The Two-Turn Lock in EatG

by Dean N. Essig

Some time ago I promised to write about how it was possible to create a solid Stalingrad Pocket in **EatG** in the first two Soviet player turns. That was a promise I had completely forgotten until a caller asked "Where is it?" I'll try to make amends for that lapse here with this piece.

Executed properly (and to do so takes an extremely high attention to detail, mind you), the method I outline below cannot be stopped by German actions or poor dice rolling. For that reason, I do not want to give a hex by hex set up and instructions for the precise ordering of events. Call this a fear of generating stereotyped play by handing out a set plan which would be followed to the letter without room for individual experimentation (and mistake...). I hope the outline below does not have this bad side effect even with its intentional vagueness.

Frugal Operations

As a Soviet commander you must condition yourself to accept the fact that there will always be more nice-to-have objectives and missions than you have troops. It would be nice to take out Tatenskyia or Millerovo early on. It is up to the Soviet player to keep focused and not to allow his combat power to be dispersed over a large area by going after numerous objectives which are only of annoyance value. On the other hand, welcome the efforts of your Axis enemy to go after his own wild goose chases—operations along the Northern Don with the Hungarians come rapidly to mind. Many players seem to think that they will accomplish great things up in that area by advancing across the Don and attacking□.□.□. better yet they tend to ship things like Panzer Divisions to the area to help out. Great, as a Russian, I'll welcome this waste of Axis effort. While I'm busy crushing the center of the Axis line along the Chir river, my Axis enemy has done me the favor of advancing his tissue-paper-like Hungarian infantry into the open on **my side** of the major river where I can kill them with ease. Such an offensive has occurred in many a game I've been in and always with the same result—by turn three or four, the Northern Don will be denuded of even the lame Axis defenders which were there at the beginning. That leaves the northern half of the Axis line undefended (and the southern half indefensible by position). Coming as it does by turn 5, this situation leaves the Red Army in a position to thrust deeply toward Kharkov months earlier than scheduled. Be sure to thank your Axis opponent for the help.

Overall Objectives

I hope I have convinced you of the wastefulness of silly little operations. Even so, once you have focused in on the main battle area, tough choices remain. I like to take down both the 22nd Panzer Division and the Rumanian Panzer Division right away. This takes some troops away from other tasks that could also serve a function—such as taking Bokovskaia and sealing the right flank of the 5th Tank Army from that annoying little formation D'Aosta. I try to hedge my bets by devoting some attention to the flank screen, but doing so steals troops from the effort to severely damage those armored formations. The balance is a hard one to make.

The overall objectives I set forth for my Red Army are as follows:

- Open as few holes in the Rumanians as needed to get the spearheads through (don't try to take out vast numbers of Rumanian infantry□.□.□. yet).
- Seal the Don Bridges from Kalach on south (some players go for taking Kalach as well, I'm usually content to backstop properly).
- Allow as much infantry to escape into the pocket (or starve on the open steppe) as possible.
- Drive a wedge through the center of the historical pocket to form an inner ring of Russians with the pocket cut into two halves.
- Have the southern pincer link with the inner ring and seize the RR bridge along the minor river in the center of the pocketed area.
- Heavily barrage the known mobile division positions in the pocket to keep those units at reduced effectiveness between the first two moves of the Russians (to keep them from being able to participate fully while the Soviet units are not quite fully deployed).

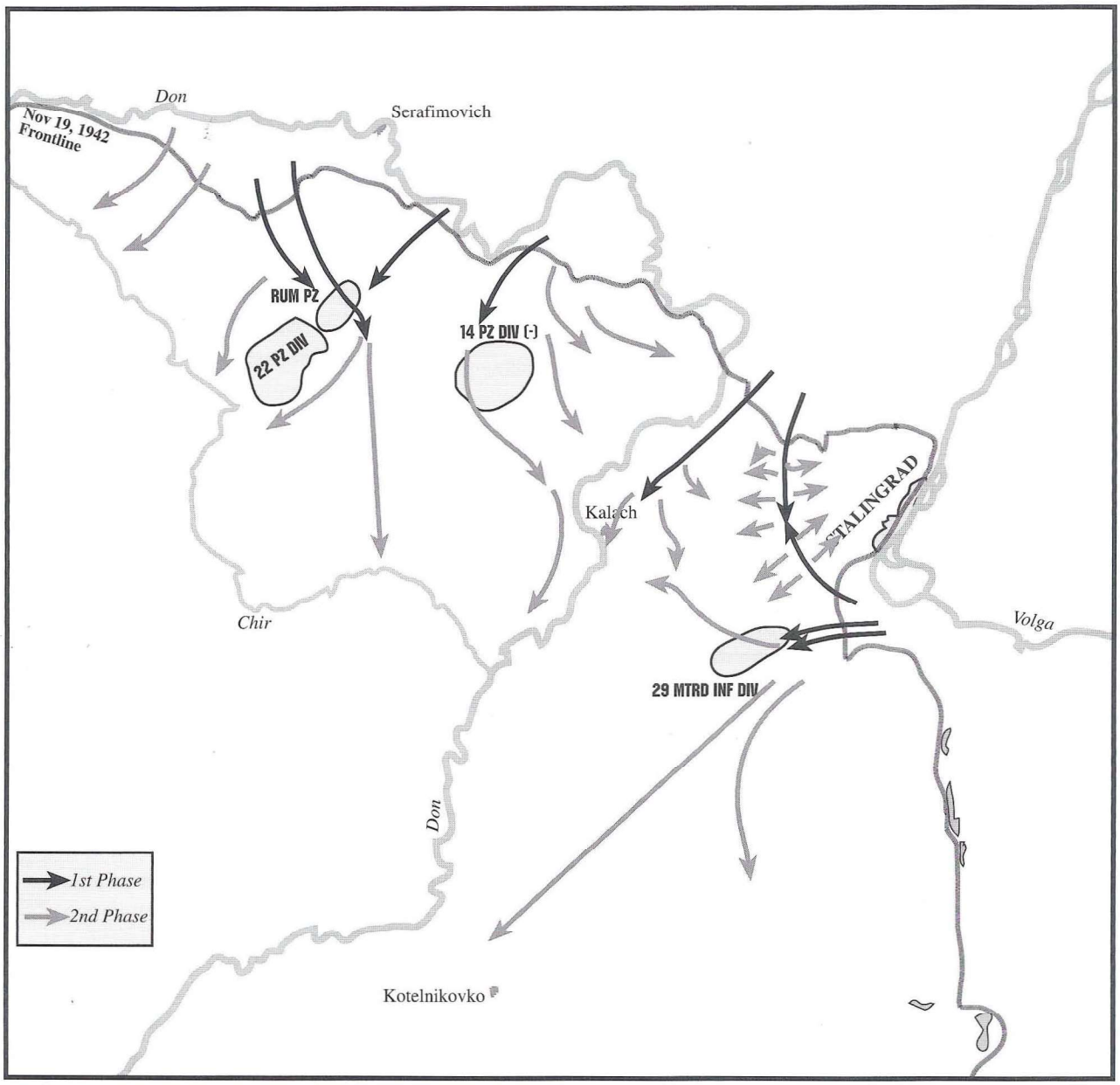
See the map on the next page for a graphic depiction of these operations.

The Northern Pincer

The Northern Pincer area contains all troops from the Don River west through the 1st Guards Army. These guys must open the holes in the Rumanian lines needed to run troops through in order to backstop the lower Don bridges. While some suggest an attack across the Don to take Kalach and I can see some strong merits in such an attack during Exploitation, I prefer to allocate more troops to the reduction of the 1st Rum and 22nd Panzer Divisions. In the first Exploitation Phase, I can usually damage both formations to the point where they are no longer even a shadow of a threat. I also like to take out the mobile troops of the 14th Panzer Division in the bend of the Don. Other prime targets include HQs (especially that Rumanian one astride the road I need to get to the Don Bridges) and those silly Werfer units. Much of the enemy infantry which does not starve on the steppe will be forced to retreat into the pocket (good) to starve there, so I tend to prefer to kill units capable of moving fast enough to get away (anything with wheels or tracks) as well as those nice soft rear area targets.

Aside from exploiting troops through the handful of holes I've opened, I like to dispatch a force to hold Bokovskaia and secure the right flank of the drive.

When I'm done, many Rumanian units will be destroyed, the two mobile formations will be severely damaged, the main Don bridges will be backstopped, and I'll have spent something like 40-60 SPs. The main power of the army (the infantry) will be moving on the Chir river in mass and in combat mode against a shattered foe.



The above map gives players an idea of where and how far to attempt to go with these first turns of attack. Note the effort toward building the double-wall pocket as well as the division of the historical pocket into several segments. The operations to destroy the Axis mobile reserves are shown as well as the drive to seal the Don River Bridges. You should toast the wagons in Kalach before they can help feed the pocket(s).

I hope this gives an idea of what I'd be looking for without actually letting on too much!

Bon Chance!

The Southern Pincer

The Southern Pincer has the hardest job in the initial attacks. It is by an order of magnitude weaker than the Northern Pincer (containing only those troops east of the Volga and further south), but it must slice through a dense German-held line and link up with the neck forces (more on that later). Other than that link up, the Southern Pincer is forced to prepare for a running open battle with any escapees from the pocket and the 29th Motorized Division. It must threaten (if not take) Kotelnikovo to cut all rail links into the pocket area as well as allow no trace supply capabilities to Rumanians caught in the open steppe. It is a tough job and one that takes even more focus than the Northern Pincer.

The idea is to form a small breakthrough and drive a wedge between the Rumanians and the to-be-pocketed Germans in the south. I would strive to run forces out to seize Kotelnikovo. Once that is taken, excellent units like the 29th Motorized must turn to deal with the threat in their rear (in order to clear a supply path). While I would expect the Germans to retake the town, any diversion of effort on their part in that direction will be that much less the weak southern pincer forces will have to deal with in consolidating their gains. The Russian commander must attempt to short-circuit any German plans for initiating an open field fight in the area south west of Stalingrad. That is a fight the southern pincer forces are not really prepared for and can drain Soviet energy from more important efforts. Unit for unit, the Nazis still have a lot of fight left in them. You don't want to let them make use of their tactical prowess—and the way to do that is to beat them operationally. Just like in real life.

The Neck Troops

Here is where the Soviets can throw a monkey wrench into their erstwhile opponent's plans of turning on the southern pincer and escaping with the mobile troops. The forces in the northern neck (the area between the Volga and the Don) provide the right (although hardly plentiful) forces and location to seal an inner ring of steel around the Stalingrad Pocket. These troops attack to create a small breach so that infantry can flood into the deserted level one hedgehogs in the middle of the historical German pocket. Once these are filled with at least three steps per hex and as much combat mode infantry as possible (don't forget to supply each hex with somebody with an Action Rating worth talking about), the German must launch a major and expensive operation to cut through this wall and then finds himself with a dilemma. He can either try to force a river crossing against your northern pincer backstops or he can drive to the south and try to get to somewhere he can trace before time runs out (another reason to secure Kotelnikovo). I've seen the Germans try to beat their way out of this ring only to lose many good units and almost all their supply holdings and find themselves without a breakout in the same pocket they were in before less the supplies they started with.

The German who (more wisely) chooses to sit tight will find himself cut off from the extra supplies at Kalach and the wagon extenders which he needs to feed Stalingrad. Neither the "put your head down and charge" nor the "sit and wait" plans are particularly appealing to the German player as both bring the death of the units in the pocket and the fall of the city—one just makes it happen sooner than the other. This is just the sort of dilemma the Russian player wants the German player to be in.

The German player should be whining and crying about how he can't win the game.

Results

So where should the Russian player strive to be by the end of turn two? There should be two rings around the Stalingrad Pocket. One garrisoning the river crossing points along the Don River and the other tightly wrapping the city through those convenient hedgehog hexes. The inner ring should be heavily held with steps in combat mode and mobile troops in reserve. The 22nd and 1st Rum Panzer Divisions (as well as those parts of the 14th Pz Division outside the pocket) should be damaged to the point of no longer being an issue. Russian troops should hold Bokovskaia and Kotelnikovo and infantry should be moving up to the Chir River line positions. There should be numerous out-of-supply Rumanian formations lost on the steppe ready for destruction to add to those which have already died due to attrition. The German player should be whining and crying about how he can't win the game, how imbalanced it is, etc. You have him right where you want him.

If you pay close attention, you might even see Joe Stalin give you a wry smile...

Conclusion

I hope I have pointed the way toward success for you Soviet players out there while, at the same time, not letting too much of the cat out of the bag. I have attempted to give you what needs to be done, but not how to do it. Trust me in that exactly what has been enumerated above can and has been done—to the point where the plan's success in the proper hands is never in doubt. Good luck in working out the details—let me know what you've done.