

# OPERATION STAR

Martin A. Chadwick

## Strategy

Operation Star is a good game in that optional play follows the course of history. The historical background notes explain that Hausser — commander of the two SS Panzer divisions initially in the Kharkov area — considered, in spite of opposition from Hitler, abandoning Kharkov without a fight.

Paul King in his review in Phoenix 23 tries to defend Kharkov. He clearly fails as he talks about isolating the Germans around Kharkov by sending Russians to cut the railroad supply lines. Finally he ends by writing about which type of victory the Russian should try for.

In contrast I prefer Hausser's abandonment. On turn 1 all three German mechanised divisions to the north-east of Kharkov should be withdrawn to the Belgorod region and, on turn 2, complete the junction with German Second Army North of Volchansk. This plan has the advantage that two small but easily defensible concentrations of units are formed quickly namely: the area north of Volchansk and in the south the area between the Donet and Krivoi Dor rivers. This situation is much more desirable for the German player because a much shorter length of front has to be defended. This is very significant as, initially, the German is short of units and needs to keep his panzers intact for local counterattacks. Secondly, due to offensive mode movement restrictions and fears about his centre later on, the Russian player has difficulty in attacking either concentration effectively. Thirdly the German player has no supply worries, the sources at 0107 and 3906 are securely protected.

The German is not expected to sit passively in these concentrations. They should simply be regarded as strong bases from which to launch increasingly damaging attacks on the Russians. In the north the German has two 24-18-10 SS Panzer Divisions and the 12-12-10 Gross Deutschland. These have considerable striking power as they are stacked intact on the south side of the northern concentration. Each turn they should easily be able to destroy all nearby exposed Russian units by surrounding together with others in frontal 10-1 assaults.

Meanwhile the Southern German concentration should gradually extend its operation. All the good reinforcements come on in this area. (A competent Russian can stop the German crossing the Donets as he can easily take step losses in a cross Donets attack and overruns across major rivers are not allowed). Thus these Germans should normally simply smash everything south of the Don. By turn 4 there will usually be no Russians left in this area on the southern half of the map so move up toward Kharkov and from turn 5, in conjunction with the ex-northern concentration, start mass unit killing. The German players armoured might is sufficient to allow Kharkov to be surrounded and taken.

From this account it appears that the Russian stands little chance. Undoubtedly he stands no chance of fulfilling the Decisive Victory conditions (as Paul mentioned area L is surely the relevant one). However if he can hold on till the mud, which cripples German overrun capability, he may be able to hold Kharkov.

## Tactics

The disengagement rule as it stands is misnamed. It should be called the German infiltration rule. It allows German units to walk through Russian ZOC's at a small movement cost. Just think of any Panzer Group Guderian game with a rule like that included! I play with the following modification: units entitled to disengage may only do so at the start of a movement phase. I have assumed this modification throughout this article.

German strategy is designed here to allow full use of the Panzers. Multiple overruns and surroundings

are the order of the day. One should not even consider unstacking decent Panzers for defensive work. Ignore victory point towns. Try to kill Russian leaders as these are vital to a decent Russian defence. Finally take advantage of the fact that Russian corps cannot retreat on top of other corps or divisions.

The Russian player can substantially reduce the effects of Soviet Doctrine by swapping headquarters back and forth: withdraw offensive headquarters in the second movement phase so that units are controlled by defensive headquarters and hence can disengage and move normally in the first movement phase. Bring the offensive headquarters back to the front, for the combat and second movement phases, during the first movement phase.

## Summary

Operation Star is a challenging game. It is also very subtle. The German player has several strategic options and even then implementation times are difficult to judge correctly. I feel, even with the disengagement modification, the game is biased in favour of the Germans.

I suggest the following modification:

The German player receives only 2VP for each Soviet rifle or cavalry division or Guard rifle division step loss. There is considerable historical justification for this. Manstein, the German commander claimed many divisions destroyed in this battle but only claimed a small number of prisoners explaining that due to lack of German troops many Russians escaped from these divisions.