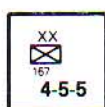
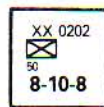
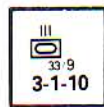
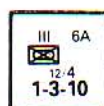
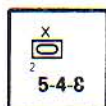
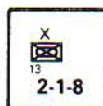
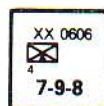


A REVIEW BY PAUL KING



ARMY GROUP SOUTH QUAD



In this article I would like not only to review this quad, but also give some guides to play so as to explain and exploit the exclusive rules found in each game.

As with all SPI Quadrigames, a complete set consists of four small games all linked by a common game system. The **Army Group South Quad** covers four campaigns in the Ukraine during W.W.II and uses the **Panzergruppe Guderian (P.G.G.)** game system. Each game has 200 counters, a 17"x22" map, short rules and the complete set includes an historical article giving a background on each battle. I am sure that all but the novice will have heard of P.G.G. and the games that have followed it, such as **Kharkov** and **Drive on Stalingrad**, so for SPI to produce a quad based on it seems a natural progression. However, the game system has been used so often, are we to be faced with nothing but a rehash of old ideas? In other words, is this quad the dying gasps of a rather tired game system?

For those of you not familiar with the design, each player moves his units, attacks and then moves any mechanised units a second time. However, during the two movement phases units can conduct overrun—a "mobile combat", which displaces units leaving them disorganised until the following game turn. Combat losses are taken as retreats or strength (step) losses. Soviet units are initially untried, i.e. their strengths are unknown. The standard rules are concerned with the above, plus supply. For the Soviet player there are headquarter units, each with a supply radius within which units must lie if they are to function properly in attacks and defense. German supply is much simpler, being traced to a map edge by road, rail or by country hexagons alone.

The exclusive rules folders build on the above or alter them radically to suit a particular scenario. I will look at each, not in historical order, but rather in order of convenience, for two games have air rules and will be left till last.

KIEV 1941

Kiev deals with the German encirclement of a large Russian force which gave them the entire Ukraine on a plate. The Russian begins on a river

line in a huge curve; it is up to the German player to turn this curve into a closed circle! From the north comes Guderian, fresh from the battle of Smolensk, whilst another Panzergruppe led by Kleist heads in from the south. Players who know the game system will rub their hands with glee; Panzers will cut through any defensive line, and you can then laugh all the way to Moscow, right? wrong.

Panzer divisions are given divisional integrity — if stacked together the regiments of a division double their attack and defense strengths. However, the panzers are not at full strength, attrition has taken place (especially with Guderian) and the regiments are brittle — a step loss on the armour regiment reduces attack strength greatly, whilst a loss on the panzer grenadiers will lower defense strength. The panzers of Kleist are much stronger, but do not appear until half way through the game as reinforcements. Immediately one can see that the German player has problems. Added to this is the fact that units pushed back as a result of overrun are not disrupted; since the combat Results Table will only give, on average, a pushback of one hex, no generous advantage is procured by trying overrun.

Fortunately the Soviet has no mechanised movement phase which is a small compensation. Also, the personalities of Guderian and Kleist are present as units, strong on attack, and can be used to overstack. They are very useful in making "super panzers" which can move with relative impunity.

Kiev has many other features specific to it which help to give the feel of the old style Russian Army. Some Soviet units are marked with an asterisk and in a combat they **must** retreat instead of taking step losses. This "battle panic" includes units stacked with them so they all retreat or, if encircled, are all eliminated even if step losses could normally have preserved some units.

In the middle game the Soviet is restricted by a Stalin Directive by which the units can only advance into the salient or stand and fight — Hitler wasn't the only one for crazy orders apparently. Towards the end of the game this ruling is a variable, but it can still damage any plans the Soviet player may have.

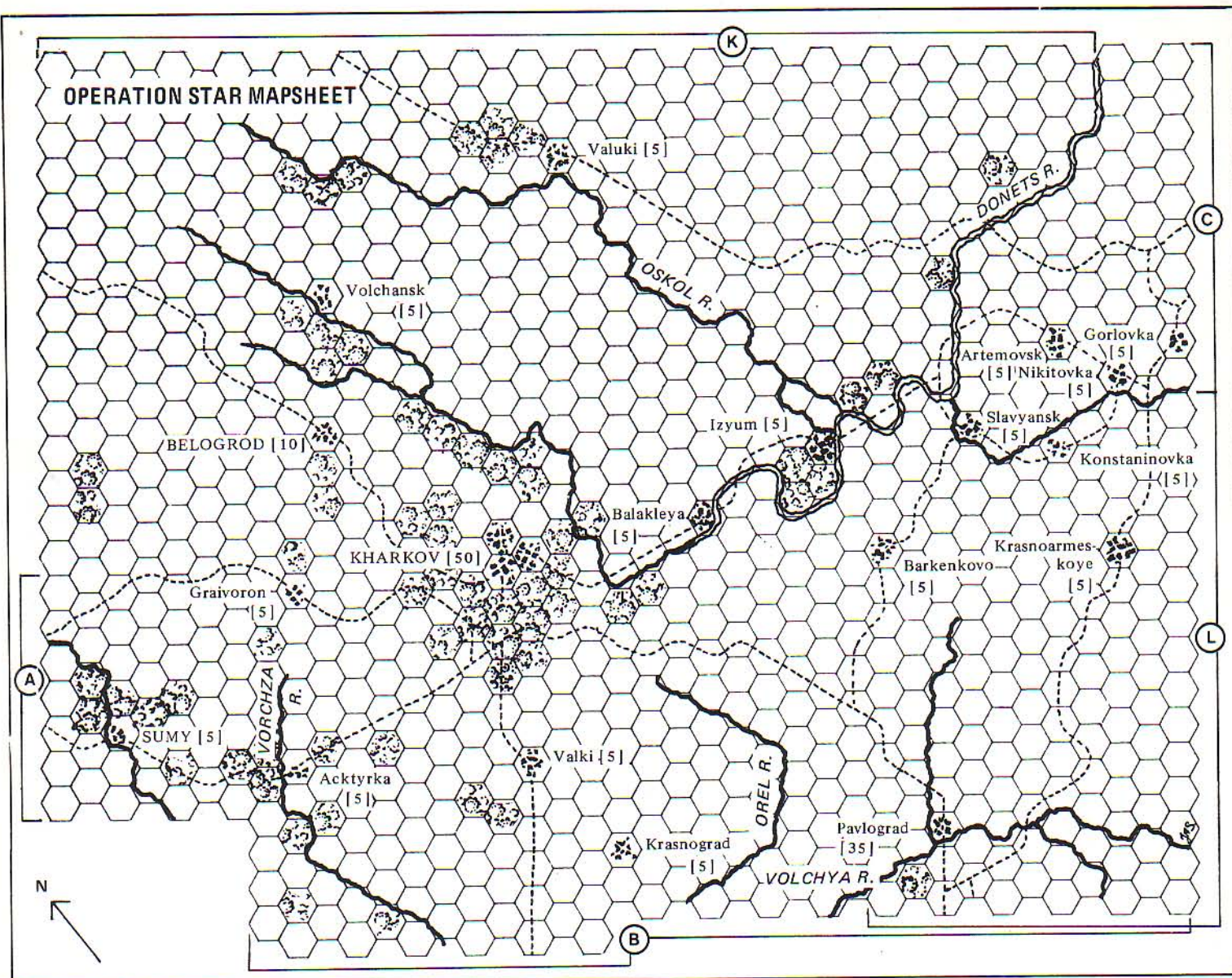
One advantage for the Soviet is that in a retreat the opponent always retreats units, so the Soviet should always unstack panzer divisions into separate hexes. This means no overruns for them next turn for all units in an overrun must start from the same hex. Another useful feature is that the major river along which most units lie prevent locking zones of control and this means units can move on their own side of the river at will. Thus withdrawals to new defensive lines can be made and units can concentrate for the occasional counterattack.

German Tactics.

First of all the city of Kiev cannot be taken immediately so most of the action should take place in the north where Guderian's units come on. However, a steady pressure should be applied all along the line. When Kleist does arrive he should be moved north to close the ring. Panzer forces should always be concentrated; if they are spread thinly the Soviet can easily soak up their attacks. Towns are important, so any attack should include one of these as a bonus.

Soviet Tactics.

The Russian player has a hard job here, especially when the Stalin Directive begins to mess things up. Kiev will be lost eventually, and sending reinforcements there is a waste of time. Reserves should be built up on a minor river which cuts across the map and, while being defensible, also allows units to fall back on it. The biggest bonus is the fact that overrun units are not disrupted, and any German unit pushing into the line should be surrounded and destroyed.



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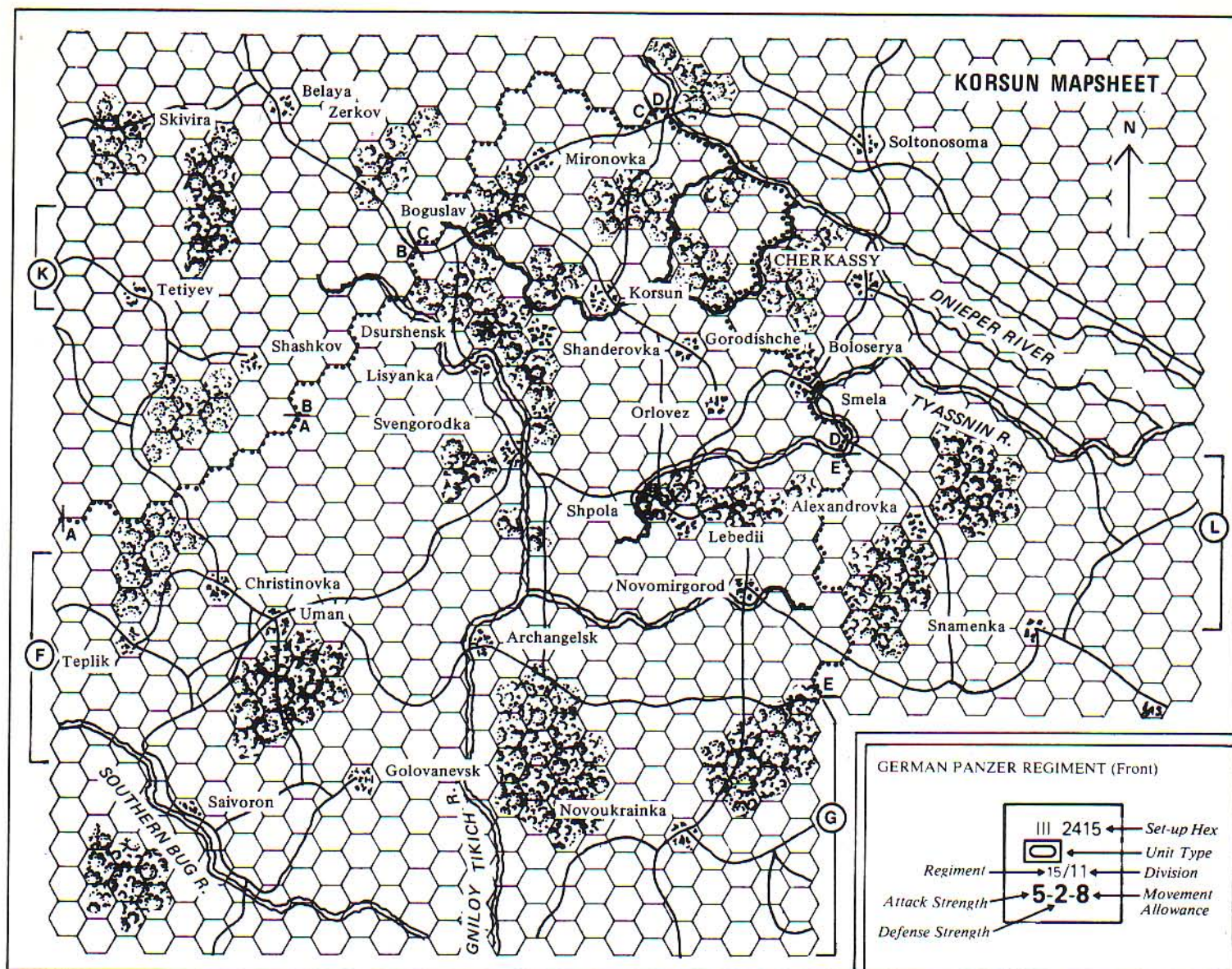
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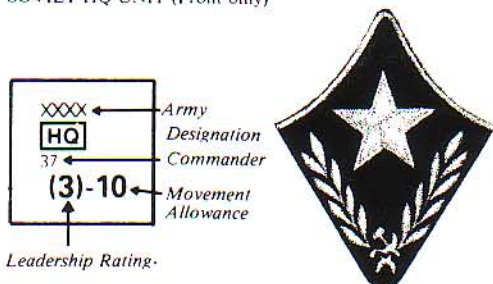
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All in all, Kiev is a pleasant game, and is a good introduction to the game system. One added bonus is a play by mail module: whilst you may have no desire for this, it does give the historical reinforcement schedule, so a purely historical game can be played for an added bit of variety. Perhaps the only criticism of Kiev is the map — everything is a shade of blue and concentrating on it for a long time is the best way to a headache. Apart from rivers being blue, marshes are the same shade — and there are a lot of marshes! — cities are a dark blue and roads a grey-blue; all very off putting when you realise that the 18th Panzer Division has been sailing down a river at double speed for the last two moves! The other three maps do not suffer so badly, but it is a problem easily overcome if the roads had been black, brown or even red.

SOVIET HQ UNIT (Front only)



OPERATION STAR 1943.

Operation Star covers a Soviet offensive to retake Kharkov and send units south to cut off Army Group Don in the Ukraine. At the beginning of the

game the Germans are dotted everywhere with a massive tide of Russian units running towards them.

Since it is winter, all minor rivers are frozen. There is little to stop the Soviet advance — or is there?

The German player in this game has a number of devices to help him out. First, all the units of a panzer division need not be stacked for integrity so they can be spread thinly to hold the line. Second, defensive terrain is supplied by the Donets River (a major river) over half the map; the other half, especially around Kharkov, is heavily wooded. Thirdly, in the last three game turns the thaw sets in and all units move at half speed — this can aid the German player for the Soviet must get to the south-west side of the board to stand a good chance of winning. Perhaps the greatest advantage is the ability to disengage from Soviet zones of control at a cost of two movement points: this allows a moving defence line to be set up, dotting from defensive terrain to defensive terrain.

From the Russian point of view, the biggest change comes in the form of supply alterations. H.Q. units can be in one of two conditions, offensive or defensive. All start on the offensive, but can change to a defensive stance — once this is done they cannot revert to the offensive. Units tracing supply to an offensive mode H.Q. are at full strength, but must take step losses in combat. Also such units can only move west, south or south-west. Obviously the Soviet player must think ahead here, or units may be unable to assist in a combat, being too far forward. In the defensive mode a H.Q. can only supply half attack strength to units, they cannot move in the mechanised movement phase, nor can they overrun, but they can move in any direction. If command control is your speciality then I recommend this game as your personal headache!

Russian Guards units and corps size units have step losses which can be useful, but beware of the offensive mode rules. Because corps are so large, brigades are the only units able to stack with them; this can be very useful when step losses are required as a brigade unit in a stack provides a 'soak off' for the larger units.

The rules, however, make one big error. In the Victory Conditions the Soviet gets an automatic victory if he gets 30 strength points off map area A in the north west. This is a German reinforcement area, and surely to cut off Army Group Don, units must be sent south and south west. A glance at the map gives an area L in the south which is not mentioned in the rules. It is here that units should be sent, not to area A. Added to this, most of the towns containing victory points are in the south, and Von Manstein's daring armoured thrust came from the south, ready to cut off the Soviet over-extended front. Seen in this light, the game makes sense.

German Tactics.

Initially the German must retreat to defensive terrain, giving up half of the map. The armoured units, so desperately needed, trickle on from the south, but here they can be conserved and provide a constant thorn in the Soviet flank. By the middle to end game, units can be sent to the relief of Kharkov. By the same token, greater aggression in the south where the victory points lie means more Russian reinforcements are sent there, thus relieving pressure on Kharkov.

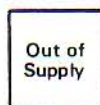
Soviet Tactics.

The Soviet player has an either/or problem; either he goes for an automatic victory by getting 30 in supply strength points off in area L, or he takes Kharkov and as many towns as possible.

If the automatic victory is chosen, the last four or five moves are vital for the mud slows things down. The biggest problem is trying to contain the German panzer thrust in the south.

The second option is often the hardest for not only must the panzers be contained but Kharkov must be cracked open in a heavily wooded area. The trick is to send a few units in defensive mode round the flanks to cut supply by occupying the railroads. Once the German units are out of supply, Kharkov will fall. Particularly if the second option is taken, two competent gamers can have great fun, for it is all so finely balanced.

Weather is handled in a simple but effective way and the Soviet H.Q. business gives the feeling of "drive" which we hear so much about in Soviet doctrine. Perhaps one of the best points of the game is that it is important to differentiate between units of different sizes such as brigades and corps, for each is styled to a particular function. This is not an idle game of "pushing around counters," the pieces of card you move have some meaning to them and care and attention must be given in any attack.



ROSTOV, 1941.

This game has a strategic feel to it; the map covers the entire Donets Basin with Kharkov in the north and Rostov in the south. If this does not convey anything to you, then consider that the map for SPI's *Kharkov* game could fit in the top left hand quarter of the *Rostov* map! The game covers the dash to take the communication centre of Rostov in late 1941. The push was stopped by Timoshenko's army in the south, with weather and supply problems helping out.

The Russian has no supply problems, the German does! He must trace supply through seven supply dumps to the western map edge. Each supply dump has a radius of six hexes and a branching tree system of supply soon builds up centred on the few roads. However, as the weather worsens, the supply radius is cut in half, which effectively strangles the German advance.

The weather can be one of three types, clear, moderate or severe. The game map is cut into a northern and southern weather sector, with severe conditions setting in in the north very quickly. Not only does weather affect supply, it interrupts movement by doubling terrain costs.

As if this wasn't bad enough for the German, the Soviet player has the disengagement ruling on his side. This is a great advantage for crumbling defensive lines can be reshaped. Actual disengagement is dependent upon a dice throw with plus and minus modifiers for such features as being faced by armour or only attacked through a river. However, the German cannot follow up; it is annoying to see infantry trip away whilst a panzer division sits cleaning its gun barrels. Without a doubt this could be expanded upon. Admittedly, step losses are often necessary but incongruent events often take place.

Air units are now included and this is where the German can find help. Air units can disrupt rail movement, etc., as in PGG, and they can also air supply units or even protect supply dumps from attack. By the same token, the Soviet air marker can only be used to raise combat odds or disrupt supply dumps — if the German player is careful, the latter is impossible.

If the picture for the German player looks gloomy, the Victory Conditions make it even worse. Points are awarded for the capture of towns and cities only, destroyed Soviet units are used as replacements for step losses or are put in the reserves pool for re-use. Without a doubt, this game is a tough nut to crack.

German Tactics.

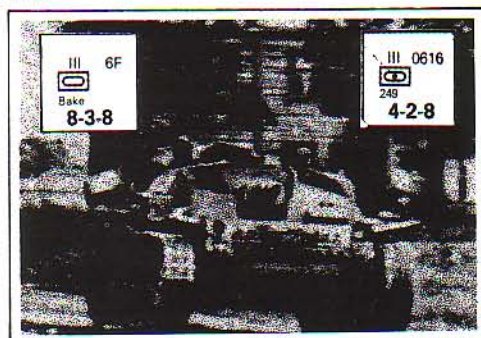
By the end of the game the German must take Kharkov, Stalino and Taganrog, plus having a few units on the far bank of the Donets, thus securing a Soviet tactical victory. I prefer to call this a draw. Weather is a serious problem, so most of the armour

should be sent south where the weather stays better for longer. Also, most of the supply dumps should be here in the south so as to help the over-extended line when the bad weather does arrive. A continuous front is needed to prevent Soviet attacks in the tender rear supply areas.

Soviet Tactics.

The disengagement rules can be used to good advantage for whilst the German tries to attack the equivalent of a slippery eel, a new defensive line can be built up on the Kalmius River, hinged on Stalino. In the north there are plenty of units to defend Kharkov in the heavily wooded terrain. Also, as the weather deteriorates, the German may leave tiny supply 'chinks' in his line — these should be exploited to the full.

Without a doubt this is an historical game, the German supply and the weather rules provide this. An optional weather table is given, but you can get severe weather on game turn two in the south. Obviously it is better to stick to history with this one. However, the Victory Conditions should be taken with a pinch of salt and modified as required; any player should be satisfied with a draw in this one.



KORSUN, 1944.

Next to Kiev this is my favourite in the quad for it deals with a pocket forming in reverse, the Germans are on the inside this time! At the beginning of the game the Germans have a tiny foothold across the Dnieper, with long flanks running south (see map). Hitler wanted the foothold for a future offensive, so when the Soviets attacked the flanks in force a pocket was bound to form.

To reflect Hitler's "hold" orders, the units in the front line are fairly restricted in their movements, thus the pocket will form. Added to this, some Soviet units are "supported" for the first two game turns; this ruling doubles attack strength so once again things look grim for the German.

Fortunately the German player is assisted by integrity, which allows mechanised units to unstack but double on defense. There is even integrity for infantry divisions if stacked in one hex — combat odds are reduced on being attacked. Overstacking is permissible for special units such as the Baeke Heavy Tank regiment and numerous Assault Gun (Sturmgeschutz) regiments.

Perhaps the biggest disadvantage for the German lies in the weather rules. Whilst half the game is spent in snow conditions, which allow normal movement, etc., the other half is spent in mud. As usual this means restrictions — half movement rate and no mechanised movement phase. Although this upsets the Russians as well, the German tank reinforcements come on in the mud and it's a slow haul to relieve that shrinking pocket.

Disengagement can be used by the German, but units cannot re-enter an enemy zone of control that turn. An alternative, called delay, is also available — one unit of a stack is left behind to allow the others to attack, or plug a gap, elsewhere. This latter is very useful and can often help in a desperate situation.

The air rules are quite interesting for the German player can use air markers to supply the pocketed units. However, on first doing so the German units are given "Heavy Equipment" markers — effectively digging in. These markers double defense strength but if a unit moves twice it loses this advantage and is termed out of supply permanently, nor can it attack. Air units can also be used for combat odds changes.

The Soviet player is no longer troubled by untried unit status, all units are of a proven, standardised strength, and Corps units have four step losses. H.Q. units are either active or inactive, and in any game turn only a few H.Q.'s can be active. Being inactive means that units tracing supply to such an HQ cannot attack, only defend. Active status naturally allows attacks. Since some H.Q.'s have a supply radius of six hexes there is no real problem except for the middle game when only one H.Q. can be active — a problem just when the German reinforcements arrive!

German Tactics.

On setting up, units should be stacked within one hex of the start line. By a careful bit of juggling everything can get integrity bonuses. For the first few turns step losses should be taken rather than ground lost, it can be an advantage later on. Perhaps one of the biggest temptations is to send mechanised units into the bulge to relieve pressure; this is fatal for once inside they are stuck and moving them in a Heavy Equipment status will burn them up very quickly. Armour, assault guns, etc., should be kept in reserve to crack open the pocket as soon as it forms, pulling the Soviets off balance at a delicate time. Naturally withdrawing, delaying and disengaging to make use of terrain goes without saying.

Soviet Tactics.

By careful concentration of tank corps a pocket will form; there is no need to spread units along the line, for the German can hardly move anyway. Both the players have three air counters; however, the German must use one for supply in the pocket — he is a fool if he does not. So, during the mud turns when air power is used, judicious use of the third Soviet air unit is needed to get a good combat results shift. To prevent the Germans relieving the pocket, use should be made of the Gniloy Tikich, a major river, to hold the German up.

The game does favour the Soviets slightly but such rules as delay, integrity and supply to pocketed units help the German a great deal. To get a draw the German cannot sit in a defensive posture all the time, he must show his teeth occasionally so as to obtain a few victory points for Soviet step losses. Meanwhile, the Soviet has the problem of H.Q. status and whether to reduce the pocket or stop the reinforcements getting through — all very tricky.

At the beginning of this review I posed the question of whether the game system was worn out or not. Without a doubt it is not. Each game has its own subtleties; Kiev with a modified overrun system, *Operation Star* with Offensive/Defensive modes for Soviet H.Q.'s, *Rostov* with a good system for Soviet disengagement and German supply, *Korsun* with integrity for infantry divisions, no Soviet untried units and a superb air supply situation. Weather is dealt with in a simple way in the games, often providing the make or break of the scenario.

What I would like to see is a bigger game using some of the better points of this quad. As an example, why not have active/inactive status with offensive/defensive modes for Soviet H.Q.'s? The disengagement idea could be expanded on from *Rostov* and greatly improved as could the air rules in general. This quad has certainly churned up some new ideas, let's hope they can be improved upon, the result would be well worth it.

