STRATEGY IN STALINGRAD III

Because Russian strategy is so dependent upon what the Axis player does in each individual game; it is almost pointless to go into the fine points of Russian strategy. However, this is not the case with the German player and it is worth while to give a description of what Axis strategy should be.

The extremes of weather in Russia divides each year into three distinct parts and until 1944 each year should generally follow the same pattern. Summer signifies a German offensive, in Fall the offensive peters out, Winter brings a Russian counter-offensive, in the Spring their offensive peters out, Summer brings a renewed German offensive, and so on...

The German player will quickly learn that his Panzer and Motorized (which later become Panzer-Grenadier) Divisions are his lifesblood and that without them he is helpless. The Special Odds Chart and Airpower further enhances the fighting capabilities of these units. However, in bad weather the Germans lose both of the aforementioned advantages and thus one can see that during mud and snow there is little chance of the Axis launching a successful offensive. Regardless of the amount of Russian divisions the Germans face, without perfect weather there is not much he can do in regards to a full-scale attack. During poor weather everything should be done to preserve and rebuild as much of the Panzer-Motorized force as possible in preparation for the coming German Summer offensive.

German infantry, by itself, unless facing extremely poor quality Soviet units, can in general do little actual attacking; save soak-offing, during an offensive. They should follow in the Panzers’ wake consolidating the conquered territory while at the same time defending the flanks against possible Russian counter-attacks. Through the Hedge-Hog table German Infantry can become extremely battle-worthy and if lucky destroy the best of Russian units and make it possible for the Panzer-Motorized force to be rebuilt and refitted over the Winter.

The Axis Allied Armies (Rumanian, Hungarian, Italian, and Balkan) with the exception of the Finns are not very battle-worthy and can be used for little more save garrison duty, suicide attacks, and uncertain defense. This is due to their weak combat strengths and the fact that when they are attacked be Russian armour and/or cavalry the Soviets have the benifit of the Special Odds chart. Unfortunately there will be times when the German player will have no choice but to put them into the line. When this happens all care should be made to put them into the best possible positions (and more importantly positions that appear unlikely to receive a heavy Russian blow) and to intermingle the more dependable German infantry amongst them so as to give the Soviets a more difficult time when attacking.

Airforce Units are extremely valuable in breaking river positions and interdicting Russian attacks. However, once the Axis-Soviet border has been breached, these units due to their slow movement rate and dismantling-rebuilding times, will rarely be able to keep up with a rapid advance. Utmost care should be excercised when initially placing them on the board; for a blunder can make for an extremely difficult time for the Germans in breaking the Russian border river positions.

In the Summer of 1941 the Germans grossly outclass the Russians in first-class fighting outfits and should exploit this advantage to the hilt. There are only a couple of Soviet units with good counter-attacking ability and the German Player should try to destroy these as soon as possible.

The Panzer and Motorized forces must relentlessly advance and destroy the enemy; for procrastination will only see the Red Army increase in size and power. Russian NKVD units should be destroyed at every opportunity. The Germans should not shirk a 1-2 attack with the Special Odds Chart if the aims of the attack justify it. For example, attacks upon Brest, the Nemunas, Southern Bug etc. on the first turn, if successful will
force the Russians to counter-attack or give up valuable positions. If the Soviet player 
gives up the position simply repeat the procedure at the next one. Never avoid the 
major cities; take them as soon as possible; for the longer they remain in Russian 
hands the more difficult they become to take.

In 1941 it doesn’t really make much of a difference where the stress for the Ger-
man offensive lies since the entire front from the Baltic to the Black Sea is advancing. 
(If it isn’t the Axis is in a good deal of trouble. For if they can’t move with celerity 
at this point of the game, they never will.) It is only when weather, the length of the 
line, attrition on the Panzer/Motorized Force, and increasing Russian strength, begin 
to take noticable effect that the offensive must be discontinued in certain areas and con-
centrated in the vital ones.

**Fall 1941** By October the Germans, if they have not taken a major Russian replace-
ment city, will find that they are unable to continue their “sea to sea” offensive and 
only attack in selected areas when the weather is perfect or the Russians exceptionally 
weak. They may still get some offensive action in before the coming of the Siberian 
Line-Up and Winter; but the problem is whether and where to attack. The German player 
has reached his first major strategic decision.

He will undoubtedly be near Leningrad and Moscow (by near we mean at the most 
one movement turn away) and there should be a great temptation to take one; or possibly 
both of these cities. Another possibility would be to continue the advance in the southern 
portion of the mapboard in order to reach good Winter positions. Finally the German 
player may decide to stop all attacks in areas where he might risk heavy losses and 
conserve his strength for the Winter and following Spring. However, unless the Panzer/
Motorized Force has taken extremely heavy losses this last possibility should be avoided.

If the Germans decide to go all out for either Leningrad or Moscow (you should 
never go after both unless the Russians are extremely weak) take the following into con-
sideration: The Russians will constantly be increasing in strength. They will always 
commit their best troops to defend their replacement cities; and you can count on being 
constantly counter-attacked once you get within striking range of the city until the Russian 
has nothing left to counter-attack with. Never-the-less with a sufficient amount of troops 
and luck the Germans should be able to take a replacement city.

Leningrad should be the target. Moscow, although it might be easier to take due 
to the increased amount of frontage that the Russians will have to defend, will be more 
difficult to hold over the Winter. Fresh Soviet units can enter the game from both 
Leningrad in the north and Stalingrad in the south and thus catch the German forces 
around Moscow in a vise. Besides, although by capturing Moscow you do present the 
Russians with dire movement problems and cut down his replacement rate; you are also 
extending your line and making the formation of any reserves that much more difficult. 
The capture of Leningrad, on the other hand, is sure to shorten the front. A link-up 
with the Finns will give the Germans an ample stock of reserves (any Russian units still 
on the Axis-Soviet border are not long for the World since their nearest source of rein-
forcement is Moscow; far to the south and presumably under some sort of German pres-
sure) and an extremely defensible Winter line of only four or five squares.

Keep in mind that even if you do take a Russian replacement city you should not 
sit back upon your laurels. The seven square halt rule for the Russians should be emp-
loyed against him and after you take a city every effort, unless undue risk seems to be 
required, should be made to force the Soviets seven or more squares from the city. 
This will insure your conquest.

The best Winter line, without attacking the replacement cities, is Stalino-Kharkov-
Kursk-the river running from Kursk to the mountains south of Leningrad-the aforemen-
tioned mountain range-and the Luga river. This line coupled with the Hedge-hog Chart 
and a reserve Panzer Force should be able to stop any Russian attack.
However, if the Russians attack during the Fall, mud, or perfect weather, a line composed of anything save Panzer Divisions is sure to crumble. Never, at any point of the game defend open territory with force; you will just maul the divisions you want to defend with and the Russians will get the territory anyway. Simply delay the Red’s advance with small units (H.Q.’s and Todt units are ideal for this purpose since they can be lost again and again and be replaced at no cost) and heavily defend the next doubled position. However, in the Fall of ’41 you might not want to do that since it might involve losing key positions; but at all times try to avoid “meat grinder” type battles.

Winter-Spring ’41-’42 During the Winter it is possible to defend “all” due to the Hedge-Hog Table and more importantly that the Russians may only attack with three regiment Divisions at nothing worse than 1 to 1 odds. The Germans should counter-attack whenever neccessary and possible. Once the snow clears and you lose the Hedge-Hog Table abandon all open territory; defending it will prove fruitless for you will simply lose units which will later prove invaluable to the German 1942 offensive. Of course abandoning means the use of delaying units to slow the Soviets down.

The 1942 Summer Offensive The Axis Armies should, at the very worse, be no further west than the Divina-Dnepr line (this is when you become experienced with the game) when the first sizable reinforcements from the Reich arrive. Although the German player should immediately begin making attacks to gain good jump-off positions; it is with the one/thirds that he is truly in a position to renew the offensive. The question is... where to strike? For although the German Army is stronger than it was in 1941, it is no longer facing the Russian Army of 1941. The Red Army is now quite powerful and capable of offering serious resistance to the best the Germans have to offer. The Axis player has reached his second major decision of strategic import in the game.

If Leningrad has not been captured by this time it is pointless to go after it. Not all of the new units could be used due to the shortness of the front (four squares) and a bloodbath will be the result; with the Russians favored to win due to their high replacement rate and the fact that reinforcements will enter the board only one or two squares from the front. Moscow is only slightly better to go for. Reinforcements can easily reach the area from Leningrad, and while the Germans will confront the Russians with dire movement problems they will not gain any important economic areas.

Stalingrad and the Caucasus should be the target of the 1942 Offensive. If these areas are not taken now they probably will never be taken. There are many advantages to launching an attack here. The Axis with the infusion of greatly enlarged Rumanian, Hungarian, and Italian Armies, possess an impressive superiority to the Russians in amount of units and the amount of front each side is capable of covering. An attack in the south will lengthen the front and the Germans are far better prepared to do this than are the Russians. The only source of reinforcement for a Stalingrad attrition battle is Moscow which is far from the scene. If the Moscow-Stalingrad railroad is cut (this can be done by breaking the Don river line) and Stalingrad under pressure, the city will almost certainly fall; for Russian reinforcements would have to circumvent the Axis railblock and thus give German forces at Stalingrad and in the Caucasus time to complete their job of conquest. Once these areas have been subdued the Russians will be hard put to recapture them due to the seven square halt rule and the fact that the Germans, once having taken this area, will have just so many more troops to employ on their now ever shortening front.

The conquest of Stalingrad and the Caucasus by no means signifies the end of the game; for the Russians will still have tremendous strength left. However, the Red Army will have to set the liberation of Stalingrad and the Caucasus as its objective for the Winter Counter-Offensive and thus leave the main German line deep in Russia and in a position to apply the “coup de grace” in 1943.
Winter-Spring '42-'43. If you can take a major Russian replacement city in 1942 and hold it through the Winter the game is as good as yours. But if you fail; if only by the thinnest of margins, you will be in a most difficult position during the late fall, winter, and spring of 1942-'43. The Germans will be stuck with a horrendously long line manned, to some degree, by troops with dubious battle-worthiness if the '42 offensive fails. However, due to the reinforcements that come in during the Winter, the Germans will not be as severely pinched for troops as they were during the previous winter. But, a long line in open territory will chop them up almost as soon as they come in; regardless of the Hedge-Hog Table. The German Player must take utmost care to preserve his strength through the Winter and into the following Spring. Only river lines and cities should be heavily defended. If you have no choice but to defend an open square only use dependable units (i.e. Panzer Divisions). Counter-attack whenever and wherever possible in order to preserve a line (remember all SS Panzer Divisions and the Gross Deutschland Panzer Division have the Special Odds Chart during all weather conditions at this point of the game); but know when to withdraw to the next line and avoid "meat grinder" type battles. However, it might be desirable to initiate a "meat grinder" defensive battle when conditions are in the Germans' favor. That is, when they are doubled-up; the Russian player attacks the position and breaks it with taking heavy casualties (A-Elims and Exch's), the Germans counter-attack and force him to again attack, or give up trying. Remember the Germans have the Hedge-Hog Table to further louse the Soviets up. When the snow clears and the mud sets in try to avoid all battle save on your own terms. Retreat, do not be brave and go in for last stands; even if it appears you have the troops to sacrifice; any unnecessary losses now will really hurt later.

Summer 1943. When the first summer reinforcements arrive the line should be no further west than the Nemunas and the Axis-Soviet border (it will most likely be somewhat east of this line). The huge German reinforcement and reorganization of the Army will make further Russian attacks impossible for the time being. The initiative has slipped back to Germany and the German player must now make his third group of strategic decisions.

The first decision that the German player must make is what type of army he is to have. There are one-thirds which he may take that favor the construction of Panzer-Grenadier units and others which favor the organization of Panzer units. He cannot have both. The solution to this problem might be to take the Panzer-Motorized one-third and get as many strong Panzer units as possible. Over the Winter and Spring save all of your replacements and with them construct the Panzer-Grenadier units which will prove so valuable in the latter defensive fighting.

Next, the German must decide whether or not to launch an offensive or to sit behind a defensive line and employ the new Panzer/Panzer-Grenadier Divisions as a reserve to counter-attack and destroy any Russian penetrations in the German line. The later decision will almost always preclude any sort of major Russian offensive success for several months. However, it is always dangerous to allow the initiative to slip into enemy hands.

So generally the Germans will decide to go on some sort of offensive of their own. At this point of the game there is absolutely no margin for error on the part of the German player. The troops he receives in June of 1943 will have to last him until the Winter and above all the Panzers must not be squandered in fruitless attacks against solid steel walls of Soviet troops. The Germans must carefully choose their targets and destroy them with a minimum amount of effort and risk.

But what should the targets of a 1943 offensive be? If the Russians have been foolish enough to allow German troops to still be within range of a major Russian replacement city, they could go after that. Or they could attempt to take new and better
defensive positions on the board from the Russians. In either case the German Player must keep one thought in mind... Preserve the Panzer/Panzer-Grenadier Force, do not squander it. The best means to prevent crippling losses to the Panzers is to set a cut-off point in losses indicating where the offensive should be halted. For example, when the Germans lose seventy-five factors of Panzers all offensive action immediately stops and the German Armies switch to the defense allowing the remaining mobile forces to be pulled out of the line and to form a reserve to thwart any Soviet penetrations.

Fall 1943 - end of game The Summer 1943 Offensive should be the last major offensive that the Germans ever launch. Thus, the basic German strategy should be one of defense and to make the Russians pay dearly for every yard of ground that they gain.

Fortifications should be built in areas in which they will link existing river lines and thus form a continuous front of doubled positions. The German Player will soon discover that he is engaged in a slow but sure war of attrition in which he will be the ultimate loser. The trick is to delay this loss in order to make the game a draw. The Panzers should be used to counter-attack whenever possible to disrupt Russian plans and perhaps force them to commit more troops than should be necessary to win a particular battle. During the Winter of 1943-1944 all Panzer and Panzer-Grenadier formations may use the Special Odds Chart during all types of weather. The Germans’ back is to the wall and territory can no longer be so freely given up; any retreat must be carefully calculated. If the northern and southern commands are split (that is, the south no longer has a direct link with Warsaw) the German player must be sure to leave enough units to competently defend the Balkans; for the Rumanians, Hungarians, and Balkan troops can not do it alone.

STALINGRAD III REPLACEMENT PARTS

Rulebook.................... $2.50
Unit Counters.............. $3.00 (Axis)
                   $2.00 (Russian)
Order of Battle Cards (6) $1.00
Time Record Sheets...... $ .50
Guerilla Warfare Deck.... $2.00
DESIGNER'S NOTES---STALINGRAD III

There is no sense in bothering with the actual history of the WW II Russian Campaign since all who have this game are probably familiar with it. Consequently, these notes will discuss the game of Stalingrad III.

No doubt you will find this game somewhat of a digression from the average wargame. Many may be quite disappointed over the fact that play is resolved on Avalon Hill's Stalingrad gameboard and that the order of battle, to say the least, is somewhat inaccurate. All this, however, is unavoidable when one understands how the game came about and what it is meant to be.

In this designer's experience, it is impossible to create a game of the WW II Eastern Front (1941-1945), on a divisional level, and still have a playable game. The game would have far too many counters and/or too huge a gameboard to be playable. Most wargamers will not bother to record the positions of units, at the completion of a day's play, if the board covers their entire living room floor. Consequently, Stalingrad III uses the AH mapboard and although the initial impression is that there are many units to the game; the stacking rules greatly simplify their mechanics (the game had been originally designed using a supplemented double set of Stalingrad counters).

Most important, is the premise upon which the game is designed; and this is perhaps what makes Stalingrad III so unusual. Just about all wargames are designed by taking an historical situation and then "gamifying" it with the hope that an enjoyable and historically accurate game results (in all too many cases this does not work out). Stalingrad III was designed by taking situations that wargamers find enjoyable and then finding an historically correct context to fit them in. Playability was not sacrificed for an accurate OB. Primarily the game was designed for wargamers and not historians; although the "feel" of the 41-45 Russian Front is unparalleled in any other game. The data may be somewhat inaccurate, but the result is a duplication of the actual campaign and conditions. Of course the duplication will not always be the same as it really was and this is what makes the game interesting.

Words really cannot fully describe Stalingrad III; you will have to play several times in order to see what is meant.

NOTE: Stalingrad III is a game which slowly evolved over the course of five years from a simple S-grad variant into what you now have. All this was made possible through the continued help and suggestions from the designer's friends (to whom due credit is now being given). No game should ever be considered totally completed at any time; there is always room for improvement. Please feel free to send in questions and comments; for it was questions and comments that made Stalingrad III what it is today.