

Strategic overview

Turn 5: Strategic Considerations

Nothing much has happened on the ground during the Soviet phase, and there is little of strategic note to mention.

In the air, the Soviets have continued their bombing attacks on forward units as well as attacking the Finnish airfields with their local forces. This has resulted in the total loss of 23 Axis Aircraft for 337 Soviet Aircraft over the Soviet turn, but as only five have been German single seat fighters, I am little concerned.

I have decided to reorganize the Luftwaffe at the beginning of this turn, so that it has various airfields and Air Groups assigned to various tasks. This way, I will basically design four different Luftwaffe setups:

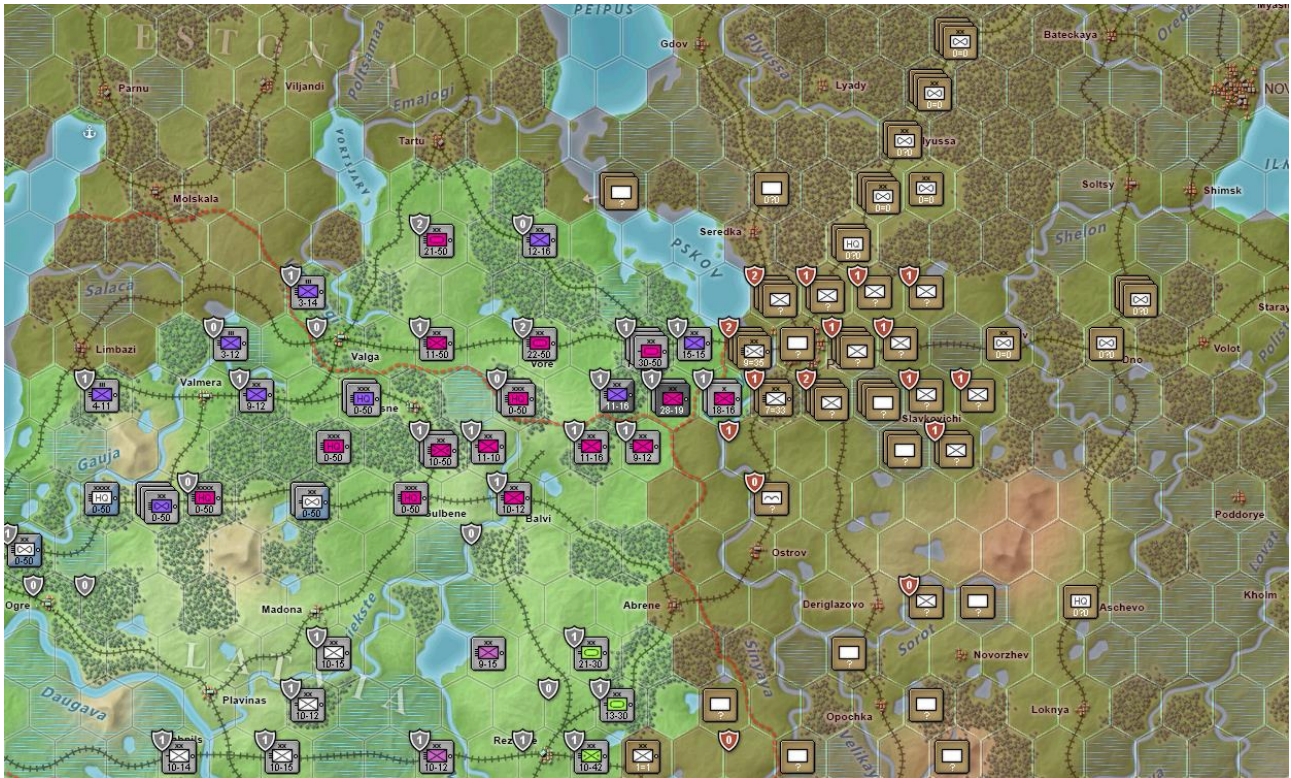
Fighter Sweep Groups. These groups will conduct fighter sweeps against the Soviet airfields. The purpose is to inflict as many losses on the Soviet Air force as possible. The fighter Groups selected for this duty will be the ones that will be withdrawn over the next turns and will have turned replacements off.

Soaking Bomber Groups. The purpose of these groups are to do ground attacks on the secondary Soviet forces, not to be attacked during the current turn. The hope is to force the Soviet Air Force to conduct interception raids that will force a lot of mileage upon the Soviets for meagre gains. These groups will be comprised of Twin Engine fighters and Ju-88 Bombers, both selected as they are the most durable of the German aircraft.

Primary Bomber Groups. After the Fighter Sweep Groups and the Soaking Groups have inflicted some fatigue and attrition (hopefully) on the Soviets, the Primary Bomber Groups are tasked with ground bombing of the primary battlefields for the coming turn. These groups will be tasked with bombing Soviet positions before a main attack and bombing important airfields. They will generally consist of single seat fighters and He 111H bombers.

Combat Support Groups. These are the aircraft I will use for combat support. The groups will consist of dive bombers and single seat fighters, and be used for the major attacks on Soviet positions.

The North



Situational assessment

The initial Recon missions over the Soviet territory has revealed that the Soviet Air Force is back on interception duty.

No ground attacks have occurred, but the German units close to the Soviet Positions has been heavily bombed, including by the Soviet Tactical Bombers. These aircraft has flown at least four missions over the Soviet phase, and may not be very adept at reacting to the coming German attacks.

Planning

I will start the turn with establishing a local Fighter Sweep Group and using this to do a series of fighter sweeps against the Soviet airfields. I will take care not to hit the airfields having heavy concentrations of tactical bombers on them, as I may decide to do some airfield bombing later in the turn, depending on the outcome of the ground attacks.

Second, I will establish a soaking bomber group and use this to attack a few peripheral Soviet units, mainly to weaken the Soviet fighter response before my main attacks at Pskov. I will then establish a primary bomber group and start bombing the Soviets west and southwest of Pskov.

Third, I will establish a combat Support Air Group and commence to attack the 7=33 stack southwest of Pskov, in the hope of pushing it back into the city. I will follow up by trying to rout the 9=35 stack, take Pskov and push on north.

Depending on how the Soviet airforce handle this, I may then decide to conduct a few airfield attacks on exposed Soviet airfields.

Execution

On the Finnish Front, I have encircled two Rifle Divisions this turn. I fully expect to find myself stuck at the Finnish No Attack line, so I have very little to say of this area.

At Pskov, the initial Fighter Sweeps were a mixed blessing, with 21 MiG-3's downed for a cost of 4 German single Seat Fighters. Normally, I would have been very unhappy with this exchange, but since I am going to lose those fighters in a few turns anyway, then why not use them while they are available? Continuing with four soaking attacks on a few unimportant Soviet units, the Soviet fighter response rapidly dwindled to nothing at all. This paved the way for the pre ground attack bombing runs, which proceeded without any surprises

Moving the XXXIX Panzer Corps north and attacking with it did hold its share of surprises. First was that the Soviets had two Rifle Divisions in reserve directly east of the hex, which eventually caused the attack to stall. However, the attack also showed that the Soviet Airforce seems out of balance in the area, and the response was entirely ineffectual (not even a disrupted German unit).

<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>XXXX Panzer Corps 7th Panzer Division (110) 20th Panzer Division (69) 20th Motorized Division (86) 101st Flammpanzer Battalion (17) 620th Gun Battalion (0) 74th LW SP Lt Flk Bn (4) 244th Stug Battalion (4)</div> <div>[v]</div>		<div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 61880, art 604, afv 653 DAM: men 565, art 22, afv 38 LOST: men 737, art 15, afv 22 ATK: ftr 80, bmr 32, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>Defending Forces HELD</div> <div>CV: 348->629.8 Eng Val: 8 Comm HQ: XXXIX Panzer Corps G Rudolf Schmidt</div> <div>Show Details</div>		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>8th Army 154th Rifle Division (41) R 175th Rifle Division (34) R 25th Rifle Division (154) 524th Heavy Gun Regiment (1) 302nd Howitzer Regiment (0) 29th Crps Art Rgt (1) 25th Sapper Regiment (2)</div> <div>[v]</div> <div>CV: 353->444.3 Fort: 1.90->1.78 Comm HQ: 8th Army GA Georgy Zhukov</div> <div>Exit</div>	
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The second attack on the hex was then conducted by five Infantry Divisions of the I Corps, after moving a Motorized Division adjacent to the two reserve Refile Divisions. This attack saw another two Rifle Divisions activated and another ineffectual flight of unescorted Soviet Tactical Bombers. The attack was successful, and pushed two Rifle Divisions back into Pskov city.

Axis Forces Attacking:		<div>< 2 of 4 ></div> <div>73,31 - Light Woods - Clear</div> <div>Turn:5 1941-07-17</div> Forces Engaged		Soviet Forces Defending:	
I Corps		ATK: men 90355, art 1008, afv 47		11th Army -10%	
1st Infantry Division (76)		DEF: men 55764, art 755, afv 52		117th Rifle Division (28) R	
11th Infantry Division (115)		DAM: men 454, art 19, afv 4		8th Army	
21st Infantry Division (71)		LOST: men 603, art 10, afv 1		106th Rifle Division (33) R	
11/37th Howitzer Battalion (0)		ATK: ftr 64, bmr 66, utl 0		25th Rifle Division (127)	
11/58th Howitzer Battalion (0)		DEF: ftr 0, bmr 38, utl 0		438th Crps Art Rgt (2)	
637th Howitzer Battalion (0)		LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0		29th Crps Art Rgt (1)	
536th Howitzer Battalion (0)				613th Crps Art Rgt (1)	
		24th Rifle Division RETREATED			
		25th Rifle Division RETREATED			
		Odds 3.31 : 1			
CV: 481->1210.3		Show Details		CV: 300->364.6	
Eng Val: 24		Exit		Fort: 1.78->0.00	
Comm HQ: I Corps				Comm HQ: 8th Army	
GI: Walter Model				GA: Georgy Zhukov	

After this followed an attack on the Soviet positions directly west of Pskov. For this attack, I used six Divisions, mainly from the 1st Panzer Group. The attack succeeded, causing three Soviet Divisions to rout due to the lack of a retreat path. This will lead those divisions to not receive any replacements next turn, even if they manage to rally. In the air, the "usual" picture of unescorted Soviet bombers losing heavily to the German attack repeated itself once more.

Axis Forces Attacking:		1 of 3 > 73,30 - Clear - Clear Turn:5 1941-07-17		Soviet Forces Defending:	
LVI Panzer Corps 8th Panzer Division (171) Totenkopf SS Mot. Div (104) II/61st Artillery Battalion (0) 92nd LW SP Lt Flk Bn (4) 274th Mot. Flk Bn (0) 276th Mot. Flk Bn (0) 559th Panzerjager Battalion (5)		ATK: men 104275, art 1293, afv 362 DAM: men 344, art 18, afv 25 LOST: men 337, art 5, afv 6 ATK: ftr 58, bmr 93, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 1, utl 0		8th Army 3rd Tank Division (110) 163rd Motorized Division (113) 111th Rifle Division (91) 438th Crps Art Rgt (2) 302nd Howitzer Regiment (0) 29th Crps Art Rgt (1)	
[v]		163rd Motorized Division ROUTED 3rd Tank Division ROUTED 111th Rifle Division ROUTED		Northwest Air Command [v]	
CV: 637->1677.1 Eng Val: 22 Comm HQ: LVI Panzer Corps G Erich von Manstein		Odds 5.08 : 1 Show Details Exit		CV: 317->329.7 Fort: 2.08->0.00 Comm HQ: 8th Army GA Georgy Zhukov	

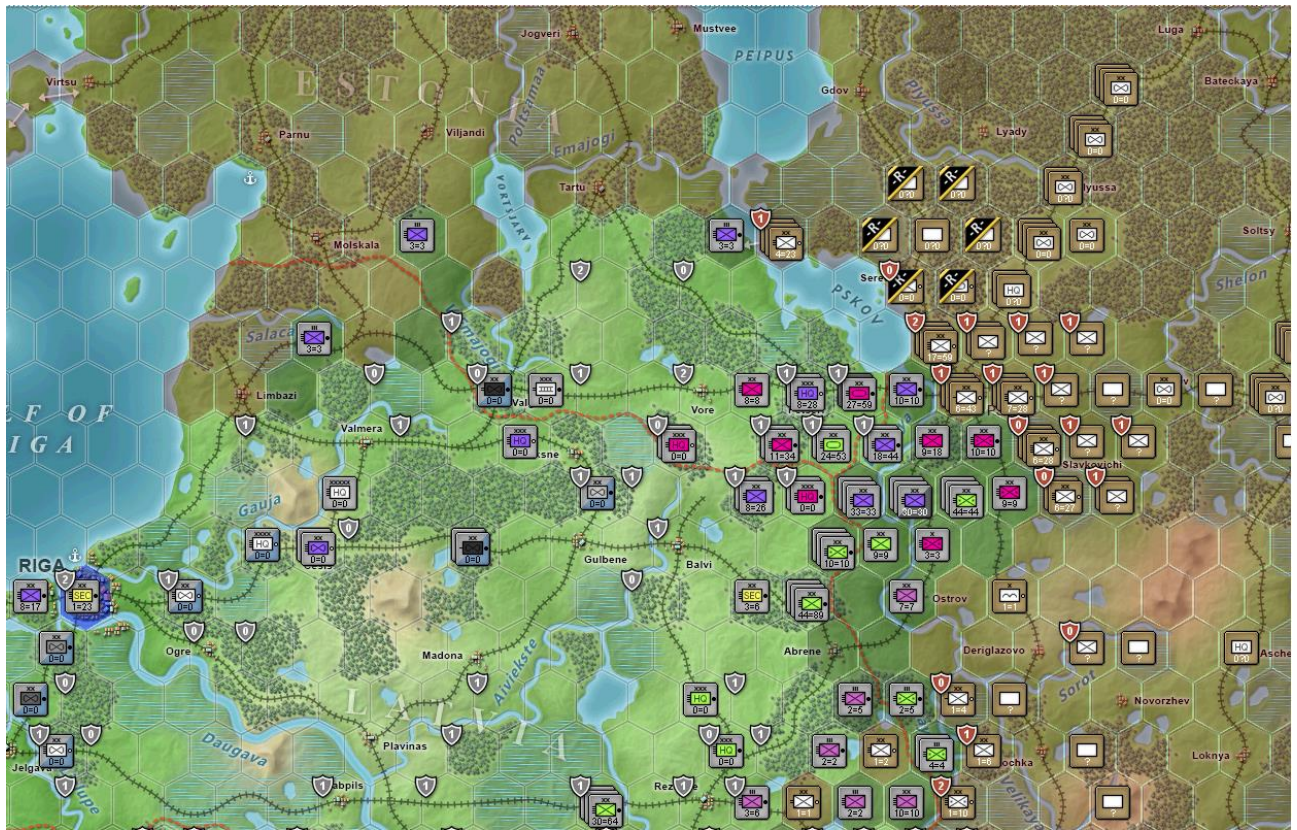
This left only three mobile German Divisions capable of attacking, and I decided to strike at three Soviet Rifle Divisions southeast of Pskov, partly because these units lacked a retreat path and partly because I wanted the hex as a buildup area for the attack on Pskov City, which I have to postpone until next turn.

<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>XXXXI Panzer Corps 1st Panzer Division (178) 6th Panzer Division (184) 3rd Motorized Division (103) 52nd Werfer Regiment (3) II/67th Howitzer Battalion (1) 272nd Mot. Flk Bn (1) II/411th LW SP Lt Flk Bn (7)</div> <div>[v]</div>	<div>1 of 3 > 74,31 - Clear - Clear Turn:5 1941-07-17</div> <div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 48547, art 558, afv 536 DAM: men 350, art 17, afv 33 LOST: men 530, art 12, afv 16 ATK: ftr 83, bmr 63, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>149th Rifle Division ROUTED 175th Rifle Division ROUTED 154th Rifle Division ROUTED</div> <div>Odds 2.75 : 1</div> <div>Show Details</div>		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>11th Army -10% 187th Rifle Division (21) R 148th Rifle Division (20) R 8th Army 154th Rifle Division (100) 175th Rifle Division (80) 149th Rifle Division (136) 438th Crps Art Rgt (2)</div> <div>[v]</div>
	<div>CV: 505->1290.1 Eng Val: 10 Comm HQ: XXXXI Panzer Corps G Georg-Hans Reinhardt</div>		<div>CV: 363->468.5 Fort: 2.10->0.00 Comm HQ: 8th Army GA Georgy Zhukov</div>
	<div>Exit</div>		

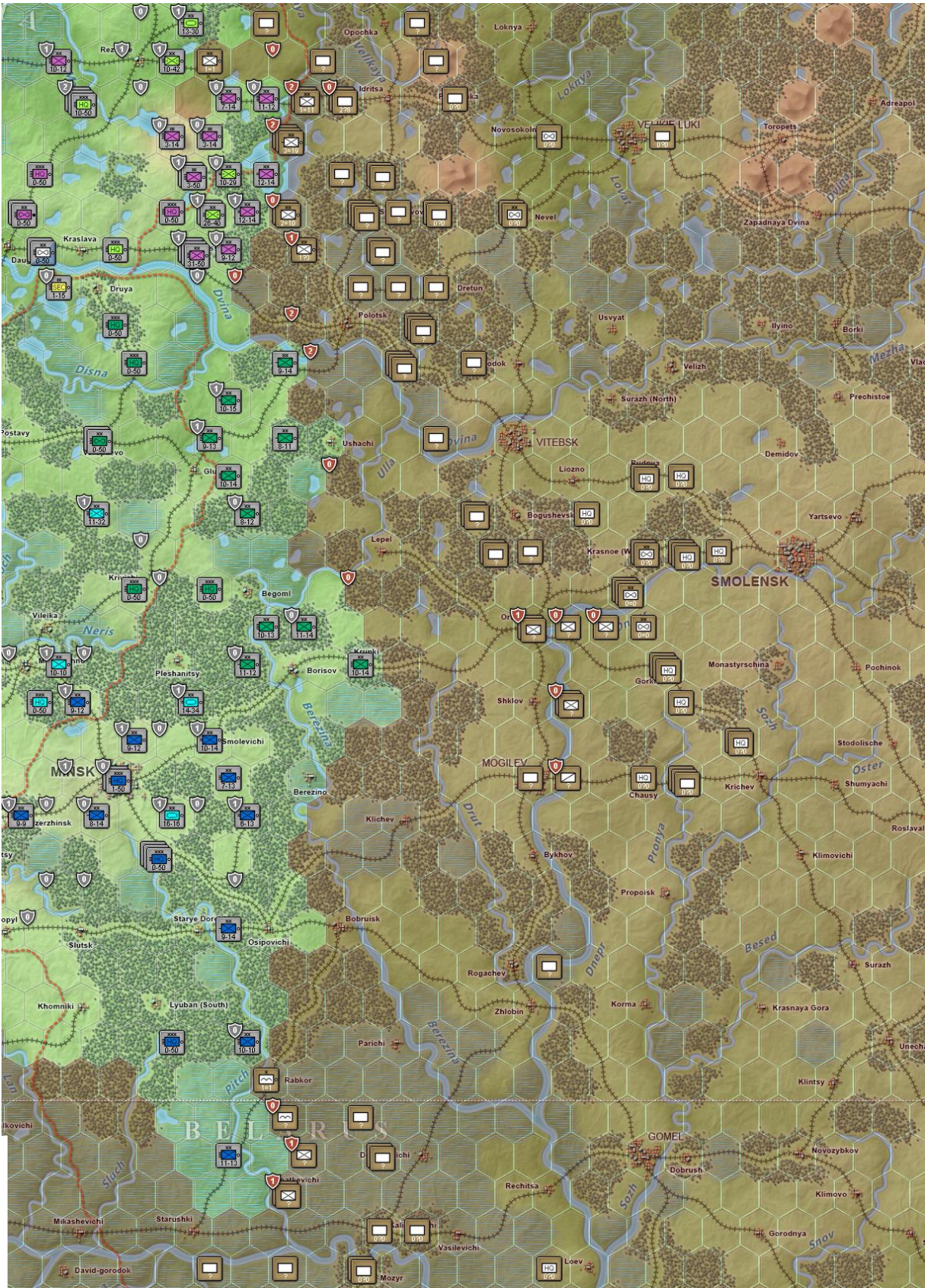
After this, I decided to postpone all further attacks, as I would rather save the fuel and attack with more units come next turn.

The attacks have also revealed a stack of Soviet divisions northwest of Pskvo, consisting of two Tank Divisions (7=23 and 8=25) as well as one Rifle Division. My guess is that those Tank Divisions has been on Refit for a while soaking up a large number of T-34's and KV-1's as they are produced by the Soviets.

Below is an image of the situation in the north, as I give the turn to Sparkley.



The Center



Situational Assessment

In the center, the Soviets have pulled back directly north of the Dvina river, which I am quite happy with. This will mean that I now have a little more terrain that I can easily take and expand my rail line on. I had feared that I needed to spend time pushing my infantry through heavy Soviet defenses, thus slowing down my rail advancement. However there is still a rather heavy concentration of Soviet divisions in the area northwest of Vitebsk.

South of Vitebsk and along the Dnepr, the Soviet defenses look a lot weaker, but it will be another turn at least before I can attack these positions in any meaningful way. Behind the front, a series of Soviet airfields hold a number of various aircraft, although not many of the prime targets for a German attack. At Minsk, I have a Panzer Corps that will need to move towards my own supply lines in order to get restocked for the coming attacks in this region.

Furthest to the south, in the Pripyat Marshes, the Soviets have placed a rather large amount of troops to defend the withdrawal of forces from the battles around Rovno. It is quite obvious that I do not have the strength to carry out the encirclement of the forces outmaneuvered last turn south of the Marshes.

Planning

I will use the 16th Army, north of the Dvina, to push forward my front in order to clear hexes for rail conversion over the coming turns. South of the Dvina, the 9th Army and the 2nd Panzer Group will push towards Vitebsk in order to put pressure on the Soviet defenses here. Further south, the 4th Army will push towards the Dnepr at Mogilev in order to force a crossing here. All in all, I expect little fighting to occur in these areas, as I have few Panzers available and I need time to get my infantry into contact with the Soviets.

In the air, I will continue the reordering of the Luftwaffe assets. In this area, I will create another Fighter Sweep Group, a Combat Support Group, a Primary Bomber Group and a Soaking Group. I will use these as I best can to inflict a few casualties on the Soviets and supporting the attacks I do this turn.

Execution

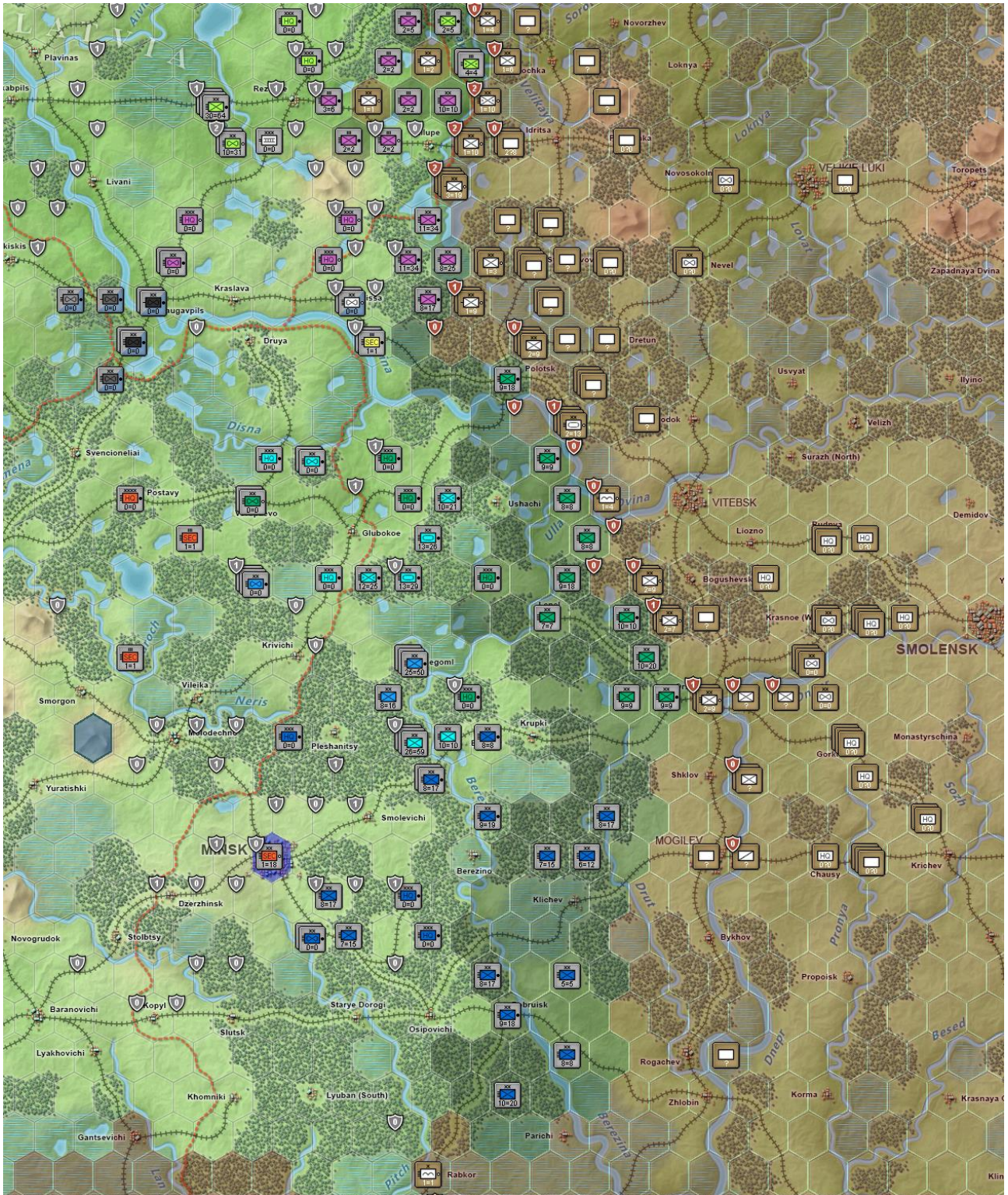
Perhaps the most noteworthy event from the Center has been that the Bialystock pocket has finally been cleaned this turn.

Other than that, I have only fought two battles this turn, the first to dislodge two Rifle Divisions near the planned rail line, and the second in an attempt to inflict another defeat on the two Divisions just beaten back. This second attack gave the following result.

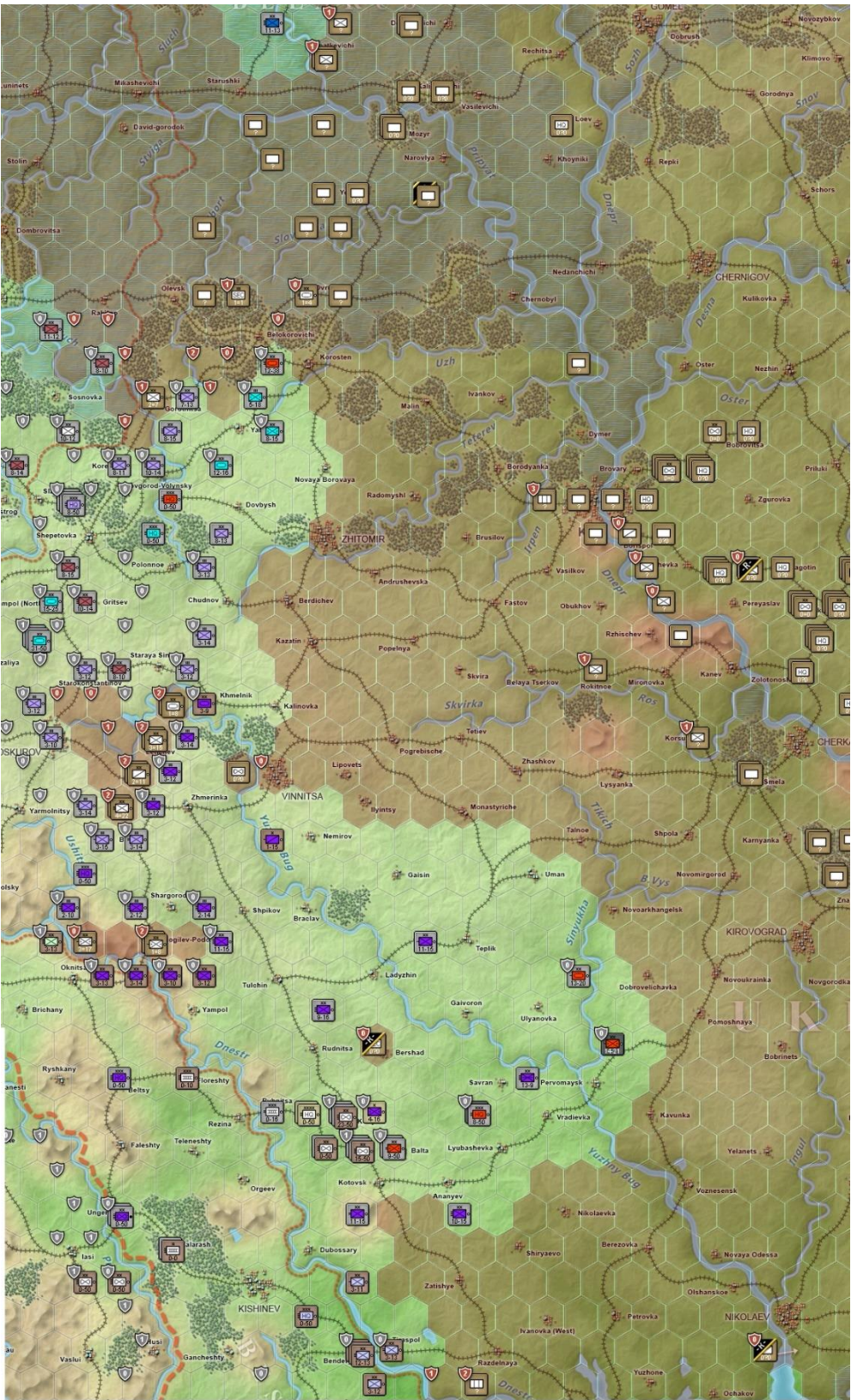
<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>X Corps</div> <div>94th Infantry Division (88)</div> <div>846th Howitzer Battalion (1)</div> <div>850th Howitzer Battalion (1)</div> <div>VIII Fliegerkorps</div> <div>15 Bf 109E-7</div> <div>57 Bf 109F-2</div> <div>CV: 90->201.7</div> <div>Eng Val: 2</div> <div>Comm HQ: X Corps</div> <div>G Christian Hansen</div>	1 of 3 > 74,42 - Light Woods - Clear Turn:5 1941-07-17		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>13th Army</div> <div>153rd Rifle Division (18)</div> <div>165th Rifle Division (21)</div> <div>538th Howitzer Regiment (1)</div> <div>205th Crps Art Rgt (2)</div> <div>Western Air Command</div> <div>10 MiG-3</div> <div>[v]</div> <div>CV: 42->102.7</div> <div>Fort: 0.00->0.00</div> <div>Comm HQ: 13th Army</div> <div>GM Georgy Zakharov</div>
	<div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 17430, art 218, afv 2</div> <div>DEF: men 23991, art 316, afv 19</div> <div>DAM: men 82, art 3, afv 0</div> <div>DAM: men 118, art 5, afv 0</div> <div>LOST: men 111, art 1, afv 0</div> <div>LOST: men 352, art 8, afv 0</div> <div>ATK: flr 72, bmr 50, utl 0</div> <div>DEF: flr 10, bmr 3, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: flr 1, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: flr 1, bmr 1, utl 0</div>		
	<div>Defending Forces HELD</div> <div>Show Details</div> <div>Odds 1.96 : 1</div> <div>Exit</div>		

However, I have moved the front a lot closer to the Soviet defensive positions, and the battle south of Vitebsk can certainly commence next turn, unless the Soviets do a hasty retreat.

Below is an image of the center, as I give the turn to Sparkley.



The South



Situational Assessment

South of the Pripyat Marshes, the Soviets are trying to extricate the divisions from the fighting near Rovno. Those divisions are pulling back through the Pripyat Marshes. One Rifle Division has lacked the MP to move out of harms way, and will certainly be encircled come next turn. It looks as if I will be unable to catch any other units, although I might be able to delay their retreat for some time.

The Soviets have also established a defensive line stretching from Kiev southeast, at first along the Dnepr and then over the plains of western Ukraine.

In the air, the Soviets have placed their airfields behind Kiev and spent their time dropping supplies to the Soviet units encircled near Proskurov. There is a rather heavy concentration of LaGG-3's and Yak-1's in this area that I have not noticed before.

Planning

This turn, I will continue withdrawing the 2nd Panzer Group units from the front, while pushing the forward elements of the 1st Panzer Group towards the Dnepr. Meanwhile the Infantry will be charged with reducing the pockets and pushing along with the Panzers in order to force a crossing of the river.

I think that the Logistics modifier in this game will mean that this push will be very slow, as it will be another six turns or so before the rail lines reach the Dnepr. Because of this, I will be operating at quite some distance from my railheads, and my Panzer's will be receiving little fuel. For this reason, I stated the game planning to pull the 2nd Panzer Group north about turn three or so, but the continued presence of high value targets has led me to keep it in the area until now.

By using one Panzer Corps to push towards the river, while keeping the other one back, I hope to be able to acquire enough fuel reserves that I may push across the Dnepr in one or (more likely) two turns to establish a bridgehead.

Furthest to the south, the Rumanians will be closing in on Odessa, which seems to be ill defended.

Execution

The advance on the Dnepr has revealed a rather interesting concentration of Soviet Divisions in the forest north of Kirovograd. In here I have discovered one Tank Division, one Motorized Division, two Rifle Divisions and one Cavalry Division (probably backed up by an HQ just behind them. I certainly lack the MP to attack these forces this turn, but I decided to do an HQBU on the Panzer Corps to the rear. While this will cost me 35 AP, it will lead to either one of two outcomes.

- 1) If the Soviets stand and fight, I can probably push the Panzers in behind and encircle this force.
- 2) If the Soviets pull back, I can either use the MP for a dash on Dnepropetrovsk or else make an attempt to cross the Dnepr.

In the air, I reorganized the Rumanian airforce into two Combat Support Groups (four fighters and five tactical bombers each) and one Primary Bombing Group (four fighters and eight level bombers). This is more or less a test to see if the Rumanians can have a good impact on the fighting to come. I decide to follow up with using these air assets on an attack against an encircled Rumanian Motorized Division, in order to gauge the effectiveness of the Rumanians before they encounter serious opposition.

This I gave up again immediately after the first attack, as the report showed me what I had forgotten: For some reason there are a ton of AA guns present in these encircled units.

Axis Forces Attacking:		1 of 2 > 68,94 - Clear(Mogilev-Podolsky) - Clear Turn:5 1941-07-17		Soviet Forces Defending:			
		Forces Engaged					
		ATK: men 0, art 0, afv 0 DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0 LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0 ATK: ftr 28, bmr 70, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 5, utl 0				DEF: men 0, art 0, afv 0 DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0 LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0 DEF: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0	
		ground forces were BOMBED					
13 He 112B(R) 15 IAR 80A 18 Potez 633B2(R) 12 Bloch 210(R) 20 He 111H-3(R) 8 PZL 37B(R)		Show Details		Exit			

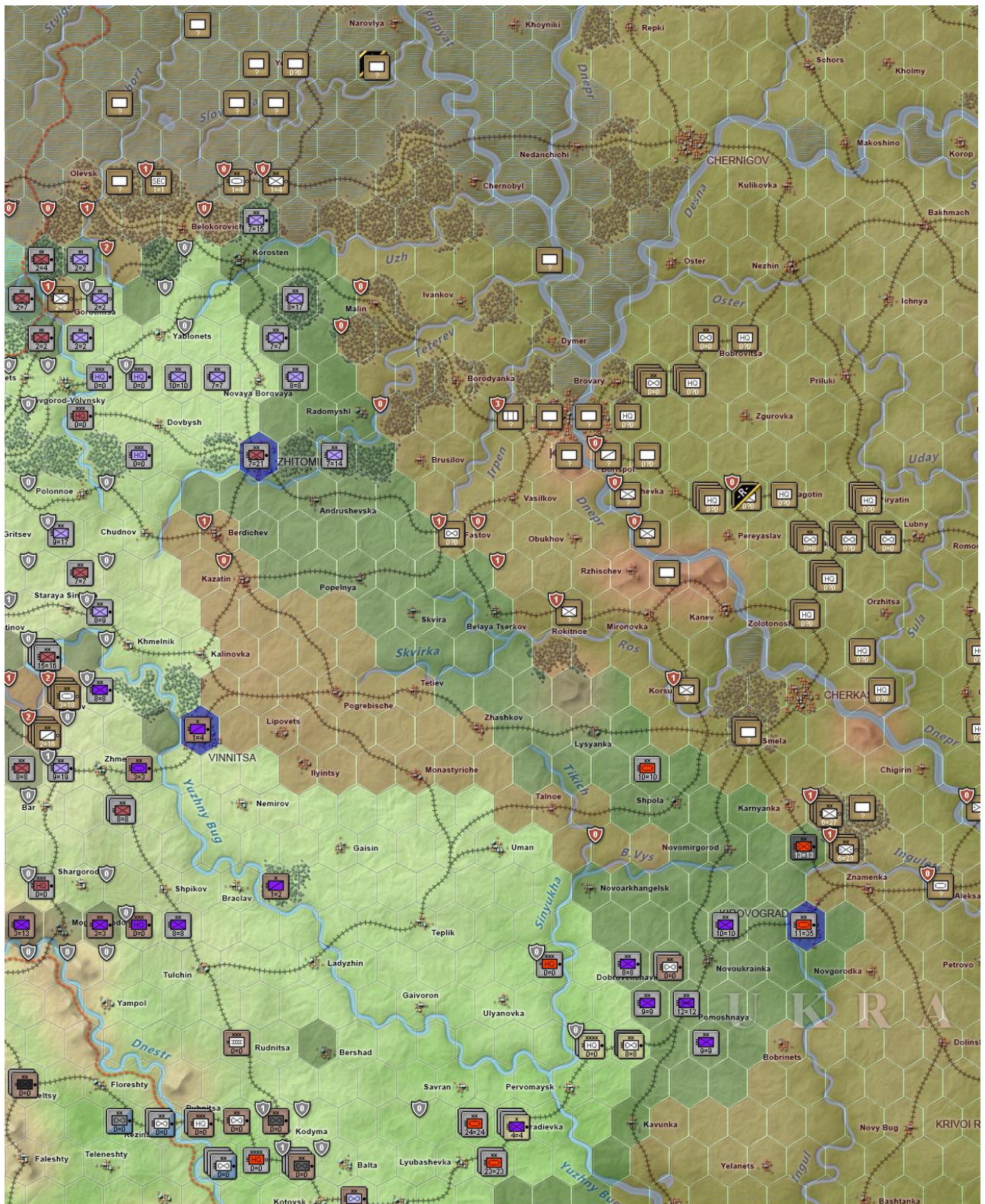
The ground attack revealed why there had been so many AA guns present. The battale succeeded in destroying no less than five PVO AA Batallions under STAVKA command. This totalled to some 70 76mm AA Guns and 29 12.7mm AA guns along with all the other equipment destroyed.

Axis Forces Attacking:		1 of 3 > 68,94 - Clear(Mogilev-Podolsky) - Clear Turn:5 1941-07-17		Soviet Forces Defending:	
XXX Corps 8th Rum. Infantry Division (14) 13th Rum. Infantry Division (30) 14th Rum. Infantry Division (33) II/54th Artillery Battalion (0) I/77th Howitzer Battalion (0) XI Corps -6% 2/239th Infantry Division (23)		ATK: men 58433, art 557, afv 0 DAM: men 224, art 4, afv 0 LOST: men 412, art 4, afv 0 ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0		18th Mechanized Corps 218th Motorized Division (70) 3rd Airborne Corps -13% 6th Airborne Brigade (8) STAVKA 85th PVO AA Battalion (0) 169th PVO AA Battalion (1) 334th PVO AA Battalion (2)	
[v]		218th Motorized Division SURRENDERED 6th Airborne Brigade SURRENDERED		[v]	
CV: 123->341.5 Eng Val: 4 Comm HQ: XXX Corps G Hans von Salmuth		Odds 5.95: 1		CV: 83->57.3 Fort: 2.50->0.00 Comm HQ: 18th Mechanized Corps GM Pyotr Volokh	
Show Details		Exit			

Instead, I decided to try my luck on the two Soviet Mountain Divisions north of Chernovtsy, as they have preciously little offensive firepower and I had a series of Rumanian units standing by doing nothing. The initial bombing runs did little damage, but did disrupt som 3680 men (converted to fatigue and thus smaller to hit chance during the following ground battle). I had few expectations of success going into the batle, as my attack was conducted with fewer offensive CV than the Soviet defensive one, and upon seeing the enemy commander was Tolbukhin, I expected even less. The final CV odds were close though, and the attack demonstrated the (lack of) value of the Rumanian combat support, by disrupting 600 men.

<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>Mountain Rum. Corps 7th Rum. Infantry Division (68) 1st Rum. Mountain Brigade (56) 2nd Rum. Mountain Brigade (56) 4th Rum. Mountain Brigade (47) 36th RM Art Bn (0) 56th RM Hvy Hwz Bn (0)</div> <div>Rum. Combat Air Command</div> <div>CV: 227->650.2 Eng Val: 4 Comm HQ: Mountain Rum. Corps GdB Gheorghe Avramescu</div>	1 of 3 > 60,94 - Rough - Clear Turn:5 1941-07-17		<div>Soviet Forces Defending (C):</div> <div>17th Rifle Corps 60th Mountain Division (103) 96th Mountain Division (169) 6 -> 37mm Anti-aircraft Gun</div> <div>CV: 272->334.0 Fort: 1.10->0.04 Comm HQ: 17th Rifle Corps GM Fyodor Tolbukhin</div>
	<div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 47630, art 392, afv 0 DEF: men 15423, art 127, afv 2 DAM: men 312, art 5, afv 0 DAM: men 73, art 0, afv 0 LOST: men 362, art 5, afv 0 LOST: men 147, art 7, afv 0 ATK: ftr 42, bmr 30, utl 0 DEF: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div>		
	Defending Forces HELD		
	Show Details Odds 1.94 : 1 Exit		

Below is an image of the situation in the south, as I give the turn to Sparkley.



Conclusion

This turn, I have not made many new encirclements. The Finns have encircled two Rifle Divisions and another two has been encircled in the north. Those two may easily be broken free by the Soviets, but doing so would deploy a couple of divisions that may otherwise have been sent to Pskov.

I have not really managed to make much new "Lebensraum" this turn, as the territorial gains of the Axis has been limited. Industry wise, the Soviets are still way ahead of the curve, and I have only taken two Heavy Industries this turn. Given the Logistics modifier and Sparkleys experience, I think I will not be able to change much on that account.

Losses are dropping in the sense that I have only destroyed 11 divisions this turn (three Tank Divisions, three Motorized Divisions and five Rifle Divisions). Achieving this has cost me almost 150 AFV since my last turn, while the Soviets have lost another 1.400.

In the air, the Axis has lost 55 for 513 since my last turn. Maybe 5-10 of those are German single seat fighters in units which will stay onboard for a while, so I am pretty content with these numbers. On the other hand, the Soviets have lost some 114 tactical bombers and 37 recon aircraft. Those losses will take some time to cover for the Soviets, so all in all, I am content.

Interestingly, the Soviets have mainly been flying MiG-3's during my phase, so maybe they are preparing some sort of surprise for the next turn. However, I-Type fighter bombers dropping bombs are not really something I fear.

Finally, the vehicle losses screen is interesting. So far, the Soviets have supplied me with about the same number of vehicles as I have lost invading them (not counting damaged vehicles, of course).

CURRENT PLAYER		
Vehicles Lost in Combat	137	1197
Vehicles Captured By Enemy	28	294
Vehicles Lost Moving Supplies	1211	4148
Vehicles Lost Moving Units	1682	6494
Vehicles Spent On Production	8	46
Vehicles Withdrawn With Units	0	869
Vehicles Arrived With Units	678	3971
Vehicles Captured From Enemy	1914	13840
Vehicles Damaged To All Causes	18825	70599