

Drive on Stalingrad

GAME STRATEGY
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THE GAME

SPI's "Drive on Stalingrad" is a double-map, 600 backprinted counter, regimental/divisional level game of the Summer offensive of Army Group South and the subsequent Soviet counter-blow of the Autumn of 1942. The basic game system is almost identical to SPI's Panzergruppe Guderian; step reductions, double-impulse movement, half-combat strength overruns, divisional integrity, HQ (or leader) counters for the Russians and Axis-Allies, locking ZOC's, three unit stacking and air interdiction. In two aspects, however, Drive on Stalingrad differs radically from its illustrious predecessor - air rules and political considerations. The air rules, apart from allowing interdiction, enable the combat odds actually to be shifted for both regular combat and overruns (as many as four columns in some cases) and, perhaps more unusually, allow German (not Soviet) units to be supplied from the air, an important consideration given the vast distances involved.

The political considerations involved, however, are the cornerstone of the game. The Hitler Directive rules impose a limit on the number of mechanised divisions the German may have on the northern map (north of Rostov in effect), the number of units they may have over the River Don (between Voronezh and Stalingrad only), the number and nature of German retreats and also the optional deployment of the XI Army. The application of

the Hitler Directive rules is dependent on two things, namely luck (via dice roll) and the number of victory points that the Axis have amassed (the greater the number of victory points the less the effect). The penalties for infringement of these rules are severe (indeed they may go a long way to losing the Axis player the game); the Axis player either gives away victory points or even has mechanised divisions removed from the map, never to return (sent to Leningrad according to the rules). The Soviet player is handicapped by political considerations much less: he must maintain a line of units or ZOC's along the east bank of the Don from Voronezh to Stalingrad (infringement entails the loss of victory points) though he may retreat units through Axis ZOC's, again with the loss of victory points. A final word on victory conditions: points are awarded as above and for control of cities (the points awarded may be doubled for the Axis player if he captures it within a specified time limit). The Axis player wins by achieving a 3:1 superiority at any time during the game (virtually impossible unless the Soviet player happens to be some sort of zombie) or, failing that, it lasts the full 25 turns, at the end of which time victory point ratios are computed - between 2:1 and 3:1 and the Axis win: between 1:1 and 2:1 the Soviet wins a marginal victory or a decisive victory if the ratio is less than 1:1 in the Axis favour. The game length is 7-12 hours in all. As the game is very finely balanced (it normally depends upon the Hitler Directive rules) it seemed to me to be a good idea to **outline** a possible strategy for both sides - hence the article.



THE GERMAN (AXIS) PLAYER

You can be assured of early success virtually everywhere. This must be followed up as rapidly as possible in order to gain bonus points for the capture of cities: remember even if you lose the city you retain the bonus points. Secure your northern flank on the Don (or Voronezh River) in the vicinity of Voronezh: on no account whatsoever cross it north of Stalingrad. Your central thrust should be aimed for the town of Kalach-na-Donu on the River Don: whether you base your final line on the Chir or Don is up to you - basing it upon the Volga is not a sensationally good move and, in fact, you could hardly do worse as you risk losing units by Hitler Directive as well as over-extending your already perilously weak flanks yet further. However, it is a good idea to capture Stalingrad before turn 12/16, gain the bonus points and then retreat back to the Don. You should not however concentrate all your mechanised strength in the north: you risk losing most of it by Hitler Directive. Your southern thrust should aim to secure Rostov (remember the bonus points) and advance towards Maikop, Krasnodar and, possibly Grozny which you should be able to reach. Don't attempt to capture Astrakhan - unless you think you can end the game - because there is no way that you will be able to retain it and your final line should be Krasnodar/Groznyy/Kalach-na-Donu/Voronezh.

Probably the key to your success, whether your front line is the Chir, the Don or Stalingrad, are reserves. You should maintain four mechanised divisions on the northern map if at all possible: two to the west of Voronezh and two in the Millerovo area to counter-attack Russian blows towards Rostov which, as the lifeline to your troops in the Caucasus, must be held at all costs. Moreover you should maintain two-three mechanised divisions on the south map but north of the Don which may, should the Hitler Directive be favourable or non-operative, be used once again in a counter-attacking role. There are, however, other points worthy of note not the least of which is the requirement that your front line should be achieved as soon as possible (Game Turns 10-12) so that sound defensive positions can be found from which counter-attacks may be repelled. It is the northern section of the front that is the key (Voronezh-Stalingrad). For, while a weak line in the Caucasus is permissible, a weak front along the Don bend will lead to the catastrophe which, historically, Manstein, probably the finest strategist of the Wehrmacht, could only delay (and if you're

in the Manstein class I'd like to meet you). With this in mind, Axis-Allied units should not be deployed shoulder to shoulder and, despite the constraints imposed by the leader (or HQ) rules, should be combined with German units as far as possible. Failure to take this action will, inevitably, lead to catastrophe. Finally, on no account should infantry units be deployed in the Caucasus - there's no way you will be able to retreat them through Rostov should the northern front collapse. These units, especially the German ones, are best deployed in the Don Bend or, better still, given the constraints of the Hitler Directive on mechanised divisions in the north, in reserve.

The keys, then, to success are rapid exploitation of weakness, a secure front line and powerful reserves. Remember the Axiom "Fortune favours the Brave" (but not the foolhardy) and have fun.



THE SOVIET PLAYER

Abandon any hope of resistance west of the Don/Voronezh Rivers whatsoever: you haven't a hope of holding the initial German attack. Ignore the loss of victory points and utilise the strategic withdrawal rule even if it means the loss of Voronezh and Rostov (even with bonus points). Remember above all that units are infinitely more important than victory points (until late in the game i.e. after turn 15): note, however, that you must not allow the Axis player a 3:1 victory point superiority at any time as you will lose the game instantly - it is easily avoided by holding Astrakhan, Stalingrad and north of the River Don. Every reserve you can lay your hands on should be deployed in readiness for a counter-blow in the Kalach-na-Donu and Kalach areas (note that these are two different cities a considerable distance apart - Kalach-na-Donu being west of Stalingrad while Kalach is north of the Don between Voronezh and Stalingrad). You should ignore Axis progress in the Caucasus completely: the further he advances the further he will have to retreat and the weaker his flanks.

Your strategy should be to build up a vast array with which to counter-attack, preferably as late as possible (Game Turns 17-20) when the Axis player is most vulnerable to the effects of the Hitler Directive: don't however, leave it too late or you will lose the game. Your counter-attack, when launched, should have two distinct phases. The first should be an attack in the Kalach-na-Donu area on Game Turn 17, the main purpose of which is to draw off German armoured/mechanised reserves in the Don Bend to counter it. Moreover, you should add to the deception by moving ten powerful units (guards divisions, ideally) into this area so that they are within forty rail hexes of the Kalach area, your Schwerpunkt (main concentration area). Hopefully the Axis player will assume that your main attack will be in the Kalach-na-Donu area and denude the Don Bend of armoured reserves. As soon as his reserves are committed you should launch your main attack in the Don Bend, having moved your ten divisions back into their original assembly area by rail. His armour will be unable to re-deploy and you will be in the perfect position from which to attack. It should be aimed at the Axis-Allied units, for obvious reasons, and all your air power, which may prove decisive, should again be committed here. Your blow itself should aim for Millerovo and Rostov and, if successful, will cut off all German units west of Stalingrad and the Caucasus.

The blow should not fail provided you have saved enough units. For the Axis player will be faced with two widely-divergent thrusts and, though he may be able to halt one, the other will succeed especially thanks to Hitler Directive limitations on retreats and the deployment of mechanised units. Note, however, that by leaving your attack as late as possible, you risk running out of time and you must move as rapidly as possible or lose. Hence as long as the above conditions are fulfilled (and you have a reasonable slice of Hitler Directive luck, upon which the result may ultimately depend), you will win. Good hunting!