is many times "rewarded" with a German marginal victory. Equally deflating is the sight of yet another red piece being flung off the map after destruction by the superior race, while the German "dead pile" remains empty.

Perhaps these difficulties are what make *PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN* the challenging game that it is. Few other games can give the rewarding feeling that a Russian player gets when he sees the Wehrmacht ground to a dead stop against a quagmire of Russian defenders. Creating this quagmire, however, takes meticulous play, plenty of forethought, and a generous amount of prior experience, but it is far from the pipe-dream of "legend."

### THE QUAGMIRE PRINCIPLE: How to be Russian Flypaper

*PG* has some fairly novel rules systems not found in most other games. The most important one to the Russian is the "Zone of Control Pin." When a unit enters an enemy Zone of Control, it may never move again until it somehow escapes that Zone of Control during combat. This escape can be engineered by eliminating the enemy or by causing the enemy or yourself to retreat.

Because the German panzer units have the ability to move 20 movement points in one turn, first priority for the Russian is to limit the German mobility as much as possible. The best way to do this is by pinning the panzers with Russian units. This is usually easy to do; the difficulty comes in maintaining that pin. One or two Russian units sent up to pin German units can usually expect to be surrounded and overrun with virtually no loss of time to the Germans. Because of this, more than simple pinning is needed.

The Combat Results Table in the game does not create many casualties in and of itself. Attackers can be totally eliminated only at odds of 1-2 or less, and even then the chances of elimination are never greater than 33%. On the other hand, attackers need at least 6-1 odds for a meager 16% chance of rolling a *Defender Eliminated*. Attackers need at least 9-1 odds to get a better than 50-50 chance of causing complete elimination of the defender; these odds are very difficult to obtain against an average Russian unit in good defensive terrain.

What the Combat Results Table does create is a lot of retreats—so surrounded units who have no retreat option are living on borrowed time. With the lightning speed of the German panzer and motorized units, the German player needs only one hole in a Russian line to pour units through and surround a whole region. This is where the Russian challenge comes. You, as the Russian player, must create a line which cannot be outflanked, which has no significantly weakened area and which can deal with small German breakthroughs aggressively. A well-planned Russian line in good defensive terrain is a tough nut to crack and can win the game by itself; a hap-hazard "delaying" line is usually doomed on the first contact with the panzers and allows the Germans a lot of practice throwing red

pieces into the "dead pile" without delaying his army more than a turn.

The basic principle of the Quagmire Defense, then, is this: A solid, permanent Russian line is possible to create if enough planning is put into it. This line must be strong and must be wholeheartedly adhered to or it is just a waste of time and units. If successful, it will stop the German push, pinning it down for at least the first eight turns—and possibly until the end of the game.

### THE LINE: Where?

The Quagmire Defense requires that the Russian player plan exactly where his defense line is going to be before play even begins. Many players believe that the line from the V1 entrance area to Smolensk and down to Roslav offers the best defense area. This line is shaky at best. Certainly Roslav has good terrain, and the area north of Smolensk is no place for mechanized units; but the area between, around Smolensk, is a playground for panzers. Even stacks of three Russian units are easily cut down in clear terrain once surrounded or put out of supply. And the number of Russian units needed to defend just the middle area in a permanent line is prohibitive.

The Russian defense line cannot be put any farther eastward than Smolensk, however, because the German gets a marginal victory by taking just Smolensk and either Roslav or Yel'nya with the three towns on the west edge of the board. Only one place is left—the west.

The most common assessment of the western area, the line running basically along the 0500 row, is that it is too far forward to defend well. The Smolensk line is preferred because it is farther back and allows more time for the line to be set up. These assessments are fallacious for two reasons. First, if both the 16th Army and the 19th Army can move on the first turn, a total of 23 infantry divisions, five armor divisions and four good leaders are available to create a line along the 0500 defense line—plenty of units to stop the German first-turn forces with ease. Secondly, in relationship to the speed of the German units, the Smolensk line is only one turn (in fact one movement phase) farther eastward of the 0500 line—hardly much delay to be worried about how far forward you are defending.

### THE 0500 LINE: How?

The 0500 line offers by far the best natural terrain anywhere on the board. In the south, the river flowing south of Orsha, along with hexes 0424, 0422, and 0420, offers the Russians a defense line that is perfectly straight and doubled in every position. This line is extended by the woods along the Vitebsk-Orsha highway, which allows doubled and tripled defensive positions up to the West Dvina river. From here, the line can be extended along the West Dvina as far as the Russian player wishes.

The strength of this line is that it offers no undoubled positions to the German and, if the Russian can get two divisions on each of the required defense hexes, he can possibly be worth up to 32 defense points; with many of the defense hexes attackable from only two hexes, the German motorized divisions (worth 12 points each) cannot be used to attack a defense hex containing two untried Russian units on the first two turns without the possibility of getting a 1-2 odds attack—disasterous if a six is rolled.

Figure 1 gives a possible setup for the first turn along the 0500 line if both the 16th and the 19th Armies can move. The 13th Army deploys south of Orsha, sending its armor division to 0518 to help in the center. The 20th Army deploys its infantry in 0512, 0515, 0517 and 0518, leaving the defense of Orsha and Vitebsk to the 16th Army units railed up to these hexes. Another 16th Army infantry division moves to 0417 to blunt an attack in the center, while the last infantry division is sent to 0825. The 20th Army's armor moves north along the West Dvina, while one goes to 0517. Finally, the 19th Army spreads out north and west, offering reserves to all of the north front.

This line is more than a match for the first turn German forces, who are too few in number to exploit a breakthrough even if they should make one. But what if the 16th and 19th Armies cannot move? A line is still possible, as shown in Figure 2. The 13th Army takes over the defense of Orsha, while the 20th commits units to Vitebsk. Even though the line is fairly weak along the West Dvina River, it is the place that you should hope the Germans attack, for the 19th Army can stop any first-turn breakthroughs along the north, and you have one ace in the hole in the north: Yershakov's Army.

### YERSHAKOV'S ARMY: The Northern Anchor

For the first two turns, the German threat is in the north. Containing a breakthrough at or north of the West Dvina river is vital at this time to insure that your line is unruffled when the German hordes come in on Turn 3. Yershakov's Army is the key to holding the north.

Figures 3 and 4 show Yershakov's advance from the north. He should come in as far west as possible. If he does, he can be set up in the forest area at 1204—blocking an end-around by the German forces entering at A on Turn 2. If the German first turn forces have already swept around the north, Yershakov is there to pin them or cut their supply line. Later, if the Germans ignore Yershakov and embroil themselves in a battle around the West Dvina, Yershakov's forces can pull in behind them, threatening to surround the German and perfectly able to do so if the Germans continue to ignore him.

### THE SOUTH: Planning is a Must

The line south of Orsha is a tranquil place for the first two turns, as no Germans can attack it without wasting valuable time getting there. But do not let the peace lull you into a sense of security; on Turn 3 all hell will break loose with German panzers dogpiling onto your defensive line along the whole south front. You must begin preparing the south on the second turn before you realize it's too late on Turn 3.

The south line requires at least ten units: two units each in 0430, 0428, 0426, 0424, and 0422. Never spread your troops out by putting one division in each hex; this just allows the Germans to attack one hex and advance through without touching the rest of the line. If possible, several other divisions should be behind the line to block breakthroughs. The divisions needed for this must come from units which are either moved down from the north line or sent by rail. Usually this means sending the bulk of the 24th Army, as the 21st Army coming in on Turn 3 on Entrance Hex Z will not make it in time. Even if interdicted by German planes, two rifle divisions of the 24th Army can make it to 2319 on



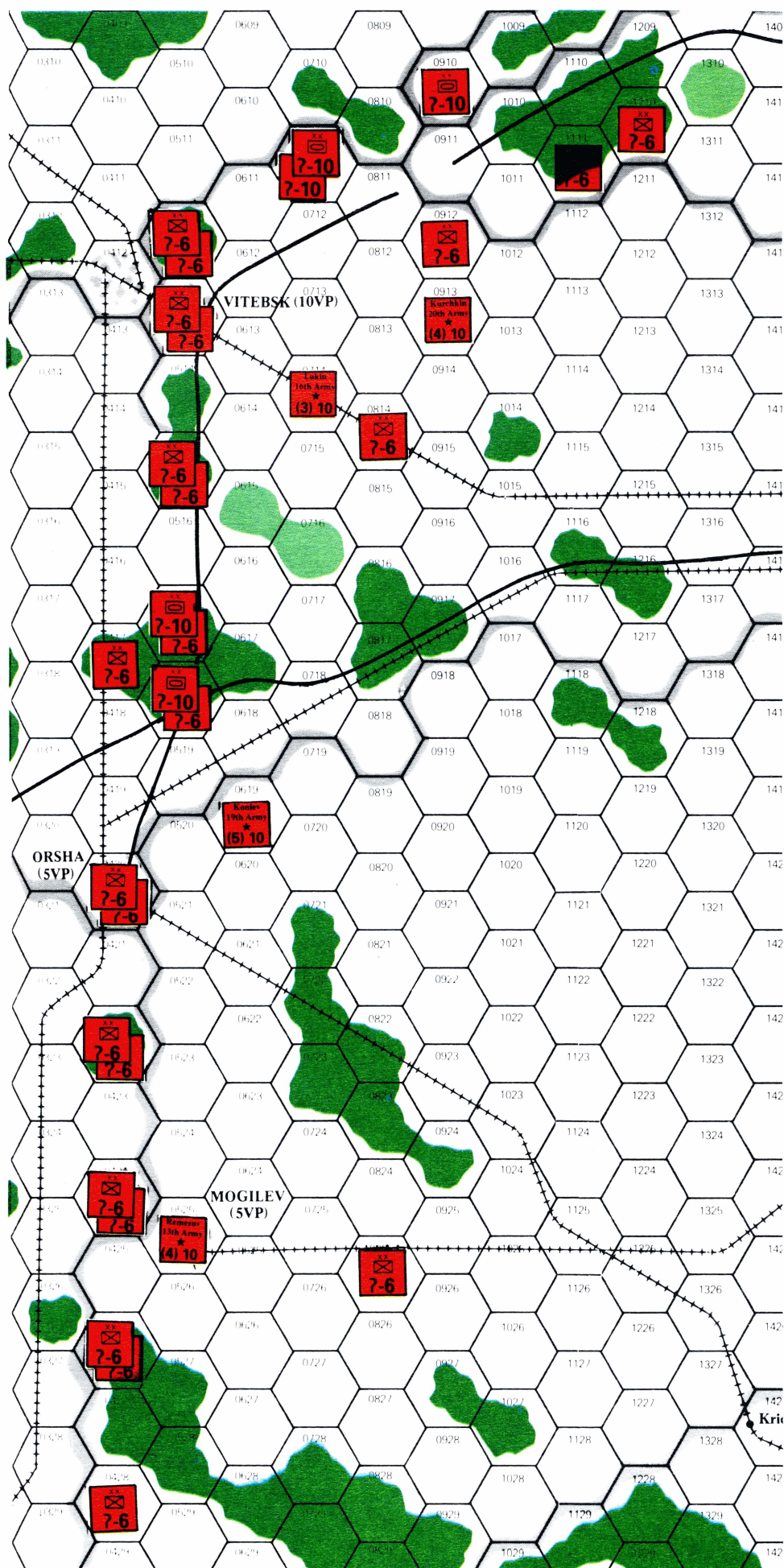


Figure 1: Russian 0500 Line on Turn 1 if 16th and 19th Armies can move.

Turn 1 (assuming the other six divisions moved by rail were units of the 16th Army.)

The German player then faces a decision. He can either continue to interdict them on the rail south of Smolensk, keeping the reinforcements from the south line but allowing the rest of the 24th army to race to any spot on the north line, letting north line units shift southward. Or he can ignore the units. The last option is obviously best for the German player; but with these two divisions, the division from Smolensk, and the seven already down on the south line from the 13th Army, the minimum requirement of 10 divisions is available.

If the 16th Army was unable to move on the first turn, the south front will need to be reinforced from the north if the German player is intent on keeping the 24th and 16th Armies from railing south on Turn 2. If the German player does interdict south of Smolensk, simply rail west to Orsha and the central road area, moving the divisions already at those places south. Whatever way it is done, the Russian must have the units able to pull into position in the south by Turn 3.

### A GERMAN BREAKTHROUGH: Do not Panic

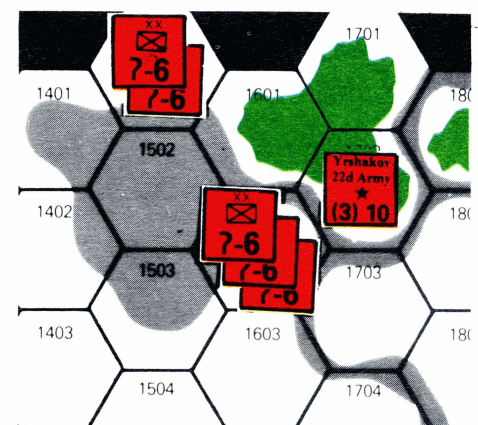
No matter how well your defense is planned, some 0-0-6 infantry in the wrong place or a lucky die roll can open a hole in your line to allow some German units to pass through. Do not fret; one breakthrough does not mean Doomsday. Any competent German player will be able to get some type of breakthrough sooner or later; you must be able to react to it without going into a headlong retreat.

Most German breakthroughs happening on the first four or five turns will be one of two types. Either the German player will make a breakthrough and have a lot of mobile divisions to run through it (which means that he has few units elsewhere that are pinning your units down). Or he will make a breakthrough with just a few mobile divisions and have you pinned in most places.

Reaction to the first option should be very forceful. Send everyone that can to pin the breakthrough units; and if the German player has left any unit by itself, especially ones on the front pinning you, attack them if you can surround them. You must give the German player a motive for coming back to the front and saving his attacked units instead of driving around your interior.

Another possibility is to close the line back up after the German player's divisions have moved through, cutting him out of supply and forcing him to reopen the hole somehow. Anytime you can knock German units out of supply during this time you should do it. Hang tenaciously to your line and if he finally totally breaches it, find a good defen-

Figure 3: Yershakov Turn 1 Deployment.





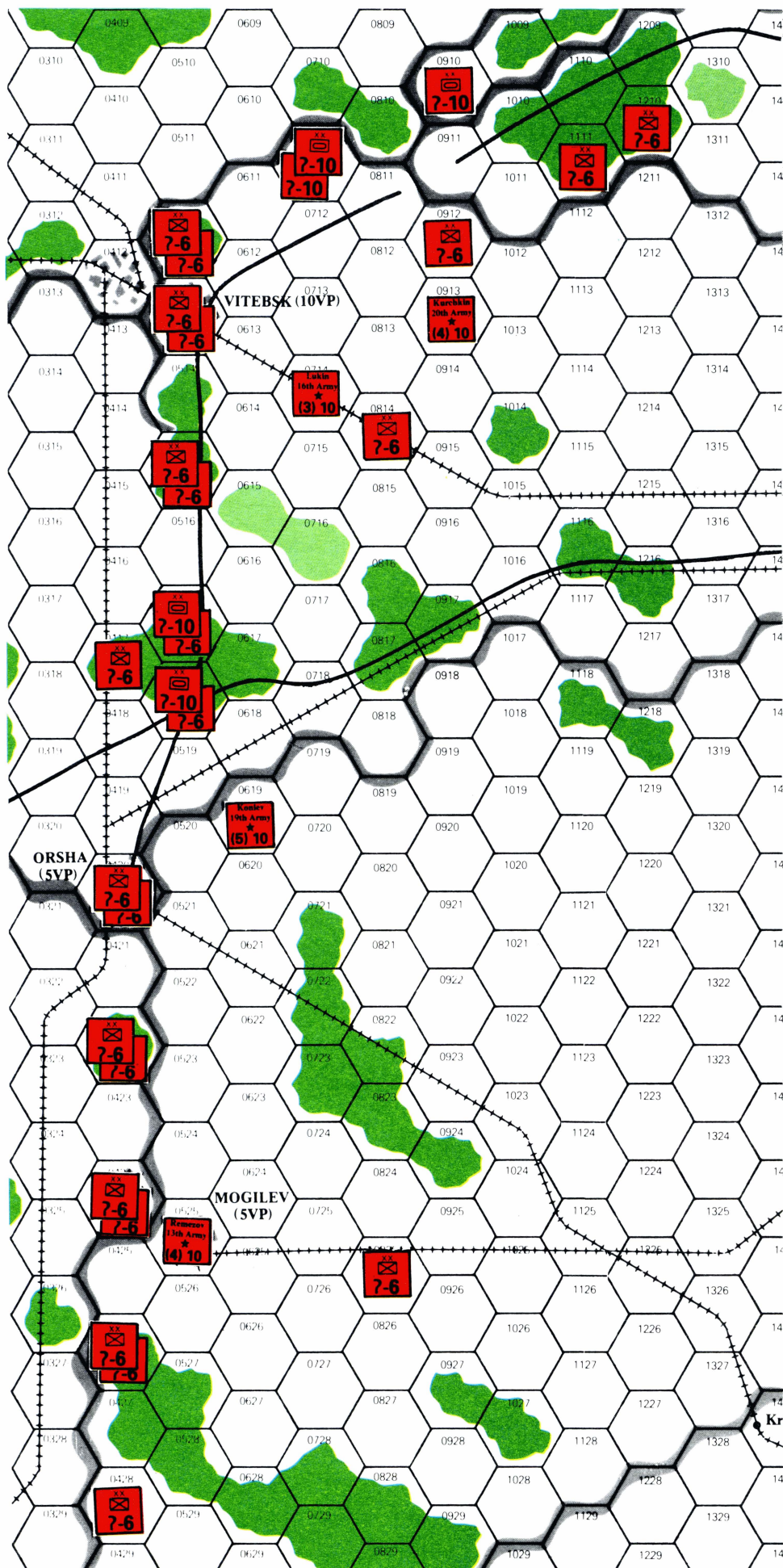


Figure 2: Russian 0500 Line on Turn 1 if 16th and 19th Armies cannot move.

sive hex and make him dig you out of it. Digging out a large defensive line even after it has been surrounded is time-consuming and cannot always be left to the infantry if the German supply roads are still in your hands.

Reaction to a small breakthrough should be more conservative. Somewhere behind your lines you should have kept several reserve units. Use these to plug the hole, but do not react by weakening your whole line to pin down a breakthrough; doing this just makes your line susceptible to another and usually bigger breakthrough. In fact, most of the deadly breakthroughs are the third or even the fourth after a Russian player has over-reacted to the first breakthrough.

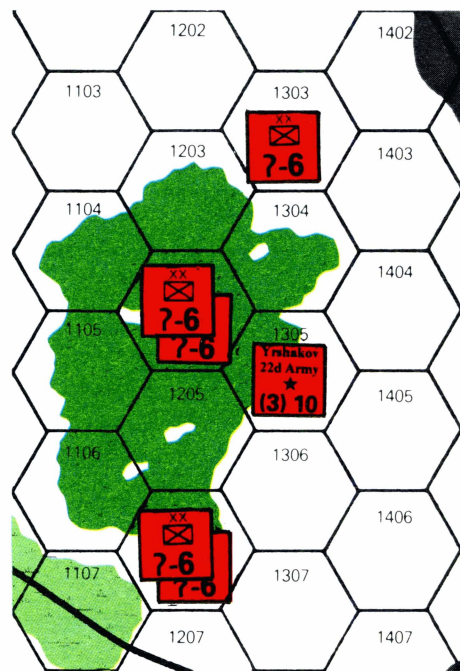


Figure 4: Yershakov Turn 2 Deployment.

## CONCLUSION: The Payoff

The Quagmire Defense, or any defense in general for that matter, is difficult to master without practice and planning. Your plans and your line are like a chain; the strength of it is equal to your weakest link and in this case you can bet that a good German player will find any weak links you might have. Whatever line you try to hold, only practice will make it perfect, and few lines that are less than perfect will be able to stand up to the German's blitzkrieg. That is the challenge of it. If, at the end of a game of *PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN*, you still have a line of red between the German panzers and Smolensk, you will know that you have pulled off one of the toughest juggling acts in the wargame field.



Back in Vol. 21, No. 4, Henry Robinette ("Is Smolensk Burning") first looked at a number of Russian defense strategies for *PANZERGRUPPE GUDERIAN*. He traced the history and explored the strengths of such plays as *The Orsha Landbridge*, *The Main Line of Resistance*, and *The Egg*. His seminal work was obviously the goad for Mr. Murrell's "Quagmire".