

## PLAYERS NOTES

# TRAVEL NOTES

## For Driving on Stalingrad

by Dave Robertson

*Drive on Stalingrad* is one of those games, the optimum operational plan for which will always remain somewhat elusive. Because of its untried unit system and Hitler Directive rules, each playing is essentially a new game. There are, nevertheless, some pointers well worth keeping in mind as one drives across the deceptively open-seeming terrain of the map. Dave participated in much of the testing on the game and herewith gives you some of the benefit of his experience. —RAS

SPI has recently produced another east front game called *Drive on Stalingrad*, which simulates the German summer offensive of 1942 known as Operation Blue. Subtitled "Road to Ruin," the game is designed on a "grand operational" level with 600 counters representing Soviet divisions, Axis Infantry divisions and Axis armored and mechanized regiments. The playing surface is two "regular" size (34" x 22") maps representing the southern portion of the Soviet Union roughly bounded by Voronezh and Stratov in the North to Tuapse and Grosny in the South. Its sixteen pages of rules are based on the *Panzergruppe Guderian* system with modifications pertinent to the situation.

Anyone familiar with the *Panzergruppe* system will quickly pick up tricks of *Drive*. The four major features of the parent system are the core of this game:

a. Soviet infantry units are "untried" — i.e., their actual strengths are unknown to either player until the instant of the first combat in which the units engage;

b. Non-infantry units have a second movement (or impulse) phase after combat; and

c. Axis mechanized units (i.e., armor and mechanized infantry) benefit from a "doubled" combat strength when all regiments of a division are stacked in the same hex;

d. Soviet units "coordinate" supply from headquarters units that have a given supply or command range.

The new gimmicks added in *Drive* are these:

a. Axis allies (Hungarians, Rumanians, and Italians) are untried and must coordinate their supply from their own headquarters units in a manner much like the Soviets.

b. The extension of Axis supply networks through trucked pipelines and rail conversion is simulated in a way like that of *War in the East* and *Breakout and Pursuit*;

c. A "Hitler directive" phase that simulates the Fuehrer's rulings from back home and tightly limits the freedom of action for the Axis player.

### Rules Errata

Before discussing the game, it is necessary to note that the original version of the game is flawed. The nature of the flaw is not obvious because the flaw is not so much a question of "realism" as it is a question of "playability." Most players considered it so weighted in favor of the Soviets that SPI has published a post-publication errata to correct this. These errata are published in this issue of *MOVES*. The events leading to the formulation of the errata could well form the basis of an article discussing the strategic situation of *Drive* and its reflection of reality in the light of playability.

### Set-Up

From the standpoint of playability, *Drive* is relatively easy to set up — the front is printed on the map and there is no "this unit must go there" rule. Both players are free from the hair pulling experience of cross-referencing hex numbers with unit strengths for an hour. The set-up rules are not a burden on the eye or patience.

### Victory Conditions and first move

Before the German player starts tearing through the Soviet line, he has to consult the victory conditions to see where he has to go. Victory is in terms of captured cities with various point values printed on the map. The cities, victory points, and hex numbers are summarized in a separate chart with the game. "Bonus" points are garnered by the Axis for taking particular cities by a given game turn.

The Axis player must study carefully the map and the victory point values of the cities — he has to be cunning. The cities have a total value of 210 points. To win, the German needs twice as many points as the Soviet player has at the end of the game. If the German player ever gets three times the Soviet player's points, the game stops and the German player automatically wins. The German player can also get a small number of victory points if the Soviet player elects to make a "strategic withdrawal" — move from Axis zones of control — or the German player can interdict the Volga. The key to victory, though, is taking the cities.

The difficult task of controlling a large number of cities is made somewhat easier for the German player by the "Bonus point" rule which grants double point value for taking a city by a given game turn. For example, Stalingrad's capture can generate bonus points if it is captured by Game-Turn 12, corresponding to September 12, 1942.

Many points lie in the Caucasus, and the German player must quickly shift his armor

to the South to take these cities before the Soviet can reinforce the area. This southern shift also dovetails with some aspects of the Hitler Directives.

### Hitler Directives

The most frustrating problem faced by the German player are the Hitler Directives that randomly create chaos in any consistent, developing plan. These directives constrain geographical thrusts (tending to force armored units to take the Caucasus and to keep the Germans from crossing the Don), troop allocations, and territory that *must* be captured. Generally, the supreme commander requires the seizure of Stalingrad. Unfortunately, the capture of Stalingrad may be mandated without allowing the Axis player to use armor in attempting to grab it. Since the directives may change, the German player may find himself shifting his forces up and down the front without sufficient time to capture any cities.

### Axis Strategy

Choosing the cities for capture and trying to garner the bonus points available for some of the cities will dictate the direction and pace of the Axis strategy. For example, if the Axis player is to win without bonus points, he must take cities worth 140 of the 210 victory points (i.e., 140 vs 70). The Russian player can win by merely holding everything north of the Don except Voronezh and holding Astrakhan, Elista, and the Georgiyevsk and "east southern" cities. In the face of a sluggish Axis Drive, the Russian player can just wait — he cannot lose.

If, though, the Axis player is aggressive, he can get a 2-1 ratio of victory points in a better way. Kalach, Maykop, Novorossiysk, Nevinomyssk, Rostov, and Stalingrad offer 60 bonus points, thus, the Russians can hold three or four more cities and still lose. This analysis must be made, if the Axis player hopes to win.

### Soviet Strategy

The Soviet player does not have to make close calculations in this game. He pulls back and waits for his army to build up to formidable size. He covers the Don in the North and slows the German drive to Stalingrad while holding stronger units in reserve to be used in the Russian counter-attack. Although the "real" Russian offensive occurred on November 19 (Game-Turn 21), many Soviet players will not wait that long in the game. Since the game "ends" after 25 turns (corresponding to December 19), there is no real reason for the Russian player to delay his big push past Game-Turn 15 (October 10), or even to avoid trapping loose, unsupplied Axis panzer divisions.

### Combat and Overruns

The combat system in *Drive* is similar to the system in *Panzergruppe* in the respect that the same type of combat results table is used with the owning player's option of retreat or taking a step reduction. The considerations of whether to engage in combat differ somewhat from the considerations involved in *Panzergruppe* because the Russian depth-per-hex is greater in *Drive*. Certain Russian units have two steps, and the Russian player in *Drive* can enjoy the luxury of holding a particular position for a longer period. The Axis unit density per hex is also greater in *Drive*, because *three* panzer (or motorized infantry) divisions can stack in the same hex. This means that Axis units can muster up to 48 strength point in a hex against a Soviet maximum of 30 to 36. (In *Panzergruppe*, the maximum is 27 — three German infantry divisions).

This increased ability to concentrate force allows the German panzers to create a powerful overrun capability against isolated Russian units. The Axis player must quickly use this to rip holes in the Soviet line and surround the remnants before the Soviet player can mass his army to a sufficient strength for counterattack.

The German player should attack vigorously for the first few turns to eliminate as many Russian units as possible — he must devote some attention to the nitty gritty of what odds are needed to assure destruction. When the German player attacks at odds where there is the chance of an “engaged” combat result, (i.e., both attacker and defender suffer a one step loss) he should include in the attack at least one infantry division so that the strong armored units will not suffer the effect of an adverse result. The Axis player can use reduced infantry divisions to serve in this role as cannon fodder.

When a player suffers an adverse result he must decide whether to retreat or accept a step reduction — the opposing player may choose the path of retreat followed by his opponent's unit. Since the path of retreat may cause more units to be encircled than would be lost through a step reduction, frequently it is better to take a step reduction than to retreat.

Combat in the Voronezh area can get dicey, and it deserves special mention. The Axis should not put any panzer divisions across the Don into the city, because they will never free themselves. They cannot escape the zones of control of adjacent Soviet units and they cannot retreat after combat across the Don. They just get stuck there. Infantry divisions are fine to throw into the city to hold to against a Russian counterattack. The Axis player should avoid sending his units on frolics across the Don outside the city of Voronezh — there is nothing to gain there except triggering the increase of Russian reinforcements (the increased reinforcements rule simulates the effect of the Axis' causing the Soviets to think that Moscow was the objective of the 1942 offensive).

The overrun attack in *Drive* is a stronger Axis (and Russian) tactic than it is in

*Panzergruppe*. In *Drive*, three whole mech divisions can stack and both sides have plenty of armor to throw around. Some care is required in effecting an overrun, though, to avoid wearing the armor out too soon. When possible, armor should be stacked with infantry so that the infantry can absorb losses. Three stacked armored divisions make the strongest force for overruns, and can literally romp all over the map (a stack of three unsupplied panzer divisions is stronger than one fully supplied division!). The added strength of stacked armored divisions allows some substantial Axis operations in the Caucasus where there is no hope for supply beyond that provided by the sporadic availability of “Truck” supply.

In regular combat and in overruns, the supply status of a unit is determined at the moment of combat. Being unsupplied causes a one-half reduction in a unit's combat strength. Consequently, some finesse is needed to sequence attacks and overruns so that units may be cut off from supply when finally attacked. The Axis player can isolate or eliminate Soviet HQ units and render several Russian divisions unsupplied in a single blow. Conversely, the Russian player can sacrifice a unit or two by advancing them across the already extended Axis supply lines to cut off the Axis front from further real combat capabilities or extended movement. The chance to use this ploy comes easily on the double size map where long stretches of front are held by fewer and fewer units as the Axis forces concentrate at the extreme limits of their supply lines.

The Russian rail net should be seen as a major asset of the Soviet player and the Axis player should attack it as if it were a juicy target — a few cuts here and there will inhibit the Soviet player's escape from the initial onslaught.

The Soviet player should conserve his HQ units because he needs them to supply his long front. Generally, the HQ units should be one or two hexes behind the front so that they will not be trapped in a zone of control. This kind of flexibility is very important for the Soviet player because the Axis player will not hesitate attacking any Russian units if they can be encircled and eliminated in detail. The HQ units cannot be bunched up because they must be spread out for continuity of supply into the rear areas (so the advancing units can move at full movement allowances.) The HQ units with ratings of 4 or 5 can provide supply for the flanks more easily than the waste of several units with lower ratings.

### The Big Retreat

When the game starts, the Russian player must decide how far and how fast he will run away from the advancing German Army. The limit in the north is the Don — it must be held and the Axis player must be forced to burn out some of his divisions where the Soviet player is defending at triple strength. Also the Soviet player should try to slow the Axis advance toward Stalingrad by denying him the bonus points for Kalach (i.e., the Soviet player must hold it for the

same number of turns that the Axis player has to receive the bonus points). The Don in front of Stalingrad is the natural place for the Russian player to stand to force the Axis player to pause for his supply to arrive via repair of the Russian rail net.

In the South, neither side is troubled by having to consider frontage or extensive supply problems — the Axis player has a tough time of it. Russian activity in the southern map depends on a strong point defense plan. Reinforcements can be placed in the mountainous cities and a larger relief force can be built up near Groznyy, where there is little chance of Axis interference for six or seven turns. This southern force will be earmarked for the counter-attack and the defense of Astrakhan.

The Germans must move quickly in the south to out run the Soviet build up. The bonus points for Rostov are easy to get if sufficient armor is shifted from the north map in the second turn. The Russian player has to decide how much of his army he will sacrifice in holding Rostov for four turns to deny the Axis player the bonus points. The units lost in a futile attempt defending Rostov are much better employed in defending the southern cities and preventing the German player from gaining any more bonus victory points for captured southern cities. In the south, the German player must deploy his truck units to conduct attacks in spurts of intensive activity followed by periods of determined defense against a Soviet force of increasing strength. The Axis player should deploy his mountain divisions to surround the Soviets defending the Caucasus because only mountain units have zones of control in the mountainous hexes.

In conducting the Big Retreat, the Soviet player should look at what the Axis player must do to win, and he soon realizes that only certain cities have to be held to prevent an Axis victory. Those cities form the point of no retreat.

### Where and When

Of course, the pace of any particular game of *Drive on Stalingrad* is greatly dependent on the particular strategies adopted by the Players (to say nothing of Hitler). Nevertheless, the location of the Victory Points and the schedule of Bonuses is immutable. The optimum Axis advance — in terms of Victory Points — can literally be scheduled, and the chances for victory by both sides is dependent on how well this schedule is maintained.

**Turn 1:** Breakthrough in North, a stab for Voronezh if it is weakly defended.

**Turn 2:** Clear as much away from around Rostov as possible, while sending the bulk of the armor due East.

**Turn 3:** Take Rostov and breach the Don to the south.

**Turn 4:** Sweep away any lingering Soviets south of Rostov. If opposition is weak, try for Kalach-na-Donu, although this will have to be with out-of-supply armor.

*[continued on page 23]*

### [15.41] NAVAL MELEE COMBAT RESULTS TABLE (Boarding)

Combat Differential  
(Attacker minus Defender)

DIE	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	I	I
2	-	-	-	-	-	I	D	D
3	-	-	-	-	I	I	D	D
4	-	-	-	I	I	D	D	L
5	-	-	I	D	D	D	L	L
6	-	I	D	D	D	L	L	L

#### Explanation:

- = No effect; I = Ineffective; for the next Impulse, the ship's Movement Allowance is halved, and the ship may not melee attack, only defend; D = Ship permanently damaged; ship's Movement Allowance is halved, as are its Ram and Melee Strengths; L = Lose 1: for Byzantine ships, the affected ship is eliminated. An Ottoman ship loses one step (i.e., it is flipped over to the reduced side unless the ship is already on its reduced side, in which case the Ottoman ship is eliminated). Differentials less than -3 (greater than +4) are treated as -3 (+4).

### [15.42] RAMMING TABLE

Ram Defense: Non-Phasing Ship	Ram Strength of Attacking (Moving) Ship			
	1	2	3	4
A	1-2	1-3*	1-4*	1-5*
B	1	1-2	1-3*	1-4*
C	1	1	1-2	1-3*
D	-	1	1-2	1-2

#### Explanation:

# = Die Roll Needed to Pin Defending Ship;  
\* = Roll again; if a 5 or 6 is rolled, the defending ship is sunk; - = No Effect. The Defending ship may not be pinned.

If a 6 is rolled at any time, the Ramming ship is considered Damaged (Movement Allowance halved, Ram and Melee Strengths halved).

### CORRECTIONS

There were two errors in Charles T. Kamps, Jr.'s Fulda Gap Variant article in *MOVES* 36. The 14 Pz Bde 6-4, under the WG 5th Panzer Division, should be indicated in hex 1213 rather than 1312. The 2nd Bde 4-6, under the 8th Infantry Division (Mech), should be indicated in hex 0325 rather than 0326.

## COBRA ERRATA (as of 31 January '78) David Werden

Post-publication playtesting has indicated the need for the following corrections and clarifications.

#### Counters:

**Correction:** The 10/10ss should start in hex 3205 (not hex 3206). The Canadian 3rd Div. should start in hex 3504 (not hex 3505).

**Clarification:** The 101ss, 102ss, and the 503 2-12 units are the three German Tiger Tank battalions and are worth one point for victory purposes.

#### Reinforcement Track:

**Clarification:** All Allied reinforcements during Game-Turn Two enter during the Mechanized Movement Phase. There are no German reinforcements during Game-Turn Two.

#### Weather Table:

**Clarification:** The weather during the entire first Game-Turn is clear. At the beginning of the second German Weather Determination Phase, the weather is determined by rolling on the *Clear* column.

#### Rules:

[6.25] (*correction*) All fractions are rounded up.

[6.47] (*clarification*) This rule comes into effect the moment one Allied unit is exited off the southwest mapedge.

[6.91] (*correction*) "During his Replacement Phase," should replace "during his Mechanized Movement Phase, after all his movement is completed. . . ." The Sequence of Play is correct.

[6.91] (*addition*) He may also place it on a reinforcement which is entering during that game turn.

[9.77] (*addition*) A retreating unit must be retreated as far away (in hexes) as the combat result indicates from the hex which it occupied

### Travel Notes

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**Turns 5-6:** Concentrate on Maykop in the south, while awaiting supply at Stalingrad.

**Turns 7-8:** Make sure of Nevinomyssk and Novorossiysk in the south and shift the main weight to the battle at Stalingrad. Establish a supplied unit adjacent to the Volga to garner that Victory Point. Leave enough in the South to worry at Tuapse and Georgiyevsk with.

**Turns 11-12:** Capture Stalingrad!

The Axis Player who meets this schedule will find himself with a comfortable margin for the 2:1 ratio of superiority in Victory Points he needs to win the game. He should even be within striking distance of a 3:1 knockout. Assuming an Axis failure to take Voronezh, Kalach, or Maykop on time, but success everywhere else, the score would be something like 170-70 in favor of the Axis, and the pressure would be heavy on the Soviet Player (who could lose the game outright by losing Astrakhan, for example) to hold onto everything plus regain a lot.

when the combat or overrun was resolved. If this is not possible, the combat result must be satisfied by taking step losses.

[10.25] (*correction*) German units must be within the Command radius of one Headquarters unit to utilize the bonus on both attack and defense.

[10.26] (*correction*) The American Headquarters unit may grant its combat bonuses if any unit involved in an attack is within the Command radius.

[10.29] (*addition*) For supply and retreat purposes, Headquarters units do not negate enemy ZOC's in the hex they occupy. Headquarters units may not be moved into an Enemy ZOC.

[14.1] (*correction*) German reinforcements enter east of hex 4101, not west.

[16.1] (*correction*) The German player gets one VP for each infantry "regiment" exited. "Division" is incorrect.

[16.2] (*correction*) Victory Points for exiting U.S. mechanized units should read: Up to three U.S. Divisions may exit the southwest edge of the map for Victory purposes.

1 VP for each U.S. armored regiment or brigade that exits the west edge of the map, hexes 0123 through 0134, on Game-Turn Seven.

2 VP for each U.S. armored regiment or brigade that exits the southwest mapedge on Game-Turn Six.

4 VP for each U.S. armored regiment or brigade that exits the southwest mapedge on Game-Turn Five.

6 VP for each U.S. armored regiment or brigade that exits the southwest mapedge on Game-Turn Four or before.

### [16.3] VICTORY POINT SCHEDULE

After the Victory Points are totaled at the end of the game, Players subtract the German total from the Allied to determine the level of Victory.

Level of Victory	Differential
Allied Decisive	+31 or more
Allied Operational	+21 to +30
Allied Marginal	+11 to +20
Draw (Historic Result)	0 to +10
German Marginal	-10 to -1
German Operational	-20 to -11
German Decisive	-21 or less

Conversely, the Soviet Player who can, say, hold onto Rostov until Game-Turn 4 and Stalingrad until Game-Turn 13, will find himself down only 135 to 170, with an Axis automatic victory a laughable proposition, and every prospect of regaining enough Points to knock the deficit well down below the 2:1 Axis superiority criterion necessary for an Axis Victory. Especially since even in the best of times, the Axis is likely to suffer some attrition of Victory Points for failing to please Berlin.

#### What If?

After playing *Drive*, some players may wonder what would happen if the Hitler Directives were ignored and the Axis field commander had a free reign on his army. This scenario is much more pleasing for the Axis player to contemplate than for the Soviet player to consider. The capture of Stalingrad is significantly easier if the panzers are not sent off to the south and the drive on Stalingrad is made by swooping down on it from the north. But, then, it wouldn't be too much fun for the Soviets. Perhaps Hitler was indeed Stalin's greatest ally.