

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

DRIVE SOUTH TO STALINGRAD

Then Take a Sharp Left at the First Light

by Tom Graveline

Drive on Stalingrad has done a lot of swerving for such a recent game. The imbalanced sensed in the early playtesting was overcorrected and then the errata patched a correction on *that* upon which the jury is still out and the game buyers are staying away in droves — which is too bad, because *DOS* is a pretty good game in spite of its waffling. The subject is a classic, of course, and *DOS* is the first specific operational treatment of the campaign. It's a tad premature to be didactic about how to win, but give Tom's approach a try. —RAS

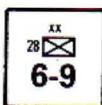
Thanks to recently published errata, *Drive on Stalingrad* has finally fulfilled its potential. Particularly the rule changes allowing three German mech divisions to stack, the elimination of certain untried two-step Soviet units, and the increase (50%) of rail hexes permitted to be cleared in a Game-Turn have given the German player a real shot at victory.

However, against a competent Soviet opponent, the German player will still have his hands full. Voronezh should be marked as a suicide mission in the existing game structure as Soviet reinforcements on the first Game-Turn bring the German player no hope for any lasting gains in this sector. And so, the German player must look south to Rostov and to crossing the Don as soon as possible. Immediately thereafter, most German players will marshal their greater forces and attempt to capture Stalingrad before, on, or near Game-Turn 12. But once again, rail movement allows the Soviet player to transport the maximum amount of reinforcements per turn directly into the Stalingrad area; i.e., a competent Soviet player can make it almost impossible to capture Stalingrad.

Therefore, I propose an optional Southern Strategy in which the German player concentrates on capturing all strategic points on the southern map. Once these points are captured, the German player can then send most if not all of his southern forces north to assist the attack on Stalingrad and also to defend against the eventual Soviet counterattack.

As occurred historically, I recommend sending the mech divisions from the Sixth and Fourth Panzer Armies directly to Stalingrad to "put the pressure on" in this sector and to force the Soviet player to place a large portion of his units in this area. The mech divisions from the First Panzer Army should be sent south: the panzergrenadier division to Tuapse, Sochi, and eventually hex 3935;

one panzer division to Maikop; and the other two panzer divisions to the greater Grozny area, including Orzhonikidze (3915) and hexes 3701 and 3801. By capturing all the cities and rail entry hexes, the German player can effectively shut off the southernmost Soviet reinforcements and force them to enter at Astrakan or east of the Volga (hex 0601).



Jaeger Division

Once the Grozny sector has been secured, the mech units should wheel north where Astrakan becomes the next target. Depending on the supply situation, the German player may be able to syphon a few units from the Stalingrad area to help carry Astrakan if the Soviets are stubborn at this location. (Once the necessary units have been exited to Astrakan, they should be brought back as soon as possible. The three Jaeger infantry divisions (6-9) are easily recognizable units to delegate for this purpose.) Special attention should be given to Vladimirovskaya (hex 3409) as this is the only location south or east of the Stalingrad area where the Soviet units can cross the Volga. The German player should attempt to secure this city to further solidify his flank by preventing any Soviet outbursts here.



Mountain Division

With regard to the disposition of other units, Axis allied units are generally much slower, cannot cross the Don if unsupplied and don't pack much offensive punch. They are best used to defend the Don in stacks of three or to soak off while attacking or defending, ("cannon fodder," as we call it). Infantry from the Fourth Panzer Army should assist the Axis Allies in defending the Don, while infantry from the Sixth and First Panzer Armies eliminate bypassed Soviet units, secure supply lines, cross the Don and drive on Stalingrad. The Seventeenth Army and mountain units should be sufficient along with the First Panzer Army mech divisions to secure the Caucasus. German reinforcements should form a reserve to counter any Soviet attack in the north, particularly in the Voronezh sector. This plan usually results in a balanced attack across the map and really stretches the Soviets thin.

Now assuming that Voronezh, Kalach-na-Donu, and Stalingrad have not been taken, but that all other points south of the Don (from the north map) have been captured in time to garner the bonus victory points, around Game Turn 10 or 11, the German player will have a victory count of 175 to 81. If Kalach-na-Donu is taken but not in time for bonus points, the count would then be 180 to 76. At this point, the German player has a temporary two to one lead. Yet he need not capture all of Stalingrad to win, but just has to occupy one hex to cause the Soviet player to lose control of the city, 20 points and the old ballgame. (A three to one ratio wins automatically for the German player.) Optionally, the German player can win now by placing a unit next to the Volga and keeping it in supply for most if not all of the remainder of the game. This action will partially negate the points the Soviet player gains due to German failure to capture Stalingrad by Game-Turn 12 and beyond.

The above point calculations do not include any points to either player for lack of a continuous front, Strategic Withdrawal, etc. The totals are based only on capture of cities by a certain time, or the failure to do so. This means that the German player should have a greater number of points, as the Soviet player is very likely to experience a lack of a continuous front, Strategic Withdrawal, etc. At the same time, the German player should be very careful to maintain a continuous front to avoid giving the Soviet player precious victory points.

Minor Modifications. For convenience I use four German air armies at half strength (one point per unit) instead of two. This eliminates the hassle of trying to remember how many points have been expended. Also I have the Soviet reinforcements appear only on Soviet cities with point values (in addition to rail hexes on map edges). This was initially due to a lack of additional counters to indicate control of non-point cities, no desire to keep track on a separate piece of paper, and a distressing need to balance the game towards the German player before the errata was available. Both these changes give the German player minor advantages, but I don't believe that they materially affect the course of battle. (In the war of playability vs. realism/historicity, the former wins this battle with me.)

In conclusion, *DOS* initially received less than favorable reviews due to an apparent lack of adequate playtesting. With the published errata, it should certainly be given a second look.