No Glory: German Survival Strategies in Hube's Pocket

by Dave Friedrichs

In recent months there has been a great deal of bandwidth on the Gamers list devoted to the difficulty in playing the Germans in **Hube's Pocket**. I'll be one of the first to admit that playing the Germans is no picnic and is definitely different than other previous *OCS* topics. However, it is not impossible, just different.

Maneuver warfare provides a great deal of insight into how to manage this problem. One of the primary principles of maneuver warfare is to fight strength on weakness, never strength on strength. Conversely, your opponent must be denied the ability to fight with his strength against your weakness. Therefore, a quick analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of both sides is required.

Soviet Weakness - German Strength

In the case of **Hube's Pocket,** one of the biggest weaknesses of the Soviet player is supply and transport of supply. The way the army is structured, it takes a lot of supply to attack and it takes a lot of supply to move around. In a typical attack the Soviet player will be confronted with 4 and 5 action rating units consistently. To combat them, the Soviets need to use their breakthrough tank regiments and guard infantry. To make up for the subsequent firepower loss, they have to add more steps to the attack. It all adds up to a chunk of supplies in the end.

On the other side of the fence, the strength of the German army is there relative efficiency in movement. For example, while most Soviet Tank Corps consist of four or five maneuver elements, the typical panzer division has six to eight elements. Both forces require an SP for gas but the German force has nearly twice the mobility. Add this to the organic trucks and you have a high relative flexibility for the Germans. The typical panzer division has many more, better quality, and better balanced maneuver elements than its Soviet equivalent and therefore can move further, faster, with more, and at a lower cost than the Soviets.

This is a situation where an obvious weakness can be turned into a strength.

There are several ways that the German can exploit the match-up of Soviet supply difficulties against their own flexible response. The most obvious is to attack the Soviets where they are not prepared to counter the attack. This will force the Soviet to maneuver forces to counter the German threat. If this happens, the Soviet player will likely run himself out of gas very quickly. The more the German player can get the Soviets jumping to his tune, the better off he will be.

The more direct route to exploit this situation is to attack the Soviet logistics directly. If the Soviet player is not careful (garrisoning dumps and extenders), a quick German raid can be disastrous. This is especially true with the transports. The Soviets have plenty of redundancy in their HQs, so making attacks to disrupt supply trace difficult if not impossible. However, they simply do not have enough transport to support everyone in the field once extenders are required. Attacking transports and rail assets can pay off in large dividends.

German Weakness - Soviet Strength

The biggest problem that the German player faces is the need to hold terrain. The lines that are required to do this are long and troops are few and far between. The dilemma faced by the German is whether to spread out in a continuous line, susceptible to breakthrough; or bunch up, leaving holes in the line, and getting surrounded.

The greatest strength for the Red Army is its size, especially in infantry. They have solid action ratings, good strength and plenty, but not nearly an overwhelming number, of combat steps. This force allows the Soviet to typically have the front continuously garrisoned by 2-3 steps, with a good-sized reserve of most of the armor and a substantial amount of infantry. This in turn gives them the flexibility to do an "ooze offensive" where the infantry seeps through holes in the German line (very efficient use of supply) or concentrate forces for overwhelming local superiority for a major breakthrough.

This is a difficult problem for the German to face, not because the tools are not available for a solution, but because the German paradigm must be shifted from those of earlier *OCS* topics. The biggest difference between this game and previous *OCS* topics is the Germans are going to lose quality troops, a lot of quality troops. No matter what you do, you are going to take enormous losses. Once this mental hurdle is behind you, the solutions become more obvious.

The basic debate centers around whether to maintain a continuous line or concentrate forces. The problem with the continuous line is that it is easily pierced and large groups of friendly troops can be surrounded. On the other hand, if one concentrates, it's even easier for the enemy to walk through the gaps and get large groups of troops surrounded. Conclusion: a hopeless situation.

Not really. This is a situation where an obvious weakness can be turned into a strength. Recall that the one thing that the Soviets have going for them is a big infantry force. The advantage of this is that they don't use fuel to move and therefore can be very effective at walking through empty terrain. However, if there is anyone in their way they are going to need some help getting past it (supplies, air power, artillery, and tanks). If we also recall that the Soviets are severely strapped for supplies, it quickly becomes obvious that the continuous front offers the greatest potential for sucking up enemy resources. If the Soviets are made to pay for every dead German, they will quickly run out of gas (literally and figuratively).

So, if the German player buys this line of thinking, where are all these troops to man the line coming from. The answer - the panzer divisions. Using the panzers in the line is, of course, sacrilege and heresy. However, consider this situation. If you can put a continuous line in front of the Soviets with two steps in each hex with 10-14 combat factors and a 4 or 5 action rating unit, start looking at what the Soviets will need to defeat you. Even if the defending German stack is DG'd, the Soviet attack

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Through the Toothpaste Tube

by Dean Essig

Some people have drawn a number of *OCS* occurrences and concepts out of context to "prove" that the system is flawed. One of my favorites (I'm sure you've heard it), is that "units can go dashing through a one-hex hole in the line, while adjacent units do nothing about it." Usually, this is an argument favoring ZOCs (or is at least the dying complaint of the guy who forgot to garrison his rear areas and is about to quit the game because he cannot "hang with the big boys"). This is drawn out of the context of the turn and examined without the background of what else is happening. It is also odd that the same player who might express this opinion would find no fault at all if the hex scale was different so that the current *OCS* hex encompassed the unit **and** six adjacent hexes of ZOC (but containing the same geographical area). The fact that this is a weak argument is not my concern; the problem is that it has been drawn out of context.

They will not be able to react before a lot of water goes under the bridge.

Putting all the Parts Together

When this argument comes up, it is invariably after a successful overrun or a mistake on the part of the enemy. The moving player blows a hole and then pours through the resulting gap. At that instant, the non-moving player hurls a series of insults at his opponent (probably deserved) and at the system (which I contend are not deserved) for allowing such a travesty. "The units are just sitting there and watching them go by...," he complains. Are they really? Let's put the thing into context.

Yes, the moving player's armored wedge slammed through the defense at that point and quite possibly went deep exploiting through the gap it made. This is the part everyone, especially the non-moving player, saw. But, what else is occurring? It is the moving player's Movement Phase. He may very well overrun these flanking units or at least attack them in the Combat Phase. One would be wrong in thinking that these things are happening in the kind of sequential manner given by the game's sequence of

is looking at 5-7 combat factors with a 0 action rating differential . You'll likely be trading those 2 steps for at least 3-4 SPs. If this happens, the Soviets are going to have a tough time winning. The other advantage of this approach is that it burns a lot less gas if the panzers aren't gallivanting around the board. More supplies means more opportunity to attack with those resources you do manage to husband.

Gambits and One Turn Wonders

One of the more aggravating aspects of "Internet analysis" of game strategies is the "magic bullet" syndrome. This is where someone comes up with the definitive strategy for a game that can not be countered. I have only one comment for this type of argument - BULL. In the *OCS* there are always opportunities. The player who runs out of ideas first is the one who has lost.

One of the most popular one-turn wonders is the "Dnepr Gambit." In this strategy, the Soviets put all of there resources into one headlong drive into clearing the Dnepr River, getting the 8 VPs for the Korsun area and the big bonus VP award for reinforcing the flanks. If the Soviet does this before the end of turn 10, holds all that they do at the start, and the German player lets them do it, they win. If the German player does something about it, good luck Mr. Soviet, your going to need it.

The simplest way to counter this is to pile supplies and troops into the pocket and hold out. By the time the Soviets slog through forests, swamps, level 3 hedge hogs, 5SS and GD, there's not going to be much left of them. More subtle approaches are to launch attacks on other axis while maintaining forces to hold for 6-8 turns while driving for your own VPs. A good axis is to drive in the north along the rail line. This is appealing because it really hurts the Soviets in the late game. Another good direction for an attack is to drive along the Uman-Belaya Tserkov axis. The capture of the latter will put an end to the gambit mighty quick.

Another popular gambit is the "Run for the Forts" gambit. In this strategy, the Soviets pour through the German lines driving as hard and as deep as they can in hopes of taking as many VPs as they can by a coup de main or, at worst, popping as many fortresses as they can so that the German rear area is hopelessly bound up by greedy local commanders hoping to grab all the reinforcements for the front. The result, in theory, will be a German teetering on the edge of VP sudden depth completely incapable of countering these actions because they have no rail movement. Yah, right.

This one is my personal favorite, when I'm the German player. At the end of Soviet turn one I'll have two or three move mode Tank/Mech Corps roaming around my rear area, a half dozen or so new regimental equivalents guarding my cities and a couple of really nice panzer divisions (GD is one of them) comin' in a rompin' and a stompin'. And as the icing on the cake, I might get the back-to-back. The Soviet can have his railroad plugs for reinforcements. The SPs still get through and the board is so small, you can drive where you want in one turn. By the end of turn two, everything should be pretty stable, except for the two or three missing Tank/Mech Corps.

Conclusion

Hube's Pocket is a different animal. If you play a tough, hard-nosed, in your face, nothing comes free, who cares about a few dead Nazi counters type of defense, you will likely be surprised as to the limits of the Soviet potential. If you roll over and let the Soviet pour through your undefended lines, you'll likely lose. If you don't panic, pick your death struggle well, and attack with venom, you will be rewarded with a satisfying, and possibly successful, gaming experience.