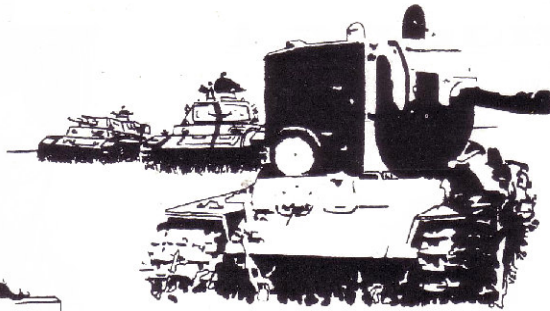


PANZERBLITZ, 1941

by Ramiro Cruz



The first year of German operations in Russia in the Second World War was characterized by enormous Soviet losses in territory and men. Most of European Russia was overrun, millions of Soviet soldiers captured and many millions more sentenced to death by starvation or mistreatment in German prison camps or under German occupation of their homeland. And yet, most of this human suffering could have been avoided by the Russians. They had the resources needed to stop or, at least, to contain the German drive. Soviet military equipment was equal to or better than the Germans' and they had numerical superiority, too. Only in individual ability was the Wehrmacht superior to the Red Army. From Feldmarschall to Landsers, the German soldier was usually more capable than his Soviet counterpart. Although part of the problem was originated by the lower educational level of the Russian soldier, a large part of it was due to a unique feature of Soviet military policy in the thirties: the political purges in the Army. By ordering the elimination of all potentially unreliable Army Officers, Stalin eliminated most of the competent officers he had and opened the way for the German invaders. Had he not done so, the invaders could have been stopped. The defense of Leningrad and of Moscow, the battle of Yelnya and the winter offensives of 1941-42 show what the Russian Army could do under competent leadership.

So? No matter what we say or do, History cannot be changed. But, at least, we can simulate what could have happened in the battlefield had the Russians been better led. We can use *PANZERBLITZ* as a basis and add a few counters to represent the weapons of the period.

Let's start from the top in the left side of the Unit Identification Table: Russian towed guns. The machinegun and the anti-tank guns are all right, except for the 57mm gun. This piece did not appear in the field until 1944. To the howitzers we should add the 152mm piece. This gun should be included in Soviet attacks as part of the stiffeners usually given to attacking units. The same can be said of the M-13 rocket mortar (Katyuska). Since the mortars are all right, let's go to an audience with the Queen of Battles: Infantry. The Guard units, of course, were not created until some months after Russo-German war began, so they should not be around in any early situation. The others are O.K. There was not that much development in weapons design from 1941 to 1943. Evolution in the men forming those units is known to be even slower. The same can be said of the Command Post and the Cavalry. Transport units should be allocated as suggested in the Campaign Analysis booklet. By the way, Soviet halftracks should be seldom used, if used at all. The Russians never had more than a few thousands of these vehicles and most of these were made late in the war or received from the U.S.

So, at last, we get to the AFV's. The course to follow is easy: discard them all, except the T-34c. This tank was in service since 1940. Actually, there were three different models with a 76.2mm gun. The T-34a had a shorter gun, only 30.5 calibers long, while models b and c had a gun 41.2 calibers long. Except for that, the three models were almost identical. So we can go on using the T-34c counters as they are. What about the other AFV's? Let's start with the lightweights. During the early thirties the Russians produced a 9 ton tank, armed with two machine-guns in two turrets: the T-26a. The twin turrets were soon replaced with a single one with a 45mm gun in the models b and c. These little obsolete machines were destroyed by the thousands in 1941. However, there were so many of them around that they lasted in service until 1942. A replacement for the T-26 was introduced in 1940. This was the T-60, tilting the scales at 9 tons and armed with a 20mm gun, similar to the one in the German Pzkwf II. The small gun was found to be useless, so another light tank was introduced in 1942. That one was the T-70, armed with a 45mm gun. This, however, lies outside our sphere of interest today.

The first medium tank made in Russia was the T-28. Armed with a 76.2mm, 26 calibers long, and weighing 32 tons, this was a powerful vehicle when it entered the service in 1935, but it was outclassed by the German Panzers and was withdrawn in 1942. Numerically, the most important pre-war Soviet AFV was the BT. This was a "light-medium" vehicle, weighing 14 tons, but with very thin armor. BT stands for a very ugly Russian word which means "fast tank." And Fast they were indeed, making up to 37 mph. These tanks were actually a series ranging from the BT-1 to the BT-8. The early models had a 37mm gun, replaced in 1932 with the 45mm gun and, finally, with the 76.2mm gun. Most of them were armed with the 45mm piece. Destroyed remnants of these tanks littered the battlefields of the world from Manchuria to Finland to Spain and, finally, Western Russia. Its polluting days were finished with its retirement in 1942. Another tank introduced in 1935 was the heavy T-35. This vehicle crammed 10 men inside its 45 ton frame. Armed with one 76.2mm L26 gun, two 45mm A-T guns and 5 mg's, with 5 turrets, this vehicle must have been a commander's nightmare. The T-35 replacement was the KV-1, introduced in 1939. The KV-1 was armed with the same gun as the T-34c, but had much thicker armor. The KV-1 was eventually replaced with the KV-85, which we know already from *PANZERBLITZ*. As for SP guns (apart from the M-13), the only one the Russians had in 1941 was the KV-2. This was a 152mm howitzer mounted on a turret on top of a KV-1 chassis. The turret was a tall box, much like a warship's turret and giving a clumsy appearance to the

vehicle. The whole thing was over 11 feet high and quite difficult to hide. It did not last long in service.

Now it's the German turn. In 1941, the standard anti-tank gun of the Wehrmacht was the 37mm L45 gun. Tsk-tsk, too bad for them. The German infantry had to drag that useless piece of ordnance around for another year. Fortunately for them, it was rather light, weighing only 990 lbs. The 50mm piece is all right, but not the 75mm A-T gun, which did not see service until 1942. All the other towed guns are O.K., excepting the 120mm mortar. This weapon was just a direct copy of the Soviet 120mm mortar and was not used by the Germans until 1942. As with the Russians, the Infantry and the CP's are all right, as they were basically unchanged through the conflict. The same can be said of the transport units. Of the armored cars, however, only the Sdkfz 234/1 should be retained, to represent the armored car used in 1941, the model 231.

Let's see now the heavy German armor. In 1941, SPA was just a good idea, so those units can be deleted. The only assault gun around was the StuG III, armed with a 75mm gun, 24 calibers long. This machine was widely used, being in service since 1940. It was later armed with the 75mm L48 gun and this is the version shown as a tank destroyer in the game counters. The only German tank destroyer available in 1941 was the Panzerjäger 47. This thing consisted of a Czech 47mm gun behind a tall shield and mounted on top of a Pzkwf I chassis. The Pzjg 47 looked (and was) awkward and it was useless against the T-34 and the KV-1. There were never more than about 170 of these machines available and they were replaced in 1942 by the Marder and the other tank destroyers shown in the game.

In 1941, the Germans had two main battle tanks. One was the Pzkwf III. A few hundred of these were old models, armed with a 37mm gun, while the others had a 50mm gun, 42 calibers long. These weapons were inadequate against the T-34 and the KV-1 and more than one author has blamed this technical limitation for the failure of the German invasion in 1941. By 1942, most of these machines had been upgunned with the 50mm L60 piece, the same A-T gun provided in the game. The other main battle tank was the Czech Pzkwf 38(t). This tank was armed with a 37mm gun and, in combat capabilities, was very similar to the Pzkwf III with the 37mm gun. As support vehicle, the Germans used the Pzkwf IV, armed with a 75mm L24 howitzer. Finally, there was a light tank, the Pzkwf II. This tank is identical to the Lynx, so this counter can be used.

Let's suppose that we want to use some of these units to simulate 1941-vintage battles. The necessary counters have been provided in the middle insert section of this magazine. Those not included are provided in your *PANZER LEADER* and/or *PANZERBLITZ* sets. Then we must decide on the force levels for each side. The tables in the *PANZERBLITZ* Campaign Analysis booklet are very useful for this purpose. We only have to replace the more modern machines with the 1941 units as needed. Following are some situations using these units.