

Turn 28, Strategic overview

This turn, the Soviets have conducted significantly less attacks than they did last turn. In total, 206 attacks has hit the Axis lines, including 70 ground bombings, 81 hasty attacks and 55 deliberate attacks as opposed to 23 observations, 65 ground bombings, 48 deliberate attacks and 388 hasty attacks last turn. The effect has been that the Axis lines are looking a lot better at the beginning of this turn than they did at the beginning of the last turn.

I wonder if the Soviets are taking a breather before renewing their attacks, or if the steam is slowly going out of the soviet steamroller, as the units are getting fatigued and the supply lines are getting longer.

In the air, I have been reading a lot of AAR posts regarding the "Recon Spam Strategy". Up until now, I have, rather foolishly, ignored the German recons as of little consequence to the air war. But now I realize that using the recon spam, you can actually fatigue the Soviet fighters before committing the Luftwaffe prime assets to the combat area, provided the Soviets conduct interception over the battlefield. If they do not, the German level bombers will have the opportunity to fly unescorted ground bombing attacks.

I must admit that I am reluctant to use such methods, as I consider them playing against the AI rather than against my opponent. While a little uncertain about the experience gain of the Soviet pilots (will the whole Air Group gain experience for a few pilots flying anti recon mission?), I will begin using my recons more aggressively. Later in the war, the Bf 109G-8 looks to be a true fighter in all but name, so I guess that using recons this way is more or less as intended.

In order to test this strategy, I will use the 60 HS 126B-1's I have outside Vyazma to test the impact of some repeated recon attempts. While I will do some more intensive recon missions than I usually do, I will also stop short of doing an actual recon spamming. I will try to limit the fatigue buildup in the German pilots, and will not go above 15 in fatigue. As the HS 126 have a very low reliability, I set out to do the test hoping not to suffer significant operational losses.

The result of doing 20 recon missions using those 60 HS 126B's was that the German suffered one aircraft lost do to operational losses. No other losses were sustained by either side. The Soviets in the area flew approximately two aircraft for each one German flying. The German recon aircraft ended up having spent 80-100% of their available flying miles, but only built up fatigue to two or three points.

Continuing to do recons in the north, I found that for some reason recon losses were significantly higher in some area than in others. However, the total loss of recon aircraft was limited to eight, so I am little worried.

In the north, the Soviets pushed back the German positions in a number of locations between Lakes Paipus and Ilmen and east of Lake Ilmen. There are no threatening encirclements, and the situation on this sector of the front seems to be as well in hand as is currently possible. The supply situation also looks less dire than it did the previous turn.

Between Lakes Peipus and Ilmen, the Soviets have attacked in four locations, pushing the Germans out of two. The German line looks intact, and everywhere the front line locations are held with a combined terrain and fortification modifier of at least two.

Planning

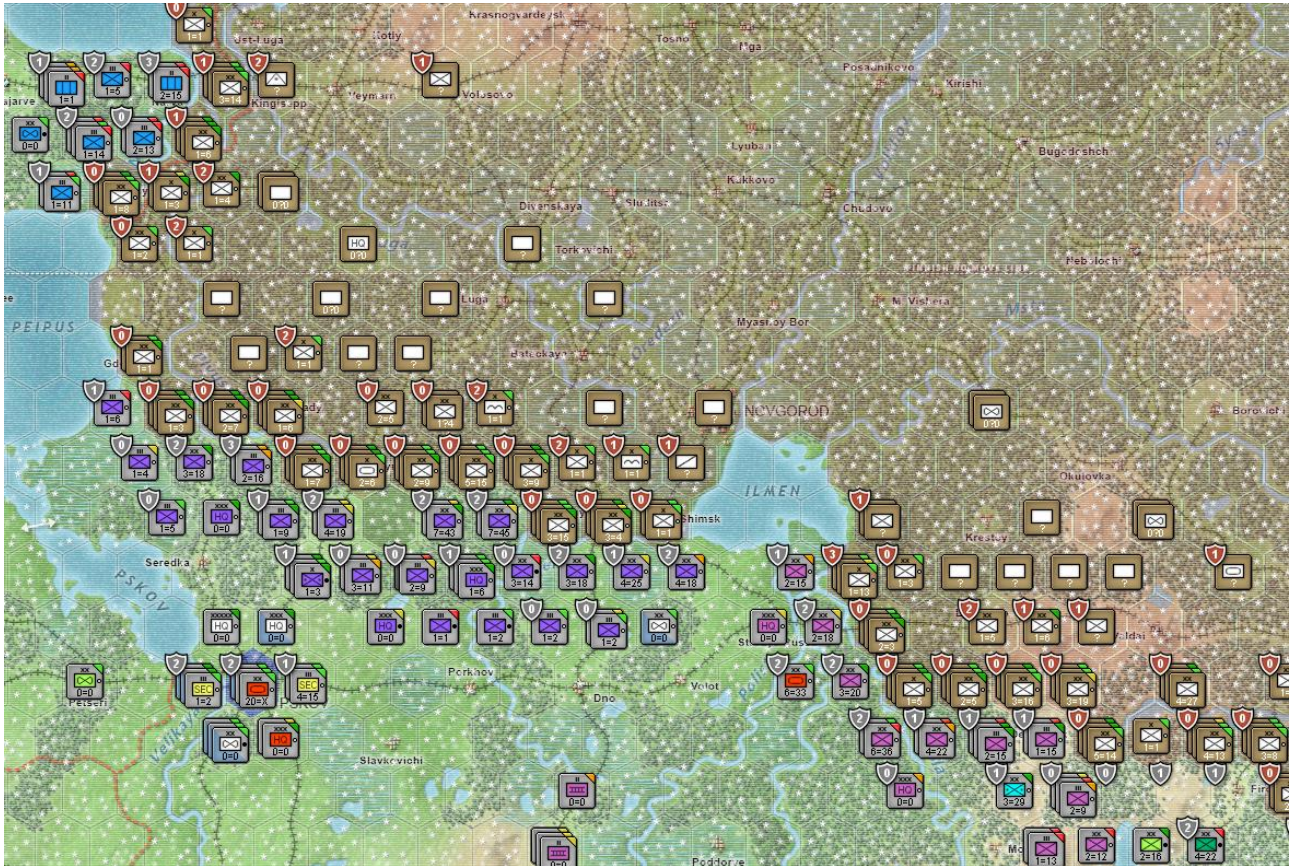
East of Lake Ilmen, I will prepare a further delaying action in the hills around Molvotitsy

Execution

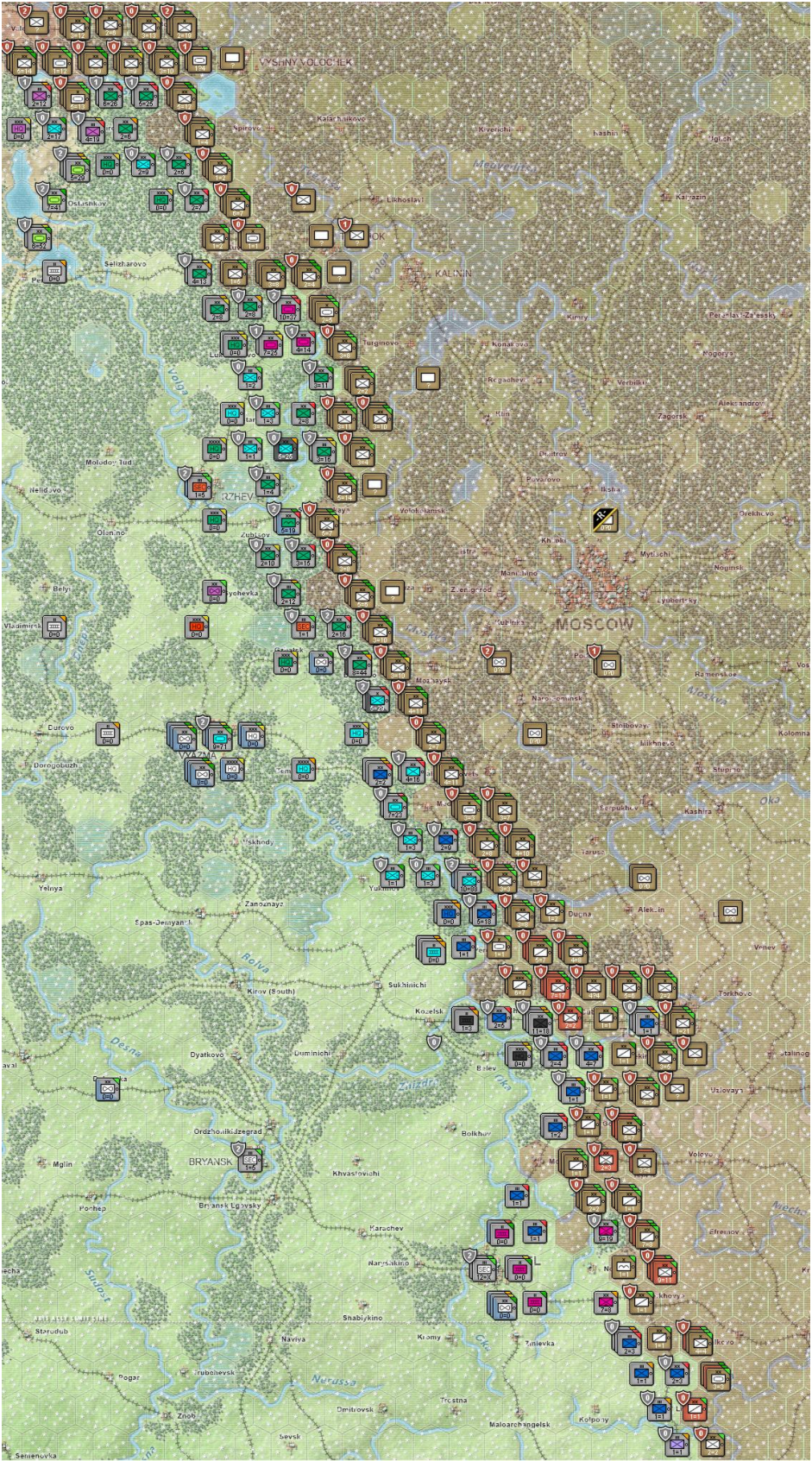
The north has been uneventful during the Axis turn.

I have made no attacks, and only flown a few supply missions to strengthen the abilities of those divisions that are down on supplies.

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



The Center



Situational Assessment

In the northern part of the center, the 9th Army under Model is beginning to feel the ever increasing pressure from the Soviet attacks in this region. While there is yet no immediate threat of encirclements, I do need to be careful not to lose track of events. An interesting event here this turn was a Soviet attack against the 7th Flieger Division forcing the Germans to withdraw. As the 7th is already preparing for its departure from the east, that division has withdrawn all the way to 1, 59 where it is currently refitting.

The weight of the Soviet attacks on the 9th Army has been especially telling directly west of Moscow, where the Germans are now no longer in any sort of defensive positions.

The city of Kaluga is now beset by Soviets on four sides, and if I wish to avoid encirclements, now would probably be a good time to abandon the city.

A little good news are seen south of Kaluga, where the Soviet attacks have reencircled the 293rd Infantry division west of Tula, much as expected. The good news are that a Soviet Cavalry Corps thrown into the front of the attack can now muster no more than 2=2 CV, although it still has three attached Support units (most likely Ski Battalions).

Further south still, it looks as if yet another German Infantry division will soon be encircled as it simply does not have enough movement to withdraw more than one hex. The good news are, that I do have some decent CV units to the rear, and I might be able to counterattack and reestablish contact, at least on a temporary basis.

In the air, the majority of the Luftwaffe is based at Vyazma and Orel. I will need some of the aircraft here to fly supplies out to the frontline troops, especially west of Moscow, where most of my units are in a poor supply state.

Planning

In the north, I will reorder the 9th Army for future defensive operations but without giving (much) ground voluntarily. If possible, I will set up a few units to be able to counterattack, should I end up in trouble come next turn.

West of Moscow, I will mainly stay in my current positions in the northernmost hexes, while I will fall back in the area north of Kaluga, which I will abandon in the process.

Further south, I will attack the 2=2 Cavalry Corps to rout it, and then pull back the forward troops west of Tula. This will be done to preserve strength and rest my forces as well as I am able, before the Soviet attacks next turn.

East and southeast of Orel, I will do a few more attacks, partly to throw back the Soviets, and partly to allow my own Infantry to continue falling back.

In the air, my main effort will be to fly supplies to those mountain units that are in short supply, but I will also be supporting a few of the attacks that I plan to do in the southern sector.

Execution

Along the entire stretch of front north of Kaluga, I have basically done what I can to strengthen my lines before the last Soviet December turn. This sector of the front is looking decently stable, and I have been able to pull a few extra Panzer divisions into reserve in Rzhev.

South of Kaluga, I have attacked the Soviet 2=2 Cavalry Corps that had nowhere to withdraw to and inflicted another defeat on this unit. Next turn, that Cavalry Corps *may* rally, but should receive neither supplies nor reinforcements. It must also be either low morale or very fatigued by now, which should at least mean that it will take a few turns to get it back in to shape. However, it is assigned directly to a Front command, so it would appear that it matters little to the Soviets.

Axis Forces Attacking: XXXXIX Mountain Corps 78th Infantry Division (32) 267th Infantry Division (17) 52nd Nebelwerfer Regiment (0) 11/53rd Howitzer Battalion (0) 1/37th LW Mix Flk Bn (0) 658th Pioneer Battalion (1) 102nd Hvy Nbl.W. Bn (0)	< 2 of 6 > 103,57 - Clear(Cherepet) - Blizzard Turn:28 1941-12-25 Forces Engaged ATK: men 34787, art 496, afv 4 DAM: men 148, art 4, afv 1 LOST: men 106, art 5, afv 0 ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 3rd Cavalry Corps ROUTED	Soviet Forces Defending: Bryansk Front -10% 3rd Cavalry Corps (13) 2nd Sapper Regiment (0) 109th Ski Battalion (0) 111th Ski Battalion (0)
CV: 50->147.4 Eng Val: 2 Comm HQ: XXXIX Mountain Corps G Lothar Rendulic	Show Details Odds 42.11 : 1 Exit	CV: 13->3.5 Fort: 0.02->0.00 Comm HQ: Bryansk Front Gl Fyodor Remezov

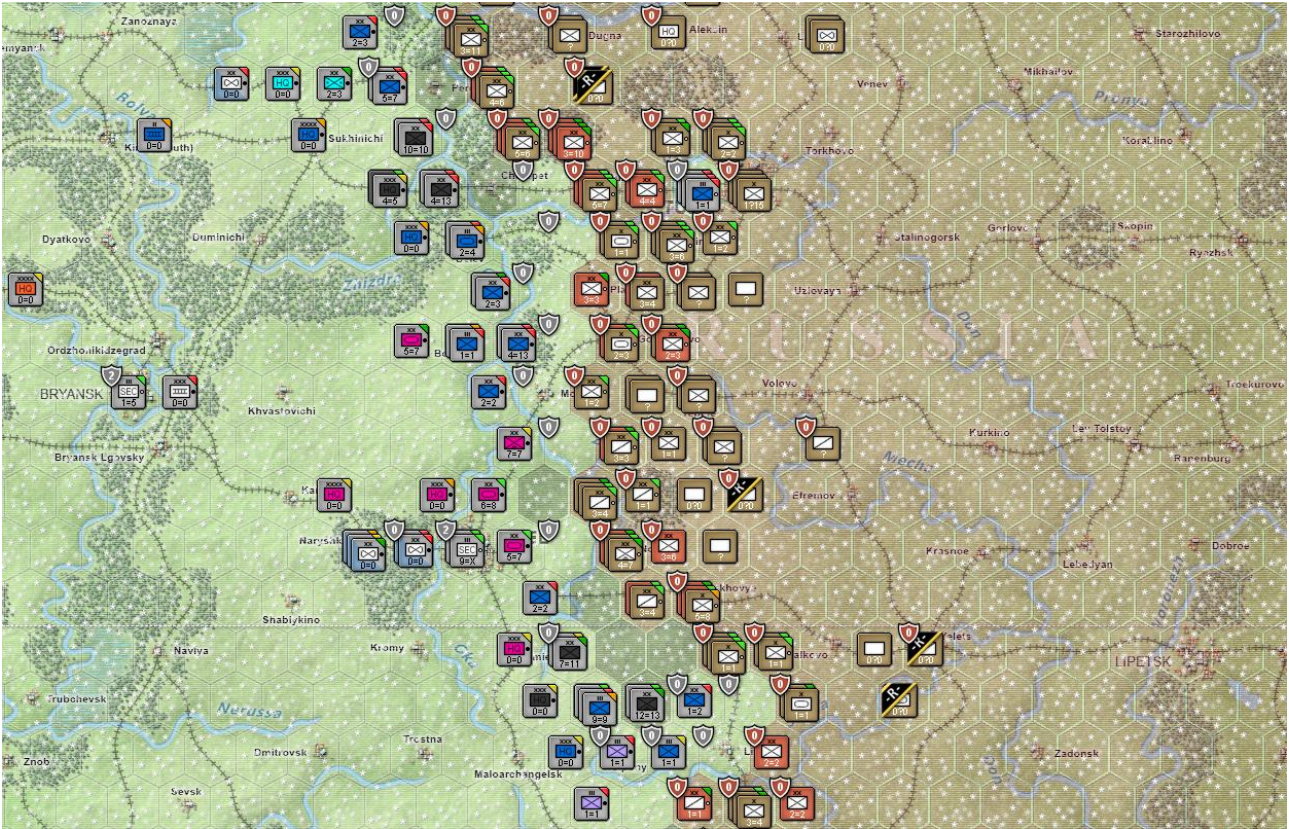
At Orel, my attacks to relieve the almost encircled Germans saw an interesting battle, as I decided to spare my Mountain infantry as much as possible, and consequently attacked a Soviet Tank Division with a Panzer Division of my own. Losses were heavy on both sides, but mostly on the Soviet. The Soviet losses were mostly BT-7's and T-26's, unfortunately.

Axis Forces Attacking:	1 of 1106,66 - Clear - BlizzardTurn:28 1941-12-25		Soviet Forces Defending:
	Forces Engaged		
	ATK: men 18625, art 260, afv 257 DAM: men 8, art 4, afv 8 LOST: men 76, art 1, afv 8 ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0	DEF: men 8860, art 124, afv 124 DAM: men 252, art 5, afv 3 LOST: men 359, art 12, afv 54 DEF: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0	
XXXXIX Panzer Corps 12th Panzer Division (47) 51st Nebelwerfer Regiment (0) 11/70th Artillery Battalion (0) 620th Gun Battalion (0) 280th Mot. Flk Bn (0) 643rd Jagdpanzer Battalion (3) 4/59th SP Flak Company (0)	107th Tank Division ROUTED		2nd Shock Army 107th Tank Division (16) 110th Howitzer Regiment (0) 5th Gds Art Rgt RVGK (1) 132nd Ski Battalion (1)
CV: 50->130.0Eng Val: 2 Comm HQ: XXXIX Panzer Corps GL Hermann Balck	Show DetailsOdds 11.01 : 1	Exit	CV: 18->11.8Fort: 0.00->0.00 Comm HQ: 2nd Shock Army GM Konstantin Rokossovsky

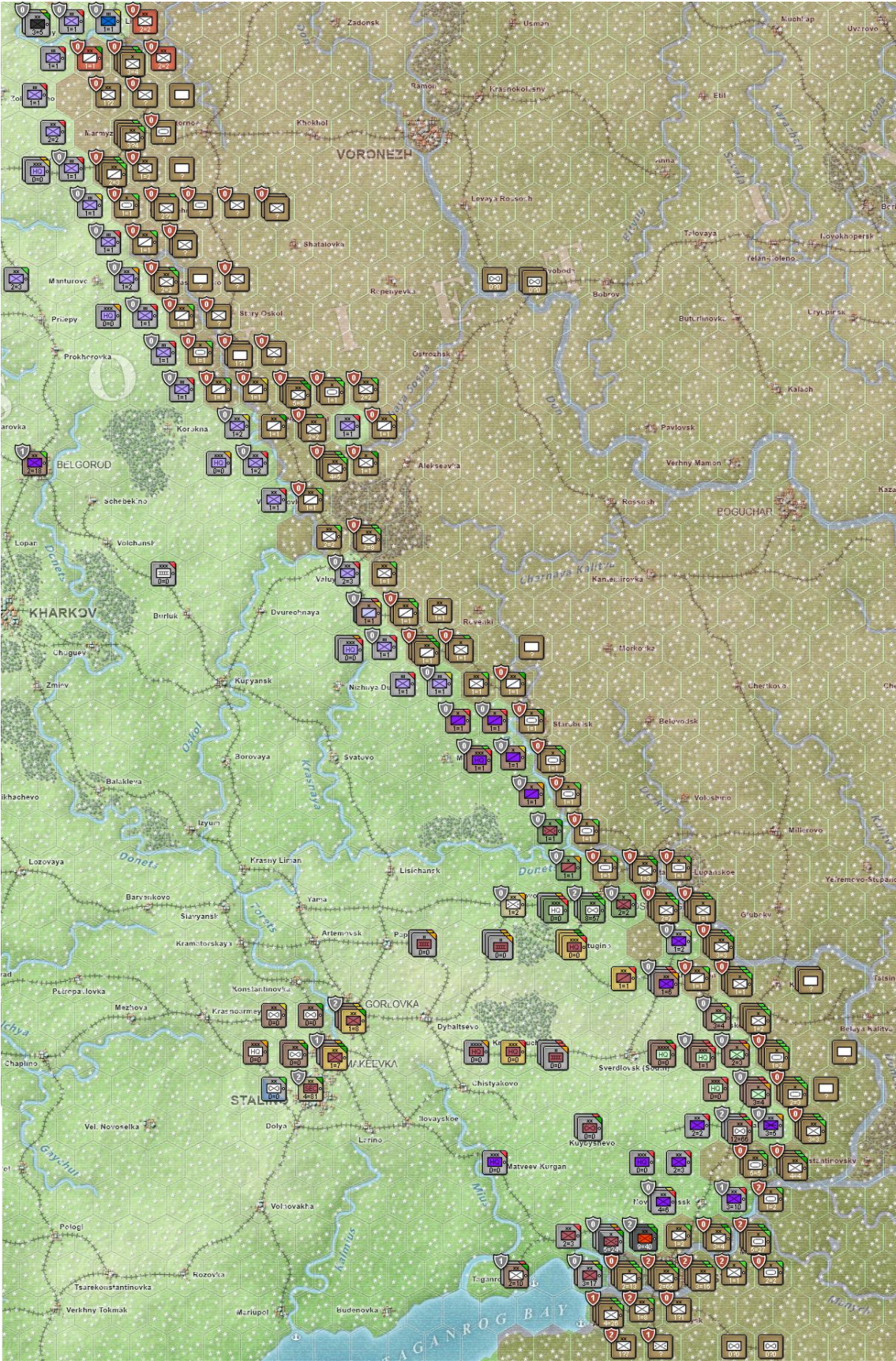
In order to guard the endangered Infantry division against encirclement next turn, I then moved up another Panzer Division and one Mountain Division and made an overkill attack against one of the weaker Soviet stacks. This should ensure, that the forward German infantry division has a spot to withdraw to come next turn, if it is attacked. This attack also saw some decent soviet losses, and even the destruction of one Rifle Division.

Axis Forces Attacking:		< 3 of 5 > 107,66 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:28 1941-12-25		Soviet Forces Defending:	
XXXIX Panzer Corps -13%		ATK: men 38981, art 612, afv 276		2nd Shock Army	
7th Panzer Division (37)		DAM: men 66, art 9, afv 8		152nd Rifle Division (18)	
51st Nebelwerfer Regiment (0)		LOST: men 194, art 4, afv 16		110th Howitzer Regiment (0)	
11/70th Artillery Battalion (0)		ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0		60th Army -30%	
733rd Howitzer Battalion (0)		LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0		2nd Cavalry Division (4)	
620th Gun Battalion (0)				106th Howitzer Regiment (0)	
605th SP Lt Flk Bn (1)				61st Army -30%	
1/36th LW Mix Flk Bn (0)				20th Rifle Brigade (5)	
[v]		20th Rifle Brigade RETREATED			
		2nd Cavalry Division ROUTED			
		152nd Rifle Division SHATTERED			
CV: 114->278.4		Odds 14.80 : 1		CV: 27->18.8	
Eng Val: 6				Fort: 0.04->0.00	
Comm HQ: LI Corps		Show Details		Comm HQ: 2nd Shock Army	
GL Walter Weiss		Exit		GM Konstantin Rokossovsky	

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



The South



Situational assessment

Between Kharkov and Voronezh, another weak German infantry division has been encircled without any hope of relief. The division contains some 8.000 men and 80 guns, so it is not one of my strongest formations. I am actually a little surprised that things are not looking worse in this area, as I had more or less expected my whole front to collapse in this area this turn.

Further south, the Rumanians are putting up a surprisingly good fight against the Soviets attacking them. In this area, the Soviets have not even penetrated my front, and an orderly withdrawal is certainly sustainable.

North of Rostov, the Soviets have continued their attacks across the Don, and two German infantry divisions are in danger of being encircled next turn, unless I do a counterattack against a stack of two Soviet Tank Divisions with a CV of 5=5. On a sidenote, the Soviets have sought out the airforces of the Axis minor units in this area, forcing them into a few dogfights, which has not been successful for the Axis. This way, a total of eight Rumanian and Hungarian fighters has been lost.

On Crimea, the Axis lines are temporarily holding out, but chances are that the whole area will fall before the spring.

Planning

In the south, I will continue my "one hex withdrawal" policy inmost of the area strechting all the way down to the Don bend. In this area I will conduct the necessary counterattacks (preceeded by Rumaninan bombing attacks) and then pull back in order to save my German divisions and to free up the Rumanian Mountain troops from their front line duties. Those troops will be sent north, to aid in the fighting in the steppes, where I am concerned about the possibility of a Soviet Cavalry division breakthrough.

Execution

In the south, the withdrawal of every thing north of the Don bend went more or less according to plan.

In preparation for the attack on the stack of two Soviet Tank Divisions (CV of 5=5) I first did a Rumanian Ground bombing attack, in which I followed the ensuing dogfight combat report in high detail. Losses were sustainable for either side, with the soviets losing five LaGG-3's and three Hurricane IIB's and a number of units disrupted.

Axis Forces Attacking:		< 2 of 2 125,99 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:28 1941-12-25		Soviet Forces Defending:	
		Forces Engaged			
20	Bf 109E-3(R)	ATK: men 0, art 0, afv 0	DEF: men 0, art 0, afv 0	3	MiG-3
5	He 112B(R)	DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0	DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0	7	I-16 Type 29
34	IAR 80A	LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0	LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0	13	LaGG-3
7	PZL 24E(R)	ATK: ftr 66, bmr 24, utl 0	DEF: ftr 40, bmr 0, utl 0	17	Hurricane IIB
8	IAR 37	LOST: ftr 1, bmr 0, utl 0	LOST: ftr 9, bmr 0, utl 0		
8	IAR 39	ground forces were BOMBED		17	-> 37mm Anti-Aircraft Gun
		Show Details	Exit		

I did the second attack as a night bombing attack by Rumanian level bombers, which saw a few I-153's fly in defense of the Rumanians.

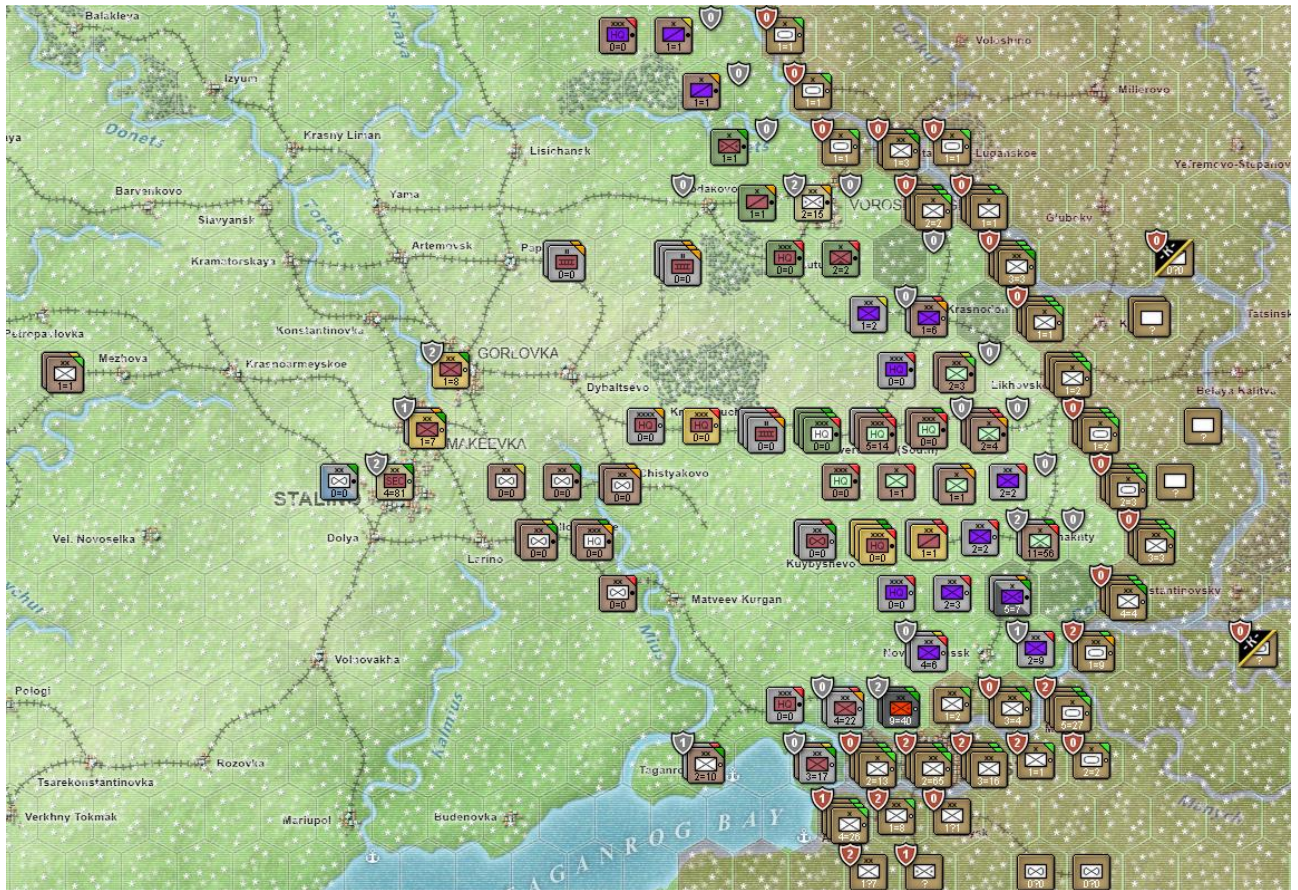
Axis Forces Attacking: 4 Bloch 210(R) 11 He 111H-3(R) 4 Ju 86K-2(R) 21 PZL 37B(R) 12 SM.79B(R)		< 3 of 3 125,99 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:28 1941-12-25		Soviet Forces Defending: 7 I-153 17 -> 37mm Anti-Aircraft Gun			
		Forces Engaged ATK: men 0, art 0, afv 0 DAM: men 0, art 0, afv 0 LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0 ATK: ftr 0, bmr 52, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 1, utl 0 DEF: men 0, art 0, afv 0 DAM: men 4, art 1, afv 1 LOST: men 0, art 0, afv 0 DEF: ftr 7, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0					
		ground forces were BOMBED					
		Show Details		Exit			

The main attack was a massive overkill, but apparently the selection of units went awry, and one of the infantry units I wished to extraxt went into the attack, and consequently failed to have the movement to get back to the safety of the German lines. Because of this, I had to adjust the plan of extracting the two Infantry divisions and have instead adopted a more aggressive stance in the area. This unfortunately also meant not withdrawing the Rumanian Mountain units from frontline duty this turn.

Axis Forces Attacking: XIV Panzer Corps 11th Panzer Division (75) XXX Corps -16% 72nd Infantry Division (17) II/54th Artillery Battalion (0) XI Corps -16% 73rd Infantry Division (21) Mountain Rum. Corps -16% [v]	< 2 of 4 > 125,99 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:28 1941-12-25 Forces Engaged ATK: men 53546, art 563, afv 183 DAM: men 158, art 6, afv 14 LOST: men 76, art 2, afv 0 ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 DEF: men 12946, art 105, afv 471 DAM: men 308, art 2, afv 4 LOST: men 238, art 7, afv 78 DEF: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0		Soviet Forces Defending: 26th Army 52nd Tank Division (21) 20th Tank Division (32)
	20th Tank Division ROUTED 52nd Tank Division RETREATED		
	CV: 139->348.9 Eng Val: 4 Comm HQ: XIV Panzer Corps GL Karl Strecker Show Details	Odds 5.54 : 1 Exit	
CV: 53->62.9 Fort: 0.02->0.00 Comm HQ: 26th Army GM Leonid V. Bobkin			

In the air, I have moved the Italian and hungarian fighter airbases into a more forward position, hoping that those aircraft will find some kind of use.

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



Conclusion

Losses continue to be a lot higher than I would like, and especially the divisions about to surrender is bad news indeed. Normal combat and attrition sees most of the German casualties as disabled, meaning that they will slowly drift back into the German manpower pool. Surrendered forces will do no such thing.

In the air, the Axis Minors have taken some losses, but I am not really very concerned with this.

For now, the Soviets have one turn of December left, after which the CV off all German infantry can be expected to rise. While I am nowhere near the end of the winter, I might be approaching the end of the beginning of the winter.