

Turn 24, Strategic overview

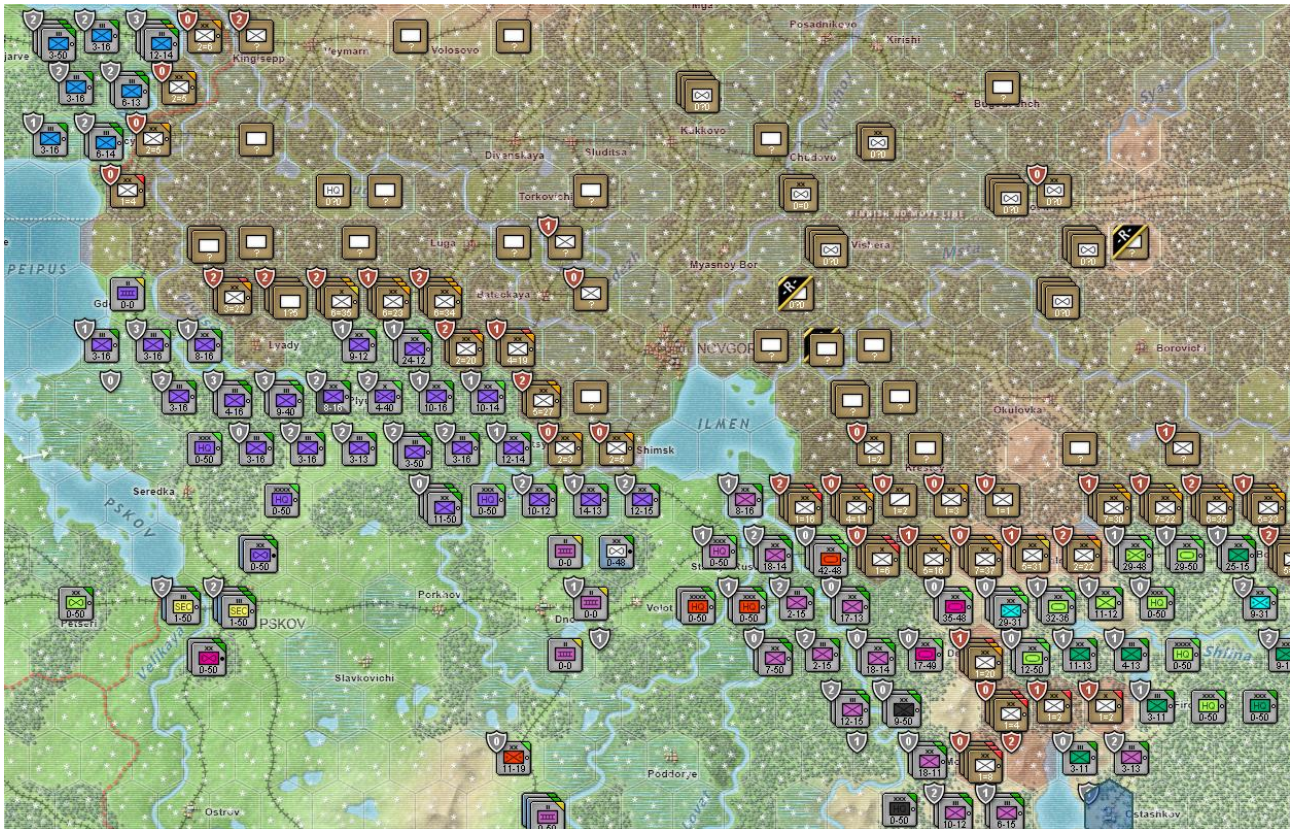
HardLuck has recently decided to downscale the level of commitment he is making to WitE. As such he has decided to continue only this game and discontinue all others for now. I am glad he has decided to continue this game, but I also feel that if he is indeed burnt out, I will not expect to much of a future commitment. If HardLuck should so desire, this game will come to an end, as there is no point playing on if either player is no longer enjoying the game.

On the ground, the Soviets have used the last turn before the blizzard to rush forward towards the German positions. Almost along the entire length of the front, there are stacks of three Soviet units adjacent to the Germans. The Soviets have also deployed nine Guards Rifle divisions and about 160 tactical bombers to the area around Tula, but as I know the Soviets have some 20 Guards Rifle divisions in total and about 570 high quality tactical bombers, they still have forces that have not been deployed to the front.

The Guards units and tactical bombers that have been deployed have all been sent to the Tula area, where the Germans are thinly stretched. My guess is that these units have simply been sent to make the Germans commit their strategic reserves and that the main thrust of the Soviet winter offensive will come elsewhere. For this reason I will not be sending my Mountain units to this location, but rather simply place the on rails where I can and then wait for the real attack to materialize.

The weather along the entire front is snow, with an absolute certainty of blizzard arriving next turn.

The North



Situational assessment

In the north, the pocket containing ten Soviet Rifle divisions has held, and I now have one turn to reduce it and destroy those divisions before the blizzard. The Soviets have put up some surprisingly high defensive CV's here, but I have little doubt that I will be able to break it nonetheless.

Along the front, the Soviets are moving adjacent to the Germans everywhere, no doubt hoping to cause attrition and to be in position for a preblizzard strike or two on the German positions.

Due to the heavy fighting in this area, there are few towns where the population is higher than one, and I will have to accept some attrition on the units left in the forward positions.

Planning

Obviously, I will reduce the Soviet pocket, eliminating the encircled Rifle divisions this turn. I hope to be able to do so without using my Mountain troops, hoping instead to send those units back on rails somewhere east of Velikie Luki to act as a strategic reserve. If that means accepting some AFV losses, then so be it.

Other than that, I will do one or two preemptive strikes against exposed Soviet stacks and otherwise focus on bringing my front in order and establishing better supply lines. I will also need to move a couple of Panzer divisions back to Velikie Luki for R&R.

In the air, I will use my local bombers to conduct a series of night bombing attacks on Soviet stacks with high experience, as this is the only instance where I can cause fatigue without giving free experience.

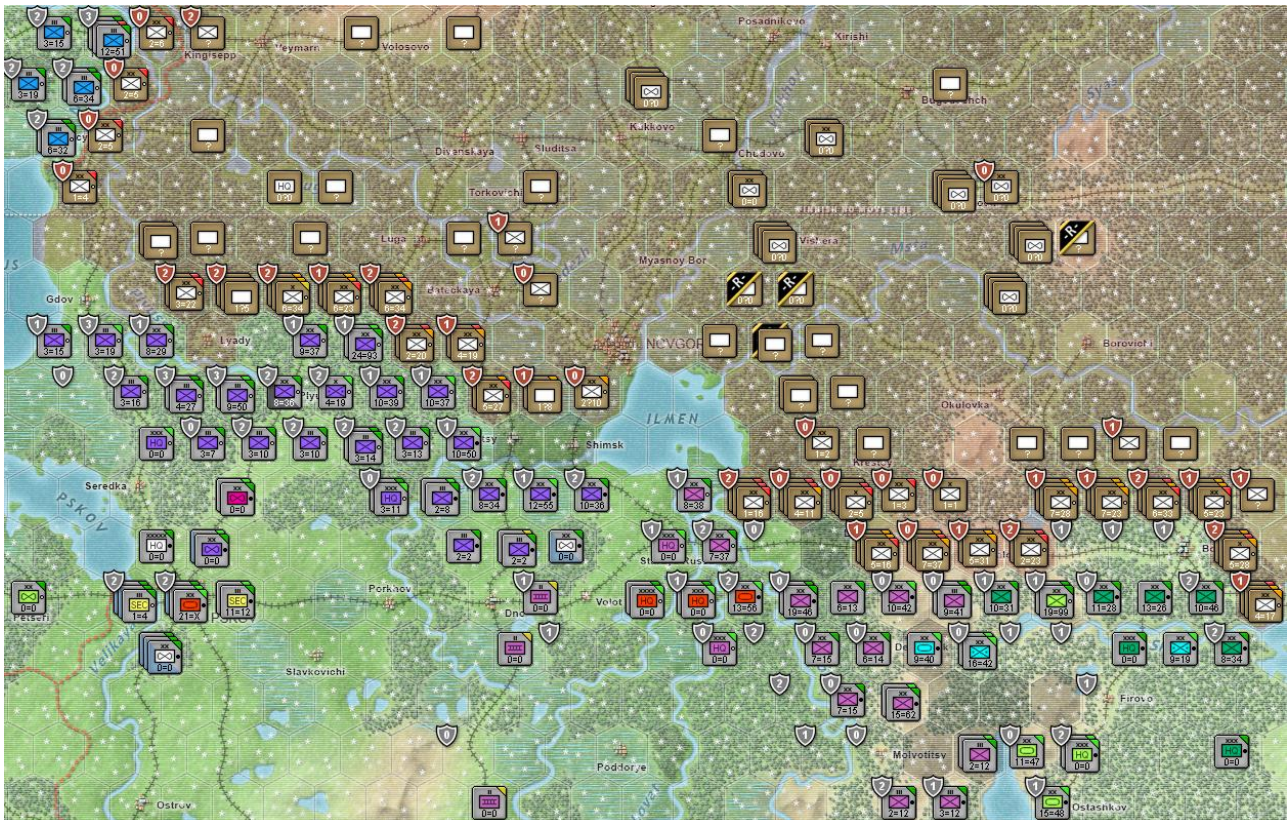
Execution

As Expected, the pocket of encircled Soviet divisions have been destroyed, and I was able to do so without engaging my Mountain infantry units. Moreover, I have been able to disengage a series of the Panzer divisions in the area, pulling them back to rail lines or to cities like Pskov.

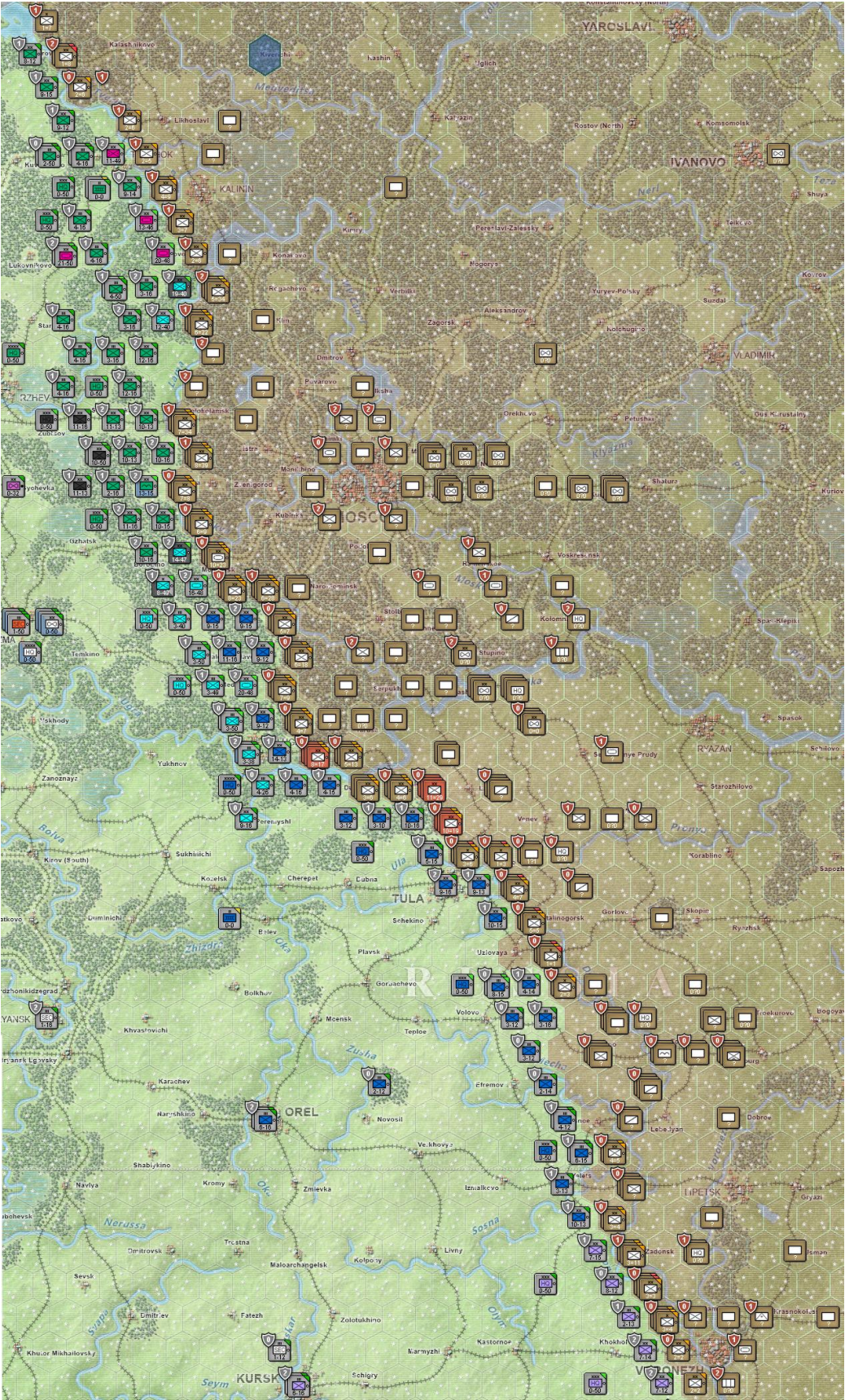
Otherwise, little has happened in the north. I have executed a couple of ground attacks in the area just west of Lake Ilmen, but otherwise has done very little in the area.

West of Vysny Volochek, I have given a little ground, and expect to continue to do so over the coming turns.

The situation looks like this, as I give the turn to HardLuck



The Center



Situational Assessment

In the center, the Soviet Kalinin Sector of the front is relatively thinly held, although the Soviets have units on every single hex. No doubt the poor supply network of the area has meant that the Soviets do not prioritize this sector of the front very highly.

In front of Moscow, the Soviets have sent forward a lot of weaker units, but also one stack of three strong mobile divisions. I am quite worried about those units, as they have the mobility to create encirclements after the infantry have broken the front.

At Kaluga, the Soviets have placed three Guards Rifle units in a forward position, and six more are poised to attack north of Tula. South of Tula, the Soviets are looking weaker, probably partly due to the slightly longer Soviet supply lines in this area.

In the air, the Soviets have placed tactical bombers in position to support the Guards units at Kaluga and Tula.

Planning

In the center, my efforts will differ in the various sectors of the front.

Northwest of Moscow, I will be more or less content to maintain my lines for now, as there seems to be little imminent threat of a major Soviet offensive.

Between Moscow and Kaluga, I will do some attacks to weaken the Soviet buildup for the coming winter attack:

- First, there are three stacks of three units within two hexes of Kaluga. If I attack and displace those in the right order, the three Guards Rifle divisions will have nowhere to displace, and will be routed instead. Combined with some heavy bombing, this might well leave them weakened due to fatigue and in poor position before the winter.
- Second, the three mobile Soviet divisions making up a 10=23 stack is in clear terrain, and if forced to retreat might well have to leave a few AFV behind weakening its efficiency in future combat.

At Tula, I will mainly be shifting my stronger units north, as this is where the Soviet Guards divisions are present, and south of the city I have absolutely no problems simply giving ground if the Soviets advance. I will also be doing one or two preemptive attacks, in order to reduce the Soviet buildup areas in front of the German lines.

Execution

West of Moscow, I preceded the attack on the three mobile divisions with two night time bombing attacks before doing the ground attack itself. This attack saw some heavy casualties inflicted on the Soviet AFV.

<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>XXXXVI Panzer Corps -16%</div> <div>10th Panzer Division (117)</div> <div>Das Reich SS Mot. Div (117)</div> <div>602nd SP Lt Flk Bn (4)</div> <div>85th Mnt Pnr Bn (7)</div> <div>706th SP Inf Gun Coy (1)</div> <div>XXVII Corps</div> <div>161st Infantry Division (97)</div> <div>[v]</div>	<div>1 of 3 > 101,47 - Clear(Mozhaysk) - Snow Turn:24 1941-11-27</div> <div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 83487, art 941, afv 204</div> <div>DEF: men 37382, art 411, afv 606</div> <div>DAM: men 118, art 20, afv 15</div> <div>DAM: men 255, art 6, afv 50</div> <div>LOST: men 409, art 11, afv 2</div> <div>LOST: men 826, art 6, afv 173</div> <div>ATK: ftr 42, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>DEF: ftr 46, bmr 32, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: ftr 1, bmr 0, utl 0</div>		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>43rd Army</div> <div>105th Tank Division (61)</div> <div>239th Motorized Division (88)</div> <div>471st Art Rgt RVGK (1)</div> <div>51st Army -10%</div> <div>51st Tank Division (60)</div> <div>127th Howitzer Regiment (0)</div> <div>130th Howitzer Regiment (0)</div> <div>[v]</div>
	<div>51st Tank Division RETREATED</div> <div>105th Tank Division RETREATED</div> <div>239th Motorized Division RETREATED</div> <div>Odds 5.82 : 1</div> <div>Show Details</div> <div>Exit</div>		
	<div>CV: 543->1186.6 Eng Val: 16</div> <div>Comm HQ: XXVII Corps</div> <div>GL Walther Graessner</div>	<div>CV: 227->203.6 Fort: 0.06->0.00</div> <div>Comm HQ: 43rd Army</div> <div>GL Pavel Kurochkin</div>	

At Kaluga, the first night time bombing attack on the three Guards Rifle divisions led to 403 disruption results while the second attack led to another 357 disruption results. Assuming 100% TOE that should mean about 3000 elements total in the three divisions or 25% of units disrupted which translates into an extra 25% fatigue reducing CV by 8%, if I understand the manual right. Once again however, this led to an actual increase in defensive CV from 8=17 to 8=18.

However, the ground attacks went according to plan, and I routed all three Guards divisions, which should deny them supplies come next turn (if they rally) and a drop of 2.5 Movement points each and also an 8% reduction to CV. On top of this comes the reductions due to the ground combat and the results from the various killed and damaged elements. The battles also showed most of the divisions to be under the command of Vasilevsky (one surprisingly, was under STAVKA command).

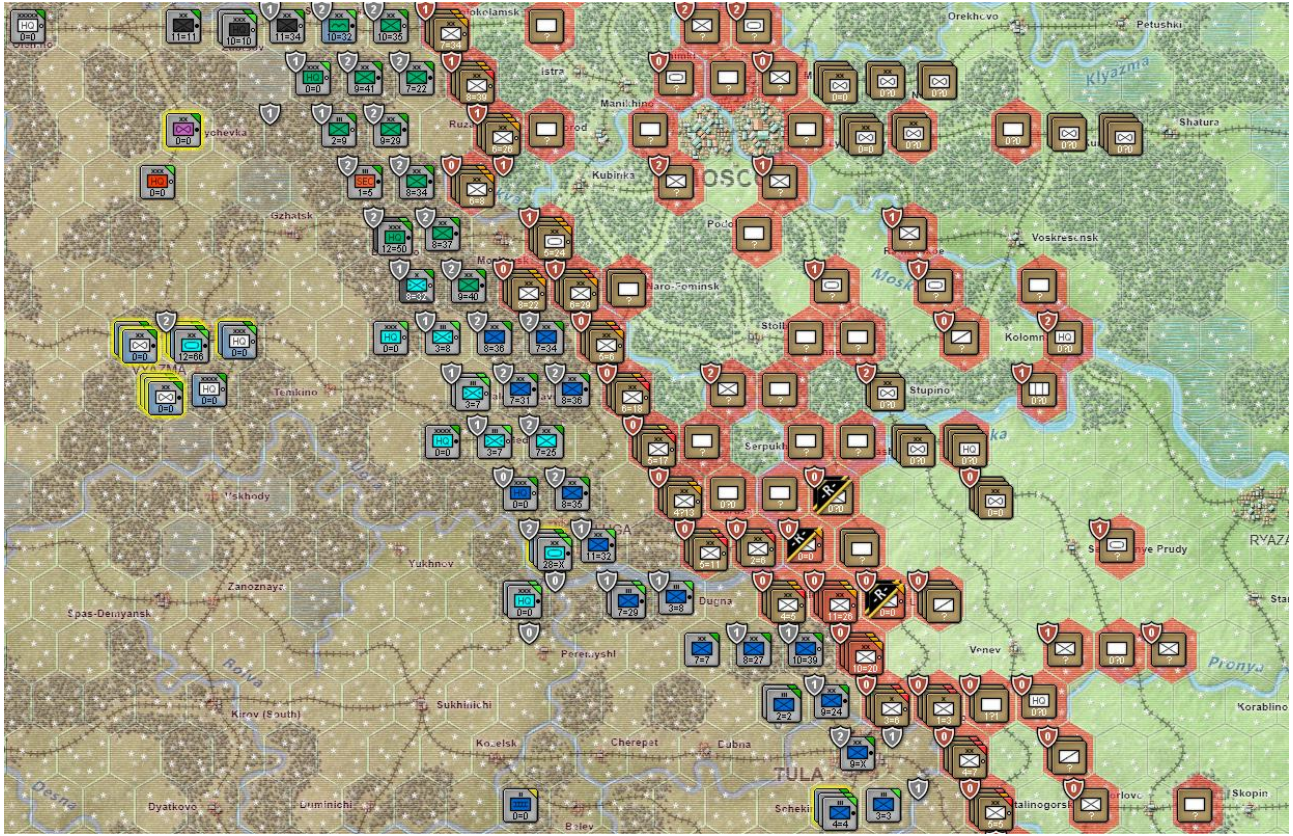
<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>XII Corps 5th Panzer Division (185) 223rd Infantry Division (88) 709th Gun Battalion (0) 704th SP Inf Gun Coy (1) XIII Corps -16% 78th Infantry Division (112) I/3rd Lehr Hwz Bn (0) <div>[v]</div></div>	1 of 3 > 104,53 - Light Woods - Snow Turn:24 1941-11-27		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>54th Army 18th Guards Rifle Division (65) 15th Guards Rifle Division (66) 283rd Army Art Rgt (1) 109th Ski Battalion (0) STAVKA -35% 20th Guards Rifle Division (29) <div>Bryansk Air Command [v]</div></div>
	<div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 50723, art 562, afv 206 DAM: men 84, art 10, afv 14 LOST: men 298, art 5, afv 4 ATK: ftr 25, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 1, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>DEF: men 33063, art 322, afv 41 DAM: men 424, art 5, afv 1 LOST: men 249, art 9, afv 1 DEF: ftr 55, bmr 13, utl 0 LOST: ftr 6, bmr 6, utl 0</div>		
	<div>15th Guards Rifle Division ROUTED 20th Guards Rifle Division ROUTED 18th Guards Rifle Division ROUTED</div> <div>Odds 3.04 : 1</div> <div>Show Details Exit</div>		
<div>CV: 389->592.8 Eng Val: 8 Comm HQ: XII Corps G Walther Schroth</div>			<div>CV: 161->195.0 Fort: 0.04->0.00 Comm HQ: 54th Army GM Aleksandr Vasilevsky</div>

Following up with a couple of night time bombing attacks on one of the other Guards Rifle division stacks, I first inflicted 137 disruptions and then another 192 disruptions. Again, assuming 100% TOE, that should give 11% fatigue and a loss of one MP for each division come next turn. Having done these air bombing attacks, my level bombers in the area had all spent all MP, but their fatigue had risen only to some 3-5%.

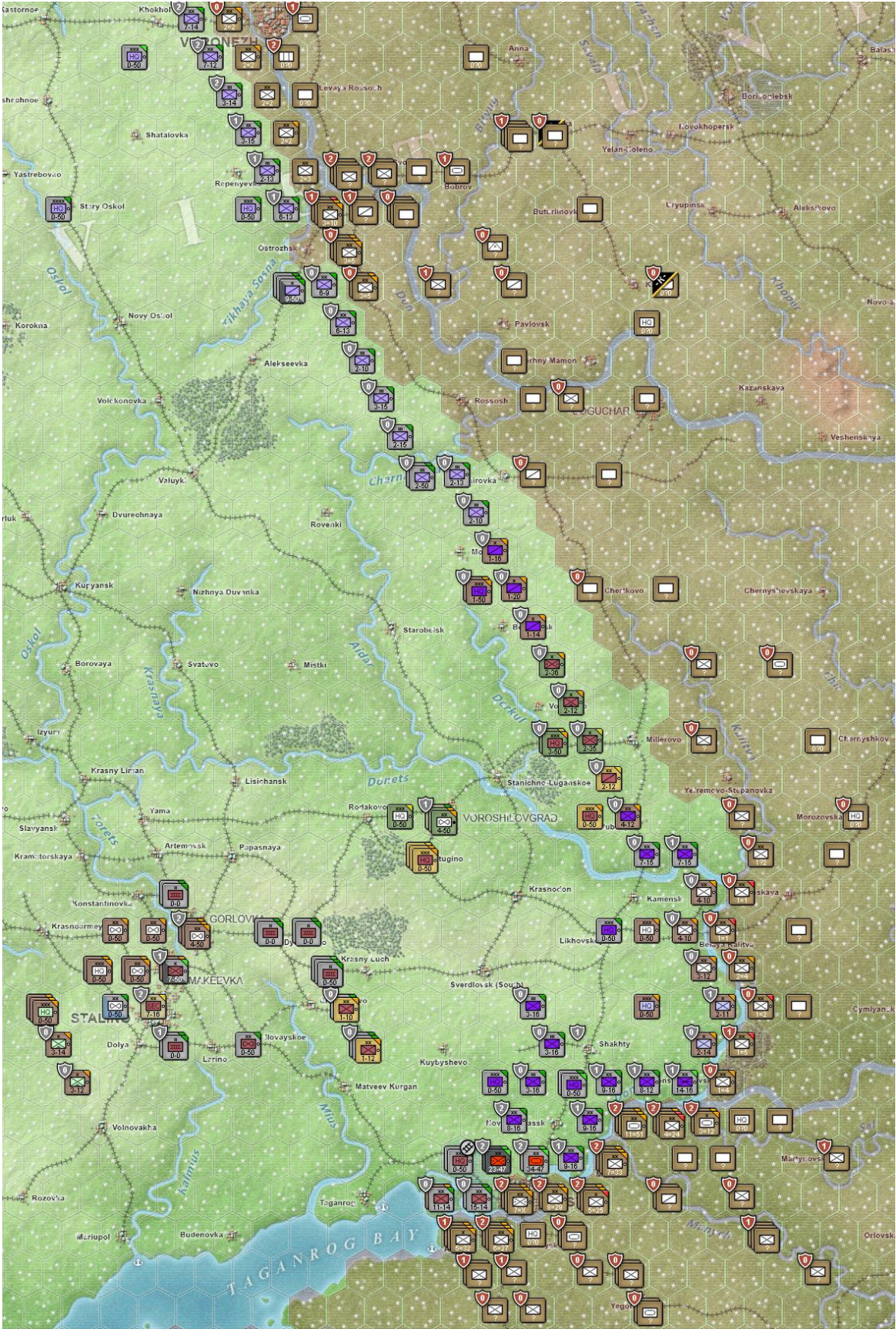
I have also pulled up another 200 level bombers from the south to a position at Orel and assigned another 120 to the airfields at Vyazma. I expect continued Soviet pressure in this area, and I wish for the largest possible number of bombers to be available for continued night bombing attacks meant to cause disruption, fatigue and movement loss on the advancing Soviets. As the weather will turn to blizzard next turn, I need to calculate that my bombers will have only half of their efficiency come next turn due to flight limitations.

Once again, I have been able to pull the Mountain infantry back onto the rail lines and have also withdrawn a series of Panzer divisions to the various cities in the area.

The situation at Moscow looks like this, as I give the turn to HardLuck.



The South



Situational assessment

In the south, the situation is very calm, and the Soviets have not even connected to my front along a long sector of the front. This section is held by weak Axis Minor units and will give way should the Soviets decide to attack.

At Rostov, the situation is one of status quo, as the Soviets are waiting for the Don to freeze over before launching their attack.

Planning

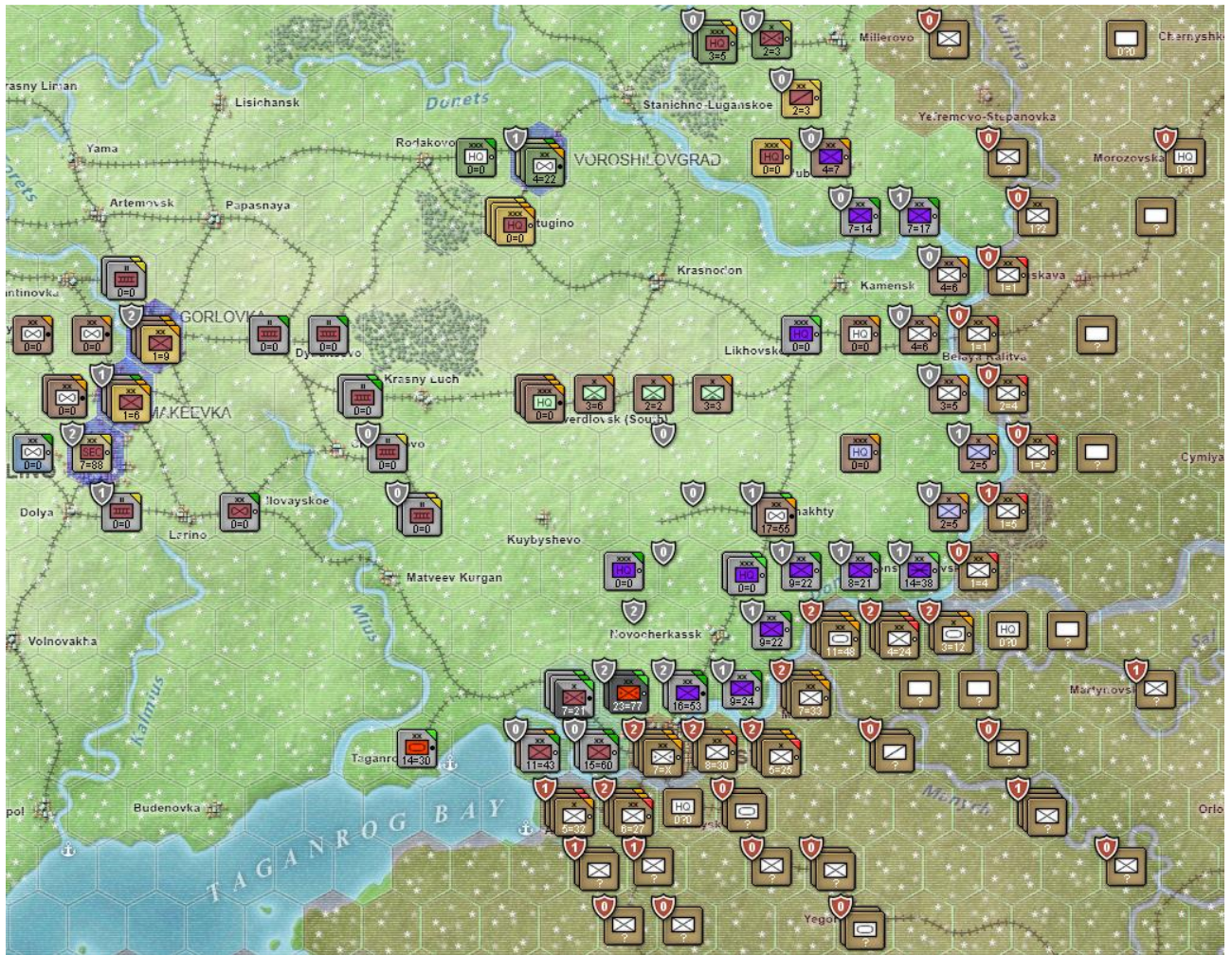
In this area, I will do little but to order my line and wait for the Soviet attack, expecting to give ground as I pull back my line throughout December and January.

Execution

A couple of Rumanian bombing attacks against a stack of mobile Soviet divisions proved that the Soviets on this area have a lot of T-34's and KV-1's. The first of the attacks did 379 disruption results while the second did another 236 disruptions. For once, these 615 disruption results actually gave the expected result, as the stack of Soviet divisions had its CV drop from 11=51 to 11=48. I would also expect the stack to lose 2 movement points on each unit come the Soviet turn.

Due to the presence of heavy Soviet tanks in the divisions, I have pulled two AT battalions back to OKH command from where they can be assigned to the local forces come next turn I hope.

The situation at Rostov looks like this, as I give the turn to HardLuck.



Conclusion

On the ground, the loss of ten Soviet Rifle divisions has cost STAVKA some 80.000 men from their OoB. I really hope that Soviet losses will soon begin to climb significantly, as the Red Army are showing some worrying numbers by now.

In the air, losses since the last Axis turn are about 10:1 in my favor, but as the Soviets have lost no more than a total of 200 aircraft, their production easily outpaces their losses. As I will certainly need all fighters for ground support and interception, I have assigned all level bombers to night flying, which they are still adequate at. I am very worried however, that most of my attacks seems to strengthen the soviets rather than weakening them. The experience gain simply outpaces the fatigue.

Next turn will be blizzard, and thing may very quickly become very scary for me, as I have never played the Axis through blizzard against a competent opponent.