

Turn 27, Strategic overview

This turn, the Soviets have conducted 23 observations, 65 ground bombings, 48 deliberate attacks and 388 hasty attacks. The extremely high number of hasty attacks has had an immediate effect on the (mostly) German defenders, in that both the fatigue and supply situation of the Germans has become extremely critical. Several German formations that have hitherto had a quiet winter are now suddenly both in extremely poor supply and very fatigued.

The Soviet strategy has been to initially attack with single low strength Rifle Brigades and single weak Rifle Divisions in order to drain German ammunition stores and build fatigue. After an average of some four to five such attacks, the Germans have seized firing back on the Soviet attackers, leaving the attacks to continue without suffering horrendous losses. As the initial attacks are done with numerically weak formations, this even means that game mechanics restrict the amount of casualties suffered by those formations. As a result, the 436 attacks conducted by the Soviets have cost them a total of 118.000 men to 23.000 Germans.

As an example of this, the German positions in the city of Narva has withstood no less than 23 hasty attacks and one deliberate attack this turn. The four initial (all hasty) attacks were done by two Rifle Brigades under STAVKA command, each brigade doing two attacks. The German positions were held by one infantry division, one infantry regiment and one fortified zone and were built up to fortification level 3.10. The most "successful" of the attacks ended up with odds 1:469.5 and all the other three at worse than 1:1.000. Soviet losses were 252, 576, 261 and 252 men respectively. German morale has not improved significantly due to these attacks, and now stands at 78 on the infantry division.

In my opinion, losses suffered due to suicidal attacks are too low. A hasty attack conducted by weak forces under STAVKA command and launched against strong German defenses in well fortified positions should lead to an absolute slaughter. This could be done by making units facing a final odds ratio at too bad a level suffer an immediate (or several, in the case of 1:999) morale check for it's survival. For those two Rifle Brigades thrown at Narva, desertion should be a REALLY big issue by now.

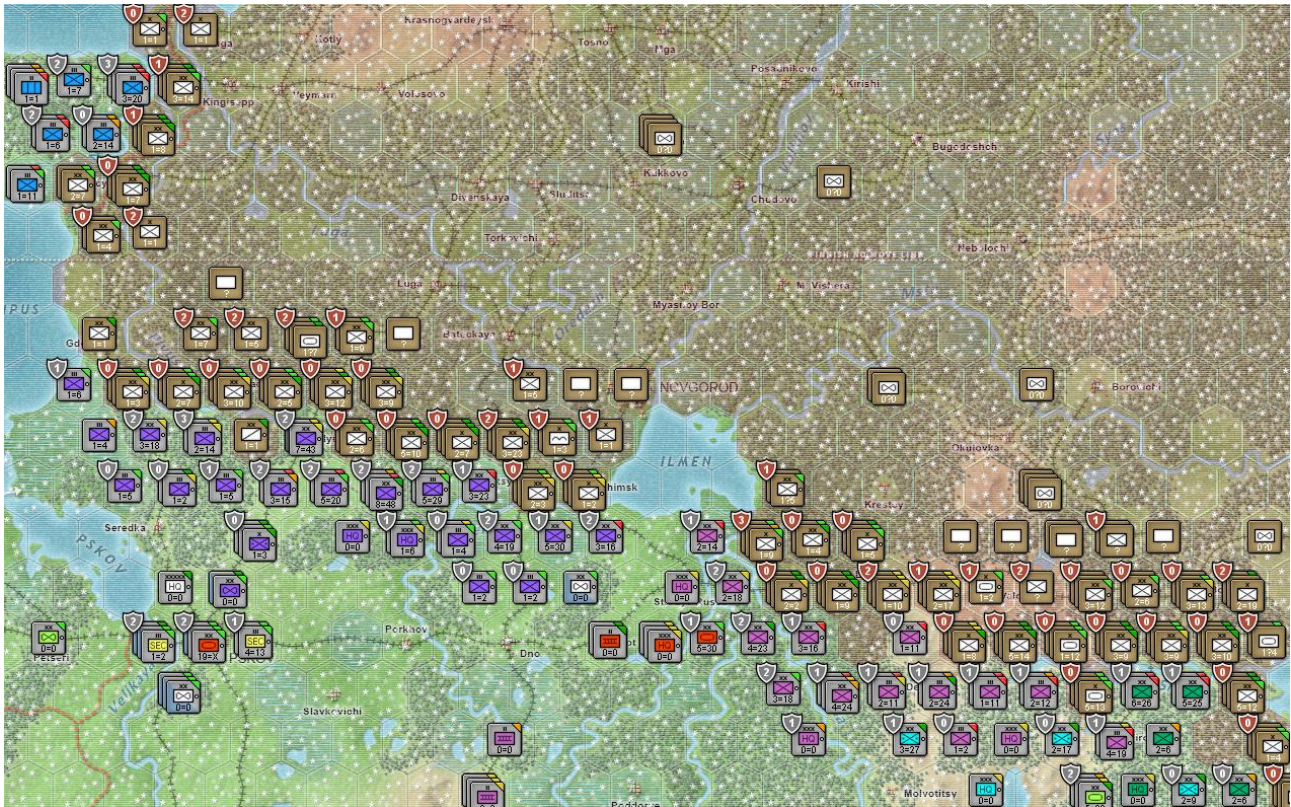
As it is, using a lot of initial attacks by weak formations before following up with the main attack will not cost much manpower. Once the main attack is conducted it will suffer a lot less while also standing a much better chance of success, as it will suffer a lot less disruption results due to enemy fire. The Germans will always run out of ammunition long before the Soviets run out of men to line up in front of the German firing squads.

The Soviets have employed such an attack strategy up and down the front, and the situation for the Germans is certainly not looking good.

I cannot help but wonder if the upgrade in game version will cause the Soviet HQ's to upgrade to their "New" TOE with only 40% of the old number of support squads. If not, the Soviets will continue to reduce fatigue and get movement points very well at the beginning of their turn. That will only help them to ease the use of the current tactics for the remainder of the winter.

In any case, I fear that making hasty attacks with weak forces will effectively always break the German defenses, for low losses. I can not help but wonder what an army of three Rifle divisions at full strength (to hold the line and prevent any counterattacks) and 12 Rifle Brigades at 20% TOE can do to a German defensive lineup. The army should be led by a weak Soviet Commander (he'll get shot for sure for failing) and contain a number of Artillery Support units. This army could then be used safely for softening any German defensive line, building up an enormous amount of German fatigue for very few casualties.

The North



Situational assessment

In the north, the Soviets have attacked virtually every unit along the front with a series of hasty attacks, sometimes followed by a prepared attack. The record I have found so far, is the 1=11 Infantry division to the south east of Lake Ilmen, having suffered no less than 31 hasty attacks this turn.

When facing those myriads of Soviet attacks, the Germans have generally fired back at the first four attacks in strength, inflicting some casualties. The fifth and sixth attack has met with less fire, and from attacks seven onwards, the Germans have generally withheld their fire altogether.

As can be seen by the soft factors above, the German supply situation is certainly not looking good. In several locations along the front, the German supply stores are less than 40%, meaning that the soft factor is showing red. On the other hand, the Soviets (who have their own supply phase coming up) is generally showing either green or yellow.

North of Lake Peipus, the German defensive line is beginning to break down, as the Soviets have now broken the first line of defense in two locations and crossed the river. The total of 36 attacks here has done its part to ensure that the Germans are fatigued and low on ammunition.

Between lakes Peipus and Ilmen, the situation is a little better. I still have plenty of units showing red on supplies, but some of my defensive line still stands.

Planning

North of Lake Peipus I will push back into the abandoned Swamp hex, building as strong a defense as possible in order to delay any Soviet advances in this area.

Between lakes Peipus and Ilmen, I will conduct a few attacks to push back the Soviet lines and create a little buffer zone between myself and the Soviets. With luck, this should put a limit to the number of hasty attacks the Soviets can do in this area come next turn.

Directly southeast of Lake Ilmen, I will also try to conduct a few attacks to throw the Soviets back from a few of their forward positions. Further east, I will pull my lines back a little, hoping the forests will help my in my defense.

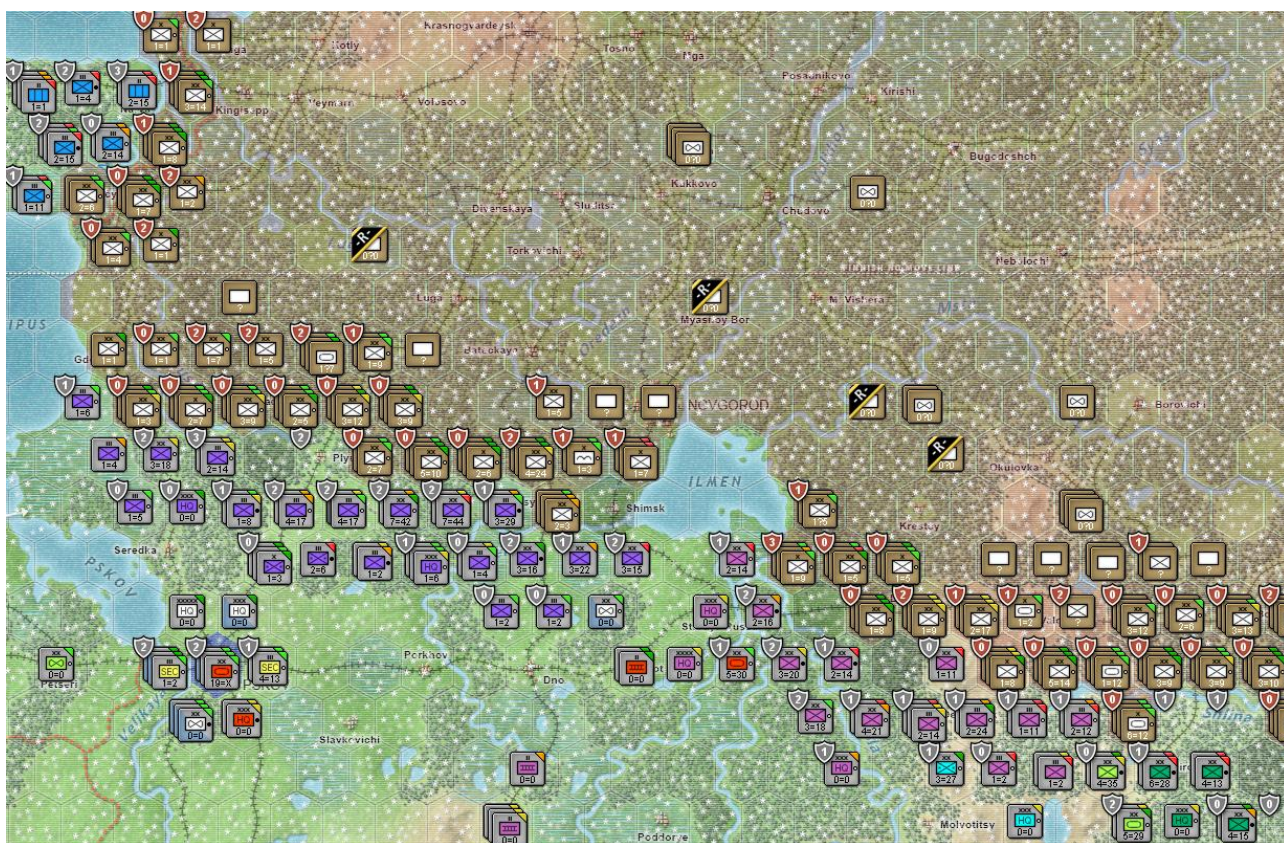
In the air, the entirety of the local Luftwaffe forces will be spent flying supplies to the forward units, with the focus being on the units east of Lake Ilmen and partly to the units north of Lake Peipus. In total, the airforces available for this total six Ju 88 Gruppen and two Ju 52 Gruppen.

Execution

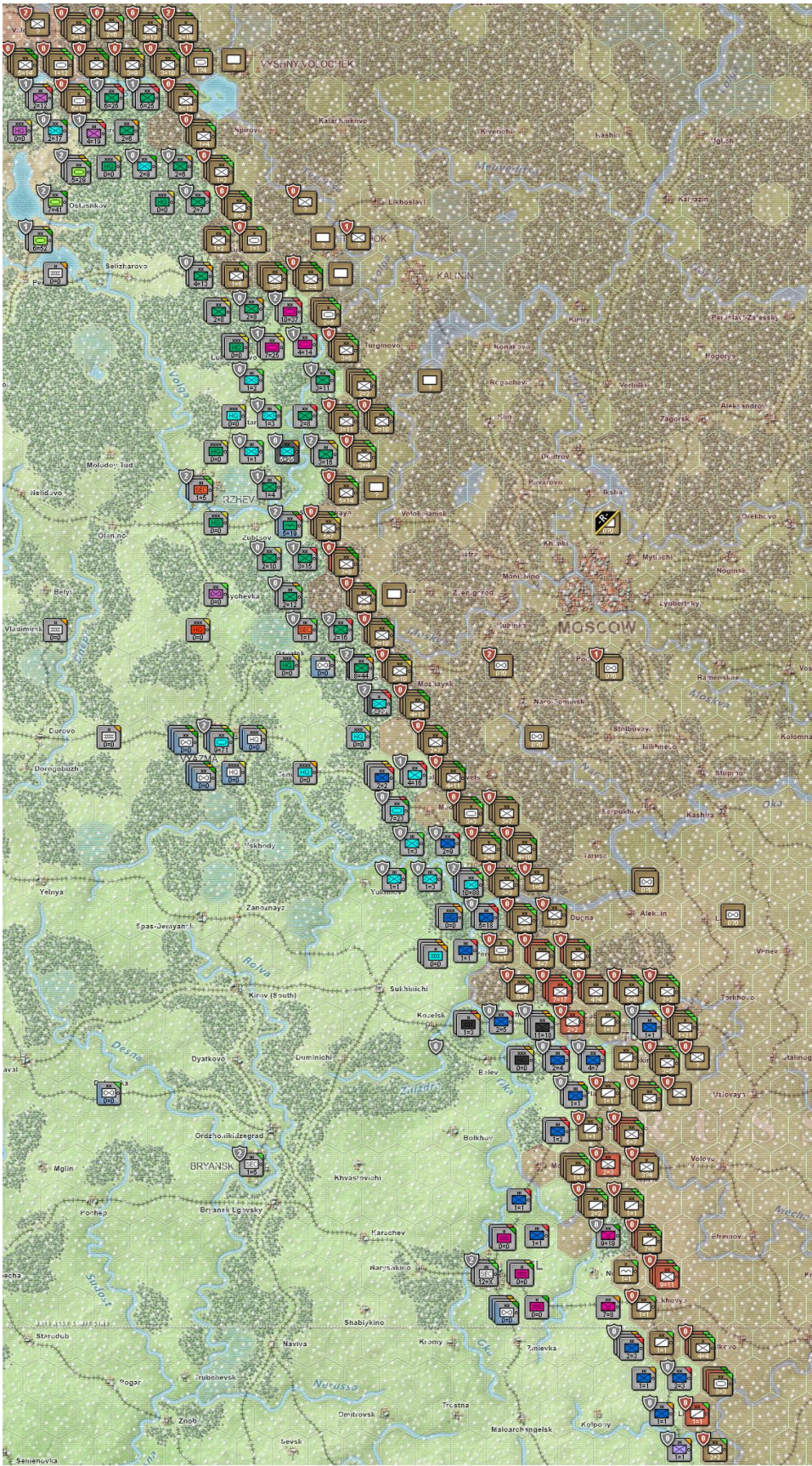
While there has yet to be any significant breakthroughs in the north, my lines are looking thinner by the turn. I have done a few attacks this turn, in order to reduce the Soviet buildup areas, but results have been mixed.

I have also flown supply drops intensively, but the Luftwaffe is completely unable to keep up with the demand for ammunition due to the hundreds of Soviet hasty attacks.

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



The Center



Situational Assessment

Between Vysny Volochek and Moscow, the Soviets are continuing to push forward, and the Germans will need to pull back to avoid threatening situations. However, the Soviets have neither deployed Guards units, Cavalry or their best leaders in this area, and the withdrawal can happen somewhat orderly.

South of Moscow a real crisis is emerging. In the area north of Tula, the Soviets are pushing forward three Cavalry Corps and nine Guards divisions. One infantry division is already encircled beyond any hope of lasting relief, and two more infantry divisions are in dire danger of encirclement. Those Soviet forces are commanded by Vasilevsky. These Soviet forces are a mere 16MP and 5 hexes from the Soviet rail system, so supply issues are not necessarily a real issue yet.

Further south, another force of Cavalry and Guards divisions under Zhukov is pushing forward, in the direction of Orel.

Behind the front, the larger part of the Luftwaffe is based around Vyazma and Orel respectively.

Planning

North of Moscow, I will pull slowly back, working to extend the Soviet lines of supply, while keeping a united front opposing the Soviets.

South of Moscow, I will continue my policy of counterattacks, hoping to dislodge several of the forward Soviet units, including two Cavalry Corps, which I plan to rout if possible. In order to do this, I will hit it with a massive attack from my He-111 bombers, hoping to weaken it before the main attack.

If this attack is successful, I will also try to reestablish contact with the forces surrounded at Tula, even if there is no hope of a lasting relief. If I can place German regiments in several locations in the area, some Soviet forces will be needed to keep the pinned, and thus fewer will be able to attack westwards.

I also wish to dislodge the 2=2 Guards division directly west of Tula, as this will make it possible to extract the two endangered infantry divisions in the area.

As it is quite obvious, that this is the main Soviet December attack, I will push several Panzer units into the area to be able to counterattack breakthrough Cavalry divisions over the coming turns if need be.

Execution

The initial attacks at Tula was aimed at the two Cavalry Corps pushing into the German lines. The attacks were preceded by bombing runs by massive forces of German bombers that were intercepted by a few Soviet aircraft. Once again, the dog fights showed the true value of having superior numbers. In a fight of 140 HE-111's against 12 Yak-1's the Soviets come off losing as many aircraft as the Germans.

The ground assault itself proved that the Soviets have assigned three ski battalions to each of their cavalry corps, which is probably a wise move. The defending forces were led by Vasilaevsky, but in the end, I was able to defeat the Soviets. This has led to the routing of those two Cavalry Corps, and my hope is that they will be unable to affect the fighting much come next turn.

<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>XXXXIX Mountain Corps 292nd Infantry Division (18) 78th Infantry Division (27) 267th Infantry Division (22) 100th Lt Inf Div (74) 52nd Nebelwerfer Regiment (0) IV/221st Howitzer Battalion (0) 278th Mot. Flk Bn (0)</div> <div>[v]</div>	1 of 6 > 104,56 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:27 1941-12-18		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>54th Army 1st Cavalry Corps (37) 283rd Army Art Rgt (1) 1st Sapper Regiment (4) 107th Ski Battalion (0) 108th Ski Battalion (0) 110th Ski Battalion (0) 19th Army -30%</div> <div>[v]</div>
	<div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 64598, art 863, afv 25 DAM: men 303, art 7, afv 1 LOST: men 329, art 10, afv 0 ATK: ftr 71, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 6, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>5th Cavalry Corps ROUTED 1st Cavalry Corps ROUTED</div>		
	<div>CV: 143->320.8 Eng Val: 6 Comm HQ: XXXIX Mountain Corps G Lothar Rendulic</div> <div>Show Details Odds 3.27 : 1 Exit</div>		
<div>CV: 63->98.0 Fort: 0.02->0.00 Comm HQ: 54th Army GM Aleksandr Vasilevsky</div>			

I then proceeded to attack the 2=2 division at Dubna, after first removing the Cavalry division to its east, as I did not want a withdrawal into that hex. This attack saw another routing of a Soviet Guards Rifle division.

<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>XXXXIX Mountain Corps</div> <div>100th Lt Inf Div (69)</div> <div>52nd Nebelwerfer Regiment (0)</div> <div>IV/221st Howitzer Battalion (0)</div> <div>278th Mot. Flk Bn (0)</div> <div>I/64th LW Mix Flk Bn (0)</div> <div>190th Stug Battalion (2)</div> <div>658th Pioneer Battalion (1)</div> <div>[v]</div>	<div>1 of 2 > 105,57 - Clear(Dubna) - Blizzard Turn:27 1941-12-18</div> <div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 18853, art 317, afv 21</div> <div>DEF: men 10613, art 130, afv 11</div> <div>DAM: men 49, art 8, afv 0</div> <div>DAM: men 152, art 5, afv 0</div> <div>LOST: men 164, art 3, afv 1</div> <div>LOST: men 145, art 6, afv 0</div> <div>ATK: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>DEF: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>4th Guards Rifle Division ROUTED</div>		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>54th Army</div> <div>4th Guards Rifle Division (22)</div> <div>468th Art Rgt RVGK (1)</div> <div>38th AA Battalion (0)</div>
	<div>CV: 73->235.2 Eng Val: 4</div> <div>Comm HQ: XXXIX Mountain Corps</div> <div>G Lothar Rendulic</div>	<div>Show Details</div> <div>Odds 14.70 : 1</div> <div>Exit</div>	<div>CV: 23->16.0 Fort: 0.02->0.00</div> <div>Comm HQ: 54th Army</div> <div>GM Aleksandr Vasilevsky</div>

I then set about to push the Soviet Cavalry as far back as possible, so that any breakthroughs come next turn will be less dangerous than they would otherwise be. In order to achieve this, I used the Panzer divisions held in reserve in Orel, and afterwards railed another Panzer division into that city. The attacks did cost me a few Panzers, but most are of a type that will be obsolete come spring.

Axis Forces Attacking (H): LVI Panzer Corps 8th Panzer Division (22) II/61st Artillery Battalion (0) 277th Mot. Flk Bn (0) 93rd LW SP Lt Flk Bn (0) IV/GG LW Lt Flk Bn (0) 717th LW Lt Flk Bn (0)	1 of 3 > 106,60 - Clear(Gorbachevo) - Blizzard Turn:27 1941-12-18		Soviet Forces Defending: 60th Army 27th Cavalry Division (4) 149th Howitzer Regiment (0)
	Forces Engaged <div>ATK: men 18911, art 280, afv 226 DEF: men 5233, art 74, afv 4</div> <div>DAM: men 45, art 5, afv 7 DAM: men 137, art 1, afv 0</div> <div>LOST: men 43, art 2, afv 4 LOST: men 61, art 6, afv 1</div> <div>ATK: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 DEF: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: flr 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div>		
	27th Cavalry Division ROUTED		
CV: 22->32.2 Eng Val: 2 Comm HQ: LVI Panzer Corps G Erich von Manstein	Odds 4.87 : 1 Show Details Exit		CV: 4->6.6 Fort: 0.02->0.00 Comm HQ: 60th Army GM Dmitry Lelyushenko

I then attacked the remaining 2=2 Cavalry stack preventing an orderly withdrawal of one of my Mountain divisions east of Orel. This attack saw an unexpected failure, as Mansteins Mountain attackers failed miserably.

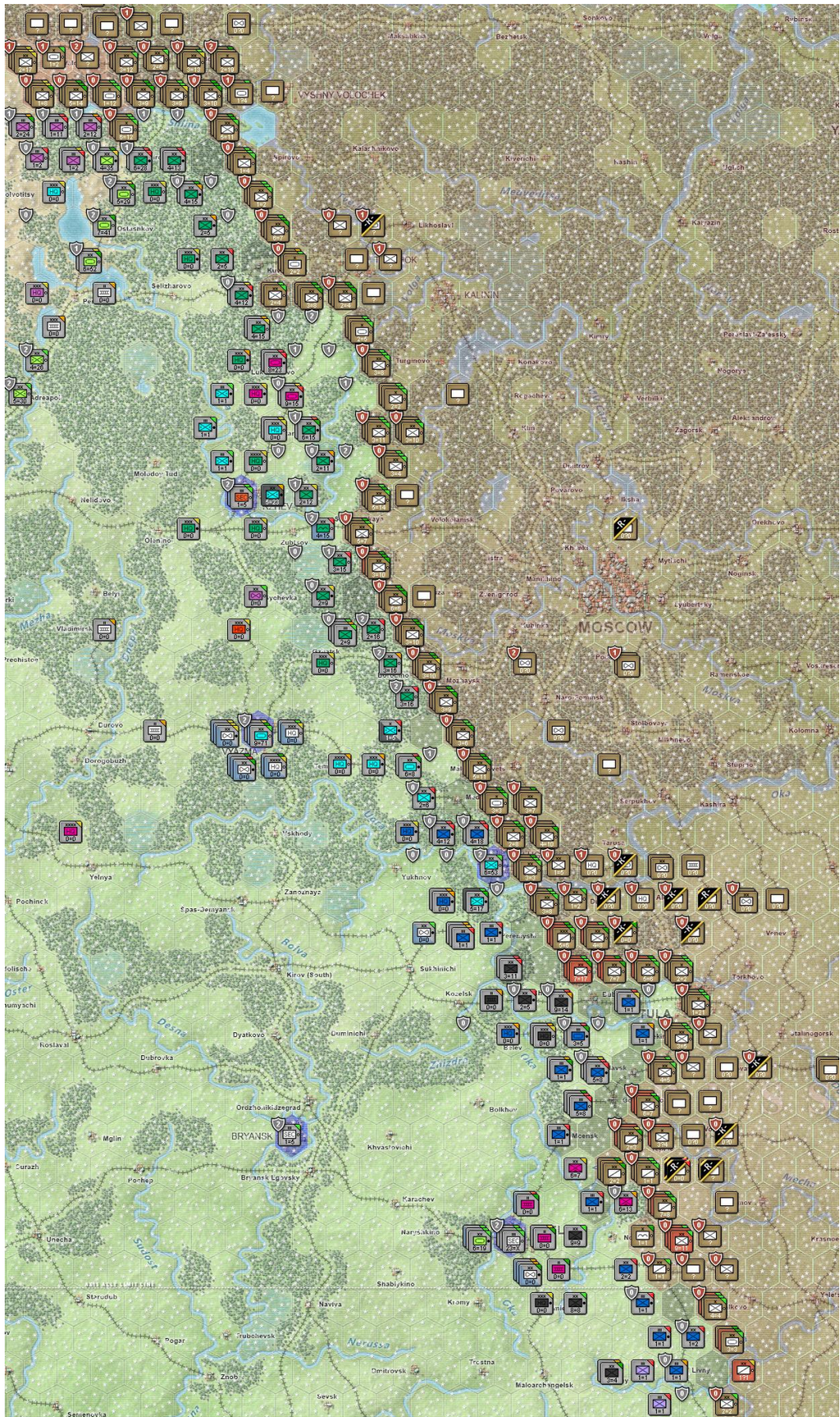
<div>Axis Forces Attacking:</div> <div>LVI Panzer Corps</div> <div>1st Mountain Division (80)</div> <div>272nd Mot. Flk Bn (0)</div> <div>92nd LW SP Lt Flk Bn (1)</div> <div>73rd Pioneer Battalion (1)</div> <div>10th Machine Gun Battalion (1)</div>	<div>1 of 9 > 106,62 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:27 1941-12-18</div> <div>Forces Engaged</div> <div>ATK: men 15916, art 193, afv 19</div> <div>DAM: men 137, art 14, afv 0</div> <div>LOST: men 297, art 6, afv 0</div> <div>ATK: flt 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: flt 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>DEF: men 24427, art 315, afv 6</div> <div>DAM: men 77, art 4, afv 1</div> <div>LOST: men 114, art 6, afv 1</div> <div>DEF: flt 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div> <div>LOST: flt 0, bmr 0, utl 0</div>		<div>Soviet Forces Defending:</div> <div>61st Army -30%</div> <div>50th Cavalry Division (2)</div> <div>60th Army -30%</div> <div>80th Cavalry Division (5)</div> <div>1st Shock Army</div> <div>302nd Mountain Division (22)</div> <div>1st Gds Art Rgt RVGK (2)</div> <div>2nd Gds BM Hwz Rgt (2)</div>
	<div>Defending Forces HELD</div>		
	<div>CV: 83->79.9 Eng Val: 4</div> <div>Comm HQ: LVI Panzer Corps</div> <div>G Erich von Manstein</div>	<div>Show Details</div> <div>Odds 1.50 : 1</div> <div>Exit</div>	<div>CV: 33->53.1 Fort: 0.02->0.00</div> <div>Comm HQ: 1st Shock Army</div> <div>GA Georgy Zhukov</div>

A few smaller secondary attacks in the area also failed, and I responded by moving several Panzer units as well as two Mountain divisions into the area to act as a reserve come next turn.

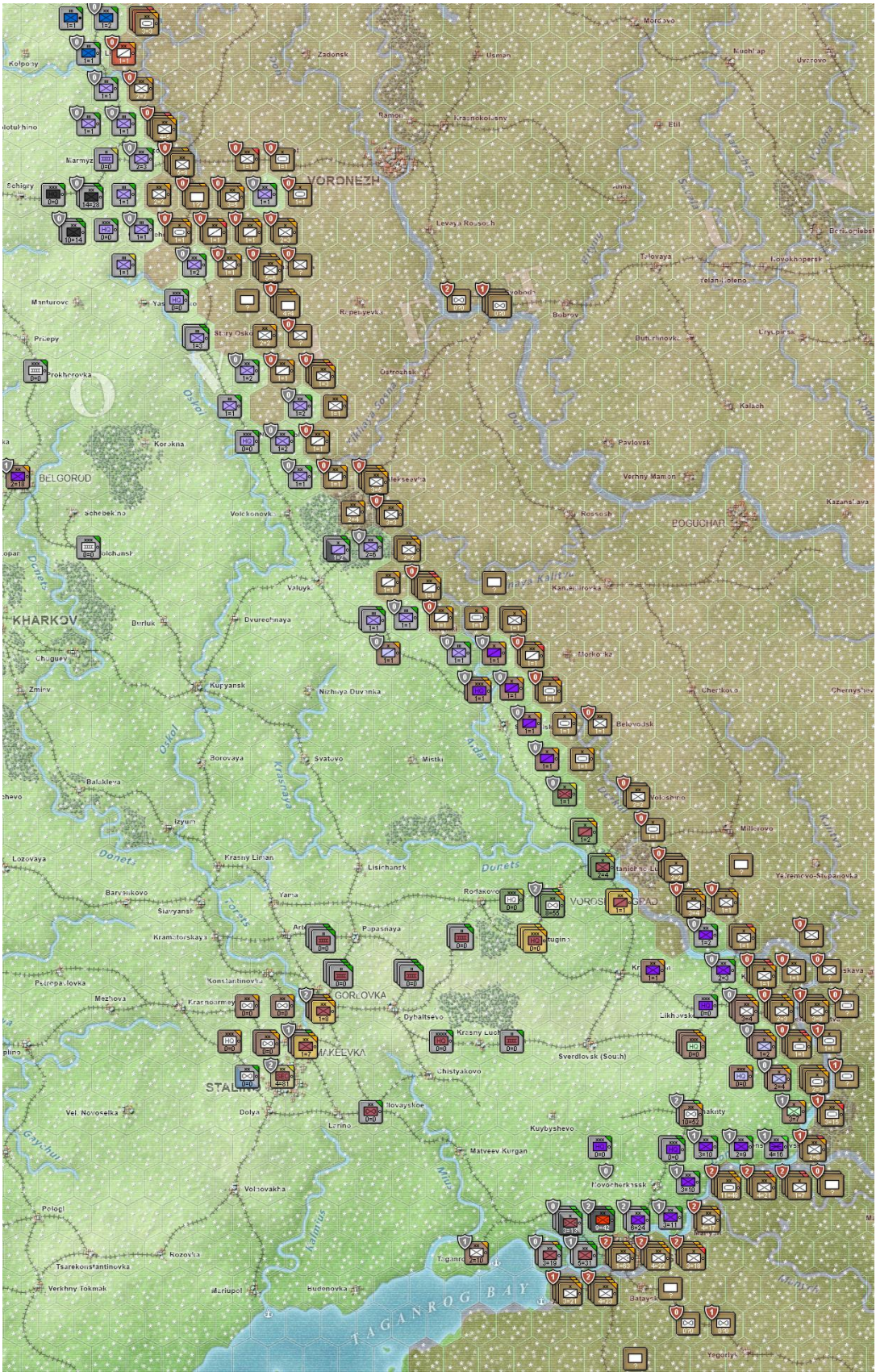
In short, the attacks at Tula this turn has achieved what I set out to do, while the attacks west of Orel has been a dismal failure. I can only hope, that my reserve forces in the area will be able to rectify the situation come next turn.

In the air, I have had few aircraft ready to ship supplies, but thankfully, my forces are getting closer and closer to my own rail system. I have also assigned several transport air groups to the area, to help ferrying supplies come next turn.

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



The South



Situational assessment

West of Voronezh, one infantry division is encircled beyond any hope of relief, and moving south, several more divisions are in danger of being encircled come next turn. This sector of the front is thinly held by both the Soviets and the Germans, and I currently have no real reserve to counterattack any Soviet breakthroughs.

At the juncture between the German and Rumanian forces, a concentration of Soviet cavalry threatens to exploit any breakthrough and move deep into the German rear. There are currently few forces in the area able to resist such a push.

North of Rostov, the Don and the Dnestre are now frozen over, and I can expect heavy attacks across the Don from the south. At the same time, the Soviets have crossed the rivers in strength to the east, and my positions around Rostov are now more or less untenable.

Planning

At Voronezh, I will continue to withdraw my frontline, while doing the necessary attacks to get the German infantry divisions free of the "Moving between enemy ZOC" penalties, if possible.

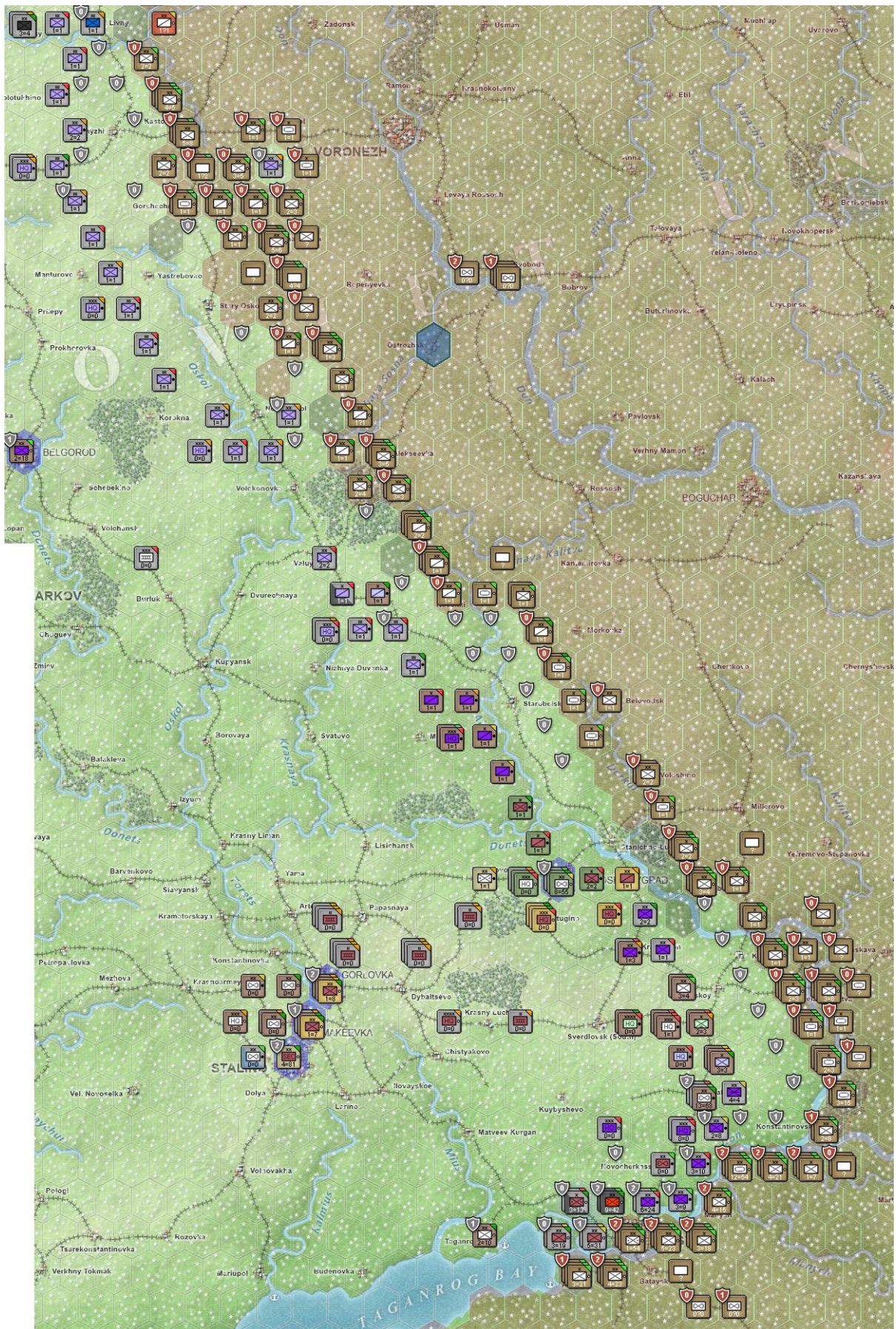
I will basically withdraw the front all the way down to Rostov, hoping to shorten my lines a little and free up a few units for strengthening the weakening front south of Voronezh.

Execution

While I have extracted at least some of the endangered infantry divisions, there are still quite a few of them in dire need of further extraction. In the area south of Voronezh, I have several infantry divisions while a TOE strength around 50-60% and thus completely unable to withstand any sort of Soviet pressure.

As I have nothing to send and no rail capacity to send it, I expect my front to disintegrate in this area over the coming turns. This will let the soviet cavalry move quickly towards Belgorod and Kharkov, but in doing so, the Soviet supply system will be stretched, which again will weaken the Soviet effort in other locations.

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



Conclusion

Losses during this turn has been very high, but at least most of the German manpower losses has been disabled men, while the Soviets have been killed as can be seen below.

AXIS LOSSES			
Men	0	67359	518743
Guns	0	1166	9543
AFV	0	96	2688
SP & AC	0	48	573
Men Killed	0	11511	161953
Men Captured	0	1049	5022
Men Disabled	0	54799	351768
Men Returned			27788
SOVIET LOSSES			
Men	0	185589	2843187
Guns	0	1438	28333
AFV	0	1025	13320
SP & AC	0	192	3389
Men Killed	0	93927	683848
Men Captured	0	1122	1188199
Men Disabled	0	90540	971140
Men Returned			55001

Next turn, I will lose the first infantry division whiel several other will be encircled. Such losses will be far worse than the disabled men slowly dripping back into the manpower pool.

In the air, German losses continue to be below production, but the Soviets are also slowly building their strength.

It is my hope that the Soviet strategy of attacking at all times, combined with the continued extension of Soviet supply lines will soon begin to stretch the Soviet transport capacity beyond its limits. But as the Soviets have only done two turns of December, there is a long way to go before the end of the winter.