

➤ Operation Mars: Zhukov's Greatest Defeat <

ver. 1.8

Historical & Player Notes

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(Note. Ver. 1.8 corrects an error in Operation Jupiter activation)

Historical Notes:

Russian vow after the war:

Nothing will be forgotten and no one will forget.

On November 25th 1942, Zhukov launched Operation Mars, encompassing four separate attacks around the Rzhev Salient. The envelopment of Velikye Luki and advance on AGN's critical rail-line beyond was also part of the larger plan. This grand offensive sought to pinch off and destroy Model's Ninth Army and, with this accomplished, further reserves would be unleashed in Operation Jupiter in an attempt to destroy Army Group Centre and take Smolensk. It was to be the premiere Soviet counter-offensive of the winter, at last driving the Germans from the vicinity of Moscow, and commencing the Red Army's advance on the most direct line of march towards Berlin. The Soviets also had high hopes for Operation Uranus at Stalingrad, but with Zhukov in direct command in front of Moscow, the bets were on Mars. Stavka lavished support upon the operation, exceeding what Vasilievsky was to receive at Stalingrad. So confident was Zhukov that he peeled off the 2nd Mech Corps, assigned to Mars, and sent it west: the battle of Velikye Luki was to be the result, indeed the only bright spot in the entire offensive.

Zhukov's intended blitz of the German 9th Army was to turn into his greatest defeat of the war, as the terrain, the weather, and the Germans, conspired to turn the Soviet attack into a brutal blood-letting for small gains. In textbook style, Model contained the Soviet incursions at the base of his salient, and then proceeded to cut them off and pocket them. German reserves were parceled out all around the salient, taking maximum advantage of interior lines and fortified positions, and the Soviet armies took crippling losses. Most would have called things off at this point; however Zhukov, with characteristic aggression and a

callous disregard for human lives, ordered the assaults to continue, and Soviet losses climbed to catastrophic levels. Lesser commanders eventually took the blame for the debacle, something Zhukov himself energetically facilitated, and Soviet histories carefully avoided mention of the defeat. Zhukov himself, in his memoirs, refers to the operation as a diversionary assault intended to keep German reserves from the critical Stalingrad front: history, as they say, is written by the victors.

Mars and Uranus occurred simultaneously on widely different areas of the eastern front in the winter of 1942. Stalingrad was a German disaster, while Mars was a resounding defensive win. In fact the Soviets lost more men in Mars for example, than the Germans were to lose in the Stalingrad area (around 335,000 men). One could argue that the Germans accomplished more at Stalingrad, even with this severe loss, as the drawn-out defensive fight of the 6th Army pocket prevented an even greater catastrophe occurring for Army Group South. In addition to this, a little-known fact behind the Soviet strategic victory at Stalingrad concerns their own actual losses, and not just the ever-emphasised loss of the entire 6th Army on the German side of the ledger. In the period from November 19th 1942 through February 2nd 1943, the Soviets lost the staggering sum of 485,777 men in the Stalingrad counter-offensive. Their victory there was even more dearly bought than their failure with Mars.

For the Germans, Stalingrad is a study in hubris and consequent unpreparedness for the Soviet winter offensive. The German positions along this front on November 19th were simply absurd. Not so the Rzhev salient under Model who was keenly alive to the threat building on his flanks, and had reserve formations at hand on every front. In addition to this Model had deep defensive zones built up around the concept of strongpoints, and his men were tried and true veterans, having weathered Soviet onslaughts upon their salient during the summer battles of '42. Granted, Model had the terrain in his favour, however his salient was even more exposed to counter-attack than the Stalingrad apex, and he was also facing the Soviets' ablest, albeit bloodiest, commander. It had more to do with anticipation, and understanding what the Soviets were actually capable of, something entirely beyond the ken of Paulus who had the patently deficient Rumanian armies covering his wings, positively inviting envelopment, and who had no effective armoured reserves deployed behind these weak sectors.

A Guderian, Manstein, or Model, finding himself as Supreme Commander upon the Ostfront from December 1942 onwards, would have seen the lessons of Mars and Uranus clearly redefining the entire German stance in the East. After Stalingrad, the veil was lifted on German arrogance and consequent underestimation of Soviet fighting quality, and the staggering quantity of forces available to the Red Army was apparent for all to see. The Soviet armies were still raw, taking unacceptable losses by European standards. They were still operationally inflexible, and the skills of their lower officer cadres were severely

lacking; however, given proper deployment against over-extended German positions, as at Stalingrad, they were able to accomplish far-reaching results. With the ever-increasing force disparity and their own ability to learn, they could only do better with time, this was clear. Hitler enormously facilitated their westward advance with his consistently irrational insistence that German armies deploy as far forward as possible, with retreat only an option when everything was collapsing. Even then, it was often not an option and the Wehrmacht took insane losses defending cul de sacs like the Crimea, Courland, and Tunisia in the West, thanks to Hitler. He might also have lost an entire elite SS Korps futilely encircled in Kharkov had not the SS Commander said “to hell with this!”, and directly disobeyed orders. The lessons of Stalingrad had at least been learned by some.

Guderian, Manstein, or Model, as supreme C in C Ost, would have noted the stark contrast between the debacle of Stalingrad, and the brilliant success of Mars occurring, as they did, at the same time. The lesson to all but a blinkered Führer was simple: force the Soviets to fight on the Wehrmacht’s terms. Adequately manned lines, in good defensive terrain, with quick-response mobile reserves, would ensure that Mars could be repeated, and the Red Army might have been bled white long before the Vistula, but this was not to be. Ironically, it was the Soviets who absorbed the import of this first-class demonstration by Model in how to defend a salient against an enemy with huge armoured forces, and they were the ones to put this lesson to great effect at Kursk the following year. For the Germans, thanks to Hitler, Mars was a critical lesson fatally missed.

Special Features:

1) Airpower: the airforces of both sides are grounded for the first day due to bad weather. The Luftwaffe is activated on turn 3, the Soviet VVS on turn 4. Continuing bad weather throughout the campaign will significantly affect airpower performance. The Luftwaffe has an air shock factor of 110% for the duration.

2) Shock Effects: Soviet shock turn 1 is 115%, and 120% on turn 2; following this it is generally 105%; however, every four turns there will be a one turn boost up to 120% on a random basis until 15; following this there is a one turn drop to 90% every four turns on a random basis, with a base shock of 100% for the duration. The Soviet PO (Programmed Opponent) could receive two back to back 120% turns conceivably (or 90% from turn 16 onwards): it could also have up to six consecutive turns @ 105% (up to turn 16, and 100% afterwards). If Operation Jupiter is launched the Soviets go to 105% shock for the duration. German shock is 100 at the outset, increasing to 105% on turn 5, representing their preparedness and recovery from the initial attack. Furthermore, on turn 10 the Germans receive a strategic counter-attack option. When used, this will give one

turn at 130%, the following turn at 120%, and 110% *for the rest of the game*. German shock represents their overall preparedness for the attack and quick recovery from the shock of it, as well as their ability to mount a very effective counter-attack. Soviet shock early on represents sheer determination and ruthless drive emanating downwards from higher commanders; later on, this works against them as it represents disorganisation amongst a high percentage of green troops and officers. This, coupled with an aggressive attack posture assumed by the PO, should result in high losses for the Soviets against a capable German player.

3) Velikye Luki: The German garrison in Velikye Luki is essentially ordered to stay in position until turn 10, afterwhich these units will be free to move. A German Supply Point exists in the central city hex until turn 10, afterwhich it is removed.

4) German units between the Velikye Luki and Rzhev Fronts: these units are frozen in place until an enemy unit moves adjacent or attacks. Various units will be released on certain turns and the German player should check for this. The German player is advised to let sleeping dogs lie on quiet fronts and not attack as this may activate Soviet formations.

5) Soviet Programmed Opponent (PO): Operation Mars involves action in the Velikye Luki Front and around the Rzhev salient, with other areas remaining dormant until specific events are activated. The PO for Mars follows two objective tracks along various routes (tracks 1 & 2) which are complimentary to each other generally. The PO will switch back and forth between tracks 1 & 2 at various times according to probability events, all formations going over to track 3 if Jupiter starts. All PO forces will switch to track 3 around turn 39-40 for the duration of the game in any case. Track 3 has key strike armies striving for Smolensk while others take up position along the south edge of the map covering the front there against the southern forces of Army Group Centre, assumed to be entirely on the defensive against this breakthrough and not directly depicted in the model.

6) Operation Jupiter: an event engine variable is set to 0 at the beginning of the game. The Soviet capture of various locations in the Rzhev salient, as well as two on the Velikye Luki Front, will increase this variable by a certain amount. Subsequent German recapture of these locations will not lower this value. All such locations have a percentage in brackets on the map, to indicate the increase given to this variable; e.g. the Soviet capture of Rzhev increases this variable by 40%. The German player is advised to initially highlight place names under Options, and have them “floating” in order to properly note all of these locations on the map. They are as follows:

RZHEV (105,11): 40%
 VELIKYE LUKI (16,5): 20%
 OSUGA (105,21): 20%
 SYCHEVKA (104,30): 20%
 OLENINO (86,13): 15%
 BELYI (74,29): 20%
 GZATSK (122, 42): 20%
 VYAZMA (105, 55): 40%
 Kholm (87,43): 15%
 Vladmirskoe (81,38): 15%
 Novoskol'niki (3,6): 10%
 Molino (90,33): 10%
 Pombiy (99,30): 10%
 Bol. Molevniy (88,24): 10%
 Gusevo (82,18): 15%
 Zviagino (97,13): 10%
 Sereda (101,24): 10%

When the event engine variable climbs to a set value due to Soviet capture of any combination of the above locations, Operation Jupiter is launched. All Soviet armies on the south-east portion of the map, including Rybalko's 3rd Tank Army, immediately assume attack orders, as does the Soviet 43rd army manning the western base of the salient. In addition to this the game-length is extended from 52 turns to 77. This event value needed to activate Jupiter is set as follows:

turns 1-10:	value needed = 45
turns 11-20:	value needed = 60
turns 21+ :	value needed = 80
Malinovsky (> turn 22):	value needed = 100

7) Malinovsky's 2nd Guards Army: this army was being held in the Tambov area for employment either in Mars, or Uranus at Stalingrad. Historically, it and Rybalko's group, were sent to reinforce success at Stalingrad given the failure of Zhukov to attain objectives in Mars. The employment of Malinovsky in Mars is more difficult, as it was historically sent to blunt Manstein's relief attempt at Stalingrad; essentially, it will not be released in Mars unless Soviet success is on a large scale, and even then there is a limited window of time within which it is allowed to appear. The event engine variable must reach 100 before Malinovsky will appear, and this appearance must be triggered before turn 22, afterwhich Malinovsky goes to Stalingrad regardless. The German player should note that this is a powerful formation. The cities of Gzatsk and Vyazma will not figure in triggering Jupiter itself; however, after this they

could be instrumental in bringing Malinovsky into play if Jupiter is triggered early enough, and the German player should note this.

8) Automatic Jupiter: The German player has this theatre option available on turn 1 (only). Activating this will mean that the Soviets launch Jupiter somewhere within a 6-turn frame from turn 12 onwards (variable). The German player receives 200 VPs for his bravado.

9) 19th Panzer Division: this formation is withdrawn for Stalingrad on turn 31 unless Operation Jupiter has been launched in which case it remains. A one-turn warning of withdrawal will be given in Recent Events.

10) 10th Panzer Grenadier Division: if Operation Jupiter is launched, this unit will appear as a reinforcement 3 turns later south of Vyazma.

11) Soviet Partisans: the German player will be tempted to use his Security units in the front line, and may often have no choice; however, he should be aware that Soviet guerrilla forces will appear behind his lines at various times, and will attempt to cut critical rail-lines. The Jupiter activation cities should be guarded against partisan attacks obviously.

12) German Operational Limits (Honour Rule): the PO, in any situation, obviously has it's limits. The German player is not allowed to send his forces into Soviet territory beyond the on-map Operational Limit line. The Soviets had ample reserve forces which could have been employed in such an emergency and it was not desired to overload the game with alot of superfluous units to guard against such unlikely incursions. Historically, the Germans regained their ground on the critical fronts, and sealed off the other Soviet penetrations, but nowhere advanced beyond their opening front-lines. The German player should be hard-pressed as it is; this rule is simply intended to avoid unrealistic situations.

13) German Victory. As was historically the case, German victory lies entirely in thwarting Soviet aims: initially the Soviets must be denied their chance for a major victory by making sure that Jupiter does not happen. *If the German player can keep the PO from taking more than 25% in Jupiter activation cities, up to turn 30, he will win an automatic decisive win on that turn.* failing this, a German victory is to be won through regaining lost VP locations and through the destruction of Soviet units, especially the victory-point bonus units. Further to point #12 above, the German player will note that there are no Victory Point locations to capture beyond his front lines in Soviet territory, apart from the city of Zubtsov (112, 12) east of Rzhev, as they have all been located off-map.

The German player receives extra points for destroyed Soviet HQs that have the commander's name (only):

Soviet major HQ (Army level) = 100 pts

Soviet corps HQ = 50 pts

The German player receives extra points for certain destroyed Soviet units (RB = Rifle Brigade; RD = Rifle Division; Tk Btn. = Tank Battalion; Tk Rgt = Tank Regiment; Gd Mtz RD = Guards Motorised Rifle Division; CD = Cavalry Division, etc.):

Pts -	25	50	75	100
	Partisans	Mtz RB	Gd RD	Gd Mtz RD
	Tk Btn*	Tk Rgt*	Gd Tk Rgt	Gd Tk Bde
		Ski Bde	Gd CD	Mech Bde
				Gd Mech Bde

* There are no extra points for destroyed standard Soviet Tank brigades, except those with "Guards" status. Soviet tank battalions and regiments were composed of heavier tanks and were specialty/elite formations.

Soviet Victory:

For a conclusive Soviet victory to occur, Operation Jupiter must be launched. *Only this activation will give the Soviets the chance at a sudden-death victory in occupying Smolensk (52,76) at any point in the game.*

The Soviets receive points for all on map occupied victory locations at the end of the game. They also receive extra points for destroyed German HQs:

German major HQ (Corps/Army, and all Pz Div HQs) = 100 pts

Infantry Division HQs = 50 pts

*NOTE: ONLY HQs which give the actual historical name of the commander give victory points for either side.

14) Note that the number of turns in the game will be noted as 77 in the turn report. This will only be the case if Operation Jupiter is triggered. Most games will end on turn 52. If the German player can contain the PO to 25% or less Jupiter cities by turn 30, he will win a decisive victory on that turn.

15) Play Balance. For a greater or lesser challenging game against the PO, players can experiment with the handicap settings when opening the game, as well as the auto-Jupiter function. **Note that this scenario will NOT work with two human opponents as various events will not function properly and the play balance**

will be decisively in the Soviet player's favour. This is a Soviet Programmed Opponent game only. A future release for head to head play is planned at some point.

German Player Notes (human player vs. "Deep Red"):

I'm certainly not going to give away any of the PO's secrets here. Suffice to say that with the CW version of TOAW (originally appearing in WotY), the ability of the PO to switch to different objective tracks mid-stream represents a revolution in PO play, and that this scenario has attempted to exploit this feature to optimum advantage. It should, at the very least, ensure that even repeated plays will offer up surprises for the German player.

Model managed to hang on in this battle, just barely at times, by seeming to conjure up that last reinforcement battalion out of a hat, at exactly the time and place where it was most needed around the circumference of his salient. Model's responses were well-timed, and his overall performance in this battle was near-perfect. I leave it to the German player to figure out his best options from the ground up. One piece of advice I will offer: assignment of major reserve formations is obviously critical, as the neutralisation of one danger area frees up reserves for employment elsewhere. Your three aces here: 1) good defensive positions and interior lines 2) your artillery is an infantry-killer for stacked attacking Soviets 3) your counter-attack option appearing on turn 10 can turn the tide if used properly. Many Soviet units, urged on by a ruthless high command (the PO can be considered "ruthless"), will drive on in depth. These units can be surrounded and destroyed entirely. Note those units that give you extra victory points. The destruction of these premier units can be decisive on the final point total.

Obviously the German is forced to defend the Jupiter percentage cities at all costs. If Jupiter starts, you're going to be in deep trouble as the entire front, not just the salient where your reserves are committed, erupts in flames. At this point it might be advised to evacuate the Rzhev salient entirely, saving what you can. To check and see how close the PO is to this activation you can either add up all the occupied locations on the map, or scroll back through Recent News to see each capture, as they are detailed therein. I think it best to keep a running total on hand. If you can keep the PO's total to 25% or less up to turn 30 you will win an early decisive win.

One might liken the historical battle to a chess-match between Zhukov and Model. Zhukov, as white, opts for a "pawn-storm" offense aided by deeply deployed knights. Model bides his time, relentlessly attriting the pawns at a favourable ratio, and finally manages to trap and eliminate the knights. Zhukov does not concede defeat and petulantly launches attrition attacks seeking to jar the

situation loose, finally conceding in the end-game long after a more rational player would have called it quits. Since Zhukov in this model is a PO, I found myself ironically referring to it in playtesting as “not-so-Deep Red”.

Acknowledgments:

This project would not have been possible without the ground-breaking study of Operation Mars by David M. Glantz (*Zhukov's Greatest Defeat: The Red Army's Epic Disaster in Operation Mars, 1942. University Press of Kansas: 1999*). Mr. Glantz was also most helpful in responding to questions about the OB and other matters. My thanks to him for this.

The map is taken directly from Soviet topographical maps of the area. Numbers on the map--e.g. “^55.5”--represent lats and longs and were left on for reference. I have done larger maps, but this one was about the most difficult in terms of detail. This area represents the headwaters for a host of venerable Russian rivers: the Volga, Dnepr, and Dvina, all start in this area. It is a vast tableland of forest and swamp, intersticed with a myriad number of rivers, and the road network is poor. It is horrible terrain to attack into, summer or winter.

I should apologise to Russian-speakers for the inevitable inaccuracies and inconsistencies in my transcriptions from the Cyrillic.

The Soviet OB is taken entirely from Glantz's work.

The German OB is taken partially from his work, with reference to Georg Tessin's *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939-1945*.

The TO&E for both sides is sound, but unrefined. If anyone wishes to offer their assistance here, I would be pleased to hear from them.

Finally, for the original idea, and usual stalwart playtesting, my thanks to Doug Hensley. Thanks also to Ilkka Mutanen for playtesting and advice.

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