

Strategic overview

Turn 15: Strategic Considerations

The Soviets are running on the entire line between the Oka river and the Black Sea. North of the Oka, the Soviets are standing their ground, defending more or less every inch of soil.

There have been few Soviet attacks this turn, and in the air, the Soviets have been completely passive except for massive Recon missions conducted all along the front. The Soviet Guards divisions are being pulled off the line and sent somewhere east, probably to build their strength for the winter battles. I assume I will be facing an army of twelve or so Guards Rifle divisions under the command of Zhukov once the blizzard strikes.

The Soviet OoB has now reached five million men, which is bad news. On the plus side, the Germans still have more than 5.000 AFV and about 140 single seat fighters in the reserve pools, so the Germans have not suffered much from attrition either.

The North



Situational assessment

In the north, the Soviets have done no attacks and also appear to have sent some of their forces eastwards to defend against the German attack on Torzhok and Kalinin. There are a few possibilities for German attacks, but nowhere can I gain terrain by such attacks.

There is also a need to start preparing positions for the coming winter.

In the air, there are still some 500 Soviet fighters present to deal with a force of about 120 Luftwaffe Single seat fighters.

Planning

This turn, I will begin preparing for winter in earnest, by pulling forces off the main lines in order to construct fortifications for a second line of defense. I will try to carefully select forces that can be spared on the frontlines without weakening them too much and allowing for Soviet attacks to push me out of my frontline positions.

Execution

My main focus this turn has been to disengage units from the front and place them in places where I need second line fortifications come winter. I have combined this with a little reorganization of the 18th Army, as the Corps structure was set for attacks (with six strong divisions in one corps for instance).

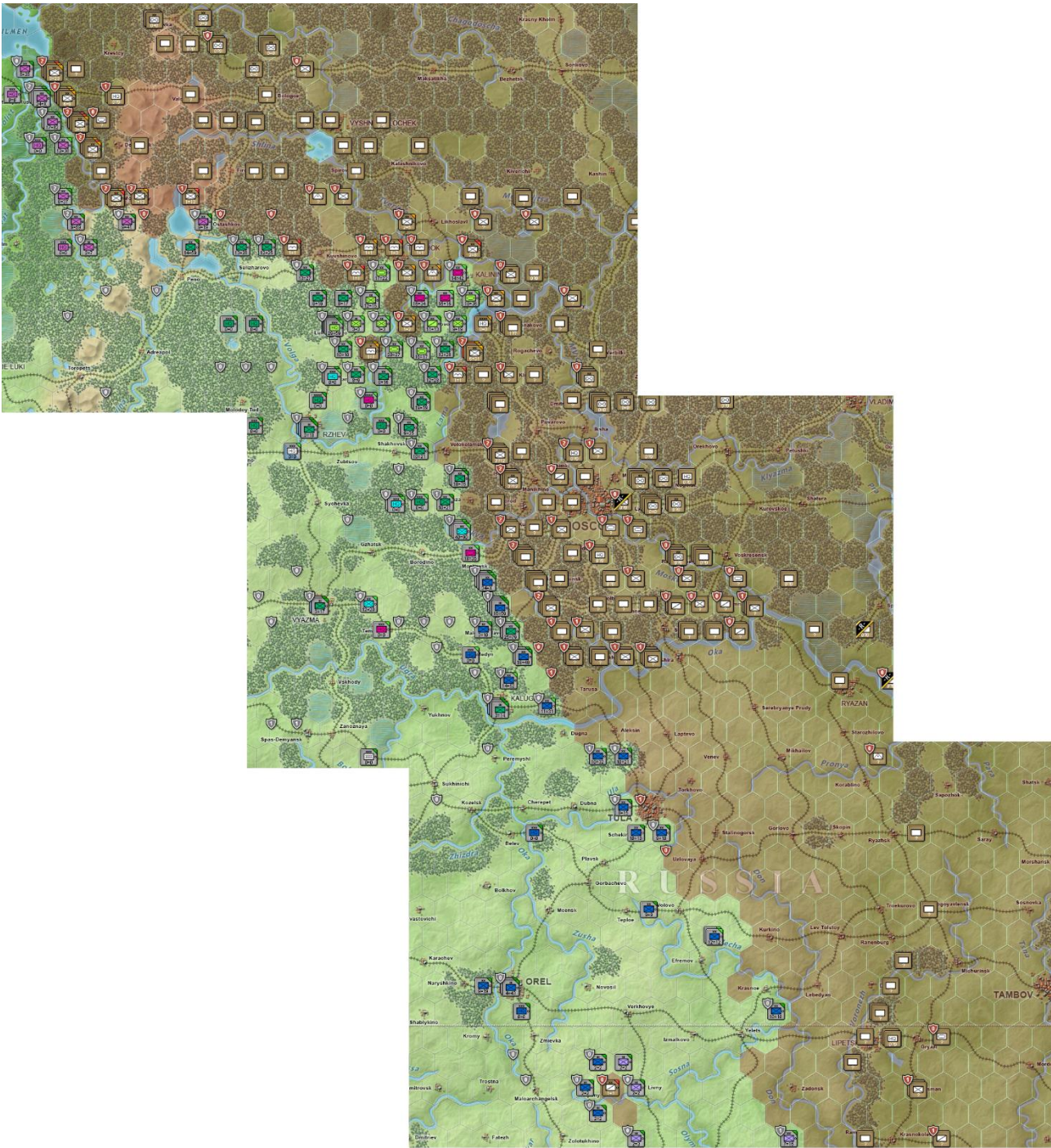
I also did one attack south of Lake Ilmen, but the result was somewhat disappointing.

Axis Forces Attacking: II Corps -6% 12th Infantry Division (50) 121st Infantry Division (44) 506th Howitzer Battalion (0) 526th Howitzer Battalion (0) 809th Howitzer Battalion (1) 656th Pioneer Battalion (7) X Corps CV: 266->369.4 Eng Val: 10 Comm HQ: X Corps G Christian Hansen	<div>1 of 1 85,29 - Clear - Clear Turn: 15 1941-09-25</div> <div> Forces Engaged <div> ATK: men 77047, art 799, afv 2 DAM: men 111, art 9, afv 0 LOST: men 282, art 8, afv 0 ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 </div> <div> DEF: men 39311, art 399, afv 41 DAM: men 301, art 8, afv 1 LOST: men 394, art 3, afv 1 DEF: ftr 230, bmr 64, utl 0 LOST: ftr 14, bmr 1, utl 0 </div> </div> <div> 115th Rifle Division RETREATED 165th Rifle Division RETREATED 153rd Rifle Division RETREATED Odds 2.27 : 1 Show Details Exit </div>	Soviet Forces Defending: 8th Army 153rd Rifle Division (29) 165th Rifle Division (29) 115th Rifle Division (36) 8th Cavalry Division (3) R 11th Motorcycle Regiment (4) 403rd BM Howitzer Regiment (2) Northwest Air Command CV: 103->162.7 Fort: 0.24->0.00 Comm HQ: 8th Army GM Fyodor Tolbukhin
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Below is an image of the situation south of Leningrad, as I give the turn to HardLuck.



The Center



Situational Assessment

Southwest of Torzhok, the Soviet have left delaying forces directly in front of the Germans, while they have begun building a new defensive line along the Tveritsa and Schlina rivers. The Soviets have also reestablished contact with one of their encircled divisions, but have been unable to extract it.

Axis Forces Defending:		1 of 3 > 98,37 - Light Woods - Clear Turn: 14 1941-09-18		Soviet Forces Attacking:	
XXXIX Panzer Corps 3/20th Motorized Division (56) II/70th Artillery Battalion (0)		Forces Engaged		31st Army 157th Rifle Division (19) 100th Rifle Division (27) 10th Airborne Brigade (7) 116th Howitzer Regiment (1) 24th Mortar Battalion (0)	
		DEF: men 5037, art 62, afv 3 DAM: men 5, art 3, afv 0 LOST: men 32, art 1, afv 0 DEF: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0		ATK: men 25304, art 300, afv 14 DAM: men 216, art 5, afv 0 LOST: men 624, art 6, afv 0 ATK: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0	
		3/20th Motorized Division RETREATED			
CV: 56->19.5 Fort: 0.02->0.00 Comm HQ: XXXIX Panzer Corps G Rudolf Schmidt		Show Details Odds 4.53 : 1 Exit		CV: 54->69.0 Eng Val: 0 Comm HQ: 31st Army GL Nikolai Vatutin	

Behind the lines, the Soviets have moved several airfields into position, and they now have 500 fighters and 200 level bombers in place behind their forward lines.

Directly in front of Moscow little has happened, except the Soviets have taken the terrain between the German and the Soviet lines.

Further south, the Soviets have abandoned Tula and pulled back behind the Oka river. This leaves open terrain all the way south to Lipetsk.

Planning

As my first action this turn, I will attempt a massive attack on the stack of three Soviet fighter airfields northwest of Vysny Volochek. If this attack succeeds, I might follow up with more attacks on the bomber and fighter airfields of the area. By looking at the numbers, I am able to send 344 single seat fighters and 295 level bombers against those airfields that have just moved this turn. As I have low fatigue on my airfields, I expect most planes to fly and I am curious to see how effective such an attack on the Soviet airfield is. As I have plenty of fighters and bombers still in my reserve pool, I am not overly concerned about losses on my part, and as the Soviet MiG-3 production has been temporarily stopped due to evacuation, I have a chance to reduce the Soviet fighter strength a little.

On the ground, my main attack will be aimed at the area south of the Tveritsa and the Schlina rivers. I will attempt to push two Rifle divisions into an encirclement, and also to bring myself into position for an attack across the Schlina on the rail line running west from Bologoe. Disrupting that, will diminish the Soviet capability for attacking south of Lake Ilmen come December.

At Moscow, I will start preparing my defensive lines, while south of the Oka, I will continue forward taking Tula and using one Panzer division to reach Ryazan. If the city is not well defended, I can launch a prepared attack, and if it is, I can pull the Panzer division back towards it's supply lines.

Execution

The initial attack proved the futility of trying to bomb the Soviet airfields, even after they have moved. While I was still able to inflict good losses in a dogfight, the fact that the Soviets fly more Air Groups than I mean that some will push past my fighters and inflict losses on the bombers.

Axis Forces Attacking:	1 of 1	93,27 - Clear - Clear	Turn:15 1941-09-25	Soviet Forces Defending:
	Forces Engaged			
	ATK: men 0, art 0, afv 0	DEF: men 0, art 0, afv 0		
	DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0	DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0		
VIII Fliegerkorps	LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0	LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0		Leningrad Air Command
201 Bf 109F-2				39 MiG-3
57 Bf 109F-4				35 I-153
86 He 111H-4	ATK: ftr 258, bmr 98, utl 0	DEF: ftr 289, bmr 0, utl 0		27 I-15bis
12 Ju 86E-2	LOST: ftr 4, bmr 21, utl 0	LOST: ftr 43, bmr 0, utl 0		90 I-16 Type 24
	airfield was BOMBED			25 Yak-1
				73 LaGG-3
	Show Details		Exit	

After this attack, I briefly considered doing a number of fighter sweeps on the Soviets, but the rise in Luftwaffe fatigue due to the long flight persuaded me to abandon this idea.

I then began attacking at Torzhok and eventually pushed two Soviet Rifle divisions into a pocket. During these attacks, I was surprised once again to see that Retreating Soviets would rather withdraw adjacent to an attacking units than it would withdraw westwards. I really need to get used to this fact.

I also found that for a lot of ground bombing attacks, the Soviets would not fly in defense of their units, so I began doing these attacks with JU88's without fighter cover. This turned out to be a mistake, as on about the sixth or seventh ground bombing attack, the Soviets suddenly decided to fly, causing massive losses to my Ju88's. The lesson is, that the Soviets have collected their main line divisions in commands supported by airforces, while their forward units are not.

Axis Forces Attacking:	<div>< 2 of 3 > 94,30 - Light Woods - Clear Turn:15 1941-09-25</div>		Soviet Forces Defending:
	Forces Engaged		
	ground forces were BOMBED		
VIII Fliegerkorps 107 Ju 88A	ATK: men 0, art 0, afv 0 DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0 LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0 ATK: ftr 0, bmr 107, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 74, 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 93, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 6, bmr 0, utl 0
	Show Details Exit		Leningrad Air Command 20 MiG-3 3 I-153 3 I-15bis 30 I-16 Type 24 9 I-16 Type 29 1 Yak-1

The loss of 74 Ju88's in one combat comprise about 20% of the Level Bombers I have lost so far during the campaign. As I currently have some 161 Ju88's in my Reserve pool (along with 346 more level bombers) I do not consider the loss a catastrophic. It does, however, reiterate the point that the Soviets have a far easier time covering heavy losses than the Germans. The air war is heavily favoring the Soviets, and it will be an uphill struggle for me for the rest of the game.

My final action in the Torzhok area was to run an HQBU on the Panzer Corps holding the line south of Kalinin. Next turn, this Corps should be able to move quite well, and I wish to be able to throw it into the fight at the Schlina river if need be.

At Moscow, I have reclaimed the "no mans land" between the Soviets and the Germans. Should the Soviets decide to attack in this area (I doubt they will), they will have to pay the MP cost to enter the first hex before any attacks are conducted.

Still further south, I have taken Tula and pushed a Panzer division all the way up to Ryazan and then pushed the Soviets out of the city in an uneventful battle.

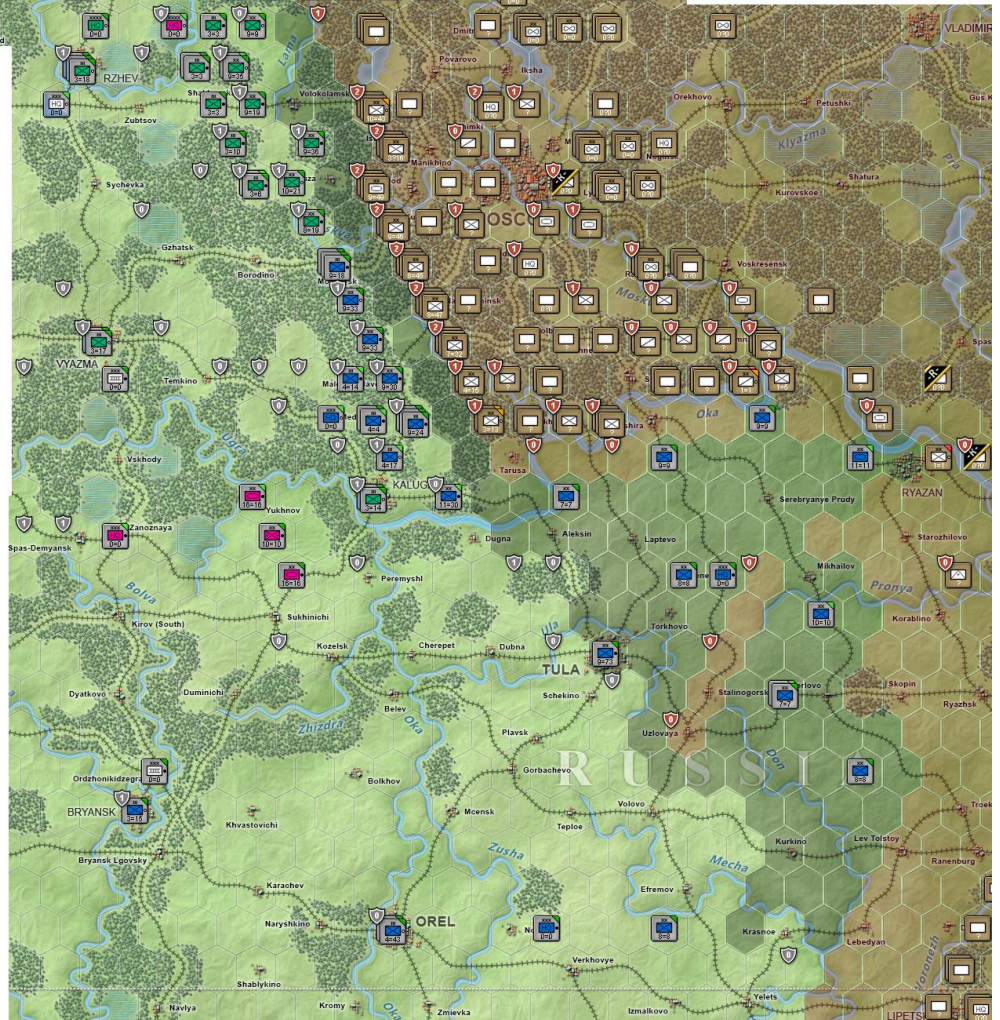
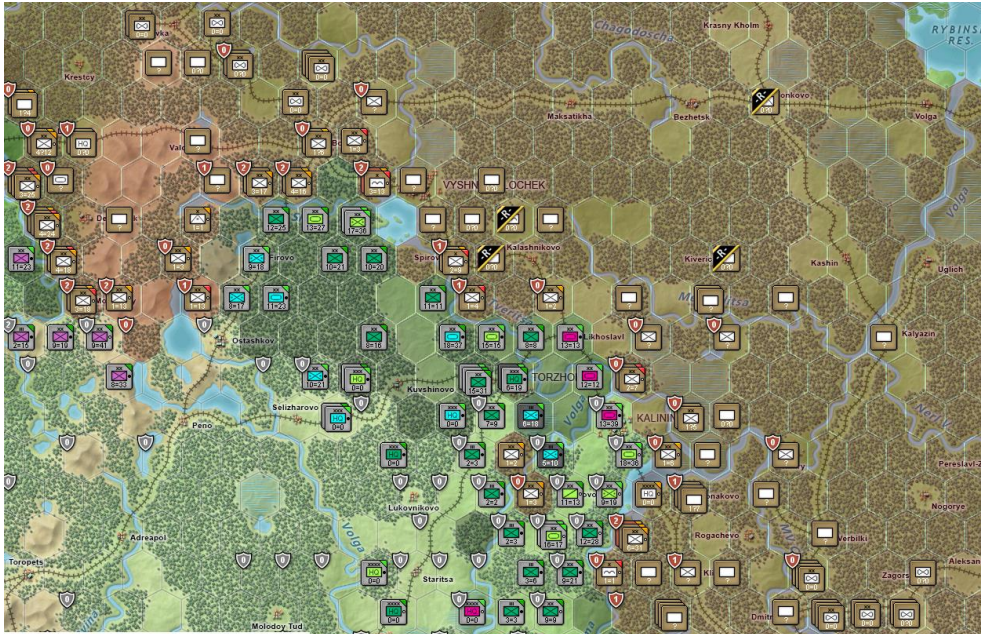
<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>IX Corps</div> <div>3rd Panzer Division (125)</div> <div>I/108th Artillery Battalion (1)</div> <div>856th Howitzer Battalion (1)</div>	1 of 1116,52 - City(Ryazan) - ClearTurn:15 1941-09-25		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>32nd Army</div> <div>338th Rifle Division (57)</div>
	<div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 15919, art 160, afv 140</div> <div>DAM: men 12, art 1, afv 13</div> <div>LOST: men 17, art 1, afv 2</div> <div>ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>DEF: men 10182, art 95, afv 0</div> <div>DAM: men 63, art 2, afv 0</div> <div>LOST: men 63, art 1, afv 0</div> <div>DEF: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div>		
	338th Rifle Division RETREATED		
<div>CV: 126->223.5</div> <div>Eng Val: 4</div> <div>Comm HQ: IX Corps</div> <div>GL Friedrich Kirchner</div>	<div>Show Details</div> <div>Odds 2.48 : 1</div> <div>Exit</div>		<div>CV: 57->90.0</div> <div>Fort: 0.82->0.00</div> <div>Comm HQ: 32nd Army</div> <div>GL Nikolai Klykov</div>

There is a chance the the Soviets will react by attacking south across the Oka, so I have placed a Panzer Corps on the German rail lines to the west. This corps can then move north or east as needed next turn.

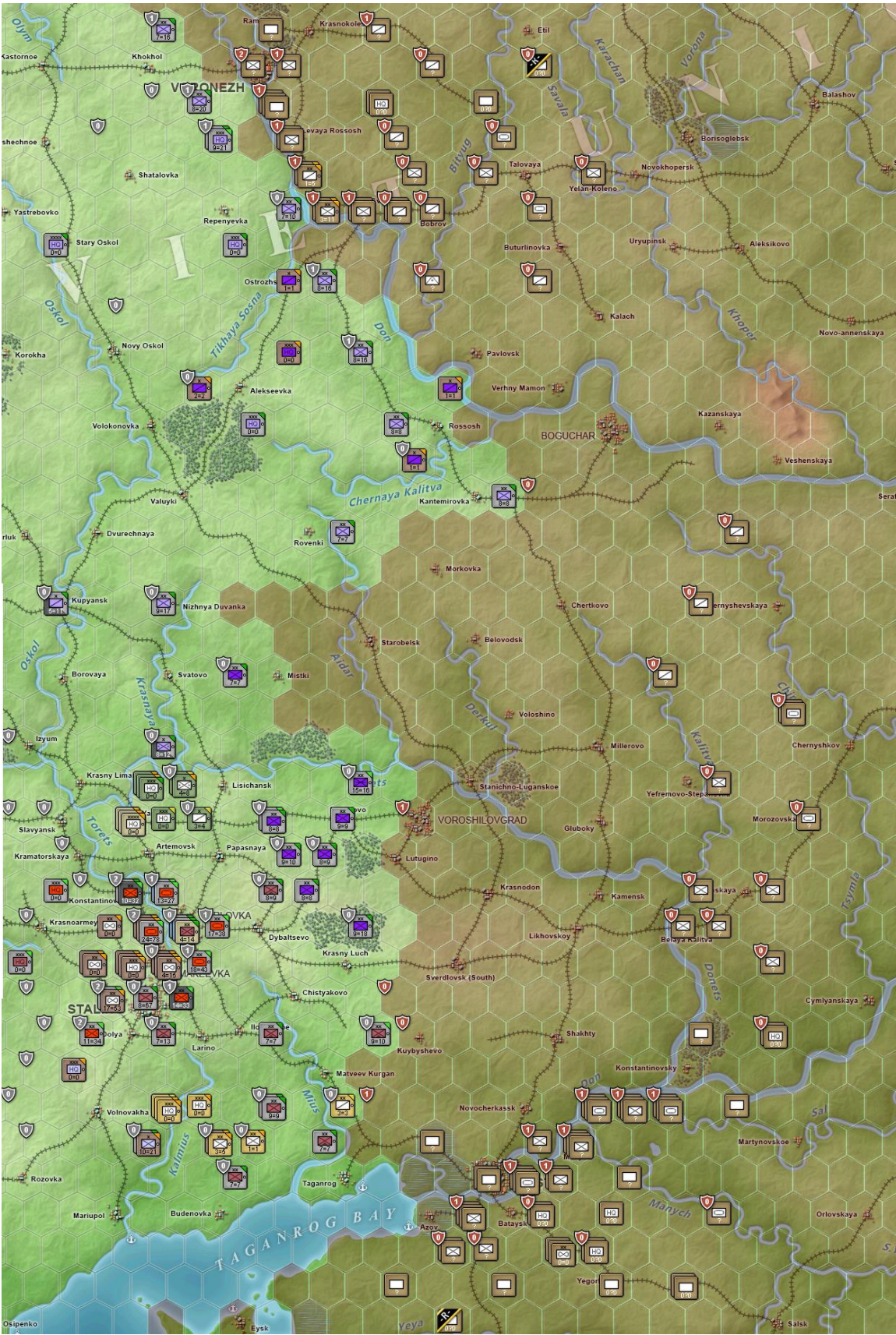
I have also sent one FBD unit on rails towards the south. It will be a while before it arrives, but the plan is to start closing the gap between the Southern railconnections and those around Moscow. If I can do this before the Soviet partisans starts hitting me for real, I will be a lot less vulnerable to such attacks.

About the only other thing I have done in this area, is to destroy the encircled Soviet Cavalry division.

At Moscow, this has led to the following situation, as I give the turn to HardLuck.



The South



Situational assessment

The Soviets has basically just done “a runner” on the entire stretch of the Southern sector. This turn, both Boguchar and Voroshilovgrad are well within the reach of the German units.

The Soviets are establishing a strong line based on the Don river holding on to Rostov and the swamps to the west of the city.

Planning

I will simply continue to push forward all over the front, capturing population centers as I go. Before the turn, I counted some 50 population points still in Soviet hands west of the Don/Donetsk/Kalitva rivers – excluding Rostov, which I deem I will be unable to take before the blizzard.

Execution

In the south, I have pushed forward to the swamps west of Rostov and attacked to take on of the hexes. This combat saw the Luftwaffe fly to support the ground troops, which proved to be another defeat in the air for the Germans.

1 of 3 > 121,101 - Swamp - Clear Turn: 15 1941-09-25		
Axis Forces Attacking: XXXXIX Mountain Corps 1st Mountain Division (152) 4th Mountain Division (109) IV/221st Howitzer Battalion (1) 658th Pioneer Battalion (13) II Fliegerkorps 23 Bf 109F-2	Forces Engaged ATK: men 26579, art 308, afv 0 DAM: men 29, art 9, afv 0 LOST: men 146, art 6, afv 0 ATK: ftr 35, bmr 60, utl 0 LOST: ftr 3, bmr 28, utl 0 DEF: men 23337, art 233, afv 9 DAM: men 84, art 4, afv 0 LOST: men 98, art 1, afv 4 DEF: ftr 107, bmr 11, utl 0 LOST: ftr 2, bmr 0, utl 0 343rd Rifle Division RETREATED	Soviet Forces Defending: [^] Southern Air Command 84 I-153 19 I-16 Type 24 11 IL-4 4 -> 37mm Anti-Aircraft Gun 4 -> 85mm Anti-aircraft Gun
CV: 275->699.7 Eng Val: 6 Comm HQ: XXXIX Mountain Corps G Ludwig Kuebler	Show Details Odds 3.05 : 1 Exit	CV: 123->228.8 Fort: 0.46->0.00 Comm HQ: Coastal Army GL Nikandr Chibisov

Apart from blaming myself for not having a firm grasp of what flies when, this battle also shows another important fact: The Soviets can easily put enough planes in the air to push past Luftwaffe escorts if there are too few of them around. This will then prove costly for the Germans. The lesson seems to be that the Germans need to put at least some 100+ fighters into the air to protect their bombers. In areas where the Soviets have 500 fighters or more (which means all the primary theaters), the Luftwaffe needs to fly at least 300 fighters to protect their bombers.

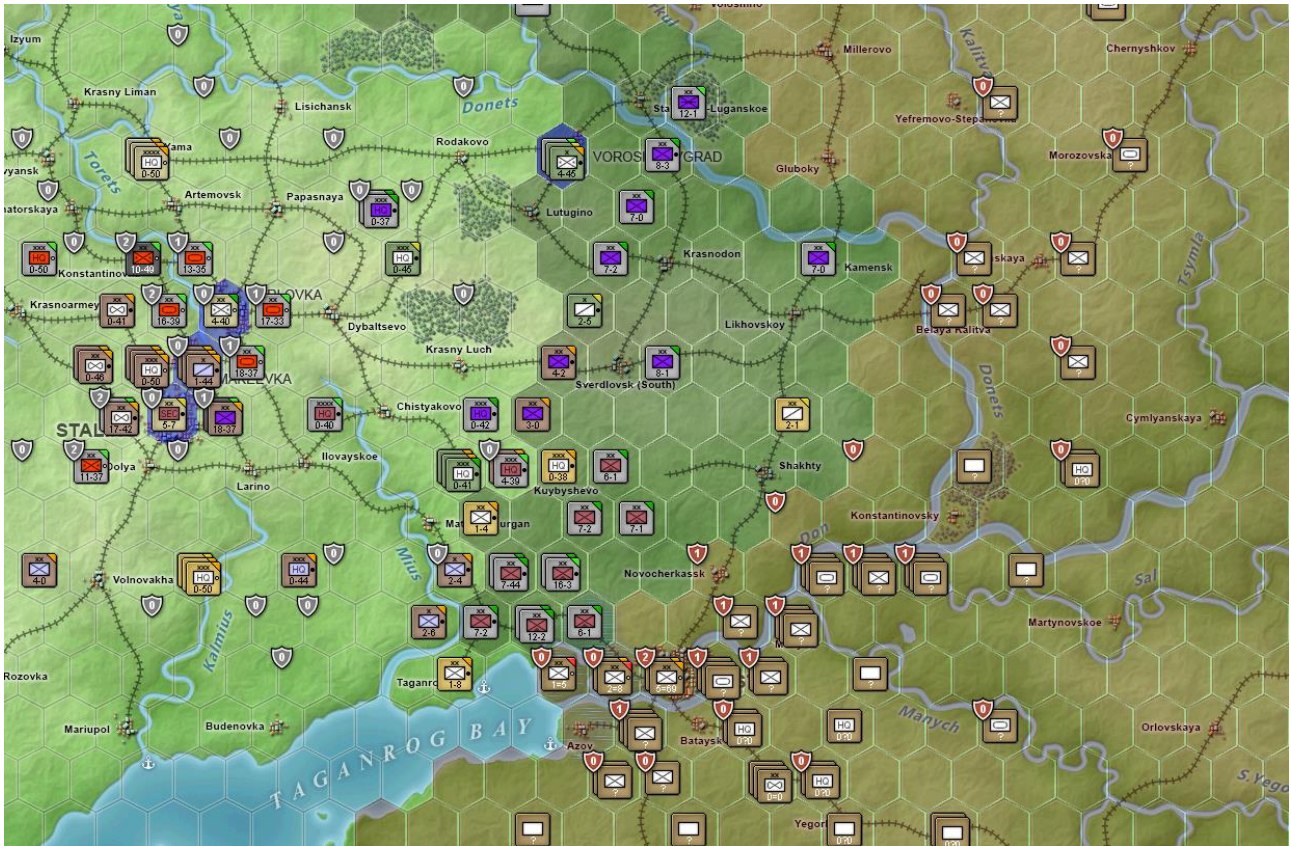
As has already been shown very aptly by HardLuck, there is no real point for the Luftwaffe to hunt for Soviet fighters, as this will simply gain experience for the Soviet Air Force. As a result, the optimal use of the Luftwaffe seems to be to group them into one huge blob and fight for supremacy over one section of the front. The Germans simply do not have enough fighters to go around to fight effectively in more than one location.

I have come to believe that game mechanics dictate, that against a competent Soviet opponent willing to micromanage his airforce, the Luftwaffe needs to accept that she can only fight over one section of the front. The Germans will also have to turn off interception during the Soviet turn, and rely solely on Ground Support. Consequently, the Soviet Air Force will have an autovictory of sorts as early as the fall of 1941.

Little else has happened in the south, as I have simply just been marching forward, the best I can.

On Crimea, I am closing in on Kerch, but the presence of at least two Rifle divisions, three Airborne Brigades and one Naval Rifle Brigade suggest that there will be a siege of the port come winter.

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



Conclusion

This turn losses in the air are numerically equal, with 189 Axis aircraft destroyed since my last turn for 197 Soviet ones. The Axis losses include some 128 Level Bombers and 29 Tactical Bombers. The loss of level bombers comprise about 25-30% of the total number of lost aircraft during the campaign, and I can replace them from current reserve pools. The Tactical bombers lost are mainly Ju87B's, which I can not easily replace. I am now about 50 of those aircraft short of filling up the various Air Groups flying this type, and my production of Ju87D-1's is way to low to fill in this number for the foreseeable future. The result is obviously to disengage the tactical bombers during the winter, slowly letting production fill up the gap. Ironically, neither the Soviets nor the Luftwaffe seem to be able to fly tactical bombers during the coming winter battles.

On the ground it seems the German offensive is reaching its limits. I have failed to take either Moscow or Leningrad, but on the other hand my forces are standing well eastwards of their historical progress in many locations. However events may turn out, preparations for winter has begun.

One final note of interest is this loss report showing the number of Soviet Pe-2R's lost during the turn to be four, and the total number of Pe-2R's lost during the campaign to be three.....

Pe-2	0	4	267
Pe-2R	0	4	3
Yer-2	0	0	2