

Turn 31, Strategic overview

On the ground, the Soviets have now reduced the number of attacks in the north and the center. This means that the Soviet supply system can focus its attention on the events in the south. This is a strategy that I have been advocating for some time, as it will create more encirclements and deep penetrations than simply pushing all over the front all the time. The result has been that the situation is more or less stabilized in the north and the center, while there is a significant need of reinforcements in the south.

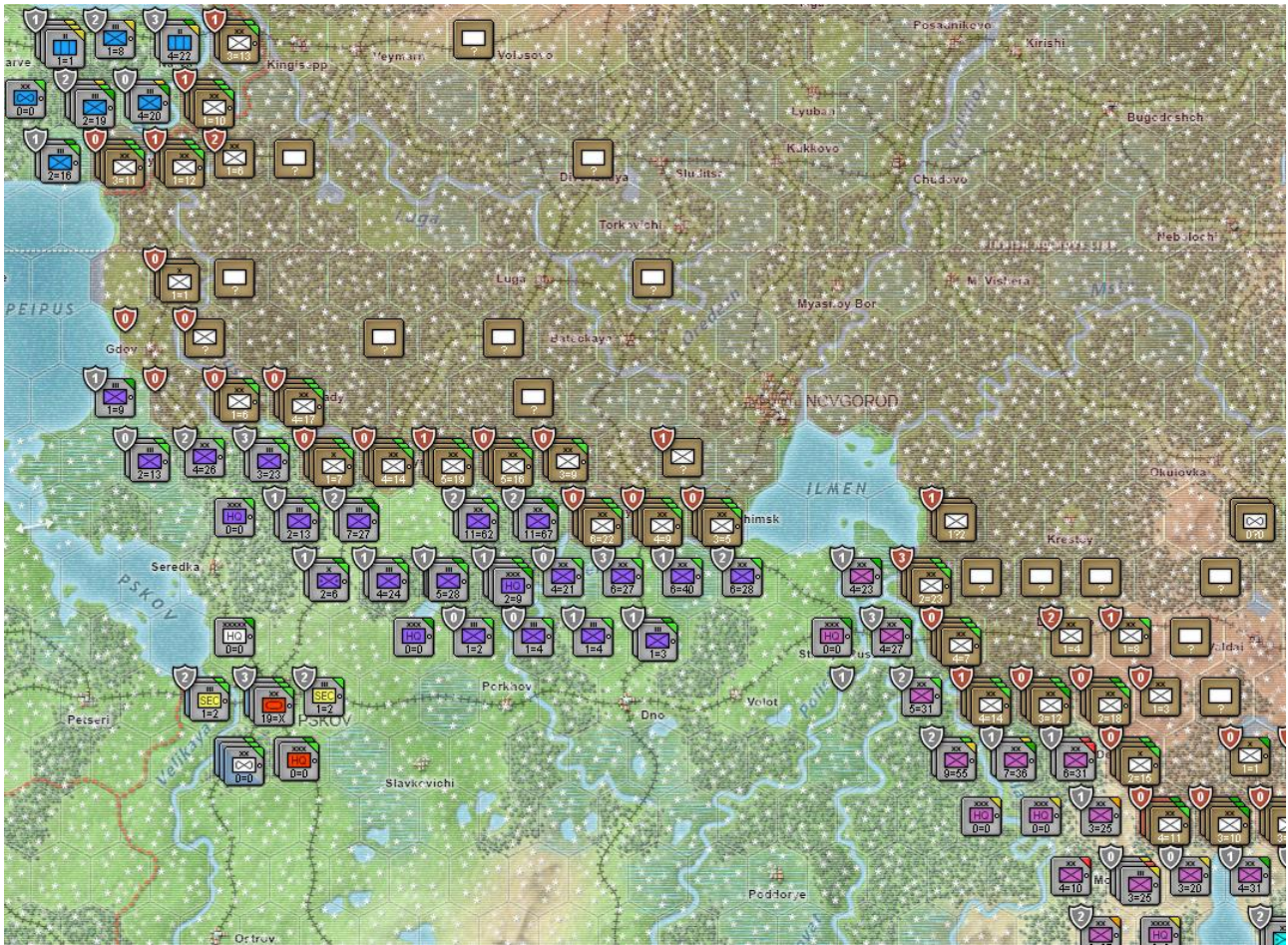
To support the Soviet effort, almost all Guards divisions and a large number of Air Groups has been pulled off the front line and will probably be used in some other location. For now, it seems the majority of those divisions have reached the railheads from where they are to be sent, so it will be at least another couple of turns before their presence can be felt in other locations. One option for the Soviets is to send the units south in order to strengthen the attack on the Axis positions here, but such a move will cost at least one or two turns before the units can make their presence felt.

Production wise, it seems that the Germans are getting a better grip on things. This turn, my armaments deficiency is only about 5.000 points. With a Reserve pool of 26.000 points still, the current situation should last more or less to the end of the winter. After that, I hope to see the Germans using a lot less armament points. It does pain me, however, to see that the Germans are still exporting armaments to the Italians.

Interestingly, I now have more than 250 medium tanks in my reserve pools, with a significant number of those being the good quality (for Germans tanks anno 1942) Panzer III's and Panzer IV's. I also have some 37 T-34's available in my reserve pools.

My Sdflz 10/4 Flak halftrack production is a complete mystery to me however. I produce six every turn, with about four of these going to the Eastern Front. My units currently want some 442 wanted according to my Logistics report. The situation has been like this ever since game turn one, and I am very confused that the German OoB contains units that will clearly never be produced in relevant numbers. I did a post on this on the forums a while back, but with no one offering any thoughts on the subject.

The North



Situational assessment

In the north, the situation is all but stable. The Soviets have attacked in only two locations (both southeast of Lake Ilmen). Of the two attacked locations, the Germans have managed to hold on to one of them, withdrawing from the other.

This has left one hex with low supplies, but all other locations along the front is now more or less in good supply.

The Soviets have been completely inactive in the air, to the extent that they have not even done any recon missions this turn. I guess that the continued losses of Soviet recon aircraft is finally making STAVKA a little more cautious in the expenditure of that type of aircraft.

Planning

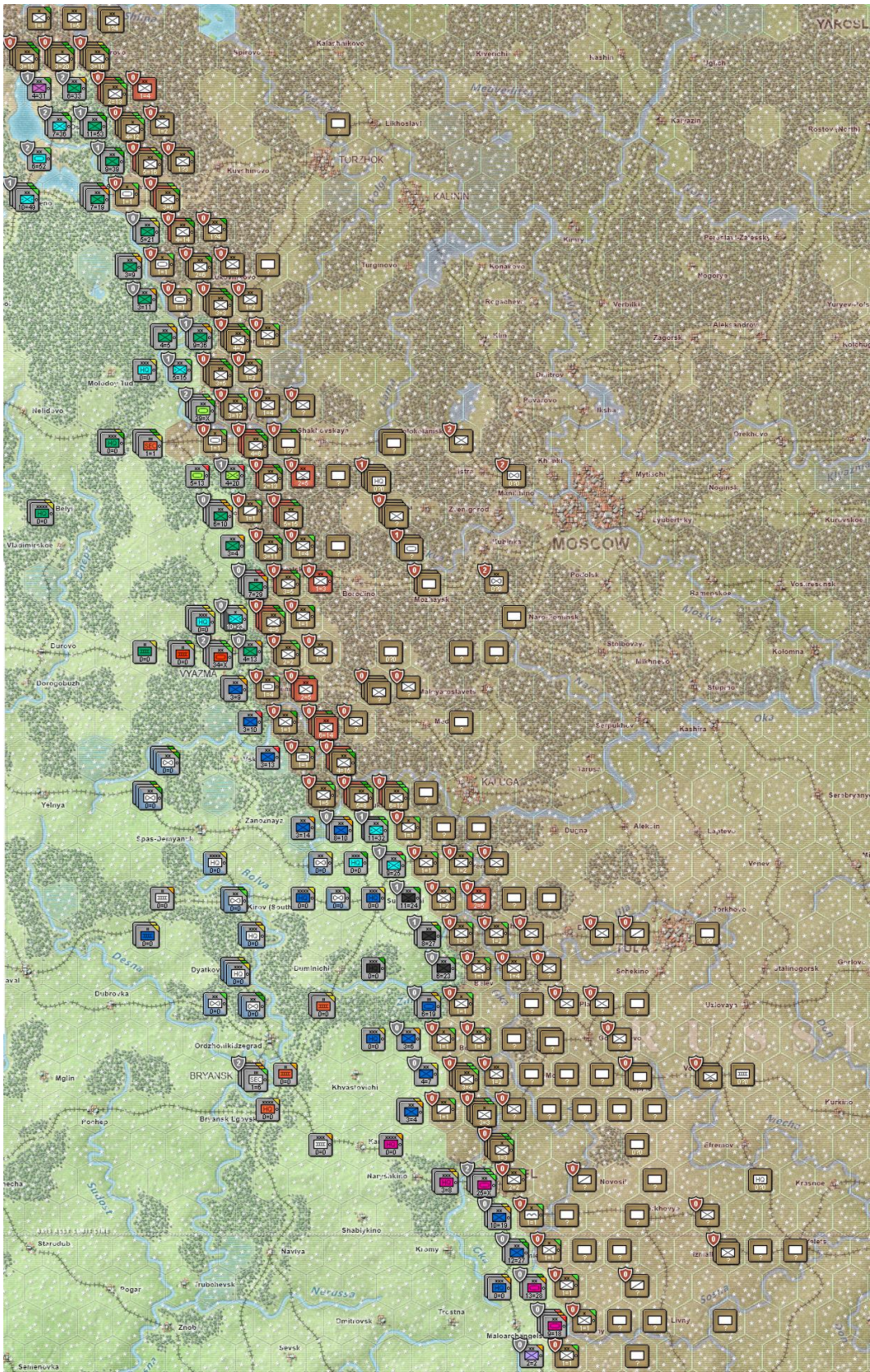
I will simply replace the units with low supplies with other units having a little more ammunition to throw at the Soviets and other wise do very little in this area of the Eastern Front.

Execution

Nothing much has happened in the north this turn.

I have begun railing the Panzer reserves at Pskov southwards.

The Center



Situational Assessment

The Soviets have been more aggressive in the center, attacking some 17 locations along the front. There appear to be no real plan to these attacks, and that the Soviets simply attack where they are strong and stay still where they are not. The result has been that there is no real threat of breakthroughs of the German lines, as the German divisions are just pushed back on hex at a time.

A noteworthy development is the fact that the Soviets have pulled their Guards off the line between Orel and Tula, and this area looks as if the Soviet offensive is slowing down considerably. The Soviets have also placed their units one pr hex up to three hexes deep, signaling they are in the process of constructing defensive fortifications.

The Soviet front lines are very often held by units with no more than a defensive CV of one. While attacking them will pose an extra burden on my supply system, doing so will often take away a relevant Soviet buildup area for further attacks.

In the air, the Soviets have conducted one recon attempt at Bryansk, losing two R-5's in the process.

Planning

In the center, I will generally be attacking the weak Soviet units along the front in order to disrupt Soviet buildup possibilities for further attacks. Obviously, I will not be moving forward, but rather just maintain my current lines, hoping to keep the front still for the remainder of the winter.

There are a few exceptions to this however:

- Directly west of Tula, around the town of Sukhinichi, there is a bulge in the German front two hexes deep. I will abandon this bulge, as doing so will help me free up the XXXIX Mountain Corps as a strategic reserve once more. I will then be able to send these four strong divisions to wherever the Soviets Guards decide to go.
- Further south, I will send the LVII Panzer Corps south, to deal with the developing threat of the Soviet attacks between Kursk and Kharkov. In order to do this, the LVI Panzer Corps will be needed to help shore up the defenses currently held by the LVII Panzer Corps.

In the air, I will have Paul Deichman take over the IV Fliegerkorps and begin moving this corps southwards. Meanwhile the Luftwaffe forces remaining in the center will use the apparent lull in the fighting to begin upgrading their machines. I currently have some 169 Bf109 F-4's in my reserve pools, and they are a little better than the Bf109 F-2's currently in some of my fighter groups.

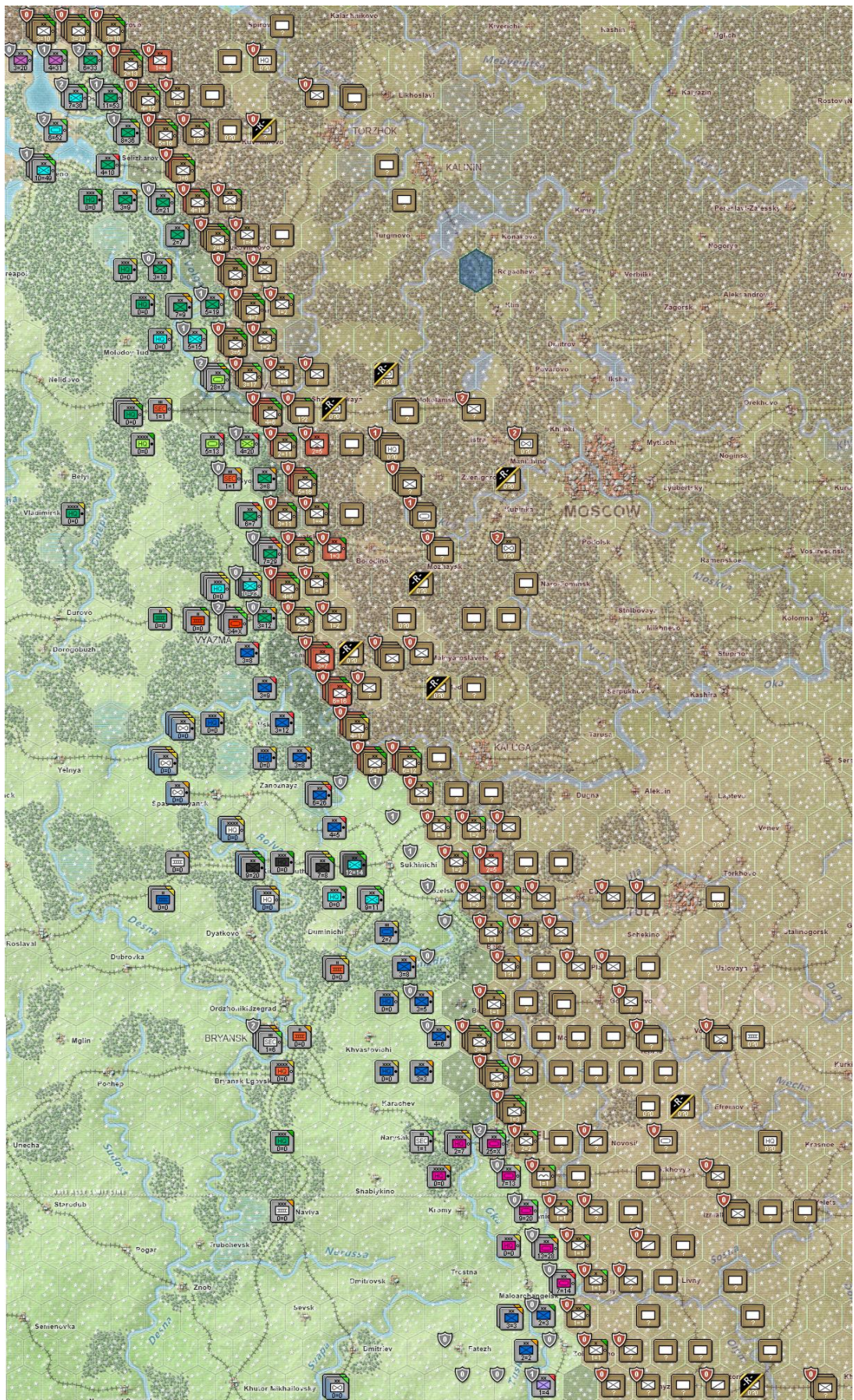
Execution

In the center, I have either maintain a relatively strong line of defenses or else created a buffer zone in front of the German lines, denying the Soviets valuable buildup areas for further attacks. I have also abandoned the bulge at Sukhinichi and freed up the XXXIX Mountain Corps to act as a reserve in this area. The Corps is now placed on the rail lines, and should be able to move anywhere in the north or the center in a very short time.

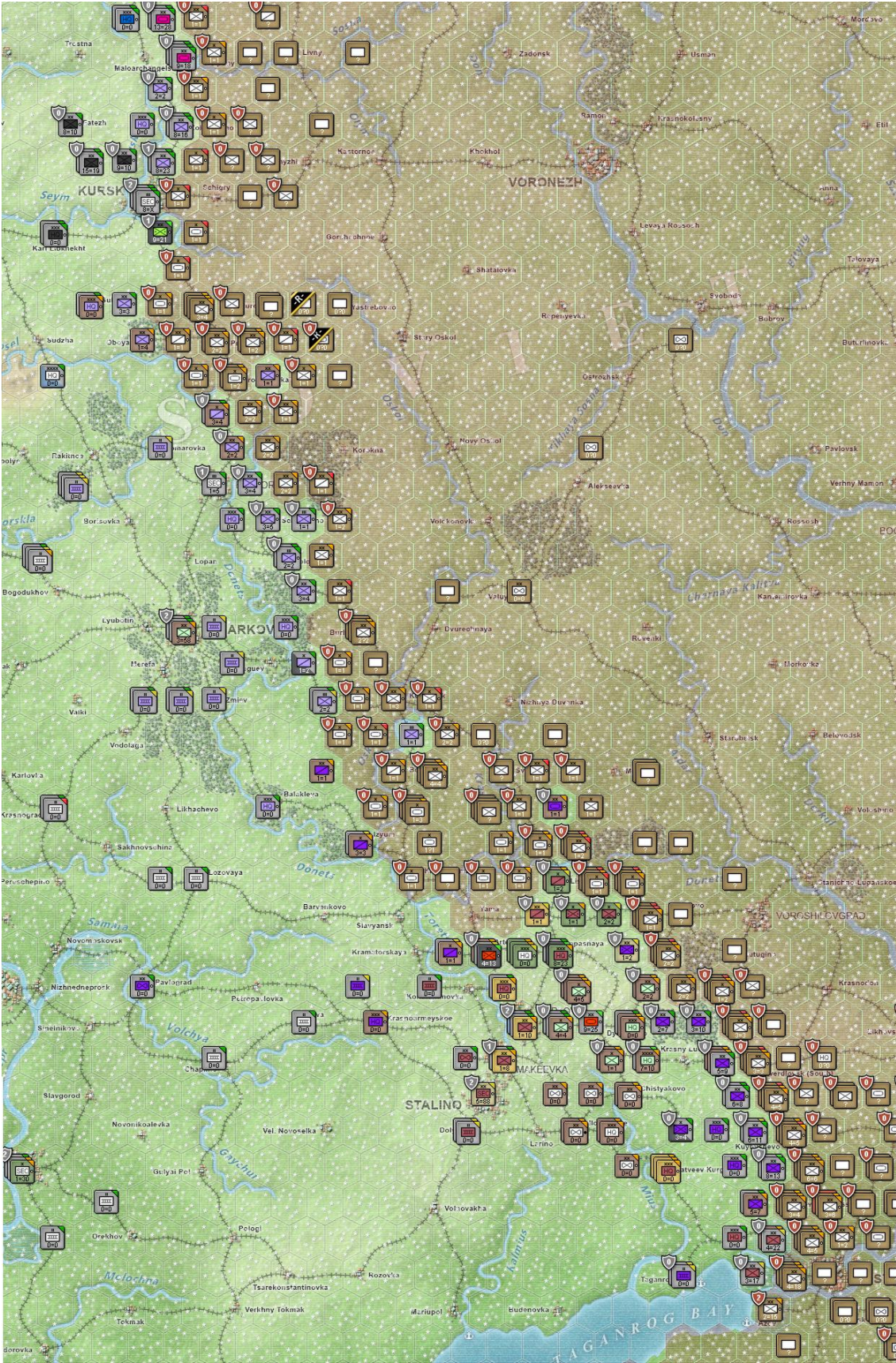
I think it very likely that the Soviets will continue to push forward south of Vyazma, as they have plenty of Guards units here with more firepower than the opposing Germans. As a consequence, I have bombed the units here with whatever level bombers I could spare, hoping to inflict some fatigue, depriving the Soviets of valuable movement points they could use in moving forward.

The Luftwaffe has also been relaying several airfields south this turn, while replacing the Bf109 F-2's in three fighter groups in the center. I plan to switch off ground support for the coming Soviet phase, thus further reducing the stress on the German fighters.

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



The South



Situational assessment

In the south, the Soviet attacks are mainly threatening a breakthrough in two locations.

- North of Belgorod, the Soviets have all but pushed aside the German defences opposite them. The Soviet units in this area look relatively weak. The Soviet attack has encircled a Rumanian division of 12.500 men and threaten to push westwards, once more disrupting my efforts to build a north/south rail line. It does not seem like the Soviets have any real air support ready in this area.
- Between Stalino and Kharkov the Soviets have attacked in force and the Rumanian defenses opposite them has all but imploded. The attacks have severely battered, and then encircled the Rumanian Tank division (now down to no more than 61 AFV) and threaten to push southwest and disrupt the main Axis east/west rail line in the south.

The Soviets have mainly used Tank Brigades in their breakthroughs, as these units are able to move further than the Rifle divisions during the blizzard. As the Soviets are now some 30-35MP from their nearest rail heads, I estimate that they will be receiving some 20-25MP come next turn, based on their current supply levels.

In the air, the Soviet airforce is very active, supporting the ground attacks as best they can. It does seem that the Soviet attacks are somewhat hampered by the long flight distance from the Soviet airfields to the combat zone.

Planning

North of Belgorod, I will use the LVII Panzer Corps to attack and hopefully throw back the advancing Soviets. I will be carefull not to use all fuel on my Panzers (and hopefully fly in some more), as I need to be able to keep up movement over the coming turns, should the Soviets reinforce their attacks. Meanwhile, the LII Corps with four Mountain divisions will continue south, in order to be able to attack the northern flank of the southern Soviet attack in a few turns.

The southern Soviet advance will be met with a few attacks by the Rumanian Mountain divisions and one mobile division of the southern area. I will also tru to present a continous front against the advancing Soviets. Meanwhile I will be doing an HQBU on the Panzer Corps in the south, and also move up three fresh German infantry divisions currently in trains somewhere in Rumania.

In the air, I will continue to strengthen the Luftwaffe in the area, moving in several dive bomber and fighter groups. I expect the Soviet airforce to be somewhat less efficient inthis area, as the Soviets are now operating far from their railheads and should receive less fuel and ammunition.

Execution

In the south, a lot has happened this turn.

North of Belgorod, the arrival of the LVII Panzer Corps has let me condut a series of counterattacks throwing quite a few Soviet Tank Brigades into a rout. Reading the manual, the supplu phase is an earlier part of the Logistics phase than the rally routed units phase. This raises the question of wheter the routed Soviet Tank Brigades will actually receive any fuel this turn, but I must admit that I simply do not know. Instead, I will post a thread in the war room asking this question.

In this area, the local Rumanian forces, aided by a few Germans, were also able to push through and relieve the encircled Rumanians.

Axis Forces Attacking: XXIX Corps 111th Infantry Division (23) 849th Gun Battalion (0) 858th Howitzer Battalion (0) II Rum. Corps -6% 10th Rum. Infantry Division (12) 1st Rum. Cavalry Brigade (4) Luftflotte 1 Eng Val: 2 Comm HQ: XXIX Corps G Hans Hube		1 of 3 > 107,78 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:31 1942-01-15 Forces Engaged ATK: men 34765, art 360, afv 1 DAM: men 306, art 4, afv 1 LOST: men 202, art 5, afv 0 ATK: ftr 7, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 DEF: men 9550, art 96, afv 0 DAM: men 105, art 6, afv 0 LOST: men 78, art 5, afv 0 DEF: ftr 30, bmr 8, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 2, utl 0 384th Rifle Division RETREATED Show Details Odds 3.28 : 1 Exit		Soviet Forces Defending: 58th Army 384th Rifle Division (22) 103rd Sapper Battalion (0) Volkhov Air Command 4 I-153 3 Yak-1 23 LaGG-3 CV: 22->27.6 Fort: 0.00->0.00 Comm HQ: 58th Army GP Maks Reiter	
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I ended up doing a hasty attack on Prokhorovka in order to improve my positions for next turn, but failed to make any progress as can be seen below. I deem that loss to be of little importance in the end, but we will have to wait and see.

Axis Forces Attacking (H):		< 6 of 7 > 106,77 - Clear(Prokhorovka) - Blizzard Turn:31 1942-01-15		Soviet Forces Defending:	
LVII Panzer Corps 19th Panzer Division (20) 273rd Mot. Flk Bn (0) Luftflotte 1 7 Bf 109F-4 18 -> SdKfz-10/4 SP Flak		Forces Engaged ATK: men 14872, art 167, afv 147 DAM: men 36, art 9, afv 8 LOST: men 141, art 4, afv 8 ATK: ftr 7, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 DEF: men 13859, art 174, afv 79 DAM: men 48, art 1, afv 2 LOST: men 102, art 2, afv 3 DEF: ftr 41, bmr 9, utl 0 LOST: ftr 2, bmr 2, utl 0		12th Army 331st Rifle Division (19) 5th Guards Howitzer Regiment (0) 315th Art Rgt RVGK (1) 39th Army -25% 33rd Tank Brigade (5) 2nd Gds AT Art Rgt (0)	
CV: 20->46.2 Eng Val: 0 Comm HQ: LVII Panzer Corps GL Otto von Knobelsdorff		Defending Forces HELD Show Details Odds 1.59 : 1 Exit		Caucasus Air Command	
				CV: 25->29.0 Fort: 0.04->0.00 Comm HQ: 12th Army GM Andrei Grechko	

Behind the front in this area, I have moved the majority of the LII Corps onto the southern rail line, meaning that these units can reach the battlezone come next turn. I have also assigned some fighters and dive bombers to the local Luftflotte racing south to take part in the battles.

Further south, I did a hail Mary attack (is that the proper way of saying it in English??), hoping to relieve the encircled German Infantry Regiment. This attack proved successful, much to my surprise. As Tolbukhin is in charge of the Soviet Tank forces in the area, I had expected more of a fight from the Soviets. However, I am still very much concerned with the possibility of further Soviet encirclements in this area.

Axis Forces Attacking: XXXIV Corps 8th SS Cavalry Brigade (13) Luftflotte 1 11 Bf 109F-4 4 -> 88mm Anti-aircraft Gun 2 -> SdKfz-6/2 SP Flak CV: 13->33.3 Eng Val: 0 Comm HQ: XXXIV Corps GL Wilhelm Stemmermann	< 2 of 4 > 110,87 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:31 1942-01-15 Forces Engaged ATK: men 6990, art 65, afv 16 DAM: men 30, art 1, afv 1 LOST: men 20, art 0, afv 0 ATK: ftr 11, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 DEF: men 1601, art 23, afv 78 DAM: men 30, art 1, afv 1 LOST: men 30, art 2, afv 17 DEF: ftr 8, bmr 2, utl 0 LOST: ftr 1, bmr 0, utl 0 61st Tank Brigade RETREATED Show Details Odds 4.11 : 1 Exit	Soviet Forces Defending: 3rd Shock Army 61st Tank Brigade (6) Caucasus Air Command 4 MiG-3 4 LaGG-3 2 IL-2 CV: 6->8.1 Fort: 0.02->0.00 Comm HQ: 3rd Shock Army GL Fyodor Tolbukhin
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Moving on to the main Soviet attack in this area, I was also able to reconnect to the encircled Rumanian Tank division, although my first attempt (using the combined force of Rumanians and Hungarians in the adjacent hex) failed. After this attack, I decided to move up the Wiking division for another go at the Soviet Tank Corps, and succeeded in the second attack. What surprises me is how weak those Tank Brigades are in terms of manpower. In tanks however, they are looking quite good.

Axis Forces Attacking: Cavalry Rum. Corps -16% 5th Rum. Cavalry Division (3) VIII Hun. Corps 1st Hun. Cavalry Brigade (12) VIII HU Art Bn (0) Luftflotte 1 4 Bf 109E-3(R) [v]		< 2 of 6 > 115,90 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:31 1942-01-15 Forces Engaged ATK: men 15200, art 192, afv 51 DAM: men 170, art 2, afv 3 LOST: men 173, art 9, afv 11 ATK: ftr 9, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 DEF: men 2819, art 32, afv 137 DAM: men 33, art 2, afv 14 LOST: men 81, art 0, afv 6 DEF: ftr 37, bmr 7, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 Defending Forces HELD CV: 15->34.9 Eng Val: 0 Comm HQ: VIII Hun. Corps VN Dezso Laszlo Show Details Odds 1.29 : 1 Exit		Soviet Forces Defending: 3rd Shock Army 62nd Tank Brigade (14) 80th Tank Brigade (7) Caucasus Air Command 19 MiG-3 18 LaGG-3 7 IL-2 CV: 21->26.9 Fort: 0.04->0.04 Comm HQ: 3rd Shock Army GL Fyodor Tolbukhin	
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Axis Forces Attacking (H): XIV Panzer Corps Wiking SS Motorized Division (28) 724th LW Lt Flk Bn (0) 670th Jagdpanzer Battalion (1)	< 3 of 6 > 115,90 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:31 1942-01-15		Soviet Forces Defending: 3rd Shock Army 62nd Tank Brigade (11) 80th Tank Brigade (7)
	Forces Engaged		
	ATK: men 18183, art 241, afv 63	DEF: men 2697, art 32, afv 131	
	DAM: men 18, art 5, afv 1	DAM: men 16, art 0, afv 5	
	LOST: men 66, art 2, afv 1	LOST: men 0, art 2, afv 5	
	ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0	DEF: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0	
	LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0	LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0	
	80th Tank Brigade RETREATED 62nd Tank Brigade RETREATED		
CV: 29->85.5 Eng Val: 0	CV: 18->24.9 Fort: 0.04->0.00		
Comm HQ: XIV Panzer Corps	Comm HQ: 3rd Shock Army		
GL Erich Brandenberger	GL Fyodor Tolbukhin		
Show Details	Odds 3.43 : 1	Exit	

I did a few further attacks to throw back the Soviets a single hex in the area, with mixed success on some of the attacks, but in the end, I was able to take most of the hexes I wanted to take – even if there is one really annoying Tank Brigade left in the far southwestern tip of the Soviet advance.

Axis Forces Attacking (H): XIV Panzer Corps L.A.H. SS Mot. Div (-) (20) 86th LW SP Lt Flk Bn (0) 985th LW Lt Flk Bn (0) 5/59th SP Flak Company (0)	< 2 of 7 > 113,91 - Clear - Blizzard Turn:31 1942-01-15 Forces Engaged ATK: men 11149, art 189, afv 56 DAM: men 4, art 1, afv 1 LOST: men 40, art 1, afv 0 ATK: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 DEF: men 5189, art 66, afv 57 DAM: men 15, art 0, afv 2 LOST: men 11, art 0, afv 0 DEF: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0 LOST: ftr 0, bmr 0, utl 0		Soviet Forces Defending: 3rd Shock Army 47th Tank Brigade (8) 205th Art Rgt RVGK (1) 318th BM Howitzer Regiment (1)
	Defending Forces HELD		
	CV: 20->65.6 Eng Val: 0		
	Comm HQ: XIV Panzer Corps		
	GL Erich Brandenberger		
	Show Details Odds 1.95 : 1 Exit		

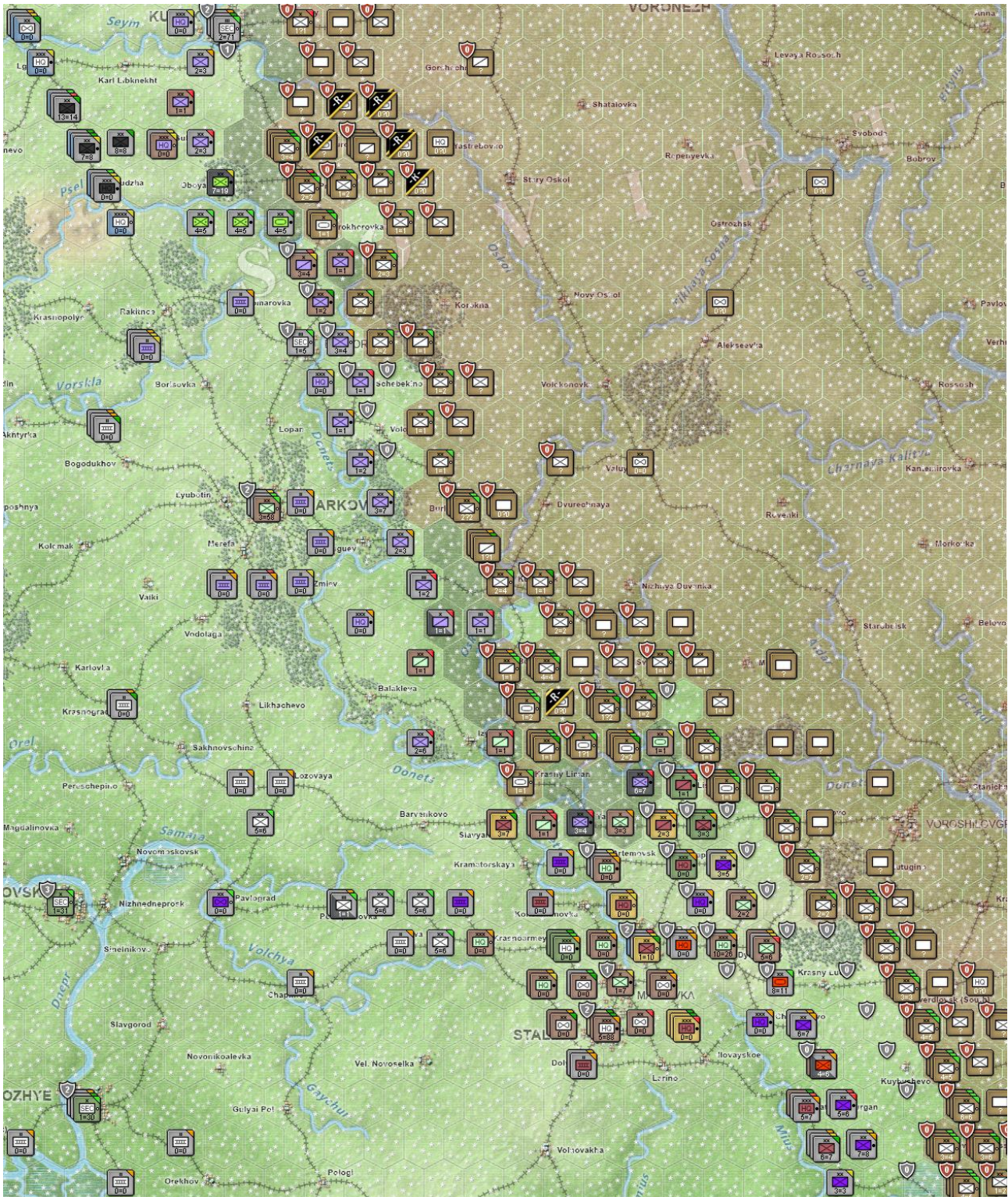
CV: 10->33.5	Fort: 0.02->0.00
Comm HQ: 3rd Shock Army	
GL Fyodor Tolbukhin	

I have strengthened the southern edge of the Soviet advance as much as I can, as I really wish to protect the southern rail line bringing supplies to all of the southern forces. That has meant that it is quite likely that the Soviets will advance due west come next turn. If they do, I expect the arrival of the Mountain divisions from the north as well as fresh infantry divisions from the southwest will mean that I can expect some heavy fighting over the area. I am not overly concerned (perhaps foolishly) as the Soviets are now quite far from their supply lines. I have placed a few Rumanian Cavalry units in their way, realizing that it is unlikely they will all survive (any attack will cause some of them to shatter).

The lines east of the Stalino city complex has been withdrawn a few hexes, and this has released another Infantry Corps from frontline duties, although it will have to use a few turn to arrive at the proper scene or else use rail movement to get there. This corps is comprised of three German Infantry Divisions and one Rumanian Infantry Division.

Behind the scenes, I have relocated a few Motorized units and done an HQBU on two Panzer divisions and one Motorized Regiment, in order to have some more movement available come next turn. Furthermore, I now have four fresh infantry divisions and one Dutch SS infantry regiment arriving in the area from Western Europe.

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



Conclusion

Axis losses this last turn has been 45.000 men, of which a large part are Axis Minors. Fighting has been heavy, with the Germans attacking 17 locations in the south, during first winter blizzard. The good news are that the Axis has only lost some 11.000 men KIA or surrendered. All three formations that started this game turn being encircled are now freed. It is likely however, that some units will be reencircled during the next Soviet turn however.

AFV losses seems to suggest that the Soviets have plenty of AFV to spare (I know they do simply by looking at the AFV numbers). This last turn, the Soviets have lost 504 AFV while the Axis has lost a staggering 121. However, that vast majority of Axis losses has been Axis Minor losses, and only 19 Pzkw III and IV's have been lost. Soviet losses are 49 T-34's and 22 KV-1's. Given the Soviet production of tanks, this is not nearly enough.

In the air, the Axis Minors continue to take losses far exceeding their production, while the Luftwaffe has lost but one Bf109 F-4 fighter.

Strategically, I am worried about the absence of the Soviet Guards formations, and I wonder where they will be sent. It looks as if the Soviets are switching more and more to prepare defenses in part of the center, so I guess there will be a massive influx of Soviet formations in the south.