

Panzergruppe Guderian:

THE BATTLE OF SMOLENSK, JULY 1941

by Graham Wheatley

In this article I shall give a rundown of the Soviet and German forces and the tactics they can employ. I had better make it clear now that this is the subscription game as received in 'Strategy and Tactics' and may not cover all the rules in the published game; this is the basic scenario. 'Panzergruppe Guderian' is an operational level game of the Battle of Smolensk, July 1941. The units are division-sized, except for the German mechanised units, which are regiments. Nobody knows the strength of the Soviet units until they are committed to combat. The combat results table uses the familiar ratio system with losses in step depletions (four steps for the German infantry, two for regiments and cavalry divisions and one step for all Soviet units). The Soviets are much at the mercy of the leaders, who maintain the combat strengths and movement allowances of units within their leadership radius. Leaders also give a combat strength boost (in attack) to units stacked with them. The scale is 10.5 km per hex and two days per game turn; the 22 x 32½ inch, three colour, mapsheet is a pleasure to behold. Also, the mapsheet is covered in 16mm hexes not, as in some SPI games, by charts, combat results tables and the like.

German Force Evaluation

Your army should be centred on your nine Panzer divisions. Each of these comprises a Panzer and two Panzer Grenadier regiments (using the German Divisional Integration rule it can double its combat strength). To support these, there are 6 motorised infantry divisions (2, or in the case of the SS Das Reich division, 3 regiments) and a couple of independent panzer grenadier regiments. The 18 powerful infantry divisions are also yours, together with a useful Air Interdiction capability. It is not really the quality or numbers of units that you are worried about, it is the time limit.

Soviet Force Evaluation

One major problem you have is that you don't know the strengths of your units. An advantage of this is that the enemy doesn't either; the only way to find out is to attack with them or force the Germans to attack you. Both methods are slow and painful. An average division of infantry

has, approximately, between 2 and 5 attack strength points and 4 to 5 points in defence, with some 0-0-6's and 0-1-6's thrown in for good luck. To be fair you may turn over a 6-8-6 or maybe even an 8-8-6; on occasions a 9-8-6 has also been seen. You know (or should know) that none of your divisions, even those mentioned above, can match the 9-7 of the German infantry but don't let that worry you too much; the enemy doesn't get victory points for destroyed units and reinforce-



ments should — it depends much on the activity of the German Air Interdiction — keep pouring in.

German Activity

On the first two game-turns the 39th and 57th Panzer Corps should be used to decimate the Soviet 20th army. This shouldn't be difficult but for God's sake do not risk anything: one unit loss to a division and it will lose its integrity bonus. When the 24th, 46th and 47th Panzer Corps and the second corps of infantry enter the scene, an advance should be made to hold the woods north-east of Mogilev. After a couple more infantry corps have arrived a pincer

movement should be attempted against enemy divisions between the Dnepr and Sozh rivers, crossing the Sozh river with strong mechanised units between the towns of Mstislavl (hex 1524) and Krichev (hex 1427), then swooping down on the enemy from behind. A general assault with all available infantry divisions should have been carried out to keep the Soviets occupied so that they have no time to redeploy: with a bit of luck great slaughter will be inflicted (if the Soviets have neglected to place a garrison at Roslavl (hex 2526) send a few mechanised regiments to capture it and other eastern objectives.

For the Northern drive you should not devote too many divisions, giving most of the reinforcements and perhaps a depleted Panzer division (for capturing victory point hexes). A front line at about hexrow 1200 would be in order, or perhaps somewhere more easterly than this, so as to be within Panzer striking distance of Smolensk.

Soviet Activity

Initially the 13th army, the reserve and anybody else you can lay your hands on should be formed into a defensive line from around hex 11 or 1218 to 1521. Hex 1521 is the best place to put the flank, as it is bordered on three sides by a river. A few divisions between the line and Roslavl would be in order to keep a line of hexes in zones of control, a necessary part so as to prevent a successful flank attack. The 21st army should be based at Roslavl, together with strong mechanised forces so as to provide a mobile reserve should a strong German attack develop. As soon as a mobile attack does develop, with a flanking movement as described above, the line should be withdrawn as far as possible to a line around hexrows 1800 or 1900. If heavy losses are then received, slowly fall back towards Smolensk. Remember — your losses do not lose you victory points.

On the northern front the 13th army should be withdrawn to the south of the W. Prina river and to Vitebsk (hex 0412). The 16th, 19th and 24th armies should reinforce it together with the 22nd, when it comes. It is obvious that the Vitebsk area cannot be held for long and it is inconvenient, as there are little other natural defences between there and Smolensk. When things start getting desperate (and they will) retreat to hexrow 1600, where you have a subsidiary of the Kasplya river to protect you from some of the German's divisions. Never miss an opportunity to damage an already depleted unit or to destroy one: you get 5 victory points for every complete German division destroyed (except their weak cavalry division). But remember, trade land and units for time; use your Air Interdiction, weak as it may be, to its greatest (or perhaps only) effect — to delay German reinforcements, or in any way gain time, as time is the most important thing in this highly playable game of the Russian war.