

## **Storming the Tartar Ditch. Perekop. 26 September 1941**

*(A scenario from Operation Barbarossa's Southern Front by Barry Hilton)*

On a recent visit to Stratagem Publications Mission Control Centre in Newark, the Editor of this mag and I had a conversation about which articles work best in a wargames magazine. Do people want to read about history or, historical wargame scenarios or, 'what if' wargame scenarios fought against a historical background with appropriate miniature forces? Needless to say, the conclusion we arrived at I cannot recall, perhaps in no small measure (no pun intended) due to the highly professional bar-maiding ministrations of the delightful Sophie at the Old Trout or some such hostelry. The upshot was a commitment from me, to contribute samples of both historical based game scenarios and historically set hypothetical game scenarios for inclusion in this respected publication. Are you still with this?

We had been photographing my 28mm WW2 Eastern Front kit in several games representing 1941 (Barbarossa), 1942 (Stalingrad) and 1944 (Bagration) phases of the conflict. I thought it appropriate to provide a scenario to match each phase of the photo shoot.

So, first out of the box is 'Storming the Tartar Ditch' Perekop 24-27<sup>th</sup> September 1941.

This scenario was inspired by a print in Osprey Campaign Title 129; *Operation Barbarossa 1941(1) Army Group South*. The picture seems to combine all of the aggression of the Wehrmacht's 1941 'can do' spirit, with elements of medieval siege warfare. The attack's ultimate success appears to owe more to human guts and determination than to war machines and technology.

The painting shows a section of German infantry crouched in the shadow of a huge earthwork rampart which itself is being bombed, shelled and flamed. These soldiers are 'tooling up' with potato mashers, improvised bangalore torpedoes, satchel charges and small arms. They are preparing themselves for a hand to hand assault on the dug in Soviet infantry at the top of the 20m metre plus earth wall to their front. This wall (the Tartar Ditch of the title) will be conquered with scaling ladders! Daunting stuff which really happened, making the whole thing all the more impressive.

### **Very brief potted history**

For those of you who have not seen the Osprey title previously mentioned let me provide the briefest of summaries to put the scenario in context. With Barbarossa well underway, the 11<sup>th</sup> Army of Army Group South thus far had experienced rather a frustrating campaign. Without any motorised formations in its OoB progress was slow. It had made a tiring march through the open Russian terrain after crossing the Dnepr, protecting the flank of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army and keeping the Rumanians out of trouble. When on 9<sup>th</sup> September Field Marshal von Rundstedt ordered that the Crimea be taken, the job was given to von Schober's 11<sup>th</sup> Army. Three days later this popular commander was killed when his plane crashed into a Russian minefield. His replacement was von Manstein. On the day of von Schober's death the recon battalion of LSSAH had made a dash for the isthmus at Perekop (gateway to the Crimea) but found it to be far more heavily protected than anticipated. Over the next few days the Germans assembled in force to assault the deep Russian positions around Perekop. Between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> September the 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were very heavily engaged in this area and ultimately had to confront the formidable 'Tartar Ditch'. They broke through on the 26<sup>th</sup> and spent a further two days fighting through the extensive defences beyond.

## Game set up

Unusually for us we played this game in 28mm on a very small table. It can be completed in three hours or considerably less if you are really bad or unlucky. It does not deal with the entire 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division assault on the fortifications but only on a 1200 metre long section of the earthwork. The board is 24 inches wide by 48 inches deep, so forget the Guderian style flank pincer movements and Fallschirmjaeger operations. This is an infantry job. The story is rather straightforward and ugly. A German infantry battalion supported by a SturmPioneer Company has to undertake a frontal assault on a targeted sector of the Tartar Ditch. Once through the breastworks the assault teams must neutralise all strongpoints and if possible, capture the sector command post. This will ensure total victory under the scenario conditions. The unlucky Fritzes do get a little help. This sector has been targeted for the last 24 hours by Divisional artillery and the Luftwaffe. Consequently, the defenders are considerably written down or so Divisional intelligence informs you (never a Wehrmacht strength). For the forthcoming assault you will have artillery support from one 105mm battery, your own battalion mortars and weather and fighter cover permitting, two air support missions from the Luftwaffe. Division have also promised a Sturmgeschutz battery but their response was equivocal with regard to your demand that these be present at zero hour. Refer to Map 1 for initial deployment.

## Terrain

Accounts of the terrain at the Tartar Ditch are quiet specific. It was open, with minimal ground undulation and almost devoid of any vegetation or natural cover. In other words a total nightmare for the attacker. We used customised TTS terrain tiles for this game with the ditch being cut down almost the full depth of a 2 inch thick tile and then textured with plaster and rough sand mixture. The area behind the Tartar Ditch was completely open except for three Bunkers as shown on the map. We use Snapdragon pieces to represent these. With regard to the earth rampart again we use Snapdragon pieces with appropriate 'integral' bunkers built in at the necessary points on each side.

## Orders of Battle

### German

(GHQ MicroArmour rules Cohesion Number: 16)

Infantry Battalion of the 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 11<sup>th</sup> Army, Army Group South

1 x Battalion HQ Platoon

3 x Companies each of 3 x Rifle platoons, 1 x Support/Heavy weapons platoon

1 x Heavy Company of 1 x Support/HMG platoon, 1 x 81mm mortar platoon (off table)

1 x Sturm Pioneer Company of 4 x Pioneer platoons

1 x 105mm Howitzer Battery (off table)

### Reinforcements

1 x Sturmgeschutz battery of 2 x StuGB platoons

## **Soviet**

(GHQ MicroArmour rules Cohesion Number: 12)

Infantry elements (thought to be of the 156<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, Southern Front)

1 x Regimental HQ platoon

7 x Rifle platoons, 4 x Support/HMG platoons, 2 x 82mm mortar platoons

## **Reinforcements**

1 x Sub Machinegun Company of 3 x SMG platoons

## **Rules**

Alas I am a creature of habit and so the rules used for our game were the GHQ MicroArmour WW2 set adapted in some small measure to accommodate a 28mm game. I noted some details in a previous article about the League of Augsburg's 1944 Campaign featured in WI issues 197 and 198. From my limited knowledge of Rapid Fire, these would also serve the purpose well. Under those rules I suggest you make the Germans 'Elite' and the Soviets 'Regular' It is a battalion size action and the basic movement element is a platoon so please, choose your own poison.

## **Figure Basing**

Our figures are multi based on 50mm diameter, round, platoon stands. Three figures on each base. Heavy weapons platoons have a two figure machine gun team. Command bases two to four figures including a radio man. I scratch built some improvised 'bangalore' charges as shown in the Osprey painting. These were made by attaching a suitably shaped charge holder to a long pole of piano wire. An open handed German figure was used to carry it.

## **Initial Deployment**

The initial deployments for this scenario are prescriptive for a very particular reason. As the table is so small for a 28mm game, the ranges of fire and movement are critical. We have doubled the movement and fire ranges for 1/285<sup>th</sup> to 1/48<sup>th</sup> as opposed to quintupling them for reasons stated in a previous article. This makes platoon rifle fire 10" maximum range and Machine guns 20". Infantry movement is 6" in clear terrain. The initial set up for this game puts the massed German battalion within Soviet machine gun range but largely out of rifle range. It also means that the leading German infantry platoons are approximately 10 moves from the Soviet table edge (including the two moves it would take to negotiate the Tartar Ditch). As the game is 12 turns duration, the Germans have a very tight (but possible) time window for total success. As you will see when you get to the section of the article dealing with our 'refight' this is a very close game indeed.

## **Commander Ability**

We determined this by chance. The main significance in the GHQ rules is the number of orders which a commander can give in any turn. Number of orders is determined by rolling 2xd6 and referring to a chart. A poor commander subtracts 1 from his dice score, average has no modifier and good adds 1. Our German commander was 'Good' and the Soviet 'Average' during the first game. In the second the German was 'Good' and the Soviet 'Poor'.

## Objectives and Victory Conditions

This game is played length ways. The German objective is to get over the Tartar Ditch in strength, breach the rampart and knock out all of the bunkers in the Soviet controlled area. If the Germans get over the Ditch and through the rampart in company strength (4 intact platoons) the result is a draw. If they are able to capture between 1-4 bunkers in addition, the result is a partial victory. If they capture all 5 including the HQ bunker they have a total victory. Inflicting 50% more casualties (point values not figures) than your opponent pushes the result up/or down one level of victory. For example, if the Germans got through the Ditch with two intact companies, captured all the bunkers but took 50% more losses than the Soviets then the result would be a partial not total, victory.

## Special rules

### Artillery Support - German

German artillery and mortars are off table for the entire game. Under the GHQ MicroArmour rules indirect artillery is plotted two turns in advance for German forces. This means if you lay down a plot on Turn 1 it is not due to arrive until Turn 3. Plots are manually estimated from the bottom left hand corner of the table as you see it from your direction. For example, 12" horizontal 37" vertical (N). This meaning measure from the bottom left of the table 12" in and 37" up. The (N) signifies for a multi impact battery (105's have 3 impacts) the shots will fall in a line 12" in and 37", 39" and 41" up. The burst diameter is 2" hence the intervals of two inches between fall of shot. Having explained this mechanism, this scenario has added artillery constraints. The Germans must plot for artillery salvos for Turns 1, 2 and 3 before the game begins. They plot for turn 4 during the 'Plot' phase of Turn 2. The reason for this is to simulate artillery preparation which on a position such as the Tartar Ditch would probably not be switched until FOOs managed to get closer to inspect the effect.

The German player has the choice of nominating any one of his Battalion platoons as an FOO (this need only be written down for fairness but not communicated to the Soviet player) or use a separate FOO model. The important thing is that the 105's and mortars cannot deliberately plot to hit targets beyond their line of sight. In other words nothing behind the earth rampart can be targeted until the FOO base is actually through a breach in the defences. If Artillery deviation mechanisms send the barrage behind the rampart then this is permitted. Of course Soviet defenders immediately behind the rampart can be targeted if they are visible to the attacking Germans.

### Artillery Support – Soviet.

This is limited to two platoons of 82mm mortars in fixed positions near the command bunker. They can target anywhere on the board and within range. They are assumed to have communication links with the FOOs placed in various points along the earthen rampart, most probably in the two bunkers. They can switch to direct fire if and when German troops breach the rampart. Under the GHQ MicroArmour rules indirect artillery is plotted three turns in advance for Soviet forces. In this scenario the Soviet player plots for his artillery support for Turns 2, 3 and 4 before the game begins. On Turn 2 the Soviet player plots for Turn 5 during the 'Plot' phase. There is not Soviet artillery allowed on Turn 1.

### Air Support

The German Player has the opportunity to call in two air strikes during the game. These cannot arrive in the same turn as each other. The procedure is simple. At the beginning of the turn in which he wishes the Stukas to appear he declares. He then needs to roll a 5 or 6 on a d6 to get the strike to arrive. If he fails, he tries again next turn on a 4, 5 or 6 if he fails again the 'strike' has been recalled. When the planes arrive they do so from the German table edge and move at the speed specified in your chosen rule set. All mechanics for bombing should be as per your rules. Planes can be over the table for no more than two moves.

## **The Tartar Ditch**

The Ditch was a formidable obstacle. At the time of the attack it was 150 feet wide and 60 feet deep, perhaps altered by Soviet engineers in preparation for such a day as September 26<sup>th</sup> 1941. On the Soviet bank it was surmounted by earthen ramparts. We had to create some special rules to deal with this significant impediment to any attack.

### **Entering the Ditch**

It takes one full move to descend the German bank of the ditch. Platoons attempting to do so can do nothing else that turn. If any `element' moving up to the ditch has a remainder of its movement allowance it cannot enter the ditch and `loses' the movement balance that turn, however large.

### **Moving in the Ditch**

Movement takes place as normal once troops are on the floor of the ditch. The ditch is impassable to all vehicles. German Players note! you will not get your armour support over the ditch and nothing is visible beyond the earth rampart to German troops remaining on their side of the ditch.

### **Leaving the Ditch**

It takes one full move to leave the ditch on either bank. A figure element is simply placed at the top of the far bank and is considered to have done nothing else that turn.

### **Visibility in and out of the Ditch**

Once in the ditch, troops can only be the target of enemy forces with a direct line of sight to the bottom of the ditch. This happens only at certain points where Soviet positions have a `line' down one of the ditch channels. Troops in the ditch are of course subject to indirect artillery fire which lands on them. Troops in the ditch may only shoot out at troops to which they themselves have a direct line of sight.

### **Ladders**

One platoon in every company is allocated to carry ladders. If they are the first to the ditch from their company and enter first, then other platoons can follow using the ladders. A unit using ladders is not disordered when it reaches the bottom of the ditch. A unit entering or leaving the ditch without the use of ladders must take an extra morale/cohesion test. Failure of this test means they are disordered/suppressed when their move in or out is completed. If the ladder carrying platoon is eliminated before the ditch is reached then their ladders are lost. If another company's ladders are available these can be used only if the `owning' company has no platoons requiring the use of them. Extremely proprietorial these company commanders! We used two sets of ladders per company. One set for climbing down the German bank and one for climbing up the Soviet bank. The ladders were simple to make using long shafted safety matches.

### **Earth Rampart & Bunkers**

This earth rampart is a line of sight obstacle. It counts as `medium cover', under GHQ MicroArmour rules – a medium improved position. This is applicable for small arms fire if the target is behind it but not for artillery fire of any sort. The rampart is not crossable for infantry except through a `breach' (see below). Bunkers are treated as medium improved positions for any kind of fire. There are two on the rampart and three (including the Soviet HQ) behind the rampart.

### **Breaching the earth ramparts.**

All platoons can attempt to do this but it will of course be easier for the Pioneers. Once at the base of the earth rampart a German platoon can 'effect entry' by using explosives. During the movement phase of your rule set, the platoon declares 'breach'. They must pass their cohesion or movement test first. Then if Engineers, they roll 1Xd6. A score of 4, 5 or 6 is successful. If an ordinary rifle or heavy weapons platoon they undertake the same process but must score a 6 on a d6 to blow a breach. There is no limit to the number of attempts. When attempting these actions they cannot move or fire but are treated as a moving target if fired upon. They will respond to a close assault and this means (if they survive) they have to try and breach again on the next turn.

### **Movement Restrictions**

The rules we use encourage movement in groups of elements (platoons). This is managed by restricting the number of available orders in any given turn. We added the following restrictions for this scenario; The German player should try as far as possible to keep his companies moving forward in their original groups. For example if a four platoon company loses a straggler platoon because it fired, came under attack or had a morale deterioration, then this 'straggler' platoon should not be allowed to join a movement group from another company. It should become a smaller independent movement group and attempt to rejoin its parent company. Heavy weapons are an exception to this.

### **Arrival of Reinforcements**

Determine which turn the German reinforcements arrive by rolling 1xd6. These assault guns enter immediately behind the starting line for the attacking German battalion. The Soviet reinforcements arrival is determined by rolling 1xd10 but not before Turn 6. Therefore any score of less than 6 is treated as 6. They arrive at point A to the left rear of the command bunker.

### **Our Re fights**

We have played this game twice. The first attempt was a very close result. The German battalion moved off en masse leaving its machine gun platoons to suppress the flanking fire from the Soviets. The axis of the German attack was straight through Bunker 2, completely bypassing the positions to their left. Using their 105's and Stukas they more or less cleared the rampart directly to their front with minimal loss to themselves. By end of T4 the Pioneers and some Landsers were up the far side of the ditch and coming under fire from either flank but not their front. T5 saw two breaches blown and then the fun really started. As they poured through the gaps Soviet crossfire wiped out all but one Pioneer platoon and suppressed the accompanying infantry. Now under direct mortar fire and without any of their own heavy weapons support, the Germans inched forward introducing reinforcements as and when movement allowed. Misdirected fire from their own artillery caused more casualties. By T7 they had a company through the breaches. By T10 they had stormed Bunker 3 and totally cleared the main rampart wall by hand but all the pioneers were incapacitated. On this move, the Soviet reinforcements arrived but despite charging headlong toward the attack were able to make little impression. Russian fire was channelling the German advance toward the left. By the close of T12 the Germans had tried but failed to take Bunker 4 and reached but not assaulted the HQ Bunker 5. They had about the equivalent of two intact companies through the breaches and their heavy weapons were just arriving. The number of casualties caused meant that the result was in fact a draw and not a partial German victory. And what of the Assault Guns? They arrived on T6 and spent the rest of the battle banging away at the surviving Soviets on the left flank but to very little purpose. Phew!

Second attempt....

This time it went rather worse for the Germans. They started with a plan (which was good) but this rapidly dissolved under the weight of Soviet fire, misdirected friendly fire and the Luftwaffe failing to turn up for one attack and missing their target on the other. The Sturm Pioneers headed for a different point on the rampart managing to breach the extreme left of the Soviet position on T6. They had more than a company through the breach by T9 but these were almost wiped out in a counter attack by the (this time) far more aggressive Soviet sub-machine gun company. By T12 the Germans remnants were being forced back through their entry point with the equivalent of around 250 killed and wounded as opposed to less than 70 Soviet casualties. This was of course a total victory for the Russians.

Aah well, the life of a Landser on the Ostfront. To paraphrase that old Landsknecht motto ***'Immer in der scheisse, nur die tiefe aendert sich!'***

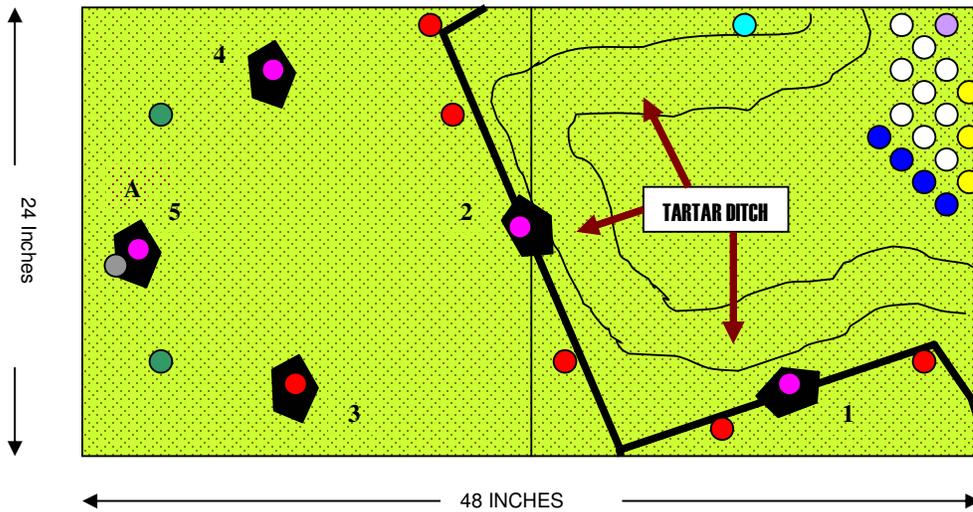
#### **References**

Osprey Campaign Title 129; *Operation Barbarossa 1941(1) Army Group South.*

GHQ MicroArmour Rules

[www.feldgrau.com](http://www.feldgrau.com) (website dedicated to German Army campaigns of WW2)

MAP 1



Key					
	Soviet Rifle Platoon		German SturmPioneer Platoon		German Bn HQ
	Soviet HMG Platoon		German Infantry Platoon		
	Soviet Mortar Platoon		German Support/MG Platoon		
	Soviet HQ platoon		Battalion HMG Platoon		
	Bunker		Earth rampart		