

THE FORGOTTEN YEAR

PANZERBLITZ Situations for 1942

By David Howery

No doubt about it, 1942 was an exciting year. And a turning point in the history of the world. Rommel was stopped at El Alamein; Japan lost the initiative in the Pacific at Midway. And, central to the cause of the Allies was Stalingrad, where the Wehrmacht lost the best part of an army and their Russian front was torn asunder.

The year began with the German army fighting for survival in front of Moscow. The Russian winter offensive was taking a heavy toll of their men and horses. The Wehrmacht had to cope with partisans, as well as the fresh reinforcements pouring in from the Far East. But as spring came, the Russian attacks faltered; and the Germans launched their own massive offensives in the summer. Striking in the south, the German forces charged over the River Don, grabbing at both Stalingrad and the Caucasus. In the end, they held neither. In late fall, the Russians launched the pincer attack which trapped the 6th Army in the ruined city. As 1943 began, the German army was again fighting for survival—but this time there would be no resurgence. The war had turned against Germany in the East.

Although the battles of 1942 can provide many interesting tactical situations, *PANZERBLITZ* alone is not sufficient to recreate them; thus the period has been mainly ignored by scenario designers. However, with the counters given in the game, and the counters originally provided with Ramiro Cruz's "PANZERBLITZ 1941" (hereafter, *PB 1941*, found in Vol. 13, No. 3 of *The GENERAL*), and a few odd counters as described, actions from this pivotal year can be simulated. The following is a brief overview of the counters necessary:

Infantry: All counters given in the game are used, including cavalry forces and CPs.

Towed Guns and Mortars: The Russians may use all units except the 57mm anti-tank gun (not in service until 1944). The 152mm howitzer from *PB 1941* is also needed. The German player may make use of all types given in the game. The 37mm anti-tank gun from *PB 1941* was discontinued in early 1942 in the Wehrmacht, but was still in use in some minor Axis units. New counters in this category are the 75mm, 105mm and 150mm howitzers; these are not found in this game, but may be adopted from *PANZER LEADER* where they appear in German colors.

Transport: Both sides may make use of all the types provided in the game. However, the Russian halftrack was so rare, it should be restricted to Recon battalions (as noted in the "Designer's Notes").

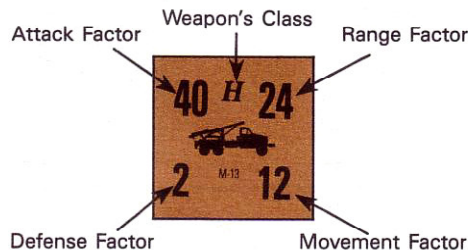
Self-Propelled Artillery: The Russian player has one new unit available not found in any counter mix heretofore: the M-13 Katyuska rocket launcher. The M-13 has the same movement penalties as a truck. The German Wespe first entered service in late 1942, and should be so restricted. No other SPA are available.

Armored Cars: The German 234/1 in the game can be used to represent the 231 model extant in 1942; both were very similar. No other AC are available.

Assault Guns: Only the German player will have these. The SG III from *PB 1941* will be needed for any early-year situations. The StuH 42 from the game is available in the latter half of the year. No other Assault Guns are available, since the Russian KV2 (from *PL 1941*) was discontinued in 1941.

Tank Destroyers: The Russian SU 76 is available in the second half of the year. The German Pzjg 47 from *PB 1941* was in service through the winter months of early 1942. By summer, though, they were replaced by the Marder and STG III75 present in the published game.

Tanks: Some say that 1942 was the year of "transition" for the tank. The Russians did away with the BT5, BT8, T60, T28 and T26B; all of these were available only in the first months of the year. The KV1 (from *PB 1941*) and T34c are available all year long. The Germans have the Lynx (Pzkw II) available throughout. For the early winter, the Pzkw IIIh and Pzkw IVd (*PB 1941*) are present. Beginning with the summer offensive, the Pzkw IIIj Special and Pzkw IV Special become available; the IIIj and IV are both found in *PANZER LEADER* (although only two of the former are provided therein, so players may have to craft more). The minor Axis powers made use of the obsolete PzKw 38, which was very similar to the PzKw III from *PL 1941*, so that counter may be substituted. Finally, the ever popular Tiger I is available in the final months of the year. No other tanks are available.



As for the situations themselves, a word on the history of each action should serve to give players some basis for play. I don't claim that these are exact simulations of the specific battles; but they are representative of the given time and place. These situations have been designed for fun and balance, rather than slavishly copying history:

Situation 1: By January 1941, the German Army was clearly on the defensive. Russian counterattacks threatened to encircle Army Group Centre. Hundreds on both sides were dying in the bitter cold. The road from Roslavl to Yukhnov was a vital supply route for the German 4th Army. The 10th Motorized Division had drawn the responsibility of securing the road southeast from Yukhnov. Throughout January, disjointed Russian forces tried to cut the road. Partisans came out in droves. Russian cavalry, ski troops, paratroopers and even regular infantry units attacked—often in cooperation with the partisans—small German detachments. The fighting was as savage and bitter as any. Eventually, German convoys could only move with heavy escorts. In spite of the heroic efforts of the 10th Motorized, Russian troops did manage to cut the road in several places. On 3-5 March, the 10th finally had to retreat across the River Urga. Their position was a poor one, and the Germans barely held it. Eventually, however, the thaw arrived and doomed the Russian supply system of sledges and skis.

Situation 2: The German summer offensive opened with both tactical and strategic surprise paralyzing the Russians. The Russian command had expected the Wehrmacht to attack towards Moscow again, not to the south. Even worse, the Russian armies

in the Ukraine had been weakened by an abortive attack on Kharkov in May. The Germans simply rolled over the enemy in their path, tearing open a huge gap between Kursk and Kharkov, and drove to the Don with little to slow the advance. Russian counterattacks at this stage were piecemeal affairs, badly coordinated and easily brushed aside. But, once STAVKA realized fully what the German intentions were, they deployed massive reserves to blunt and stop the summer advance.

Situation 3: As the panzers thundered on toward Stalingrad, the infantry of the German 2nd Army protected the exposed northern flank between Orel and Voronezh. The Red Army tried several times to penetrate this line, but their attacks were disorganized and ultimately failed. The Russian attacks, however, did cause some concern among the German High Command, which was tempted to hold back the armor to support the infantry formations. But in the end, the attacking Russian 5th Tank Army was nearly destroyed due to fuel shortages, poor communications, internal disorganization and German attacks.

Situation 4: As the savage street-fighting continued in Stalingrad, the 14th Panzer Corps took up positions on the hills north of the city. The Russians quickly moved the 1st Guards Army onto heights across from them, leaving an expanse of flat, open fields between. The Guards were then launched in a series of disastrous attacks, all of which failed. Finally, the 66th and 24th armies were joined with the Guards and all three hit the corridor, covered by heavy artillery barrages. But the 14th, though pressed, was saved by its own artillery which broke up the massed Russian formations with accurate fire.

Situation 5: What need be said? The famous Russian counterattack around Stalingrad was brilliantly executed. Not only did it take the German High Command by surprise, but the initial blows on both flanks fell upon Rumanian armies, badly-led and poorly-equipped. North of the city, Rokossovsky's 5th Army stormed out of their positions around Kremenskaya and smashed into the thin lines of the Rumanian 3rd Army. The Rumanians put up stiff resistance at first, but were simply overwhelmed. Some formations fled the debacle at midday (even leaving their artillery intact for the Russians to capture). In truth, the Rumanians had little chance against the powerful forces massed against them, and saving men from capture was more important to their commanders than futile last stands. [*The German equipment given in the situation was not what the Rumanians actually had, but it is inferior enough to represent them adequately.*]

Situation 6: With the German 6th Army trapped at Stalingrad, the 4th Panzer Army was given the task of opening a corridor to it. In fact, it was planned for the rescuers to drive within twenty miles of the 6th's lines, due to the severe fuel shortages inside the Russian ring. The 4th attacked in the Kotelnikovskiy sector and fought their way 30 miles to the River Askay. But at this point the Russians launched several spoiling attacks in other areas, forcing the German command to divert troops from the 4th Panzer to block these thrusts. After a series of intense struggles along the Askay, the Germans were forced to retreat. The rescuers had come within 35 miles of the trapped 6th Army, but it was all in vain. One month later, the 6th was gone. The year 1943 opened with a retreat from which the Wehrmacht never recovered.