

Case Blue

Play Test After Action Report

by Thomas Buettner

Introduction

This OCS AAR portrays the AGS portion of the German autumn 1941 offensive in Russia, as played out during HomerCon 2004. In particular this report refers to that part of AGS operations taking place on the 'EATG' maps.

Consequently 'Case Blue' here refers to the respective OCS product under development rather than the historical German 1942 summer offensive in southern Russia.

The overall game lined up the usual October 1941 campaign start configuration of 'Guderian's Blitzkrieg II' and extended this setup with the respective campaign setup on the 'EATG' maps and the new 'Case Blue' maps, covering the Crimea and the Caucasus (don't worry about space requirements, any empty hangar should do fine to setup all the campaign maps).

The following players were participating in this slugfest:

Germans GBII - Chip Pharr, Vernon Roberts and Kurt Gillies

Soviets GBII - John Hunt and James Plesec

Germans Army Group South (AGS) - John Wade (Crimea) and yours truly (EATG area)

Soviets AGS - Morris Hadley (Crimea) and Roland LeBlanc (EATG area)

The article focuses exclusively on the German impressions, intentions and operations in AGS, and only for that part of AGS which takes place on the EATG maps. Given that I did not study the Soviet OOB and reinforcement schedule before play commenced, I can not really make any meaningful comments regarding their situation.

Hopefully this will serve as suitable appetizer for everyone eagerly awaiting release of 'Case Blue'!

Situation at Start

The Soviet forces opposite AGS man an almost continuous frontline from north of POLTAVA to south of ZAPOROSHE, yet except for the KHARKOV area almost no operational reserves seem to be available.

The German or rather Axis forces are deployed as follows:

- Strong German infantry forces (representing 6. Army) in the POLTAVA area, including a small Hungarian motorised corps formation;
- Strong German mechanised and motorised formations (representing Panzergruppe 1) west and southwest of POLTAVA, including a very decent Italian motorised corps formation;
- German infantry forces (representing 17. Army) in the DNEPROPETROVSK area, including a small Slovakian motorised division.

Initially AGS commands an impressive array of mechanised/motorised formations:

- 4 Panzer Divisions (9.Pz, 13.Pz, 14.Pz, 16.Pz),
- 4 motorised Infantry Divisions (SS-Wiking, 25.mot, 29.mot, 60.mot),
- 1 Italian motorised corps (motorised Infantry division plus lots of corps troops with decent AR3),
- 1 Slovakian motorised Infantry Division (decent AR3 and AR4 units), and
- 1 Hungarian motorised corps (only a couple of units, but good mobility and decent AR3).

Over the first three game turns though, one Panzer and two motorised divisions have to be released to AGC for support of Guderian's push towards Moscow.

For two reasons this significant loss of forces has less impact on the conduct of the German offensive than initially imagined:

- The German supply situation is critical from the very start (only 2-4 SP arrive per turn, the collection of wagons and trucks at start does not allow forming any extenders) and
- Soviet forces opposite AGS and Soviet reinforcements during the first couple of months (!) are only a shadow of Soviet resources in 'GBII' (no Soviet 'Reserve' markers before December 1941!).

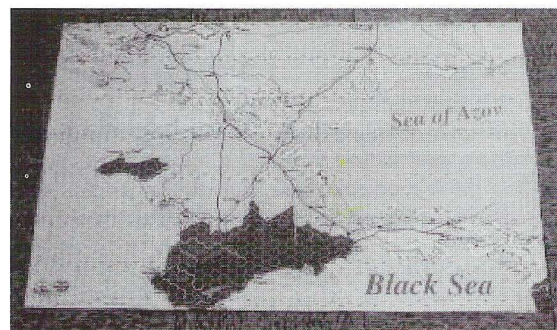
The German operating plan was fairly straightforward:

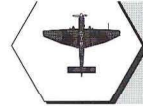
- Initially the main effort would be in the north, with a strong thrust towards KHARKOV, followed by a subsequent advance along the good road network along the river DONETS in the general direction of STALINO and ROSTOV.
- Complementary a secondary effort would be launched further south out of the DNEPROPETROVSK bridgehead, aiming to capture ZAPOROSHE and subsequently advancing in the general direction of STALINO in order to provide flank protection for the main effort and maintain communications with Axis forces (11. Army, 3. and 4. Rumanian Armies) operating south of the DNEPR and in the Crimea.

Campaign diary

October 1 – "Blitzkrieg"

Mechanised elements of PzGrp 1 force multiple breakthroughs in Soviet frontline, advance towards KHARKOV and occupy detainable hexes in the Soviet rear area.





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Tactically a fast advance against KHARKOV is intended, since this city is a Soviet on-map supply source (and the only one this close to the front line!).

The infantry follows the panzers and makes sure that at the end of the turn 3 large Soviet armies are isolated.

One German PzDiv ends the turn adjacent to KHARKOV, yet here the Germans suffer an early tactical setback due to well coordinated Soviet combined arms counterattacks.

October 5 – “Pursuit”

Determined by limitations of trace supply, the Germans focus on isolation of BELGOROD and KHARKOV, along with occupation of all DONETS river crossings east and south of KHARKOV.

Most Soviet frontline formations wither away due to attrition.

Elements of PzGrp 1 advance on LOZOVAIA.

October 8 – “The siege of KHARKOV”

6. Army besieges KHARKOV and 17. Army continues its rather uneventful advance through the steppe towards STALINO.

Elements of PzGrp 1 advance towards SLAVIANSK.

Progress in detail:

- 9. PzDiv besieges BELGOROD,
- 13. PzDiv isolates KUPIANSK and moves adjacent to IZYUM,
- 14. PzDiv and SS-Wiking reach BARENKOVO area,
- Elements of Slovakian mot Inf Div ‘Rychla’ move adjacent to KRASNOARMEISKOI.

On this turn the Germans were able to form a wagon extender, since they managed to capture 2 Soviet wagon points in the preceding turns. Without this the German advance along the DONETS would have had to be stopped or risked supply attrition.

Elements of the Italian motorised corps use this improvement of the supply situation to advance adjacent to VALUYKI. This was a purely tactical move to seal the isolation of KHARKOV and protect German troops advancing along the DONETS against Soviet counter operations from the North. Yet, unbeknownst to German and Soviet player at the time, this set the stage for one of the most intriguing battles of the whole campaign.

October 12 – “The liberation of KHARKOV”

6. Army captures KHARKOV due to tactical finesse of ‘Stosstruppen’, elements of 17. Army (motorised corps troops) isolate STALINO and PzGrp 1 advances in the direction of ARTEMOVSK and LISCHANSK.

The Soviet defenders of KHARKOV by now had consolidated their positions into two adjacent city hexes, complicating German road movement and supply trace operations. Furthermore, from this turn onwards, the defenders would block further German rail conversion

through KHARKOV. Due to this 6. Army decided on a more risky approach to end the siege of the city quickly: AGS’s one and only AR5 Inf Div entered move mode and received orders to overrun both Soviet defender hexes. Two hugely successful overruns later KHARKOV was liberated, at the cost of 50% step losses in the attacking unit (c’est la guerre...)!

Progress in detail:

- 13. PzDiv isolates IZYUM,
- 14. PzDiv advances adjacent to LISCHANSK,
- 16. PzDiv advances adjacent to ARTEMOVSK,
- the Italian motorised corps isolates VALUYKI, yet the Soviet player manages to restore trace supply for the town during his turn. More Soviet reinforcements detain east of VALUYKI, apparently in preparation for a limited counteroffensive.

October 15 – “Consolidation”

6. Army starts to advance multiple German Inf Div towards VALUYKI, otherwise Germans just continue ongoing operations.

Progress in detail:

- A Hungarian armoured car manages to advance adjacent to VOROSHILOVGRAD!

During his turn the Soviet player manages to significantly slow down the German advance through major commitment of Soviet Air Force: ALL long-range Soviet bombers based in the GBII area fly south and support local Soviet air forces in delivering heavy barrages against German stacks in the ARTEMOVSK area. When the dust settles 5 German stacks are DG, yet the Soviet player does not follow up this success with ground attacks, indicating the apparent weakness of Soviet ground forces in the theatre.

At this stage I could only speculate what allowed the Soviet GBII players to divert their air assets in such a way. Let’s just say that the capture of MOSCOW did not seem to be imminent...

October 19 – “Rasputitsa Light!”

On this turn the weather switched from ‘Dry’ to ‘Light Mud’ and stayed that way for the rest of the campaign.

Due to this the German advance slows to a crawl beyond the existing road net, main activity is consolidation of positions.

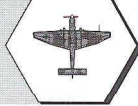
Around VALUYKI the ‘dance of death’ continues with both sides committing significantly more forces and trying to outmanoeuvre the other side’s trace supply capability.

Progress in detail:

- Corps troops manage to advance into KRASNI LUCH.

October 22 – “Battle of LISCHANSK”

No major operations take place, except for the elimination of the Soviet DONETS bridgehead at LISCHANSK through well coordinated combined arms attack (Heavy artillery barrage followed by massive infantry assault!).



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Note: Due to the difficult German supply situation, after the first turn most of the German offensive punch was delivered by leg units throughout the campaign. The German player could only rarely (every 2-3 turns) afford to move the tracked assets in his mechanised and motorised formations; these units mostly functioned as operational reserves. Instead most of the offensive manoeuvring was done by the large array of German and Axis motorised corps units, which could be fuelled through expenditure of 'just' 1 SP!

October 26 – "Into the DONETS basin"

6. Army starts to advance from LISCHANSK towards STAROBELSK, 17. Army starts to advance from STALINO (besieged) towards KRASNI LUCH and the MIUS river line, elements of PzGrp 1 slowly advance towards KRASNI LUCH and VOROSHILOVGRAD.

Meanwhile German RR conversion extends beyond KUPIANSK, enabling solid trace supply for German and Italian forces around VALUYKI.

In his turn the Soviet player finally abandons VALUYKI and retreats eastwards.

October 29 – "Game Over!"

Left wing of 6. Army advances through VALUYKI towards OSTROGOZSHK while the right wing continues to advance on STAROBELSK. 17. Army begins to encircle Soviet defenders in the KRASNI LUCH area and elements of PzGrp 1 isolate VOROSHILOVGRAD.

Progress in detail:

A single PzBn of 16. PzDiv manages to move adjacent to MILLEROVO, leading to the climatic tactical finish of the campaign: this German move put a significant amount of Soviet units north of MILLEROVO out of supply. To counter this threat the Soviets mounted an overrun attempt with 2 stacked AR4 tank and cavalry brigades. Defender surprise, 6 shifts, AL1o1Do1! This result enabled the German unit to stay adjacent to MILLEROVO, which would have lead to starvation of significant number of Soviet units.

This is where we called the game.

Aftermath, Observations and Comments

By game end the German armies were roughly positioned as follows:

6. Army KHARKOV – VALUYKI – LISCHANSK

14. PzDiv (LISCHANSK)
Italian motorised corps (VALUYKI)
8 German infantry divisions

17. Army STALINO (besieged) –
KRASNI LUCH – BLAGODATNOE
Slovakian mot Div (KRAS-
NOMEISKOI)
Hungarian motorised corps
6 German infantry divisions
1 Italian infantry division

PzGrp 1 IZYUM – VOROSHILOVGRAD – KRASNI LUCH

13. PzDiv (IZYUM)
60. mot Div (IZYUM)
16. PzDiv (ARTEMOVSK)
SS-Wiking mot Div (ARTEMOVSK)
5 German infantry divisions

Soviet forces north of the DONETS were largely outmaneuvered around STAROBELSK and otherwise retreating towards the DON river crossings.

South of the DONETS the Soviets occupied the MIUS river line in relative strength, yet this position was under immediate threat from German units outflanking it to the north and east.

Overall it was a very fun game to play, in particular due to all the participants involved. Naturally the Germans in AGS were having most of the fun at this stage of the campaign, but German supply restrictions severely curtailed freedom of manoeuvre for all mechanised forces and successful Soviet 'Maskirovka' operations managed to hide the apparent weaknesses in the Soviet OOB up until the very end.

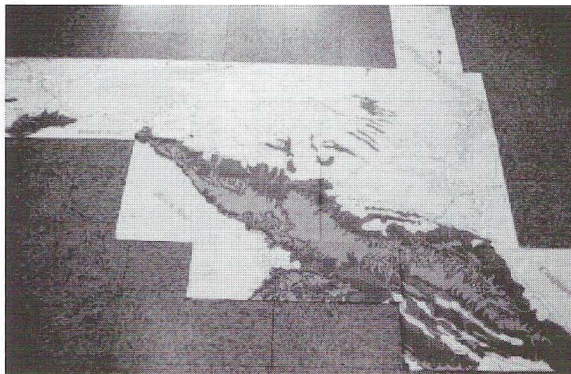
Apparently Roland had overcommitted his initial forces to the defence of KHARKOV. Once that city was isolated and bypassed, his limited railroad capacity (6 SP?) had to be used to bring up supply points as well as reinforcements. Due to this he was able to delay the German advance in specific locations like LISCHANSK, ARTEMOVSK or STALINO, but he never again managed to concentrate a large enough force to effectively stop the Germans.

To bolster the Soviet defensive position, maybe some of the early Soviet reinforcements should start on-map in cities throughout the DONETS area instead of appearing in the STALINGRAD area (?).

The counter density in AGS is significantly reduced compared to GBII, which makes for a really fast paced game, we managed to play through 9 game turns within 2 days.

Both sides' air assets are fairly insignificant in number compared with the air forces available in 'GB II'. Consequently air operations did not play a large role in both sides' plans (excluding the one-turn "visit" of Soviet heavy bombers from the north...).

Initial reading of the AAR might indicate that the game was fairly one-sided and unexciting, yet this is certainly not how it felt during the gaming session.



Additionally when we compared the German advance during the game with the historical advance at this stage of the campaign, we discovered that the game still seemed to be behind schedule at this time!

I sincerely hope that MMP manages to build and ship 'Case Blue' in 2005!

Multi-Man Publishing,
LLC.