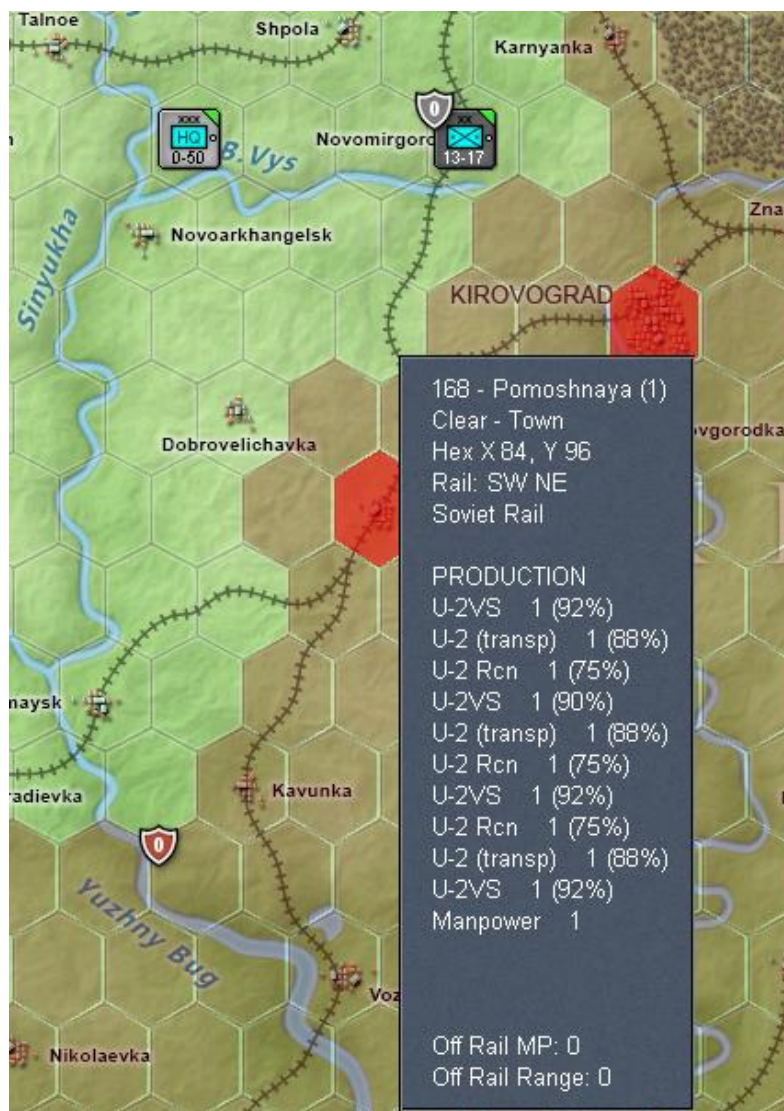


Strategic overview

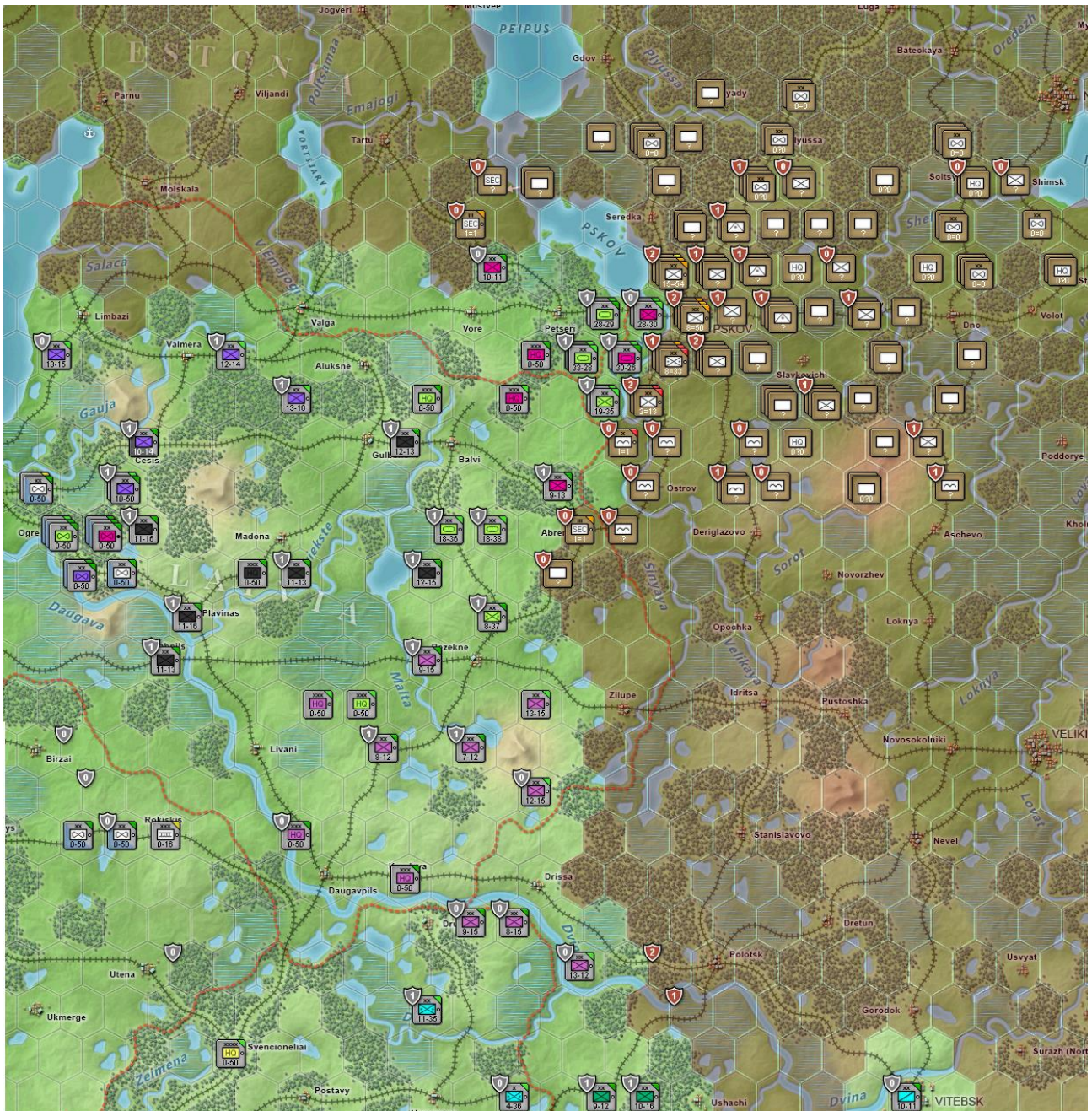
Turn 4: Strategic Considerations

Once again, the Soviets have been very defensive in their actions during their turn, having done no attacks whatsoever. Instead, they have done another 55 Recon missions, showing the absolute need for reducing the Soviet Recon airfleet.

Perhaps the most interesting news, from a strategic point of view, is this piece of evacuation history, which may not be as unrealistic as it may seem. Historically, the Soviet authorities decided to evacuate the children from Leningrad as the Germans were advancing on the city, so they loaded a lot of children on board trains and then railed them Southwest. When the citizens of Leningrad discovered this, they protested quite vocally and the transports were cancelled pending an investigation. After a while, having learned from their mistakes, the Soviet authorities began evacuating children once more. They loaded the children on to trains and railed them Southwest. Regardless, in game terms, I am quite happy to see the following.



The North



Situational assessment

In the north, the Soviets are holding on to their positions around Pskov, apparently throwing everything they have into this area. The concentration of Soviet counters alone, makes it obvious that holding Leningrad is a primary Soviet objective. The main Soviet forces are concentrated around Pskov, while to the south of the city, the front is held by Airborne Brigades and Security Units.

In the air, The Soviets have some 1200 Active Fighters and another 600 Active Level bombers in the area. On top of this, the local airfields also have plenty of damaged aircraft – 600 Fighters and 350 Level Bombers. The Soviet fighters are distributed on some 67 Air Groups, making the average count per Air Group something like 18 Active and another 10 damaged fighters per Air Group.

As all Soviet Air Regiments have been limited to 20 aircraft each, I can expect a number of fighters to be reassigned at first to the reserve for each Air Group, and then back to the reserve pool. According to the manual, the aircrafts chosen to be reassigned this way will be the ready aircraft, meaning I can expect a significant drop in ready aircraft over the coming turns (as the Air Groups go from 28 total fighters to 20).

The German Panzers in the area are partly standing in front of Pskov and partly further south. Movement is adequate but not plenty, as my units have around 20 to 40 MP to spare. Should I decide to charge the Panzers straight into the Soviet defenses, experience from the last few turns tell me that I can expect heavy losses to my tank totals.

My infantry units are moving steadily northeast however, and the first units should be able to reach the front outside Pskov this turn. Further south, I can use the advancing infantry in a few attacks on the weak Soviet units.

The Luftwaffe in this area count some 630 single engine fighters and another 77 twin engines. On top of this comes 170 Tactical bombers and 550 Level bombers.

Planning

My main plan for this turn is to move the infantry units of I Corps and XXIII Corps forward to the positions currently held by my Panzers in order to put some infantry punch into further attacks on Pskov. While doing this, I will also move my Panzers into a new attack direction and use them to advance in a southeasterly direction. I did contemplate moving all Panzers south for the attack on Moscow, but decided this would simply remove too much pressure from the Leningrad vector for now, allowing the Soviets to stop reinforcing this front.

Because of this, I intend to move the Army Group Center Panzers into an attack on Velikie Luki and then onto the Moscow attack, while the Army Group North Panzers will still be used to apply pressure on the Soviets in this sector. In a few turns, when my rail lines are advanced a little further, I might then redeploy those Panzers to the south, depending on the strength of the Soviet defensive.

In the air, I will move my airfields forward once more, taking care to place them in woods and close to the advancing rail lines, as this should help reducing fatigue over the next turns. I will then conduct a series of fighter sweeps over the Soviet fighter airfields, hoping to further reduce the number of active Soviet fighters in the area.

Depending on the success of this, I might then decide to do a number of nighttime attacks on the Soviet bomber airfields in order to reduce the danger of retaliatory attacks on my own fighter airfields. As fatigue is climbing on those airfields, I do not wish to withdraw them from the effective range of the Soviet bombers, and so some airfield attacks on my part, might be a prudent idea.

Execution

Before doing the first fighter sweep, I decided to do a single ground bombing attack on the Soviet positions using Ju88's only. This proved to me that the Soviets were prepared to fly interception against my own ground bombing attacks, and I then followed up with fighter sweeps over the Soviet ground forces at the front line.

Axis Forces Attacking: II Fliegerkorps 64 Ju 88A	1 of 1 73,32 - Clear - Clear Turn: 4 1941-07-10	Soviet Forces Defending: Northwest Air Command 10 MiG-3 24 I-153 23 I-16 Type 18 30 I-16 Type 24 12 I-16 Type 29
	Forces Engaged <div> <div> <div>ATK: men 0, art 0, afv 0</div> <div>DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0</div> <div>LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0</div> </div> <div> <div>DEF: men 0, art 0, afv 0</div> <div>DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0</div> <div>LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0</div> </div> </div> <div> <div>ATK: ftr 0, bmr 64, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: ftr 0, bmr 30, utl 0</div> </div> <div> <div>DEF: ftr 99, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: ftr 1, bmr 0, utl 0</div> </div>	
	ground forces were BOMBED	
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This revealed that the Soviets had even more fighters in the area than my recon missions had revealed, but also that I am still capable of inflicting heavy losses in dog fights that do not take place over the Soviet fighter airfields. At the end of the fighter sweeps, the casualty tally for fighters were 22 German fighters (including 11 Bf109E's about to be withdrawn) for 256 Soviet fighters (the vast majority being I-Types).

Beginning the ground attacks against the Airborne Brigades and the Security units south of Pskov, it soon became clear that the Soviets would fly ground support in their defense. This has caused some extra casualties in the air battles as my units have been attacking south of Pskov. The use of reserve units has made the calculation of "pre attack odds" more difficult for the German attacks this turn, resulting in a few failed attacks along the way.

The major move on this front this turn is a land grab conducted by two divisions in front of Velikie Luki. While I have encircled virtually no units with this move, it has brought the German lines forward to the very edge of Velikie Luki. As I could not do the land grab and take the city itself, I decided to leave the city alone until next turn, as I wish to delay the creation of partisan units in this area as much as possible.

I decided to risk some Soviet attacks on my Panzers south of Pskov, leaving them with relatively little defensive CV stacks on the line (considering the +1 Soviet attack bonus). If the Soviets decide to attack, they will suffer casualties for it, leaving their own units depleted on future turns, thus making my attacks easier (or at least, that is the plan).

As my final action in this turn, I have assigned another two Air Groups of single seat fighters to the area.

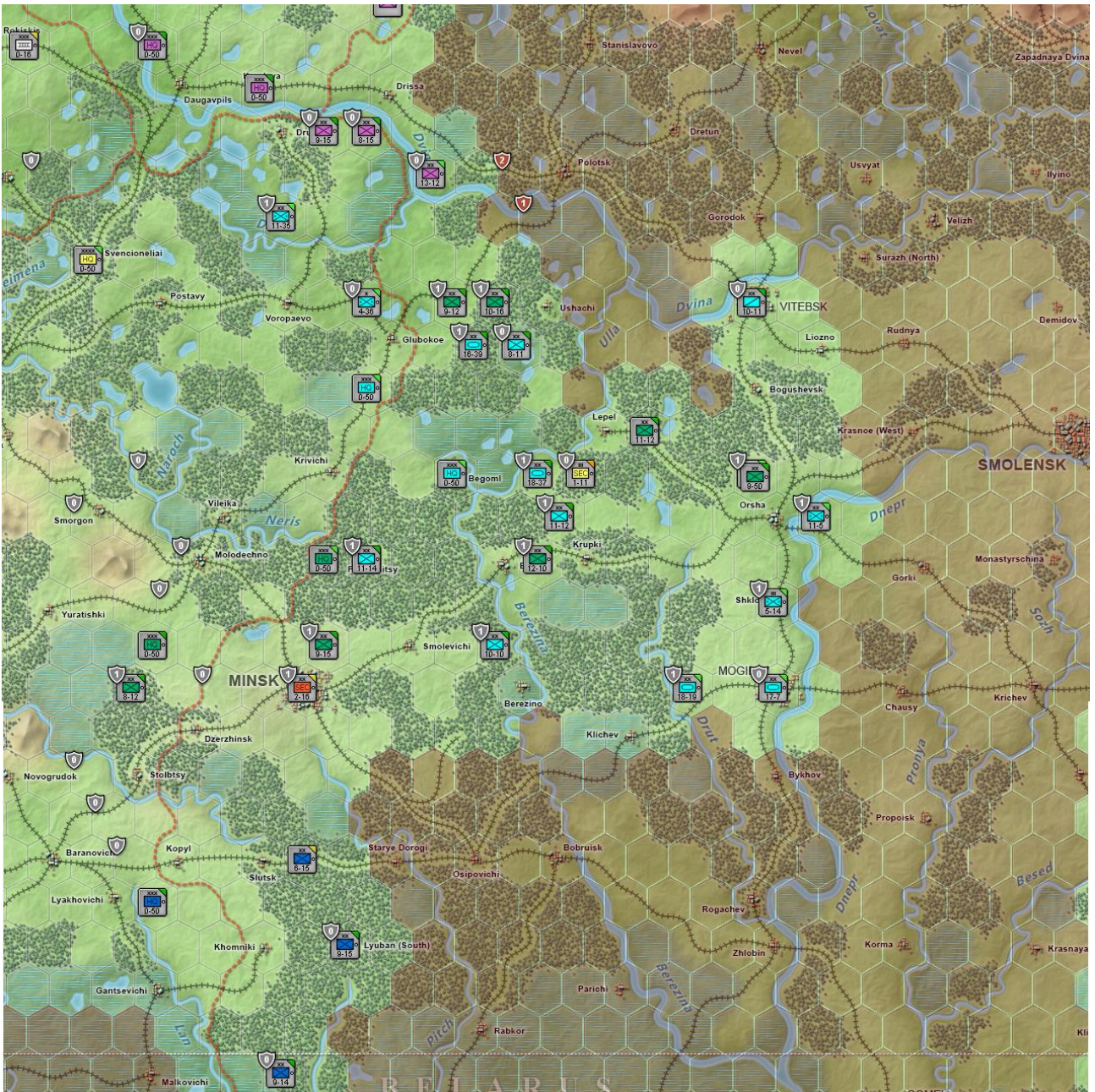
Meanwhile, in the far north, the first Finns are now active, and I have begun attacks hoping to encircle some Soviet divisions in the process. The following image is the final result of my moves in the north.



Below is an image of the situation at Pskov, as I give the turn to HardLuck.

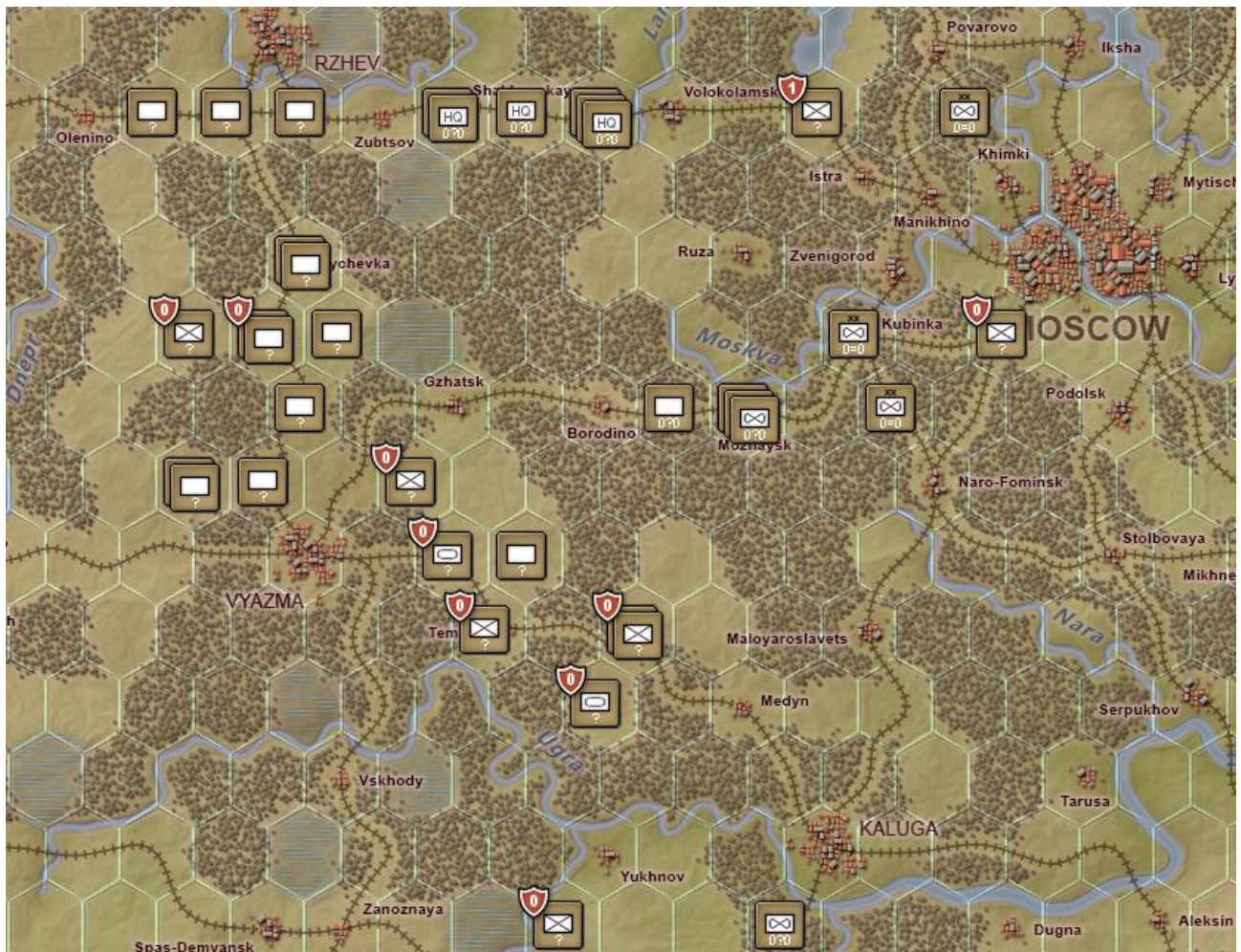


The Center



Situational Assessment

In the center, I can not find a single Soviet unit to fight. It seems that have all been pulled either north or back east to help build the defense of the Soviet capital. Recon missions around Moscow has revealed the following situation.



Planning

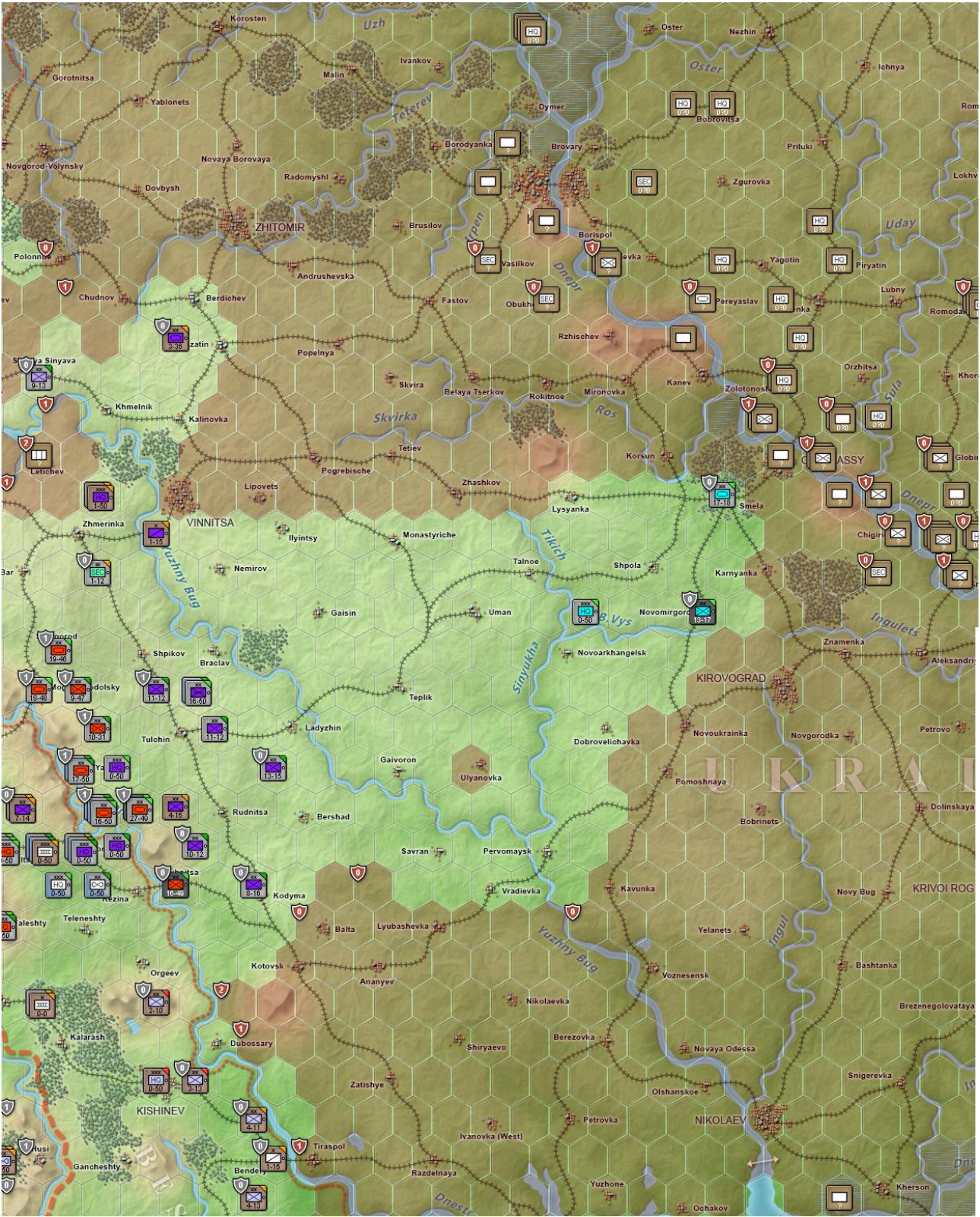
As there are no units to fight, there will also be little planning to do. I will simply push my infantry as far east as possible, while moving my Panzers into position for receiving optimal fuel supplies.

Execution

Below is an image of the situation at Smolensk, as I give the turn to HardLuck.



The South



Situational assessment

In the south, at least, I will be able to destroy a few Soviet units this turn. To the west of the above image, the Kovel and Lvov pockets still hold, and there should be some opportunity for destroying Soviet formations.

Along the Dnepr, the Soviets have placed a series of motorized divisions in stacks with what I expect are Rifle divisions meant for digging, hoping to delay my crossing of the river as much as possible.

My own Panzers have fuel, but are still a long way from the river, meaning that I will not have the movement to cross the river this turn, unfortunately.

Behind the Dnepr, I can spy a few soviet airfields with various Air Groups on them.

To the east, the Soviets have evacuated the factories at Dnepropetrovsk.

Planning

This turn, I will spend my time preparing for an attempt to cross the Dnepr come next turn. In order to do this, I will advance several of my Panzers to the very edge of the river, while I keep others back doing an HQBU on them, in order to give them enough fuel to force the defenders on the river back come next turn.

I will also move my XI Infantry Corps at all speed towards the river, hoping to use these troops in a few attacks on the Soviet river defenses come next turn.

To the rear, I will continue the destruction of the pockets, although I will not be able to finish them off this turn.

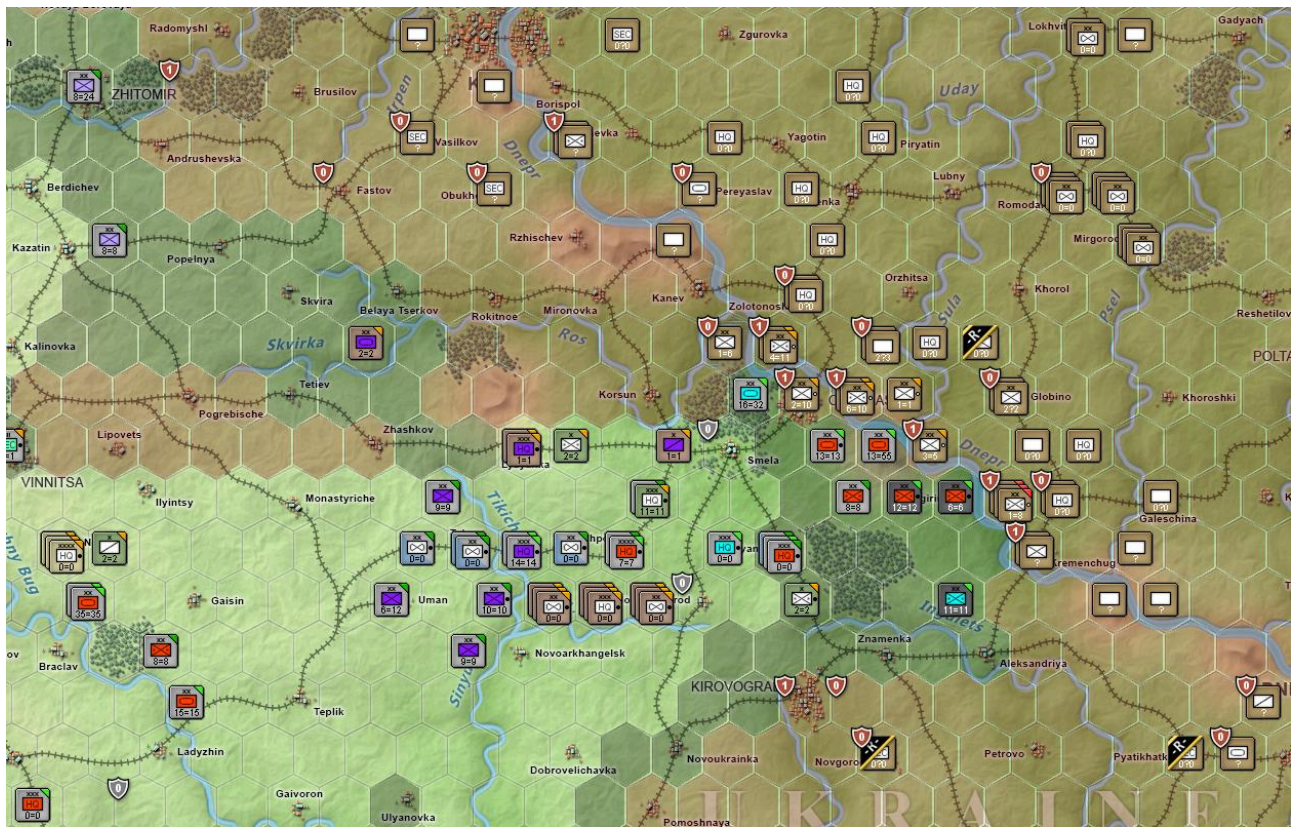
In the air, I will seek another set of dog fights with the Soviets, as I believe I can cause some casualties to the Soviet fighter wing that it will take some time for the Soviets to heal.

Execution

I have pushed several of my Panzers all the way up to the Dnepr, while I have moved one Corps forward cautiously in order to be able to do a HQBU on it this turn (not moving more than 25% of MP). As the Corps HQ doing the HQBU is at eight MP and six hexes from its nearest railhead, I expect the Corps (four divisions) to have quite a lot of fuel come next turn.

In the air, I have fought another series of dog fights as intended and caused some damage to the Soviet airforces. However, the intensity of these battles have been nowhere near that of the fights occurring in the north. In order to help the Luftwaffe, I have moved the Axis Minor airfields forward, hoping to use them for various ground and airfield bombings on future turns.

Below is an image of the situation west of Kirovograd, as I give the turn to HardLuck.



Conclusion

This has been a difficult turn for me, I think. In the north, the concentration of Soviet forces means that any progress will have to await the coming of my infantry units, while in the center, there are no Soviet troops left to fight. I am still unable to advance, as my supply lines are stretched to their limit. The soviet strategy is clearly based on this limitation for the Germans. In response, I am sending virtually all new infantry divisions north as well as steadily reassigning Pioneers and Motorized Flak units in the same direction.

In the south, I have been unable to attempt a crossing of the Dnepr this turn, and will have to wait until next turn before making the attempt. I have done my best to prepare for it, and I hope to be able to force my way across come next turn.

In the air, losses since my last turn have been high, especially amongst the fighters. The Axis have thus lost 32 fighters (including 12 Bf109F's) while the Soviets have lost 451 fighters and a lot more damaged (which will lead to further losses come the Soviet Logistics phase). The Soviets are clearly concentrating their fighter strength in the north, but I hope to be able to use this to my advantage, as I myself have significant fighter forces here.