

Offensive Behaviour

Another scenario from the League of Augsburg's 1944 Campaign – *The Sands of Time*

By Barry Hilton

Feedback about the first couple of articles covering aspects of our Ost Front campaign encouraged me to offer some further ideas. The previous instalments dealt with an increasingly perilous defensive situation for a small and isolated German command attempting to resist the Red tidal wave. This article features a quite different kind of action.

The offensive capability of the German Army on the Ost Front was rather limited by the early summer of 1944. Despite this fact our campaign did produce a few instances of German battlefield aggression. This article features a scenario in which Umpire controlled (in the map movement sense) German elements attempt to recapture the spirit of 1941 it has to be said in our case, with limited success. By referring to campaign situation MAP 1 the action can be placed geographically and also chronologically.

This scenario took place on the 29th June (campaign day 2). It involved units of the 57th Infantry Division who on the 28th were defending positions on the west bank of the Berezghina River. Of course the actions are fictitious but in keeping with the intense fighting which occurred all over this area during **Operation Bagration**. With regard to the orbats these are also hypothetical and set within the context of the campaign. They take into account losses assumed before Day 1 and those sustained within the two days of the campaign thus far.

Background

During the opening two days of this campaign the remains of the German 57th Infantry Division featured prominently. Their sector was four kilometres west of the Berezghina River and north of the highway. Its frontline strength was down to two weak composite battalions and a few supporting assault guns and artillery batteries. The German collapse had seen it involved in hard and continuous fighting.

During the afternoon of the 28th, the 1st Battalion was forced back by two Soviet Divisions attacking across a ten-kilometre front. At 1900, a further attack by the 25th Guards Tank Brigade burst through the 57th Infantry Division's positions but did not dislodge it.

The 57th quickly regrouped and by 0600 on the 29th had counter attacked, ejecting the 3rd Regiment of the Soviet 338th Rifle Division from the German positions they captured the previous afternoon. The Soviet survivors fell back on their own Divisional HQ positions west of the Berezghina near the village of Karapol.

A plan was developed. The 57th Division would continue to push northeast towards the river. The 25th Panzer Grenadier Division (600 men without transport) would attack simultaneously from the north west toward the steelworks a kilometre north of Karapol. Further support would come from an independent panzer company along with assorted sturmtruppen. The 57th were without artillery support and there had been no time for reconnaissance.

Their start line lay in woods through which ran the road toward a vital ferry point on the west bank of the river. It was believed the enemy were using this to bring troops from the east bank. Between the river and the 57th lay the village of Karapol. Three kilometres north, the 25 PzG Gruppe would attack from some open ground to the west of the steel plant.

The Soviet defences were formed in a series of arcs spreading out from the river with the innermost on a plateau and the outermost, running from Karapol through the ruined steel plant. The right flank was anchored on the ridge of Hill 103. The 25 PzG axis of attack was against this strongly held sector with contained infantry entrenched in woodland supported by AT and a few SU122 assault guns.

Objectives

The German's main objective is to push the enemy back into the Berezhina. This will involve capturing Hill 103, the Soyuz steel plant, Karapol and reaching the ferry point on the west bank in the southern sector and the artillery positions on Atot Stol in the northern. A tall order indeed. Degrees of success will produce levels of victory. The Soviets simply need to hold on and will during the course of the game, receive reinforcements. Game Length is 16 turns with 13-15 during dusk and 16 as a night turn. Visibility is 40 inches during day, 10 inches at dusk and 1 inch at night. Double these distances for 20/28mm games.

Set Up and Arrivals

The two main German units; 57th ID and 25 PzG can deploy in the areas shown in any formation the player wishes. Schussler's panzers begin the game located behind Hill 43.

The Soviet set up is more prescriptive. They are deployed in three 'lines' as shown on Map 2. The colour coding of the circles describes what each represents. These are all from the 2/338th and the mechanised artillery. The four remaining platoons from the 3/338th are deployed near the Ferry point. All the 76mm guns are deployed on the plateau and three of these are entrenched in medium positions. The two 120mm mortars on Hill 103 are in light improved positions. In addition to these compulsory prepared positions the Soviet player is allowed to dig in a further ten platoons in light improved positions and five in medium improved positions.

The reinforcements from 1/338th arrive at point A on Turn 6.

The Table

This game was originally played in 1/285th scale on a four feet by four feet table. The Berezhina was fully represented in this set up although it plays no part in the game. If you want to up scale to 20mm/28mm I suggest an eight foot by six foot table with the Berezhina omitted. The Ferry point can be represented by the table edge. Atot Stol is higher than all other ground except Hill 301, therefore the Divisional artillery can be seen by the Germans and should be within range of their heavy mortars.

Terrain Effects

Woods are dense and so should impede visibility and movement (for vehicles) as per your chosen rules. All hill slopes are steep and should also impede movement. The steel works are ruined and count as hard cover. Karapol is a peasant village and is soft cover. The Zcheris River is fordable on rolling a 5 or 6 on a D6. The gully is impassable to vehicles except by the bridge. Infantry take half move to enter and half move to exit the gully. All roads are dirt tracks.

Winning

If the Soviets hold their first line (Gully – Soyuz -Hill 103) they have a total victory. If they hold their second line (Hill 301 – Karapol – Point A) they have a draw. If they hold the third line (Ferry – Atot Stol) it's a losing draw. Anything else of course means they are in the Berezhina and have lost. The Germans can claim total victory for this, partial victory if they take Karapol and the Soyuz plant and Hill 103. Anything else is a defeat. I did not in this game consider the possibility of a Soviet counterattack, this came the next day and that is yet another game!

Commanders

General Pottlitz of the 57th Infantry Division was designated as a 'plodder' during our campaign so has a minus one influence on 'orders'. Oberst Koenig of the 25th PzG is inspired and adds a plus one on orders. The Germans are allowed a separate throw for the number of orders for each main unit; 57th ID and 25th PzG. The Soviet commander of the 338th Rifle Division is also a 'plodder'. Soviets dice for orders, subtract one for the score and double the resultant number of orders available. The reasons for this is to cope with the larger number of elements in the game.

Orders of Battle

If using the GHQ rules class the overall German Cohesion as 12 (to determine initiative) but use a Cohesion value of 15 for the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division when attempting to pass Cohesion tests as these are elite. Cohesion value for the Soviets is 11 (the 338th Division is a written down formation). The SU122s have a Cohesion of 12 for their own tests. If you use *Rapid Fire* class the Germans as regular and the 25 PzG as Elite. The Soviets are all regular.

German Order of Battle (Elements of the 4th Army)

2nd Composite Battalion 57th Infantry Division (and Divisional HQ –General Pottlitz)

1 x Battalion HQ platoon 1 x Divisional HQ platoon
1 x Sdkfz10 Flak 20mm platoon 9 x Infantry platoons
2 x Support platoons 1 x 81mm mortar platoon
1 x 120mm mort. platoon. 1 x Stug IIIg platoon
2 x Sdkfz 231 platoons

1st Composite Battalion 57th Infantry Division

6 x Infantry platoons 1 x Support platoon
1 x PAK 38 AT gun platoon 1 x Battalion HQ

Panzer Gruppe Schussler

4 x Panzer IIIj platoons (incl HQ)

Composite Battalion 25th Panzer Grenadier Division (Oberst Koenig)

8 x Panzer Grenadier platoons 1 x PAK40 AT gun platoon.
3 x Support Platoons 1 x 120mm Mortar platoon.
1 x Sdkfz252/9 Platoon 1 x Battalion HQ platoon
1 x Divisional HQ 25th PzG Division

(Attached to 25 PzG Division) Composite Sturm Company 1

1 x Sturm Pioneer platoon 1 x Sdkfz 251/1 platoon
1 x JagdPanzer IV platoon 1 x Sdkfz 251/1 HQ platoon

Soviet Order of Battle

338th Rifle Division 45th Rifle Corps (General Valkin)

1 x Divisional HQ platoon

2nd Rifle Regt

1 x Regimental HQ platoon
2 x Battalion HQ platoons 12 x Rifle Platoons
3 x Support Platoons 2 x 82mm mortar platoons
2 x 45mm ATG platoons 2 x 120mm mortar platoons
3 x 76mm Howitzer Batteries

3rd Rifle Regt

3 x Rifle Platoons 1 x 82mm mortar platoon

Divisional Support Special Mechanised Artillery Battalion

3 x SU122 platoons (Including command)

REINFORCEMENTS

1st Rifle Regt 338th Rifle Division 45th Rifle Corps

1 x Regimental HQ platoon
10 x Rifle Platoons 2 x Support Platoons
2 x 82mm mortar platoons 1 x 45mm ATG platoon (and truck)
1 x 76mm Howitzer Battery

Our Game

Vorwärts zum Beresina! 25th Panzer Grenadier & 57th Divisions at Karapol 29th June 1944.

It took the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division till nightfall to over run the first line. Losses were heavy and confusion during the attack was considerable, chiefly due to an intense and continuous artillery barrage. The attack halted several times until the sole platoon of tank destroyers fought their way up Hill 103 storming all of the mortar pits pinning down the Grenadiers. This allowed enfilade fire into the Soviet line from above. As night fell, SturmPioneers forced the position. This costly attack was hardly a success. During the battle the Soviet second line was reinforced from the north by another Rifle Regiment. The Germans were disorganised, exhausted and in no state to push forward. If the Soviet commander had put more than a token number of heavy machine guns in the ruins of the factory, the Grenadiers would have been cut down in an even deadlier crossfire.

To the south, the 57th Infantry Division's advance crawled. Their under gunned tanks got bogged down amidst enemy trenches west of Karapol. A breakthrough on the extreme right by a handful of assault guns and recce vehicles was stopped. The survivors of the 3/ 338th charged and knocked out all of them. Finally as darkness fell, the Panzer IIIs broke into Karapol but did not have the firepower to dislodge the SU122s dug in hull down and supported by entrenched riflemen. Despite numerous attempts, the Germans were unable to get infantry into the village to assist their tanks before night.

Artillery saved the Russians. Despite suffered badly from mortar fire, they kept a continuous and intensive barrage thudding into the advance. This prevented Karapol being taken. Isolated groups of Soviet riflemen held on in trenches west of Karapol. The German's failed to take these even after launching company level assaults supported by tanks. The drive for the Berezghina was a vain glorious adventure but definitely in the spirit of '41.