

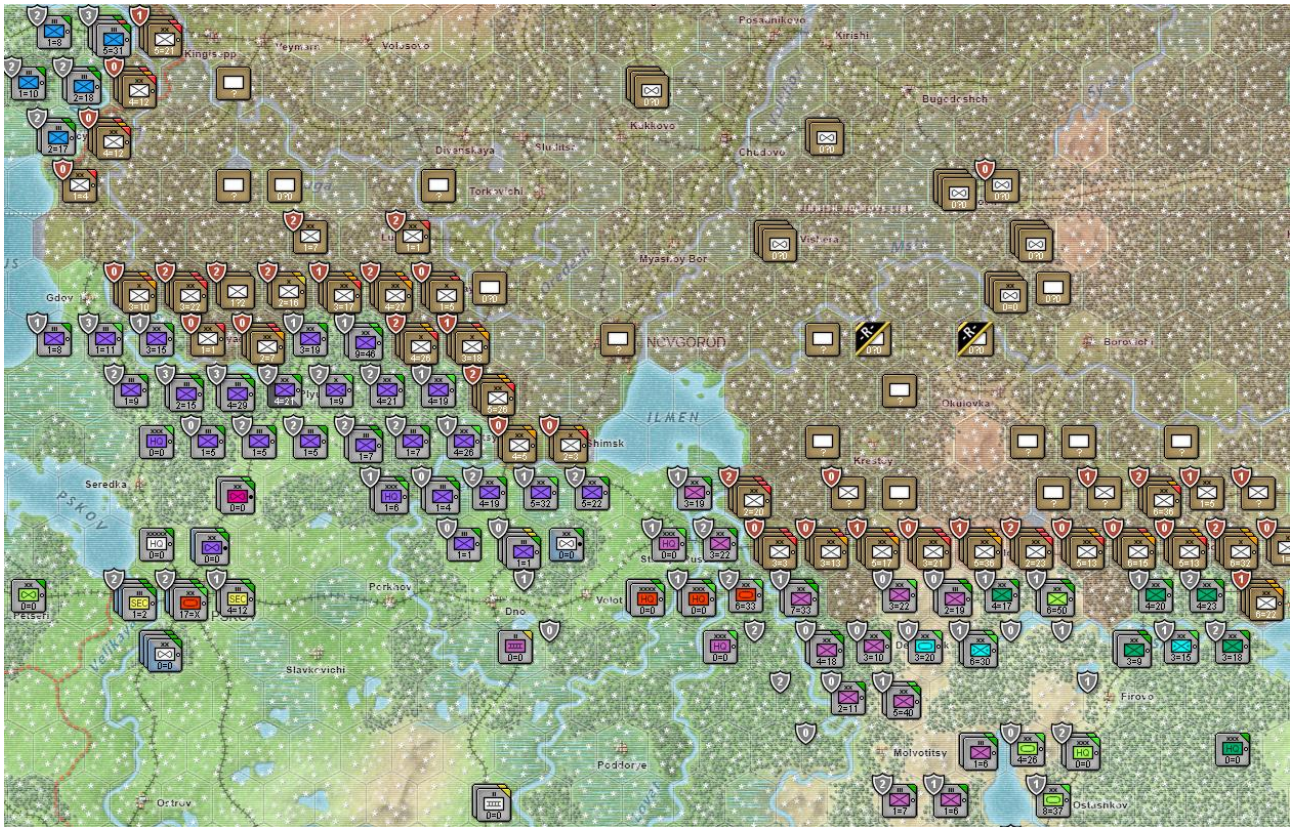
Turn 24, Strategic overview

First turn of blizzard weather. The German CV's have been reduced by about 50% or so.

The Soviets have used their last non blizzard turn to begin attacking the German positions along most of the front, and have deployed another seven Guards divisions to an attack north of Voronezh. The Soviet attacks have failed to cause heavy losses on the Germans, and the focus must be on not getting outmaneuvered by the attacking Soviets. The Axis logistics phase has cost the Axis some 53 AFV and 33 SP/AC's. On the positive side, the Pzkw III has entered production, and the replacement of AFV will thus increase over the coming weeks.

In the air, losses since my last turn are 12 Axis aircraft for 156 Soviet ones. I am pretty happy with this result, even if the Soviet airforce is getting numerically stronger by the week. My main objective is to keep the Luftwaffe flying effectively, and I feel they are doing so currently. I also have some 149 single seat fighters still in my reserve pool along with 71 fighter bombers and 380 level bombers. Only with regards to my tactical bombers are there still something left to be desired. I currently have 13 Ju87 D-1's in my reserve pools and I still have six Gruppen totaling 240 aircraft in need of receiving the modern stuka aircraft.

The North



Situational assessment

In the north, the Soviets have moved relatively strong forces up to the German front and conducted a number of attacks on the German positions. West of Lake Ilmen, the Soviets have conducted 19 attacks on four different German positions, all of which failed. These attacks have cost the Soviets around 10,000 casualties and weakened the CV's of many of the Soviet units in the area.

East of Lake Ilmen, the Soviets have conducted fewer attacks, and have caused a few German withdrawals, but none threatening encirclements.

In the air, the Soviets have shown some heavy interest in the Pskov area, conducting a lot of recon air missions.

At first glance, I saw this as a preparation for the remaining Guards Rifle divisions to be deployed here come next turn. On closer examination, the attacks were all done against a Corps having a Motorized Regiment as a Reserve unit, and I now wonder if they were done to cause losses to my force of AFV's. I do wonder how the Soviets are familiar with my Corps structure, but it seems they have pieced it together somehow. I am not convinced that the Soviet attacks gave the results that were aimed for, as I fail to see any significant losses on the German side due to these attacks.

On my part, my units in the area are as intact as can be expected, and I can move Mountain infantry reserve to the area in short order. In the air, I have some 280 fighters and 360 level bombers standing by in Pskov, all with very low fatigue.

Planning

Along the front, I will more or less hold my positions and refrain from conducting any attacks, even though I am tempted by some of the weaker Soviet stacks. East of Lake Ilmen, I will move my units forward towards the Soviets, making sure I keep a double line of troop available for the defense.

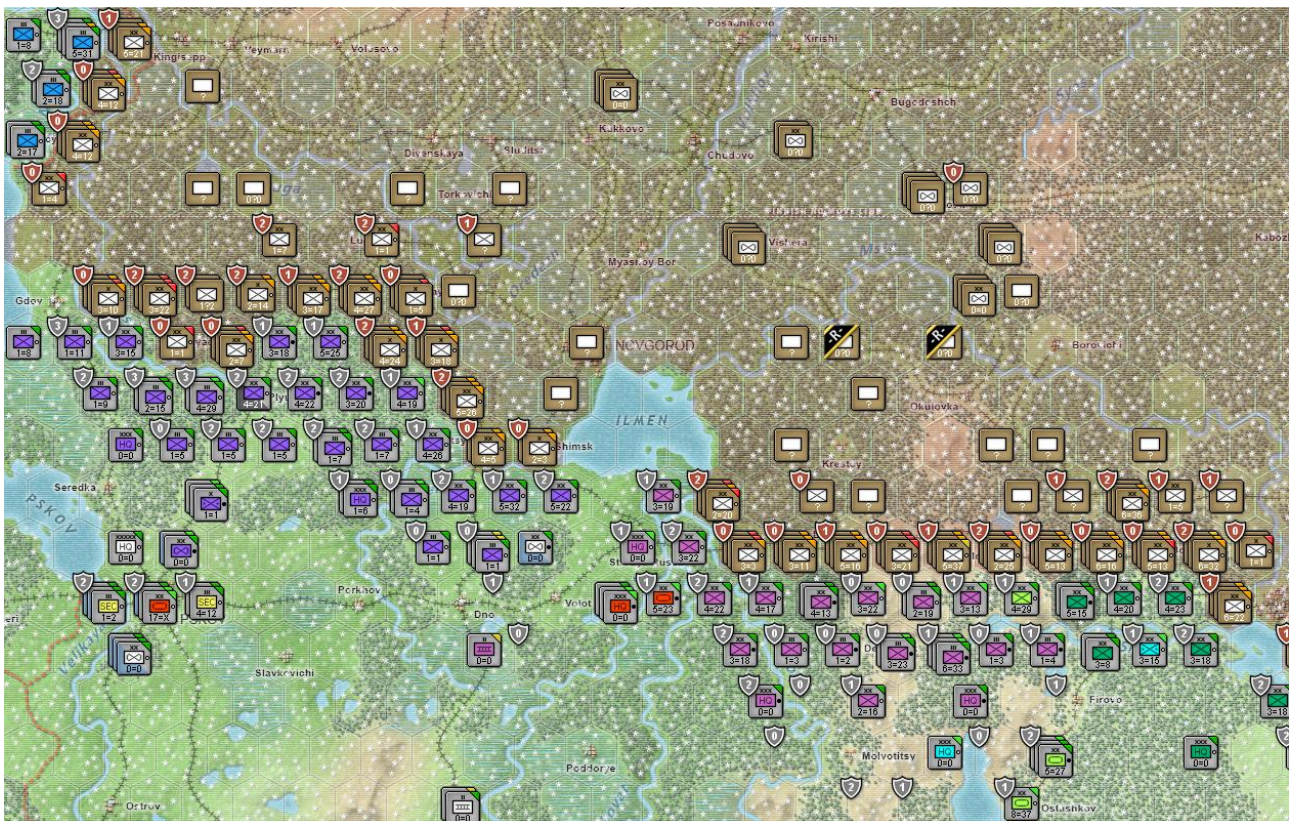
In the air, I will pull four or so fighter Air Groups back into reserve along with a few of my bombers. If the northern sector stay quiet (I had not expected it to do so), I will then start redeploying the Luftwaffe to the sectors to the south, most likely the Voronezh area.

Execution

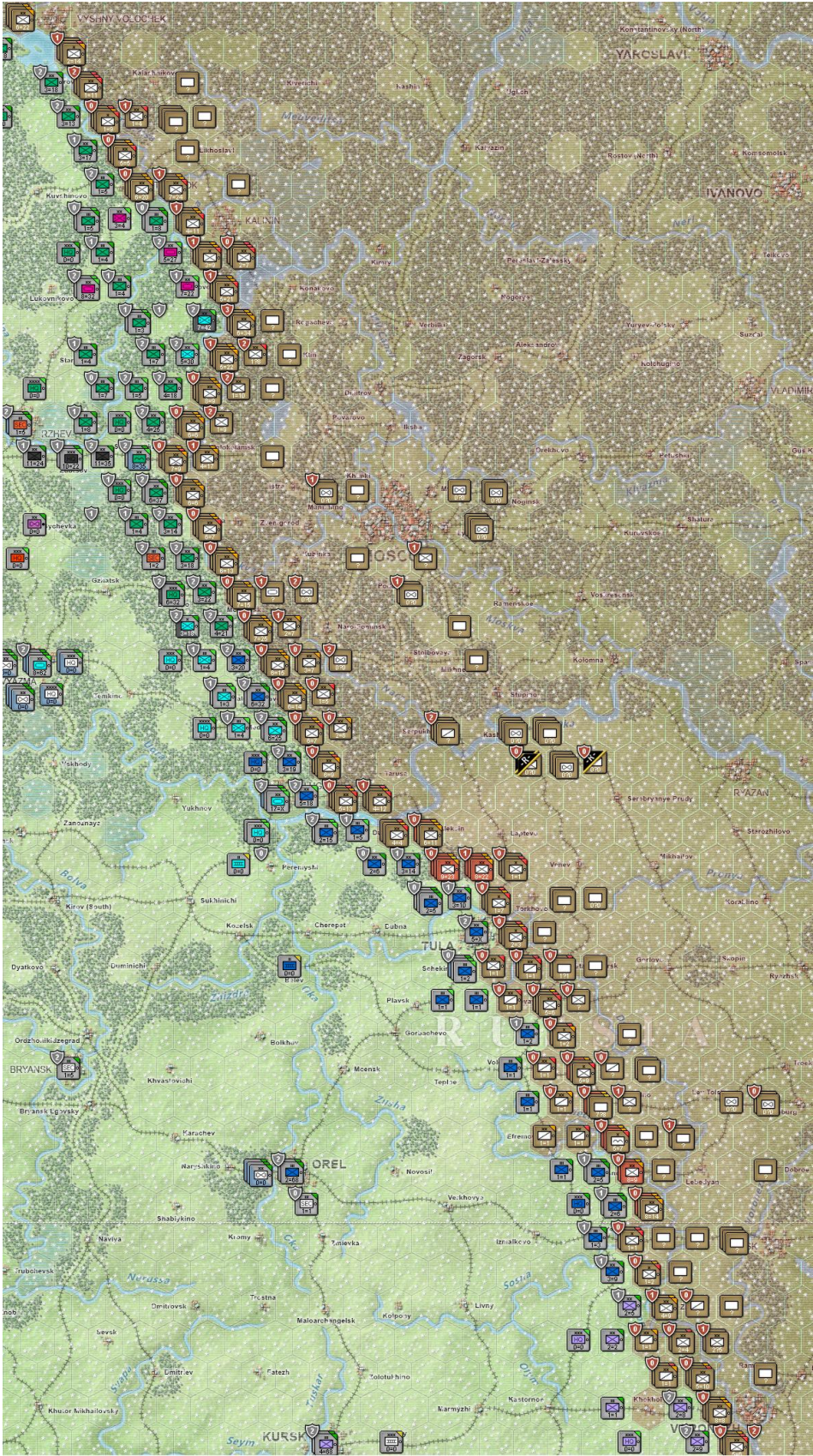
In the north, little has been happening during my turn. I have reordered my front lines ever so slightly, but in the main have simply stayed put. East of Lake Ilmen, I have set up a double defensive line in order to delay any Soviet advance.

The main action in the north has been the withdrawal of some of my local air assets to the National Reserve.

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



The Center



Situational Assessment

In the center, the Soviets, under Nikolai Vatutin, have retaken Torzhok and conducted a series of attacks against the German Panzer divisions in the area.

West of Moscow, the Soviets have also attacked in a few locations and moved strong forces adjacent to the German lines in order to continue their attacks over the coming turns. Behind the front, a couple of airfields have been moved close to the front in order to give some fighter cover for the Soviets.

Stretching from Tula to Voronezh, the Soviets have been a lot more active and have conducted a general offensive with strong Guards Rifle divisions as breakthrough units followed by Cavalry penetrating the German lines. In at least one location, southeast of Tula, a German infantry regiment is in danger of being encircled next turn. This area has seen some cover by Soviet tactical bombers. The Soviet guards units have been sent in two groups, the northernmost commanded by Valievsky and the southernmost by Zhukov.

Planning

Outside Torzhok, I will reorganize my defenses in order to disengage my Panzers from most of the front. Directly southwest of Torzhok, I will place two mobile divisions in order to have enough fortification points to construct a level one fortification during the Soviet turn.

In front of Moscow, I will remain in position, waiting for the Soviet attack. While I have no qualms about withdrawing, I would like for the Soviets to spend at least a turn breaking down my defensive network in front of Moscow.

Further south, I will abandon Tula, pulling back to the southwest along the entire southern part of the central sector. As I have a regiment here in danger of being encircled, I will even conduct a single attack with two German infantry regiments against a Soviet Cavalry division. I am far from certain of success, but I will try it nonetheless.

As the Cavalry division in question has low experience, I will not precede the attack with ground bombing attacks, as that will simply strengthen the Soviet unit. Instead, I will continue to use my level bombers to bomb the high experience Soviet stacks, hoping to cause fatigue and slowing down the Soviet advance.

Apart from this, I will also begin to move a couple of airfields closer to Orel, as I might want to gather a significant Luftwaffe force in that area soon.

Execution

At Torzhok, I have pulled a few of my Panzer units off the line and sent infantry units forward to take their place. It is my hope that any Soviet advance in this area will take enough time that I can pull my units back in good order. In front of Moscow, I have maintained my double line of defense.

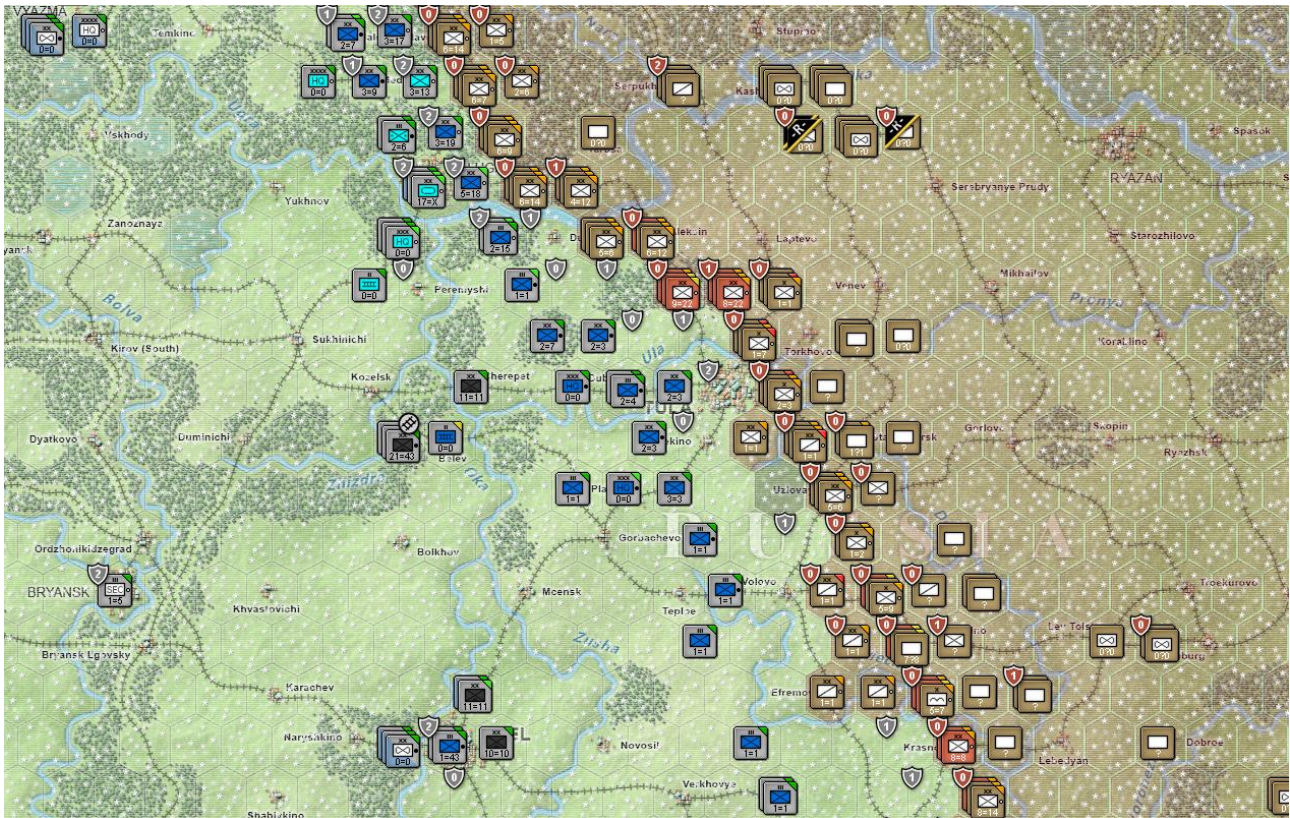
Further south, I have abandoned Tula, pulling my units back to the southwest. Behind those units, I have pushed three Mountain divisions into a position from where they can quickly be deployed to the front near Tula. Meanwhile, my level bombers have been busy bombing the Guards Rifle divisions from the air, hoping to reduce their effectiveness. This has been slightly effective, as one of the stacks has been reduced from 9=23 to 9=22.

Further south still, east of Orel, I have also pulled back my defenders and spent some time bombing the local Soviet Guards Rifle divisions, reducing one stack from 8=9 to 8=8. While it does not sound like much, I hope that fatigue will also play a part in slowing down the Soviets. Behind the front, I have gathered some

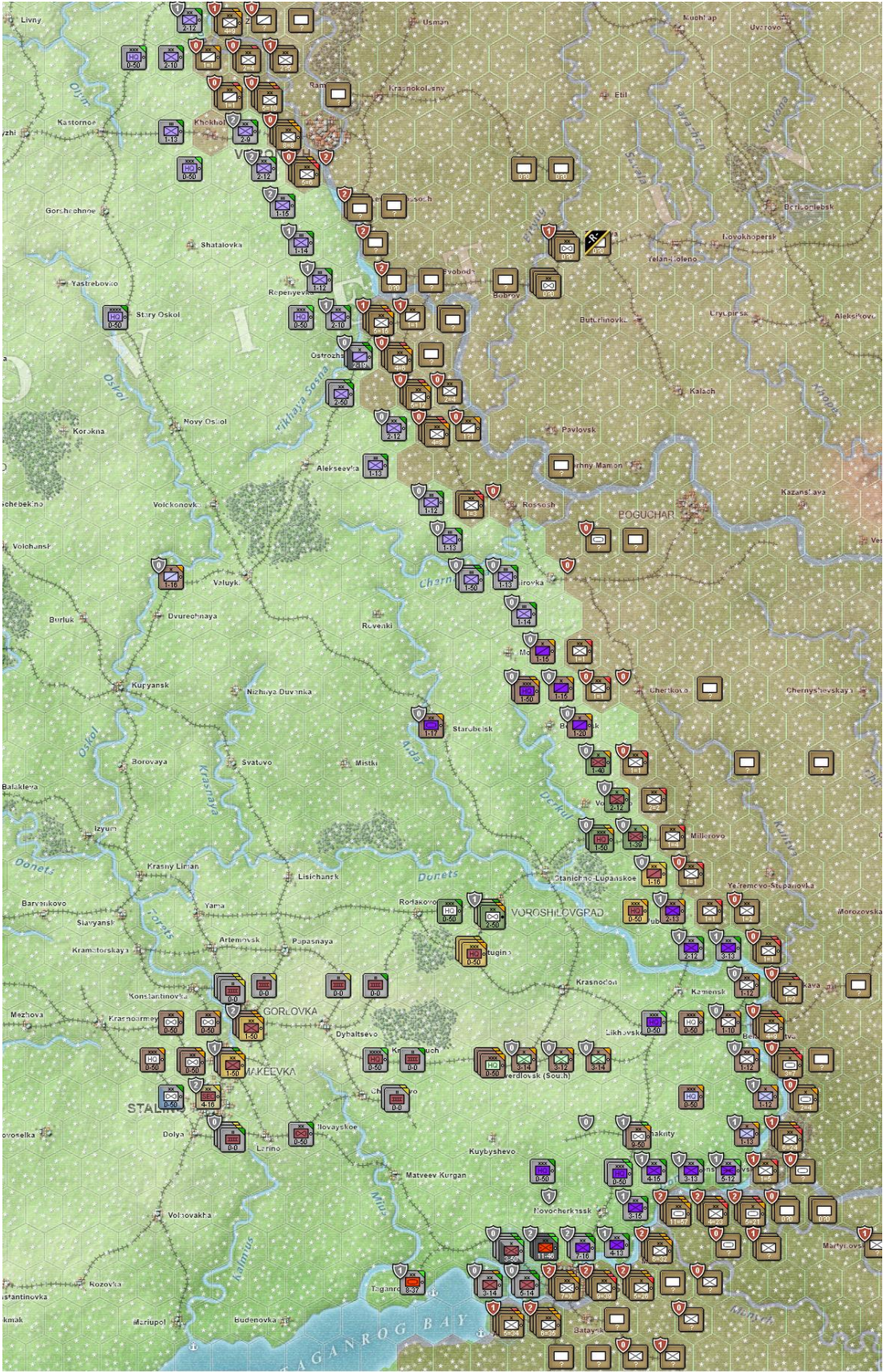
more airfields around Orel and also brought down another couple of Mountain divisions to help dealing with any overly aggressive soviet Cavalry divisions.

It is my hope that the pursuing Soviet formations will soon find themselves at the end of some extended supply lines and that they will begin losing efficiency because of it. Also, as the front moves westwards, it will get closer to the Luftwaffe bases while the Soviet ones will either be at a greater distance to fly or else no longer be “on rails”.

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



The South



Situational assessment

At Voronezh, the Soviets are massing for attacks out of Voronezh and at Svoboda. In both locations, the German 6th Army has no real strength to counter the attacks, and remaining in position will simply lead to the elimination of German forces. It seems likely, that the Soviet axis of attack will be along the rail lines leading west. Behind the front, Soviet airfields have been deployed to the front. I expect the Soviets to deploy their remaining Guards Rifle divisions and their tactical bombers to this area shortly.

Further south, light Soviet forces are making contact with the Axis Minor forces left on the line. It seems obvious to me that especially the Rumanians are in no position to fight even light Soviet forces and especially the Rumanian cavalry have defensive CV's of down to 0.4.

North of Rostov, the Don/Donets river has not yet frozen solid, and even if the Soviets decide to attack across the river, they will be unable to cross it in force. All that will have changed come next turn.

Planning

Along the entire northern part of the frontline, I will be pulling back a hex or two this turn, depending on the strength of the opposing Soviets. The terrain holds little strategic value to me, and should the Soviets push forward ten or twelve hexes over the winter, the Soviets will find themselves in prime Panzer country come the spring.

North of Rostov, I will remain in position, as I can still get some value from the river

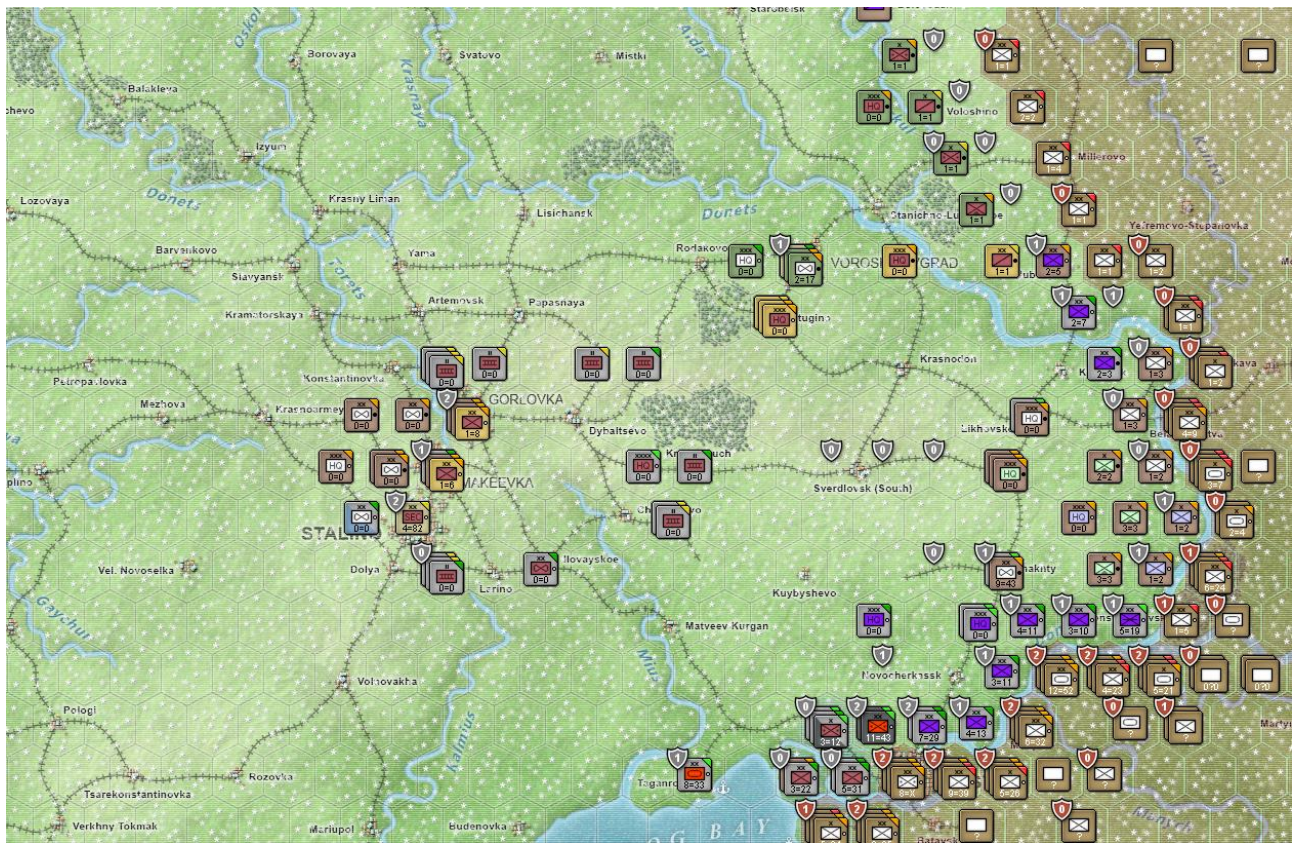
Execution

Going south from Voronezh, I have pulled back my front, as my Axis Minor units are in no way capable of putting up a stiff fight against the Soviets. As the Soviets advance, they will get further and further away from their own supply sources, and I will find myself in a better position over time

As the Don/Donets I have remained in position along the river, even if the Soviets are clearly able to push over the river against weak Rumanian units. I did contemplate withdrawing them but decided to leave them in place to see how well they would fare against Soviet attackers crossing a not yet frozen river.

The Rumanian airforces has spent some time attacking the Soviet stack of mobile divisions south of the river, changing their combat value from 11=57 to 12=52. Once again, actually using the Axis airforces to attack the Soviets risk end up making them stronger.

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



Conclusion

The first turn of blizzard has come, and the Axis position looks as if they can quickly deteriorate. Between Tula and Voronezh, very strong Soviet forces have already begun striking heavy blows against a weak German opposition. The combination of strong Soviet Rifle divisions and fast Cavalry divisions has forced me to deploy my strategic reserve to this area, although I have kept two divisions on the rail lines, so that they can quickly be moved elsewhere.

Losses so far have been light, but that can quickly change.

I will just have to see what the Soviets can make of the first blizzard turn.