

The Third Winter Scenario 2 (Game Start 26 Jan 44)

Scenario 2 starts at the time of the Korsun Pocket battle—a very uncomfortable time for the Axis. They feared a strike southward to cut off all the units in the Dnepr bend, the Soviets were pressing west to Shepetovka. Historically, the Korsun pocket battle (and concurrent evacuation of the Nikopol bridgehead) took place through mid-February, then a series of running battles as the Axis pulled back to the west. This culminated with the “Hube’s Pocket” battle, the capture of Tarnopol and Odessa, and the Soviets reaching Iasi before the mud season made operations impossible.

Note to Axis players: Our Soviet players looked carefully at the setup, noted the hole in the lines around D19.23, as well as several weak units in the Axis setup. They planned to take full advantage. Another element of this scenario is that the Axis start the game with only a certain amount of SP. Neither player makes supply rolls on the first turn. This means that if the Soviets go first on the second turn, the Axis must make it through two Soviet turns plus their own with the initial SP allocation (43.25 SP). 43 might seem like a lot, but you burn through it fast!

As you will see, the scenario is named Gotterdammerung for a reason. WHERE you position your Trucks and Wagons is extremely important. Don’t just stick them in the backfield, place them thoughtfully in an area where they can become Extenders to return cut off units to supply. Choose your Reserve units so they may respond to problems (Move Mode is best). You may need to conserve SP—42 SP will be 12 SP if you fuel 15 multi unit formations to move over two turns. Place 4-6 SP with the Panzer divisions you will most need to move (3rd Pz, 13th Pz, 14th Pz, 1st SS Pz and maybe 7th Pz Divisions) so they can fuel and overrun even if cut off. Put the other SP with Trucks or with the MUF that are in Move Mode/Reserve and can immediately occupy bridge crossing hexes. Some SP might also go with Trucks that can move and turn into Extenders, dropping the SP enroute. Oh, and the weather is “No Flight” so you won’t be able to do any Hip Shoots or Air Barrages. Read the rules regarding Extenders VERY CAREFULLY. Then buckle up, because this scenario usually gets straight into mobile warfare action.



OCS Mini-Holiday, 8-16 October 2022

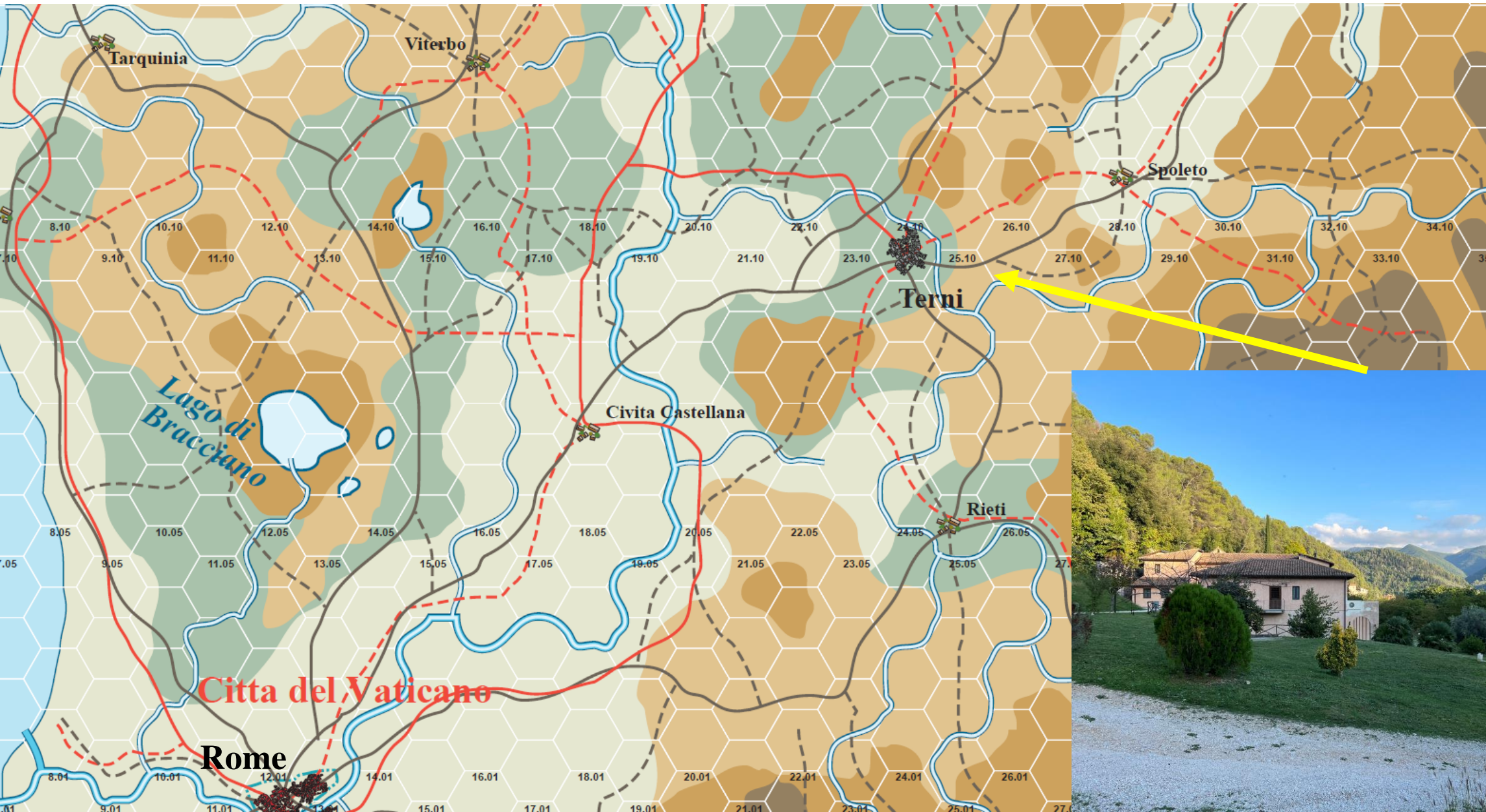
Before I get into details, I have to thank hosts Antonello Salvatucci and Paolo de Francesco for arranging such a unique venue in a lovely setting. Our group gathered at the Convento San Bernardo, formerly a Monastery and Convent. Founded in the 1400's, the building is one of several the archdiocese has converted into facilities for meetings and hotel stays. It is in the middle of the Italian region of Umbria, some 90 minutes northeast of Rome.

This proved a great location, and whilst our opponents were making their move, we could visit nearby towns, an olive oil factory, and the highest waterfall in Italy.

Throughout our building and play area were paintings from the 16th and 17th century. The original church from the 1500's is the lower left photo. For this reason, we called it a Mini-Holiday instead of a Mini-Convention. Imagine if every year we could have a gathering in a unique and different European venue, preferably near a historic site . . .



But is it on the map? The Convento San Bernardo is located on the playtest map for OCS Italy, close to the river where two hexes meet. The rolling hills nearby were a beautiful backdrop for gaming, and the weather was mostly sunny throughout.

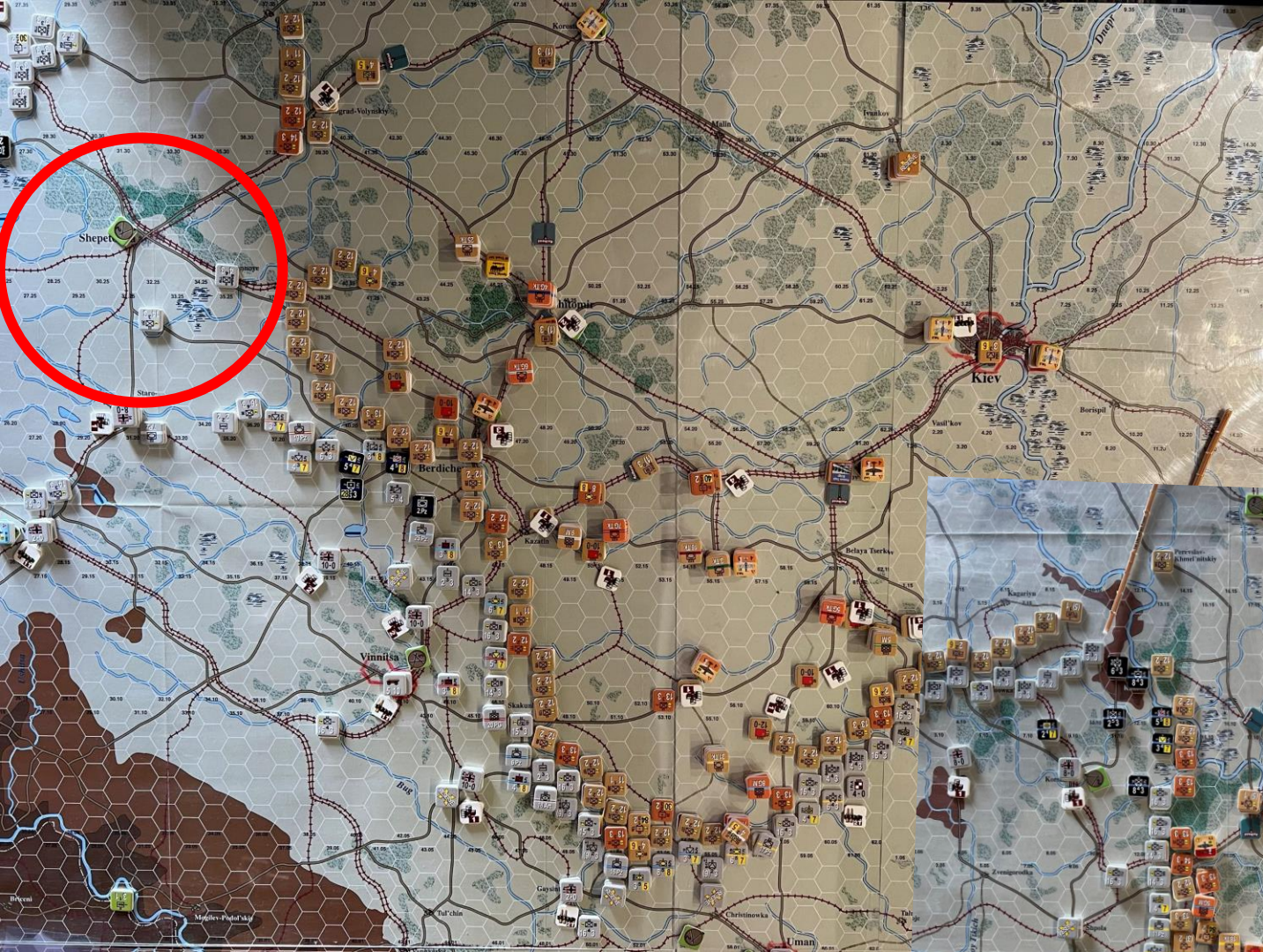




Team Soviet, above, is (left to right) Peter Mogensen, Antonello Salvatucci and Paolo de Francesco. Antonello and Paolo have been playtesters for several OCS games including *Hungarian Rhapsody*, *Third Winter* and the upcoming *Luzon*.

Team Axis, below, is (left to right) Adam Hansen, Mark Fazarkaley and Chip Saltsman. Mark was a playtester for *Third Winter* and Chip the game's developer. We are standing on a terrace just outside the game room.






This scenario picks up the campaign game on 26 Jan 1944. The Soviets have 2 VP (Kiev) and the potential to lose 1 VP each if the Axis player has units on the Dnepr upriver of Dnepropetrovsk or occupies the Nikopol bridgehead. The Soviet needs to obtain 10 more VP to win, with 2 each coming from capture of Uman, Vinnitsa, Tarnopol or Odessa and the possibility of more for exiting units off the northwest or southwest, destroying Axis HQ or forcing a Rumanian surrender.



But there is no time to waste. The game ends in roughly 25 turns (the last turn is variable), and you have only 10 turns of Freeze weather remaining. March and April bring Mud that slows movement to a crawl two turns out of three. The pressure is on the Soviet player to move far and to move fast.

This is the starting position in the northern part of the map. The red circle indicates one potential Axis headache, where little stands in the way of a Soviet advance. Soviet logistics won't allow them to move far, but west is the right direction!



Here are two other weak points in the setup. The two Flak battalions are single-step, 2-AR units. The one on the left is in Light Woods, but the one on the right is in Open. Looks like a great spot for a breakthrough! The two units circled in yellow were misplaced in each other's hexes—we corrected this when we noticed.



The Axis doesn't need more challenges, but here they are. A four-hex gap in the front between Krivoi Rog and Kirovograd (red oval) is particularly inviting. The overall position is a challenge, with a huge Dnepr Bend force that needs to be extracted. Historically, the units furthest east reached the Dneistr River 62 hexes to the west over the next 10-12 turns. The Soviets would love to pocket the lot of them.



Our Soviet opponents identified more weak points, aiming for a “super-sized” Korsun Pocket battle: D13.28 is defended by a 2-step 14-3-3. D13.34 contains a one-step 5-3-3 KG. The initial attack they planned would surround three mobile divisions (10th PG, 3rd SS Panzer and the 13th Panzer is under the Reserve Marker in D8.27). But this was hardly the end of their dastardly plans!

Axis Reaction Phase, 26 Jan 44, Uman.

The Soviets began by “drilling holes” and send forces to occupy key rail lines, thus cutting Trace to a large group of Axis units. They don’t go for a small pocket—they are intending to cut off a huge group. Their die rolls were extremely fortunate (said with the best of envy)! This is a very aggressive opening for the Soviets.

Near Uman, their first incursion places several units onto rail lines at the key rail line intersection at Christinowka. Axis reaction forces rush to the area to contain the breakthrough. Note all the Reserve markers you can see as Soviet Mobile formations move to enter the fray.





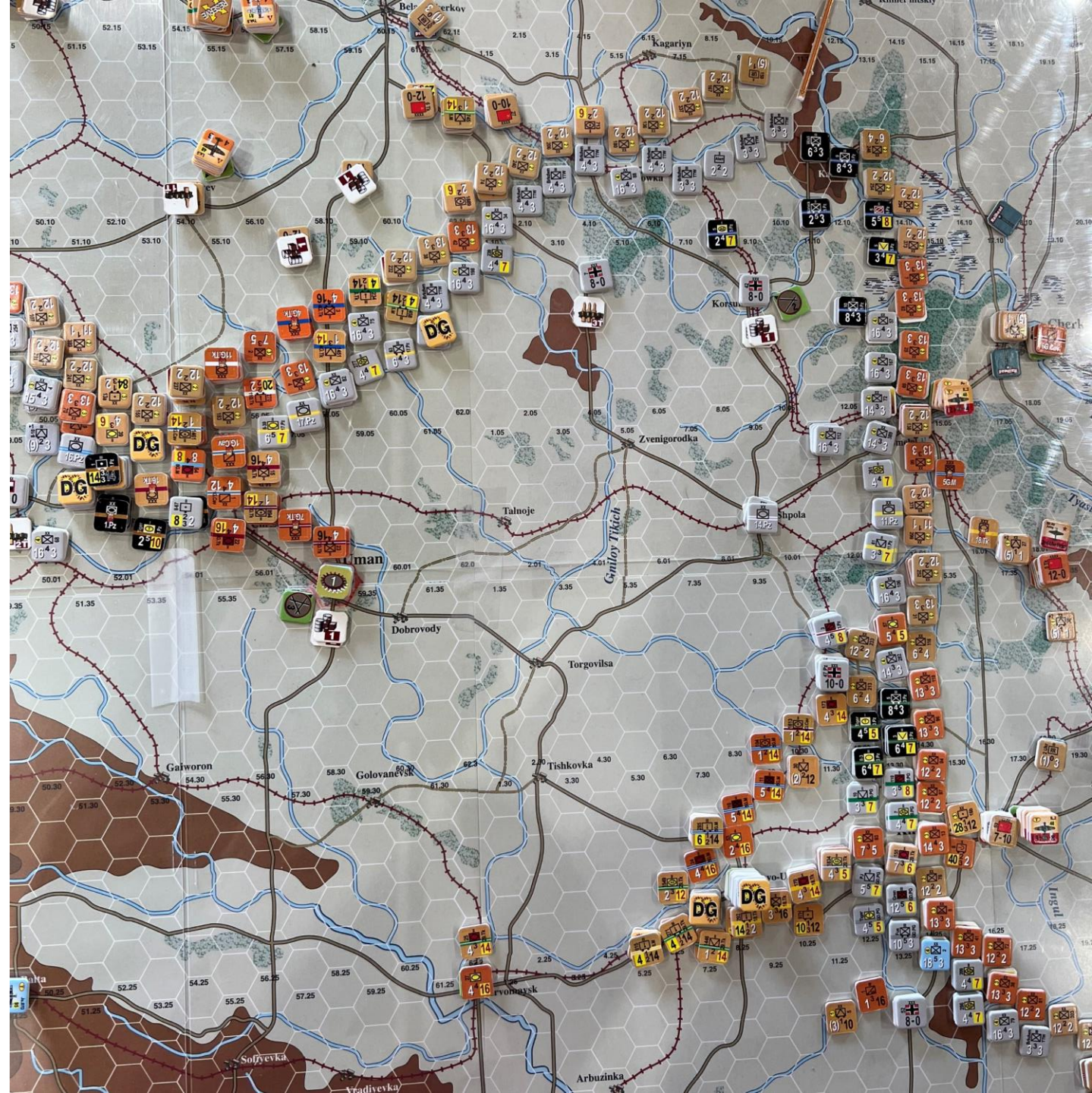
Axis Reaction Phase, 26 Jan 44, Uman.
The Soviets drill two more holes according to plan and send bothersome units into the Axis backfield. Note the Flak division and Motorcycle Regiment which are positioned to block reserve unit movement through Open terrain. A 4-AR Guards Tank Brigade is sitting in Pervomaysk (C62.25), having already reached the Bug River.

The Axis 13th Panzer division was in reserve and managed to poke back one of the surrounding units.

In the very bottom right, Soviet divisions are pressing into that four-hex gap.

End Soviet 1st Player Turn 26 Jan 44, Uman-Korsun. Did I mention this scenario gets moving fast? Here is the pocket at the end of the Soviet first turn. Rail lines into the Korsun area have been cut, with the Soviets sitting on many rail hexes. They have DG'd several Panzer divisions and pressed forward to the gates of Uman (which became a Fortress in a hurry). Their dice rolls were excellent, nearly always getting attacker surprise (if the dice are in your favor, then you are a brilliant wargamer!)

But this isn't the whole picture . . .



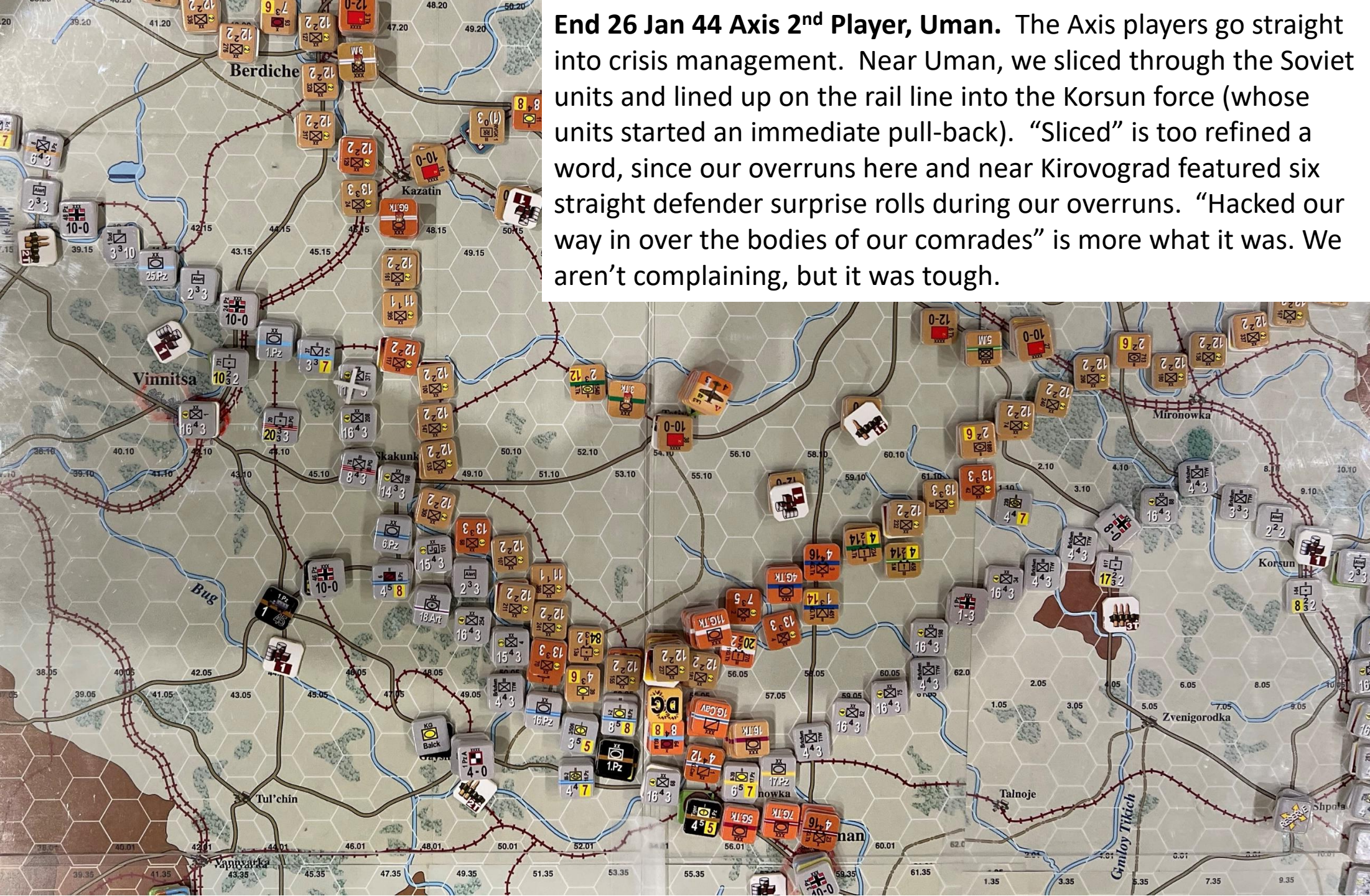


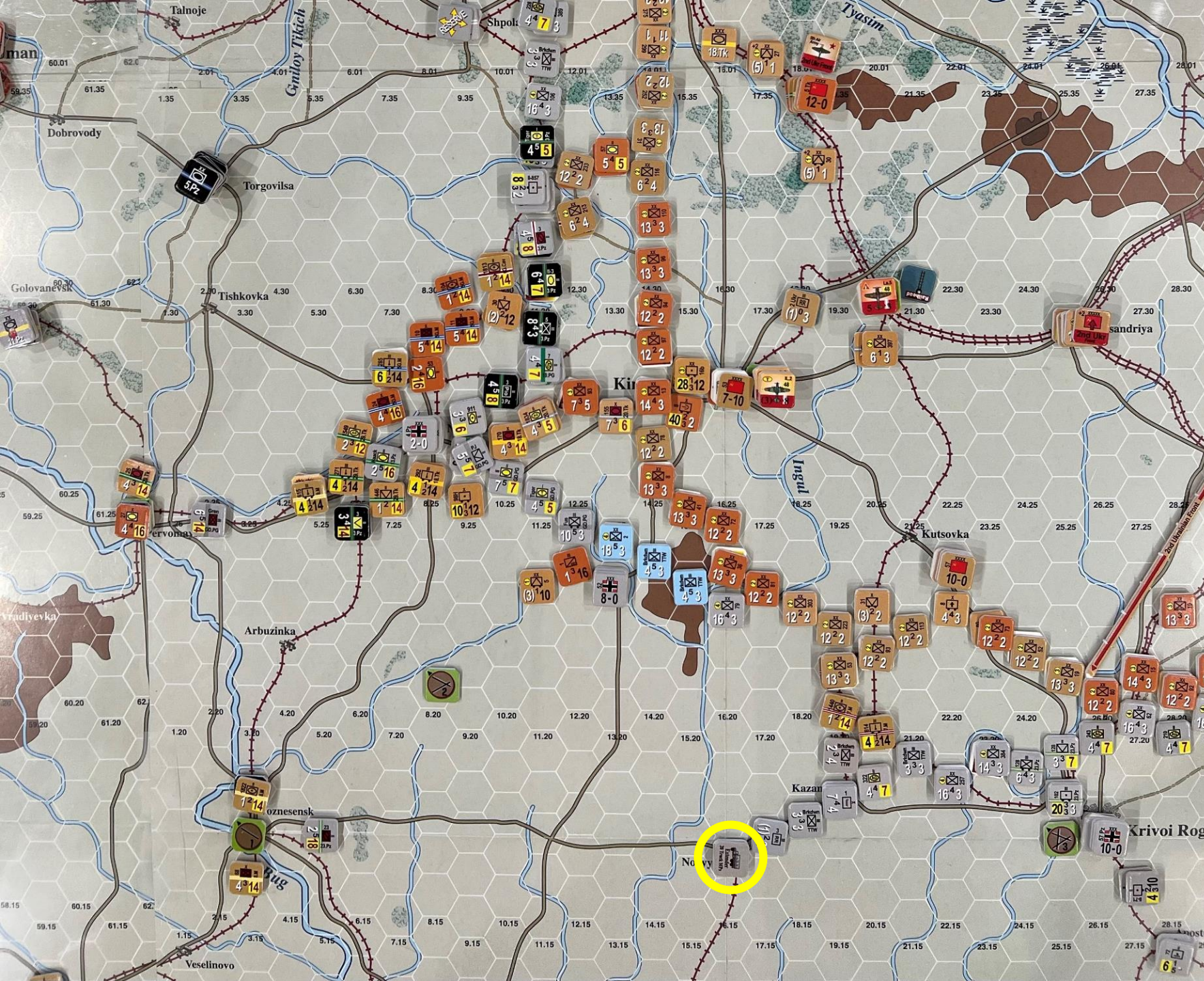
End Soviet 1st Player Turn 26 Jan 44, Axis backfield. “The whole picture” includes the Soviet 8th Mech Corps, which zipped through to Voznesensk on the Bug River (D3.18) and continued on to Berezovka (C60.13). This cut the last rail line to every Axis unit on maps B and D. Very clever moves by our Soviet opponents.

At this point, we should have read the rules about Extenders very carefully. A Wagon Extender in Nikolaev could at this point connect back to Odessa, restoring the detrainable hexes in the Dnepr bend (it doesn't connect the rail lines so we could move cargo along the Extender's path, but it would have really helped us get units moving out of harm's way!) Those Extender rules are *OCS 12.7* for all you aspiring Axis players. I don't think I have every used Extenders in this way, so it wasn't in our mental toolkit.

Instead, we focused on getting a Truck Extender in position to serve as a supply source for the Dnepr bend, and on cutting off the Soviet spearheads. Watching Soviet attrition rolls seemed a lovely prospect.

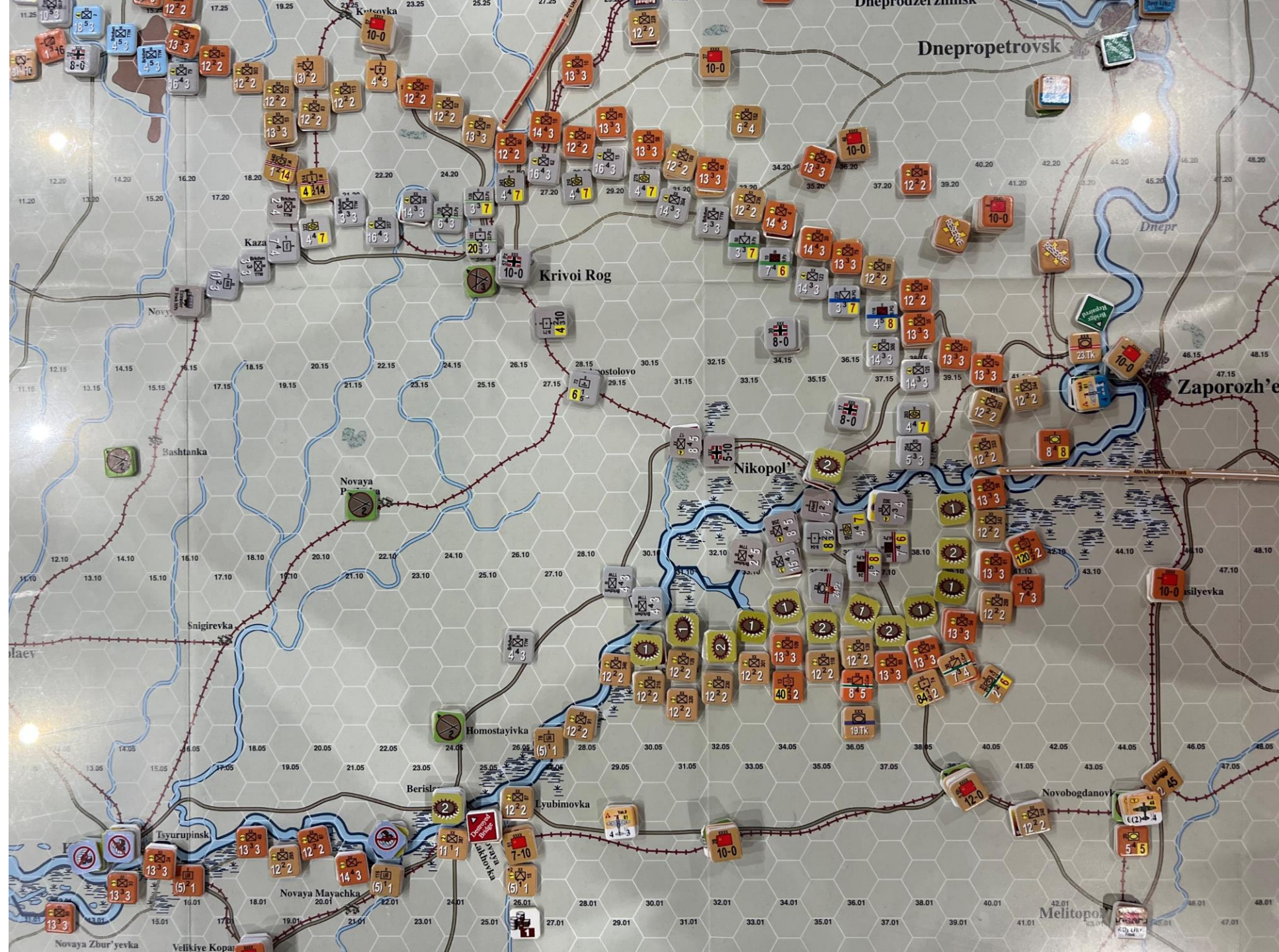
End 26 Jan 44 Axis 2nd Player, Uman. The Axis players go straight into crisis management. Near Uman, we sliced through the Soviet units and lined up on the rail line into the Korsun force (whose units started an immediate pull-back). “Sliced” is too refined a word, since our overruns here and near Kirovograd featured six straight defender surprise rolls during our overruns. “Hacked our way in over the bodies of our comrades” is more what it was. We aren’t complaining, but it was tough.





End 26 Jan 44 Axis 2nd Player, Kirovograd. The “hacking” near Kirovograd cut off all the Soviet units who had boldly driven into the Axis rear area. You can see our extender at D16.17 (yellow circle). The Soviet 4-4-16 Guards tank brigade in C62.25 hunkered down and proved impossible to touch despite the best efforts of Rudel’s tank busters, air barrage, and two overruns.

End 26 Jan 44 Axis 2nd Player, Dnepr Bend. We started our withdrawal from the Dnepr Bend—but carefully. We thought we might hang on for the 1 VP Nikopol Bridgehead 1 VP (requires a bridgehead of 10 hexes be present at the end of 1 Feb 1944). Next time we will do a full-on pedal-to-the-metal flight to the west. Using the Extender as a rail connection would have let us evacuate more quickly.





End 29 Jan 44 Axis 2nd player, Vinnitsa-Shepetovka. (I forgot to take photos after the Soviet turn, sorry about that!) The Soviet players proved to be masters of running their units to squat like trolls on Axis rail lines. They flew in supply air drops, re-opened their “drilled” holes and ran trucks through to deliver SP to their far-flung units, which flung themselves even farther. This was a time for our KG markers to make a big difference, but we managed to roll a “1,” activating exactly none of them. Great. You can see the area north of the main battle where not much is happening at Shepetovka (don’t worry, it won’t get left out). The Soviets drilled a hole near Berdichev and drove more of their trolls through to the double-track rail lines west of Vinnitsa.

End 29 Jan 44 Axis 2nd player, Uman. Here is a close-up view of the Uman area looking from the north, after the Axis second player turn. The Soviet player had generated another hole, squirted 3rd Tank Corps and 5th Mech through in "Troll Mode" and surrounded Uman. Once again, my focus was to reopen the rail line to the Korsun force, cut off the Soviet penetration and DG the main Soviet mobile formations. You can see the DGs, and I was quite pleased I hit nearly all of them. THAT would slow down his drill press, I was sure. I was wrong.





End 29 Jan 44 Axis 2nd player, Dnepr Bend-Kirovograd. More disaster management! The Soviets continued their drilling approach, restoring Trace/rushing SP to their trolls. There were more of exploiters, and they zeroed in on our extender. During our turn we again restored trace to our units (using all our Trucks to connect two daisy-chained Extenders), and re-cut-off his units in both cauldron battles. The 4th Ukrainian Front is stymied by the Dnepr River and needs to evict the Axis units in order to begin Bridge Repair.

End 29 Jan 44 Axis 2nd player, Kirovograd Kessel. This is a close-up view of the Kirovograd area looking from the north, after the Axis second player turn. You can see the Axis line formed with what SP we had left to once again cut off their trolls. The Soviets had major success dropping thickets of Interdiction/Trainbusting markers to slow Axis activity (they never missed their rolls, not that I am complaining). AND, the Soviets had rolled the “Front Commander Killed” random event, forcing 2nd Ukr to go into “Regrouping” Posture this turn—they moved their units, they drove SP, they did Trainbusting, and they attacked only once (successfully). Attacking Regrouping Posture units is difficult, but we were successful.



1 Feb 44 Thaw Simulcast Turn – this seems like a “nothing happens” turn, BUT all those Soviet units that were DG recovered, and all their advanced units flipped to Combat Mode. ALSO, their Out-of-Supply units don’t have to roll for Attrition. Normally the Axis loves Thaw turns (it takes away a turn of Soviet attacks in Frozen, when the Minor rivers have minimal effects), but this one was ill-timed.

Thaw: Simulcast Turn. (OCS 2.4.) In addition:

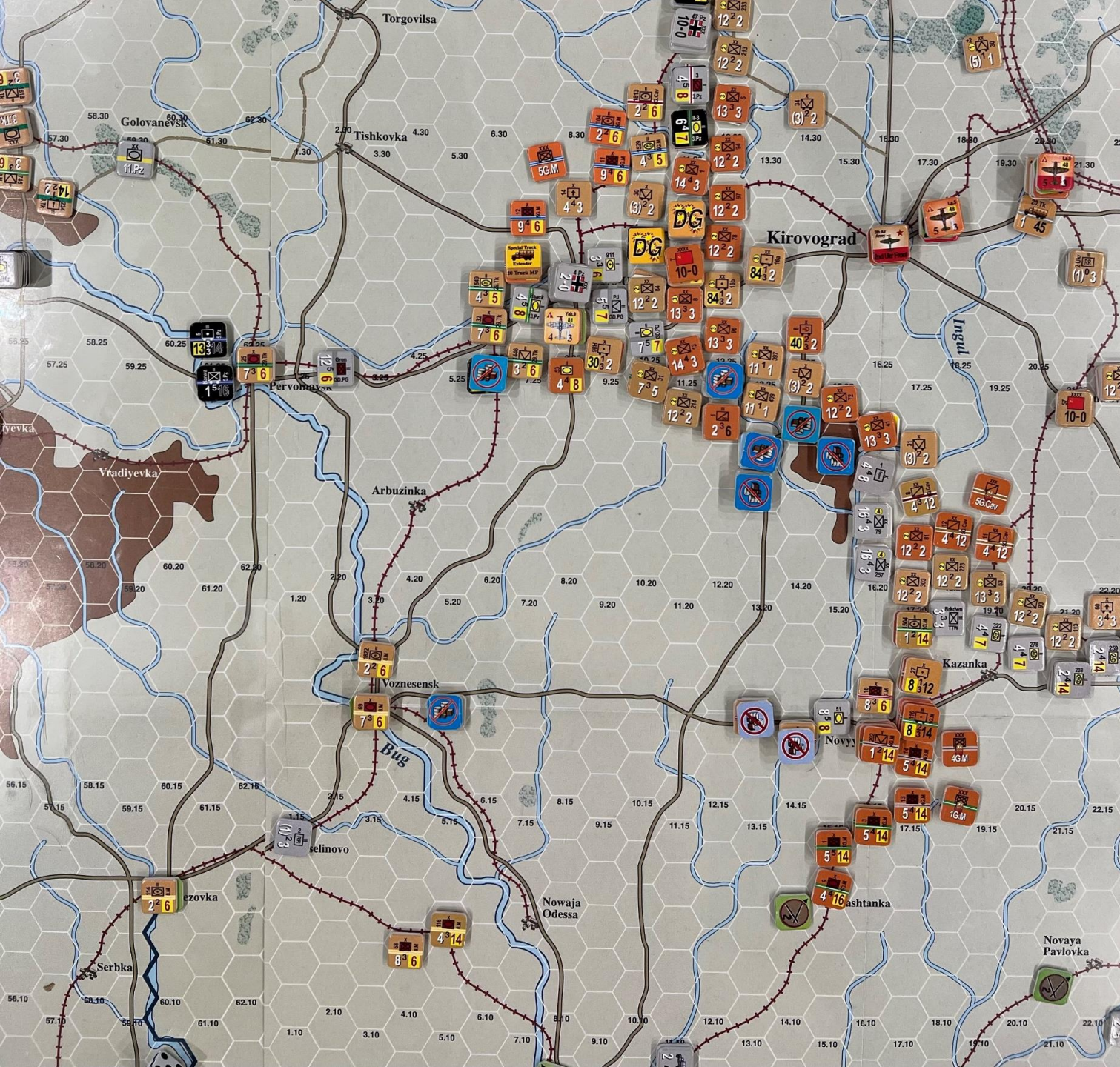
- Reduce the MA of aircraft and ground units to zero. (Ground units can only move by rail.)
- Ground units can change mode.
- Check for trace supply. Mark OOS units as usual, but **do not** make attrition die rolls.
- Stacking limits are suspended in entry hexes. Do not apply Barrage table density to these hexes.
- Construction and repair activities are not allowed.
- Airbases refit aircraft at $\frac{1}{2}$ the normal rate.

Since not much is happening, here is a photo of Paolo’s sweet home-made Case Blue dice-tower.



Feb 5 44 Soviet 1st player, Uman. The Soviets got very creative with the Soviet Special Truck Extenders (note the one in an advanced position next to Uman at C59.35), they dispatched trucks yet again to carry SP to trolls deep in the Axis rear, and air drops meant they could restore Trace to nearly all their advance units. Uman was fully invested, they made another penetration to cut off the Korsun units, and the Soviets backed off their reserve stacks to try and prevent my DGs. This time they occupied about 5 rail hexes, to make themselves more difficult to clear away.



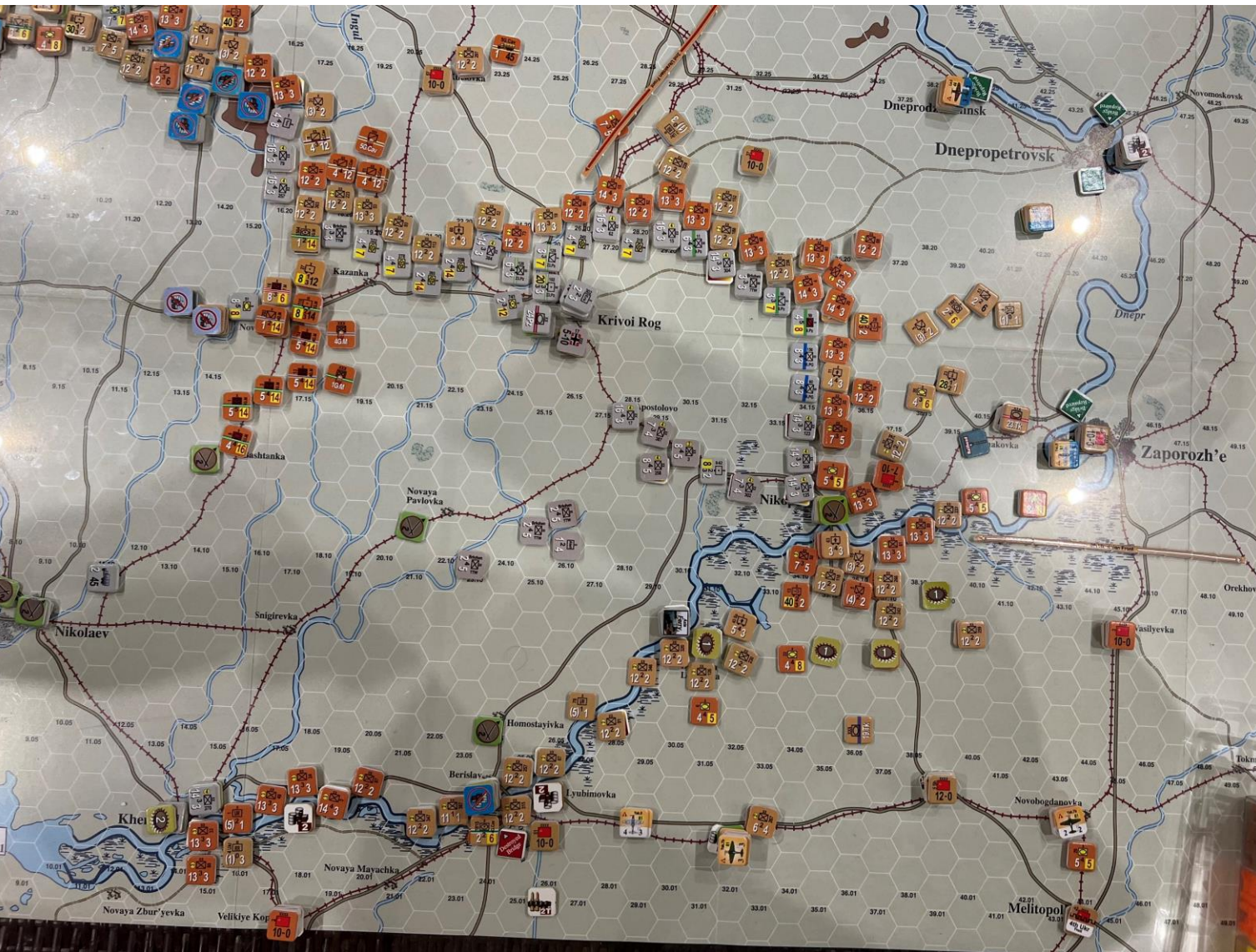


Feb 5 44 Soviet 1st player, Kirovograd. Attacks by the Soviet player destroy our Extender at D16.17 (capturing several trucks). This is part of a major new incursion heading towards Nikolaev. It also cut off the ability of the Axis to form a new Truck Extender (you can't undo/redo an Extender on the same turn, and our forward set of trucks no longer had the 5 necessary to create one).

This was the fourth turn of the Invasion of the Trolls, and the Axis is nearing the end of its ability to keep units in Trace.

Feb 5 44 Soviet 1st player, Troll Invasion. You can see the full range of Trolls wandering around our backfield in this image.





Feb 5 44 Soviet 1st player, Dnepr Bend. Behold the huge set of units now trapped in the Dnepr Bend. At this point, we Axis players didn't see how we could recover our units on Map D (Kherson-Nikopol-Krivoi Rog). We couldn't create any Extenders. We didn't have the SP to eat off the map. We were looking at either massive attrition rolls or giving up and resetting. We decided to challenge ourselves to see just what we could pull out of the situation. This meant we needed to concede a large portion of the map and try to reconstitute enough of our Army along the Odessa-Dnestr-Tarnopol line to hold off a Soviet victory.

Don't forget, should the Soviets capture of Uman, Vinnitsa and Kiev, they are still losing the game. They need more one more VP just to obtain a draw, and they need 12 for a win. This means taking Odessa, Tarnopol, AND getting units to the edge of the board (near Lvov in the northwest or in Rumania in the southwest). They can potentially cause a Rumanian surrender or destroy Axis Army/Army Group HQ for more VP. Our situation is grim, but the Soviets still face a difficult challenge.



Breakout returns



Dead Pile after Breakout

Feb 5 44 Axis 2nd player. We had experienced our moment of astonished demoralization and resolved not to “throw in the towel” and quit. Let’s see what we can pull out of the situation. So, we rolled for breakout. Something like 60 dead steps later, we have 60 more lined up for return. They come back at any HQ, so we need to position those HQ’s where they can materialize our planned line.

We also lost an Army HQ trapped near Kirovograd, for which the Soviets gain 1 VP.

Feb 5 44 Axis 2nd player, Tarnopol area. This is the Tarnopol (yellow circle) area, with all that Open Terrain east of the city. The Axis line disengaged from the Soviets and started to shift to the north. We railed a Panzer division to Kremets (A18.29) and began to rail in other units. The black blocks represent planned HQ locations.

I really wanted to kill the Trolls in the lower center of the picture, but after moving a group of Panzer divisions off the line, I just didn't have enough SP.





Feb 5 44 Axis 2nd player, Center. We needed to get our forces in the center and south back to the Dneestr before the Soviets could catch up. That meant blockers, and more HQ that would need to get west of the river (there aren't many detrainable hexes west of the Dneestr, so we would need to move the HQs first, then flip them).

The Dneestr isn't impregnable, and we couldn't man the entire line, but the Hills/Rough Terrain behind it would limit the Soviet ability to drive past our units.

The Korsun Pocket looks pretty empty!

**Feb 5 44 Axis 2nd player,
Dnepr Bend.** We put a
garrison in Nikolaev with SP,
then headed west.

Seems odd to have so many
units vanish and then pop up a
map sheet to the west, but
the historical withdrawal
happened quite quickly as
well. The historical accounts
describe units making their
way to the reformed lines
even if divisions were just
regiment or battalion-sized
remnants.





Feb 8 44 Soviet 2nd player, Tarnopol. (I didn't get photos of the Feb 8 44 Axis turn.) Remember that gap in front of Tarnopol (red circle) with no Soviet incursion? Here they come, hungry for the 2 VP prize! The 1st Ukrainian Front is still on Offensive Posture and moves forward aggressively in Move Mode. Part of the reason for getting Panzer divisions and HQ to the area was to prepare for exactly this problem. Those advanced units seem extended to the very edge of their Trace supply.

Feb 8 44 Soviet 2nd player, Center. The Axis has backed up to the Hill terrain, and now needs to slide the Panzers north and south and get the infantry into the Dnestr River crossings. The Soviet columns are a mass of Strat Move markers (we actually ran out—that is what the little yellow circles represent).





Feb 8 44 Soviet 2nd player, Odessa. Odessa is the red circle at lower left. It sits behind several estuaries and can only be taken by getting into the Open terrain west of the city, where it says "USSR." Those long lines of Soviet soldiers are looking to take this 2 VP city and jump the Dnestr River (just off-map to the west). It will still take a few turns for the Soviets to close up with the Axis, by which time many of the Breakout returns will be in place.

Feb 12 44 Axis 1st player, Tarnopol. Welcome to Tarnopol! The Axis Panzer divisions zip south and cut off the Soviet advance force. Since we know the slick Soviet sneakiness of slipping through small holes in the line, we make sure there isn't anything he can wriggle his Trolls through . . . or so we thought. I marked the one teensy place available (red circle), and so did my opponent, who noted it didn't have a ZOC on the hex.





Feb 12 44 Axis 1st player, center. The Axis forces have retreated clear out of the photo. But all those strat movers look like they have a destination in mind.

The image shows a tactical board game map of Eastern Ukraine. The map is a hexagonal grid with a coordinate system. Key locations labeled include Kirovograd, Kuzovka, Krivoi Rog, Nikopol, and Kherson. Rivers like the Dniepr and Bug are depicted. The map is populated with many small, numbered tokens, likely representing military units. A red circle highlights a specific unit near the city of Nikopol. The tokens are in various colors (orange, blue, green, red) and some have icons (like tanks or soldiers). The map also shows a scale bar and a small table in the bottom left corner.

0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4

0	1	2	3	4
Port Cap: 3	2	2	1	

Feb 15 44 Simulcast Turn, Tarnopol. (I didn't get photos of the Soviet move, but you can see the results because Feb 15 was a Thaw/Simulcast turn). Remember that teensy hole marked by a red circle? The tricky Trucks provided by Lend Lease slipped through with just enough MA to reach the units I had surrounded (the adjacent unit was in Move Mode at the time). Now they are supplied, in Combat Mode, and looking particularly troll-ish.





Feb 15 44 Simulcast Turn, Tarnopol. Here is another view of the Tarnopol area. The 1st Ukrainian Front has gone into Regrouping Posture, so its units are difficult to attack. Except for the ones cut off! By the way, the full-strength 1st SS Panzer is lurking underneath the 3-3-3 Breakdown by the red bead (hex A18.29). There is also an HQ providing Trace and another Panzer Division staying out of sight.

Feb 15 44 Simulcast Turn, Center. The mass of the 2nd Ukrainian Front has arrived near the Dnestr River (at this point, First Ukrainian extended across the entirety of Map A). They are in Regrouping Posture as well, but the Front commander has his Masters of Sneakiness Certificate in good order.





Feb 15 44 Simulcast Turn, Odessa. Third and Fourth Ukrainian are on the move as well. Fourth will probably be turning on so they can assault Nikolaev.



Feb 18 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Tarnopol. We won the initiative roll and forced the Soviets to go first this turn (ALWAYS retain the second move in a turn unless you see some major opportunity).

They rewarded our generosity in the 1st Ukrainian sector by slipping more units into that one-hex hole I have been regretting for several turns. They then drove a truck down to fuel their forces, which fled north behind Proskurov (red circle). It looks like an escape, but those are dangerous units now that they are back with their friends. The little white X marker indicates the most forward unit that can receive the Regrouping Front defensive benefits.

Feb 18 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Center. Inspired by their neighboring Front, 2nd Ukrainian slipped through the Axis lines and stuck a tentacle towards bridges over the Dnestr River. (They are still in Regrouping Posture, mind, and have proven this a very effective tactic.) They managed to attack and obtain a small bridgehead at the extreme limit of their advance.





Feb 18 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, 3rd Ukrainian. Don't mind this little, tiny Front, quietly belling up to the Axis forces! I'm sure there isn't anything to be worried about.

Feb 18 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Nikolaev. This city is a key rail line junction on a Major River. The Soviets need it to move the 4th Ukrainian forward. They put the Front into Offensive Posture this turn, but their first attack attempt ended with an inglorious AL2.

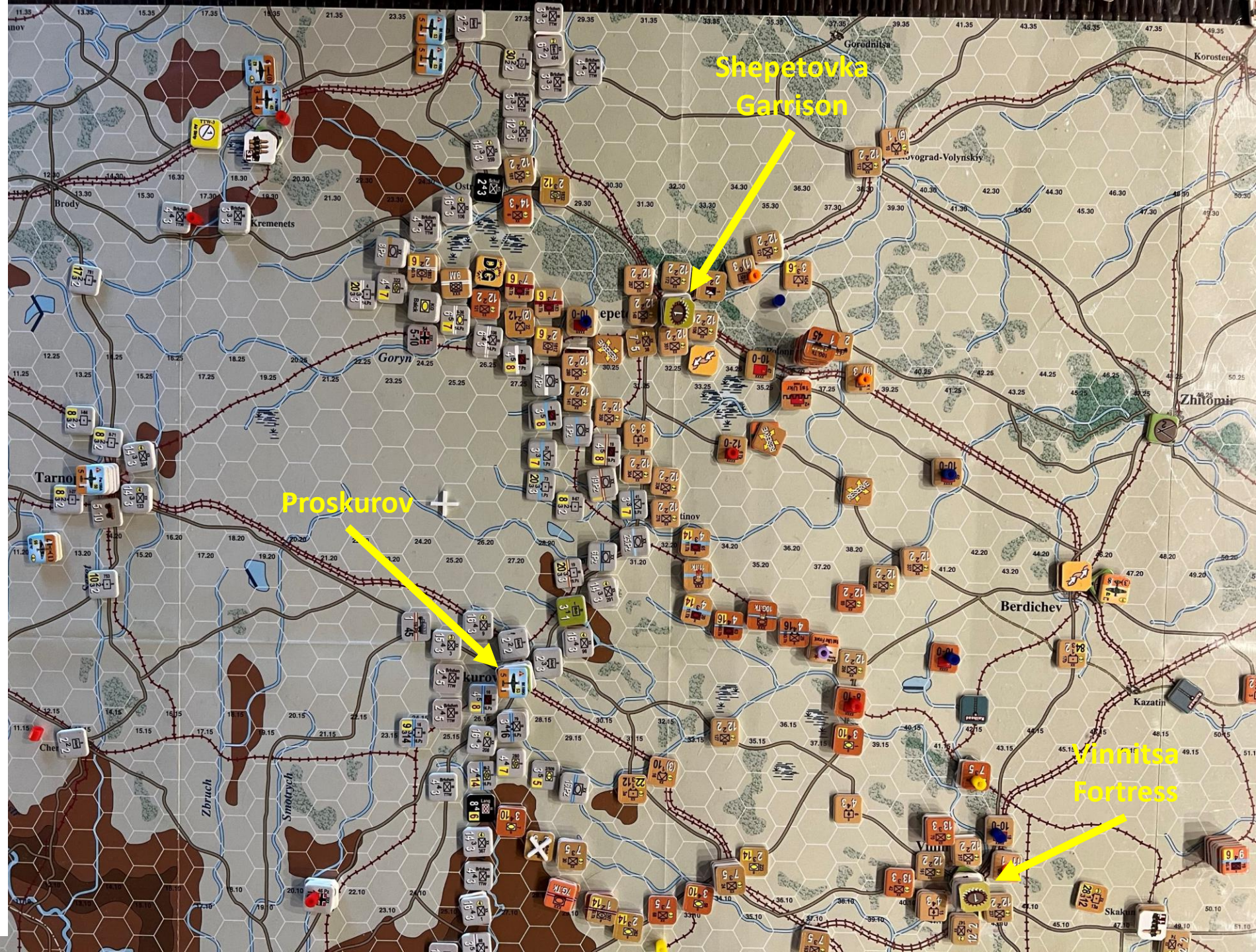
Nikolaev is a fortress with multiple steps in a two-hex minor city, a good stash of SP, hedgehogs, and a 5-AR “brain” unit. These fortresses require multiple sequenced attacks to overcome. And some die-roll magic.

(If you are a Soviet player, you will get familiar with the AL2 result, especially when assaulting cities!)



Feb 18 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Tarnopol. The 1st Ukrainian Front is in Regrouping Posture, but I still decided to try some spoiling attacks anyway. The incursion behind Proskurov was surrounded by Overruns and eliminated in combat (nearly two full Tank Corps). The white X marks the furthest unit which has Regrouping Front benefits.

Not so effective was my attack on the DG unit to the north. My idea was to cut off supply/Regrouping Front benefits to the units forward of it (there is an impassible lake which complicates supply) and crush them. But the defensive barrages and AR benefits gave me a nasty AL101 result. Unlike the Soviets, the Axis don't have throwaway steps!





Feb 18 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Center. Not much going on here. Yet. The Axis is garrisoning the Dnestr River crossings and the Soviets are making their approach march. This is a No Flight turn, so we are not able to fly any SP to our garrisons in Vinnitsa and Shepetovka, who are starting to get hungry.

Feb 18 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, South. The extended tentacle of 2nd Ukrainian Front is beyond its Regrouping Front benefit range. So, the Axis player slices into it, cutting off the bridgehead.

Grossdeutschland and 3rd SS Panzer lead the attack. We have no empty hexes for Soviet tentacles to slip through again without a fight.





Feb 22 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Tarnopol. The Soviets win the initiative roll but elect to go first to restore the situation 2nd Ukrainian Front is facing. In the north, the Regrouping 1st Ukrainian conducts one attack against Vinnitsa, suffering an AL2, but this burns more of the garrison's supply. The Soviets are moving forward but I do not yet know where their main effort will come. The green markers on some units show the location of Reserve Markers (I suspect this, as I don't know for certain). The orange ones are Rail Conversion units, dark blue mark HQ units and the purple one is the Air Army Marker.

Feb 22 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Center. The 2nd Ukrainian Front switches to Offensive Posture. There sure are a lot of them, aren't there! They abandon their original bridgehead and seize several hexes just south of Rybnitsa (C41.22 to 24), where there is a rail crossing. The Rumanian defenders were overwhelmed. Another mob crowds up against the next road crossing to the north. This looks like it will get dicey.

We had some difficulty with a straight Front boundary marker in such a crowded area, and our we will show you our solution in the coming pages.

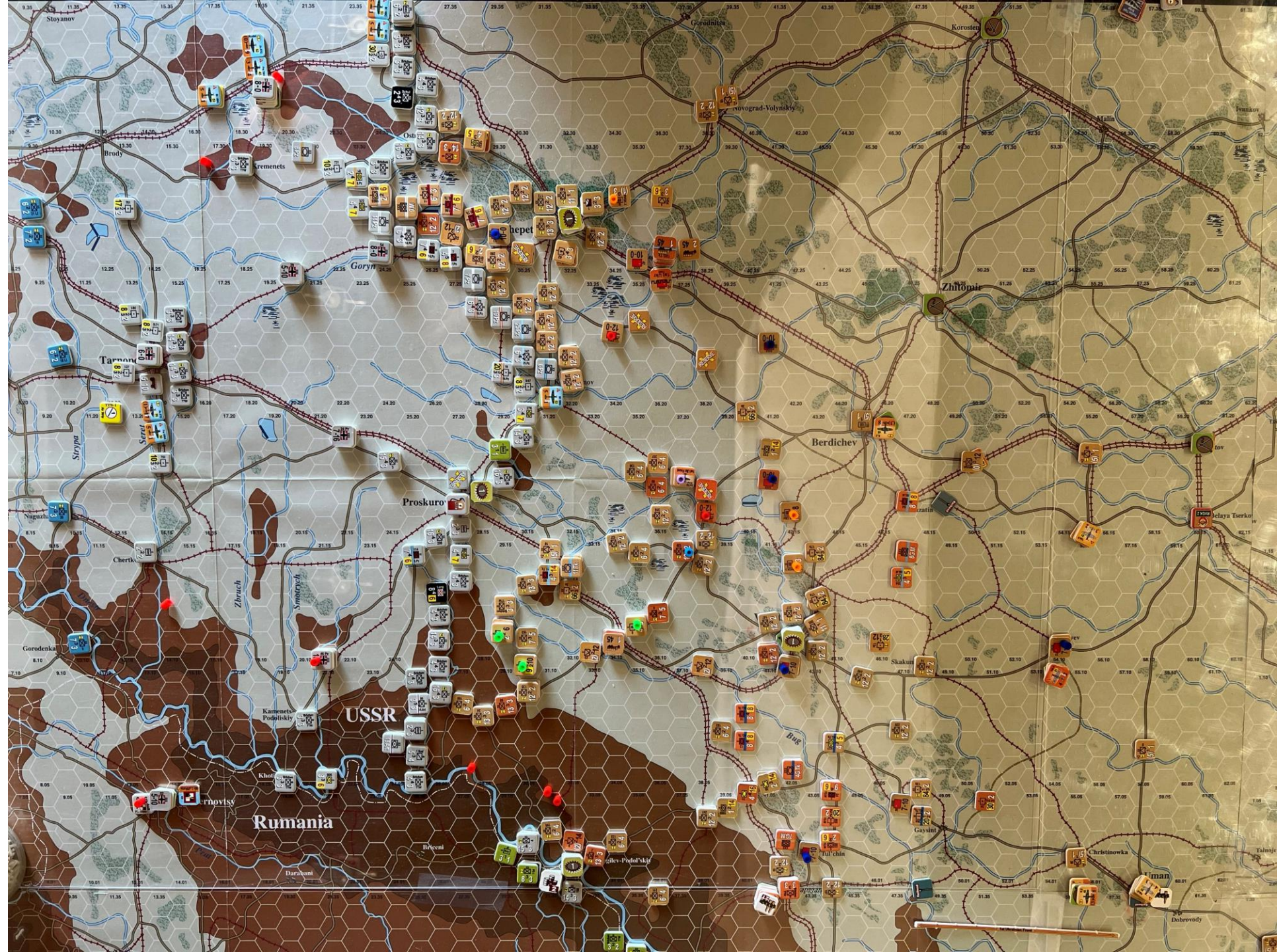




Feb 22 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Nikolaev. Once again, the Soviets throw themselves at Nikolaev, and once more they reel back in defeat. They have suffered four straight AL2 results attacking this city (did I mention how difficult they are to attack?)

Feb 22 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Tarnopol. Little to see here . . . Or so it seems. Things are happening. The Axis player (me) has pulled back three Panzer divisions in reserve locations and straightened the line a bit. This was a “No Flight” turn, which meant we could not drop SP to the beleaguered Vinnitsa garrison (only 1T remains, shhh). I am watching my opponent carefully to see where his attack may fall. It won’t come yet, as two other Fronts are still on Offense.

The turn after next is March with its muddy weather that slows Soviet advances, and it can’t arrive too soon for us!





Feb 22 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Center. The Axis braces for an expected hard punch from the 2nd Ukrainian Front. One challenging aspect of the Hills/Rough terrain is that moving around it is tricky (few detrainable hexes and slower movement). And when Mud comes, the Hills are the fastest terrain on the map (evidently, they have better drainage). The Rumanian units are probably prime targets, but we can't get much bulk into their hexes yet.

Feb 22 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Nikolaev. Just a garrison defending Nikolaev, folks. Nothing else to see.

One thing we found interesting was that the Soviets didn't build many airfields to provide Patrol Zones over their advanced units. They appeared to spend the vast majority on movement and attacks, running themselves very low in the Offensive Posture Fronts. In the case of Nikolaev, we were able to fly in plenty of SP before they wised up.





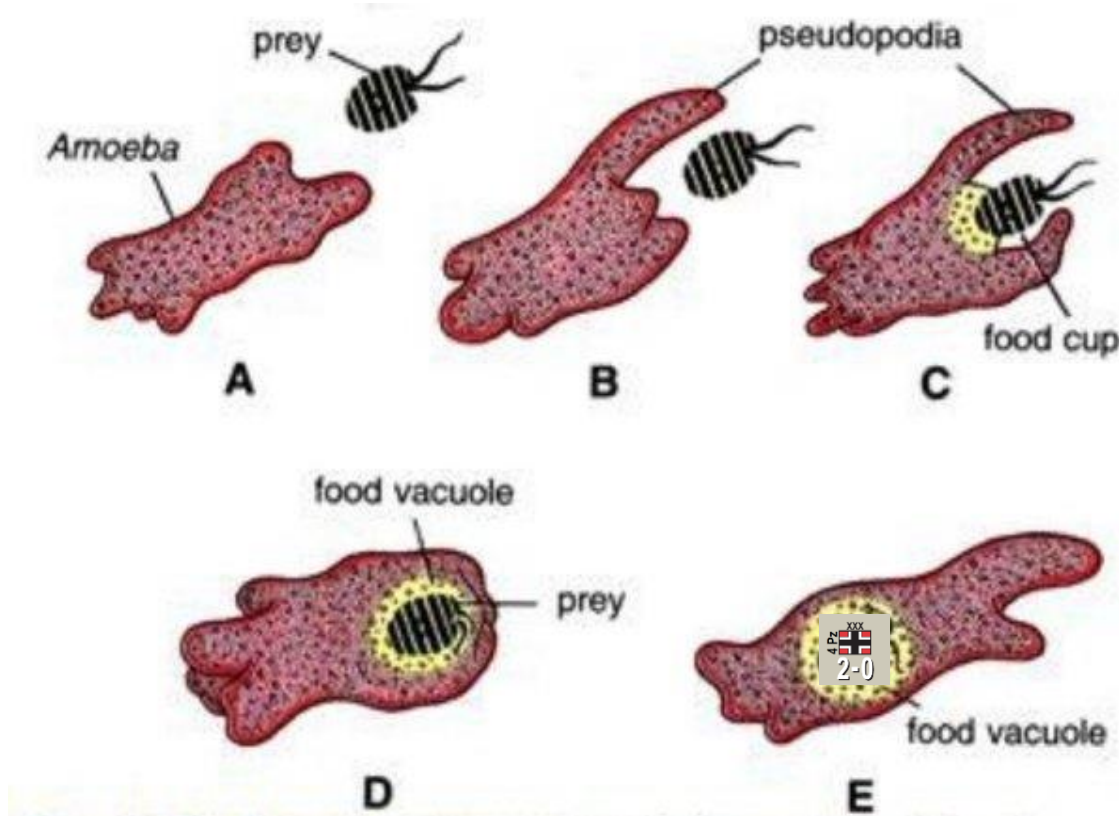
Feb 26 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Tarnopol. The northern area is still quiet while the 1st Ukrainian is on Regrouping Posture. As the Axis, I have been studying the situation to anticipate where he plans to attack. I see the Soviets getting uncomfortably close near the Dnestr (where the map says “USSR”), and I think that is where he may strike. Those markers with the soothing green color hide his Reserve Markers, I believe. We shall see.

Feb 26 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Center. Kaboom! The 2nd Ukrainian blasts through a weak Rumanian stack and down the road to Iasi (while not a VP location in itself, its capture will force Rumanian surrender rolls and likely removal of all those green units from the game). Meanwhile, it looks like another potential attack is brewing to the north, near those Pontoon Bridge Track markers.

We have gotten so accustomed to seeing these tentacles reach out, we decided the Soviet blob is akin an amoeba.



Pseudopodia. As it happens, an amoeba reaches out “pseudopodia” to encircle and devour its prey. “Tentacles” sounds better, but we like the amoeba metaphor. The surrounded prey is encompassed by a “food vacuole” and digested. Sounds like it needs a Kessel HQ!



Marker Use. We had been using little X markers (tile spacers you can buy at a hardware store) to indicate units which have moved. In this congested space we also started using the colored beads to indicate which hexes were inside the Front Boundaries. We put a Front-colored marker on the furthest forward Axis unit, then worked our way east, showing the clear path of hexes that belong to a given Front. As long as it is straight-ish, or follows some natural terrain feature like a river, that seems to work well for us.



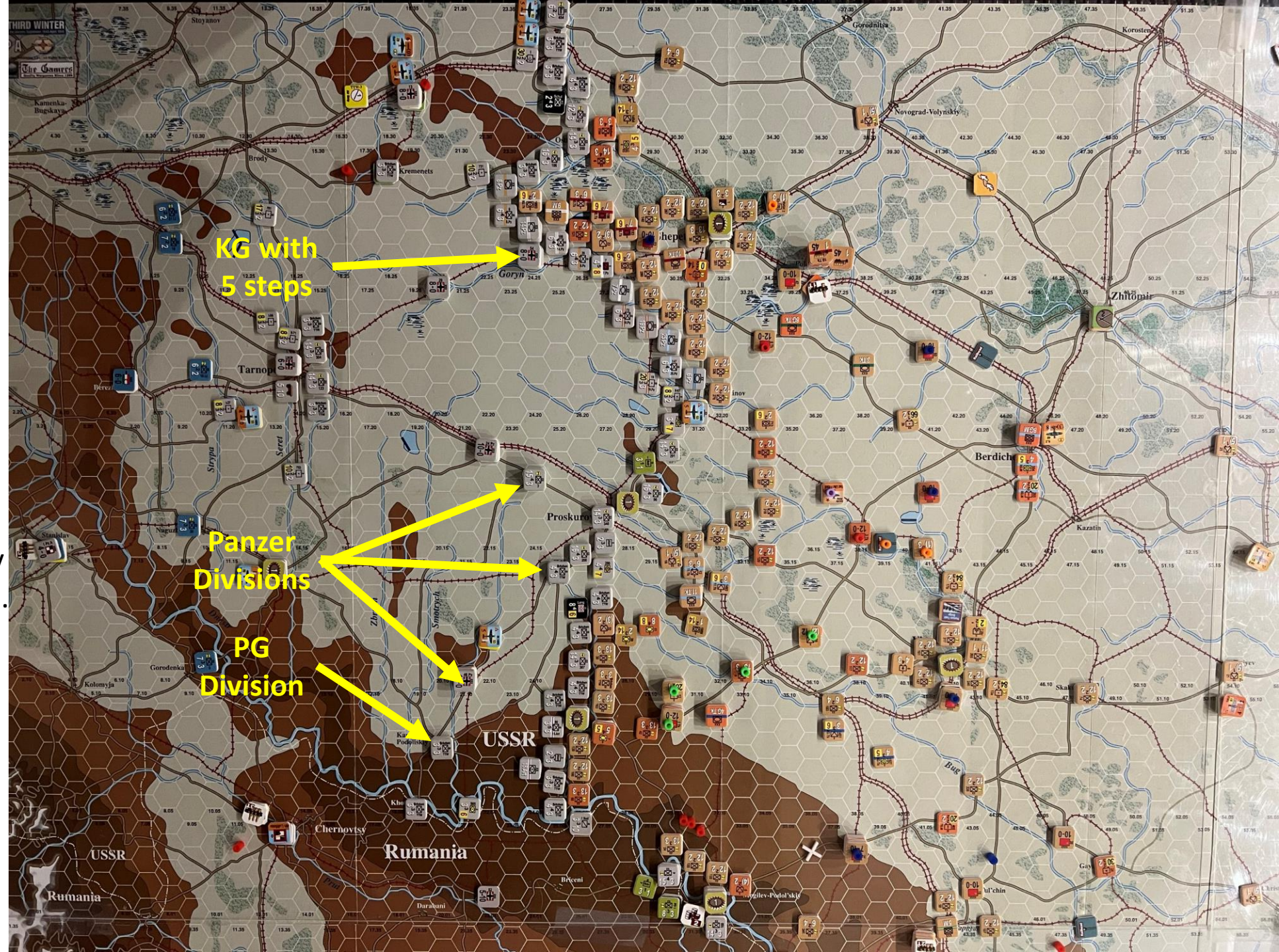
Feb 26 44 Soviet 1st Player Turn, South. 4th Ukrainian racked up more AL2 assaulting Nikolaev, but had greater success with an attack across the river at hex C58.13.

This presents a question for the Soviets—they would like to get 1st Ukrainian going again, but that requires Regrouping for either 2nd or 4th Ukrainian. What will they choose to do?

Feb 26 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Tarnopol. Since I think the Soviet player intends to attack near the Dnestr River ("USSR" printed on the map), I slide my Panzer reserves over to be ready. There are full-strength Panzer divisions hiding as marked. But no doubt my opponent has his Maskirovka going on as well.

We are thin on the ground, for certain. I have 2 SP with every reserve panzer division, so they can fuel and combat as needed. We shall see if it is enough.

One "rule" I have learned—when I see stacks of units next to major rivers (such as the 13-3-3 adjacent to the Dnestr) the chances a Pontoon is hiding beneath are high.





Feb 26 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Center. The Axis southern commander made desperate counterattacks to halt the enemy breakthrough. Many of their forward units were DG, and reserves have rushed to the area (the last returning batch of Breakout units could appear at any Corps HQ and get right into the fight).

They expected us to attack from Rybintsa (near the Pontoon Track Bridges), but instead 3rd SS Panzer and Grossdeutschland attacked from the south and pushed them off the road. The forward elements of the Soviet tentacle have been cut off.

Feb 26 44 Axis 2nd Player Turn, South. We are gambling that the Soviets will want to turn on 1st Ukrainian next, so they will place the 4th on Regrouping next turn. They could try to punch through and get behind us or turn towards Odessa, but their logistics may not allow their Front HQ marker to advance as far as it needs to.





Mar 1 Soviet 1st Player Turn, South.

The Axis won the initiative roll and elected to go second. The Mud makes significant advances more problematic.

As suspected, interviews with prisoners reveal that the 4th Ukrainian's bridgehead (C58.13) had Trace Supply, but required all its Combat Supply to be trucked/railed in. They shifted the Front boundary so that 3rd Ukrainian is covering this area now, but this Front is still in Regrouping posture.

4th Ukrainian goes Regrouping as well. They still have to advance their Front HQ through Nikolaev, so tried another attack even with awful odds. And suffered yet another AL2.

Not much movement happens here for a while, will only show photos when there is action.



Mar 1 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Tarnopol. A waiting and preparing turn. Aerial photography reveals the positions of seven Soviet Tank Corps and one Cavalry Corps. Difficult to tell from this where he intends to attack, but I am recalling that my opponent particularly focuses on single-step units.

With March 1944 comes Mud (and No Flight this turn). Movement slows to a crawl (the MP cost for Trucks in Open is 8). Only the roads and better drained Hill terrain is close to passable. March has a 66% chance of Mud each turn. April is the same, BUT during this month the game ends abruptly the moment of the third consecutive Mud Weather roll!

Mar 1 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Center. Soviet attacks generate another Dnestr bridgehead (the Assault Engineer Brigade at C42.26). This advance cuts the nearby Axis units from Trace supply—managing supply lines in this Hills/Rough terrain is very tricky, making campaigns in this area like a chess game. Reinforcements rush into the tentacle south of Rybintsa. All units to the west of the DG marker are forced to eat off the map. The DGd units are the Axis counterattack force from last turn.

What they have NOT done, thus far, is strike to the south towards Odessa, a 2 VP city.

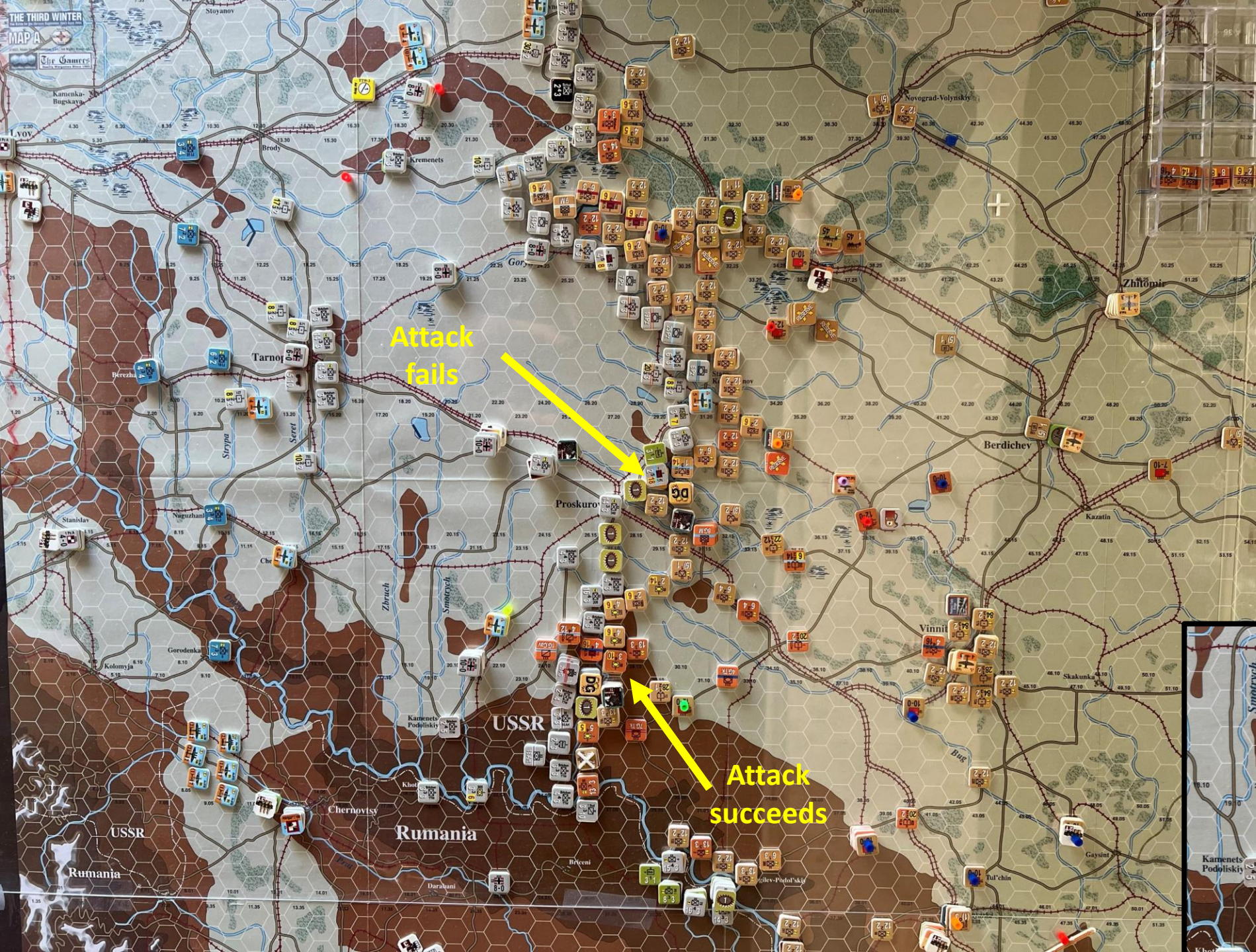




Mar 1 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Tarnopol. Not much to see here besides getting ready for anticipated Soviet offensive.

Mar 1 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Center. Main effort here was also to forestall Soviet attacks, making it particularly difficult for them to advance along the roads. However, the Axis are forced to withdraw from the Dnestr where they can no longer supply units on the river line.





Mar 5 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Tarnopol. Mud again, and the 1st Ukrainian Front switches to Offensive Posture. The Axis wins the initiative roll and forces them to go first. One attack is stuffed by an AR5 reacting into the hex and a fortunate air barrage that DGs an attacking stack and kills the AR4 “brain” unit. The second succeeds but the Mud limits the amount of tentacle the Soviets can project.

Detail:



Mar 5 Soviet 1st Player Turn, Center. The Soviet player thanks the Axis kindly and moves into the hexes just vacated. Their advanced units near where “Rumania” is printed on the map cannot be supplied and several succumb to attrition rolls.

This part of the map, west of the Dnestr and east of the Prut Rivers, is what was called Bessarabia at the time. The region is now the country of Moldova.





Mar 5 Soviet 1st Player Turn, South. The situation at Nikolaev is getting grim for the Axis. While they fend off another attack, it consumes most of the remaining supply. The Soviets at last redeploy fighters which can prevent the supply drops that were sustaining the forces. The rest of the area is quiet, other than the entrenching sounds at Odessa.

Mar 5 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Tarnopol. Mud makes movement difficult, particularly in the Open Terrain. Fortunately, the Soviet incursion takes place right in front of the 1st SS Panzer Division, which overruns two hexes and then attacks a third to restore the line (despite two Defensive Surprise rolls, thank you very much!)

What I have not appreciated, yet, is how the Open terrain in the middle of this area has changed from an area of tank-friendly rapid movement to one of Reserve unfriendly slow-movement.





Mar 5 Axis 2nd Player Turn, Center. The Mud remakes the terrain in this Hills/Rough region into a completely different map. Roads are where units can maneuver best, and while the Rough becomes a mess the Hills are relatively easy to move through. The Axis packs the roads and front lines and pushes the Soviets back across the Minor River (now back to its "normal" condition) at C37.22.

We try, unsuccessfully, to seize hex C39.22 where the Assault Engineer unit is, which would have cut off the forward units.



Mar 8 Axis 1st Player, Tarnopol. Mud and Limited Flight. The Soviets won the initiative roll and it took about 10 seconds deciding to make the Axis go first. Well, we know the storm is going to break here soon. I reassemble the Reserve panzer forces and pull back to shorten the line a bit. The Hungarian units spread out to cover every possible route to the VP hexes at the map edge (they cannot advance further east).

Mar 8 Axis 1st Player, Center.

This is also a get-ready turn in the center. We try to make the key roads several units deep to forestall the Soviet tentacle tactics.

Since this is the third turn of non-Freeze, the Dnepr will unfreeze next turn. The armies have moved past it, but the Kherson Rail Ferry opens up and Pontoons can make Ferries again.

The Nikopol garrison in the 4th Ukrainian area devoured its last SP last turn but survives its attrition rolls.

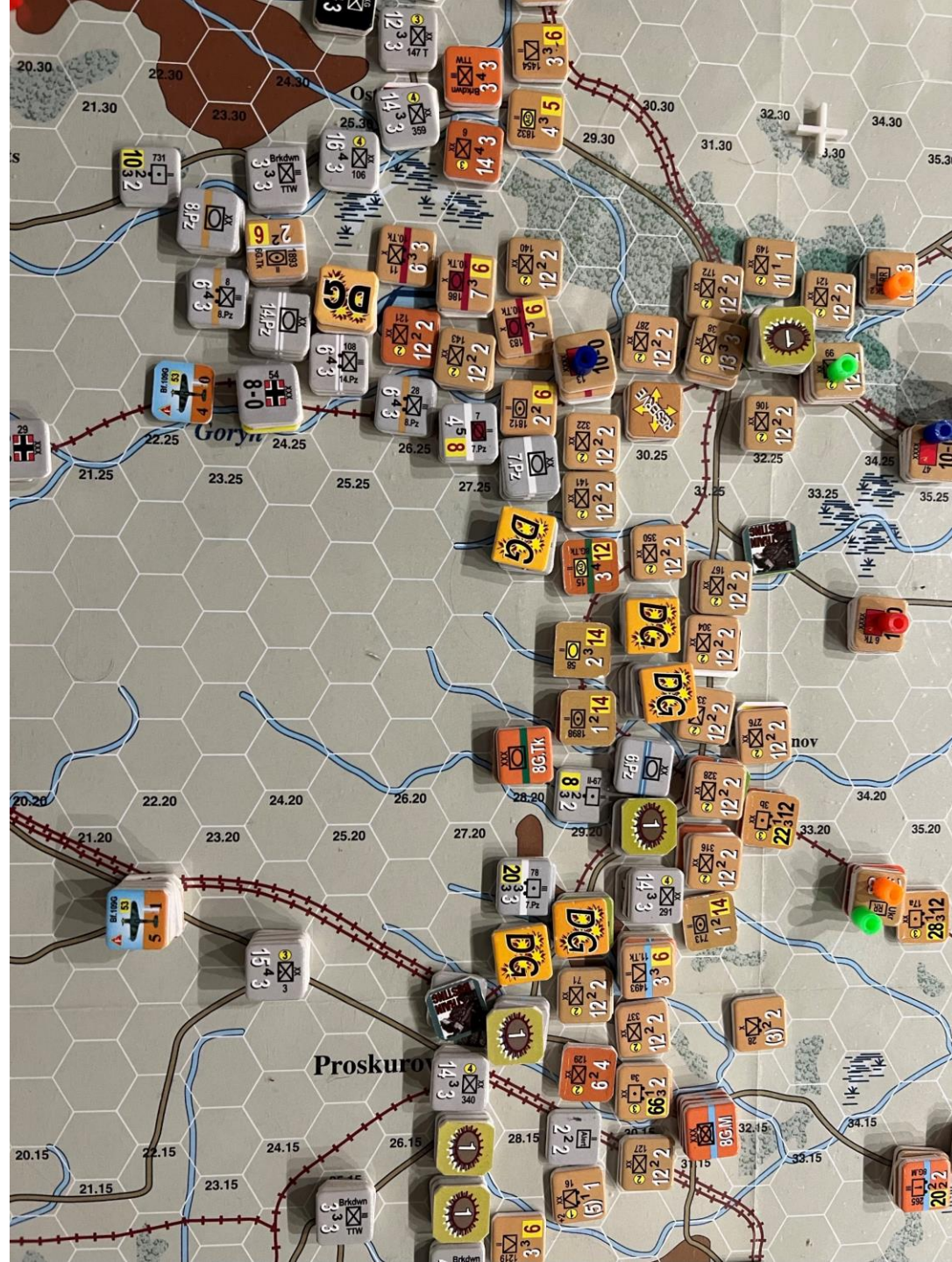


Mar 8 Soviet 2nd Player Turn, Tarnopol.

The Soviets focus their attacks on three areas in the Tarnopol region. The Mud makes their advance difficult, but they complete most of a double envelopment west of Shepetovka and a curious attack with no advance across the Dnestr at A26.05.

This doesn't look too dangerous, IF we can win the initiative roll next turn.





Mar 8 Soviet 2nd Player Turn, Tarnopol.

Closeup of the double-envelopment in process.

Mar 8 Soviet 2nd Player Turn, Center.

The Soviet tentacle monster strikes again. With an improbable 6-shift attacker surprise on a 1-2 attack against a 3-3-3 Breakdown unit at C36.23 (really, the guy seemed able to conjure ideal rolls whenever needed), they break through along a road line. The Axis player manages a 6-shift attacker surprise on a desperate 1-2 reserve unit overrun against the advanced units in return, but now we really, really need the initiative.



Mar 12 Soviet 2nd Player Turn, Tarnopol. More Mud and no flight. We need the initiative, and we don't get it. This was the last turn we had time to play but it was the turn needed by the Soviets to overwhelm the Axis forces, particularly in the center. At Tarnopol, the Soviets can't fully complete the double envelopment at Shepetovka—that situation could probably be restored by the panzer reserves. But the real disaster is happening at the Dnestr, where that curious attack revealed a Pontoon unit on the river, which allowed a force of trolls to jump across and sit on two roads. We might be able to cut them off, but this was in support of the 2nd Ukrainian's Mud Blitz.





Mar 12 Soviet 2nd Player Turn, Center. The Soviets unleash their Trolls again, supported by the Special Truck Extender and advanced HQ units. They race forward to key hexes and—supported by their 1st Ukrainian cousins, cut off the entire Axis center sector. We may be able to reconnect with a Truck Extender (those trucks in C18.29 are positioned for exactly that purpose) but extracting them will be a whole different story. We would need a back-to-back turn and some real good fortune to do so.



Mar 12 Soviet 2nd Player Turn, South. Pretty static here, with all focus to the north.

Odessa Port Cap & Damage

0	1	2	3	4
Port Cap: 10	8	6	4	2

Kherson Port Cap & Damage

0	1	2	3	4
Port Cap: 3	2	2	1	1

Finis, 8-16 October 2022

At this point, as we run out of time, the Axis players conceded that we would very likely be defeated—but it would take some time. The Soviets have roughly 10 more turns since we are just past the midpoint of the scenario. Currently, they have just enough VPs for a Draw (two each for Kiev, Uman and Vinnitsa plus one for the destroyed Army HQ). They need five more for a win, which can come from knocking Rumania out of the war (2 VP if they can capture Iasi or exit units in the southwest to force Rumanian surrender die rolls), or get 2 VP each for Tarnopol, Odessa, and reaching the northwest or southwest map edges. Enough of these are probably doable. Had we been able to extract more units from the Dnepr Bend, we think the Axis could have held the draw even with this situation.

A huge thank you to Tony Birkett for creating such an excellent game, and to Antonello and Paolo for hosting us in such a lovely space. The experience was excellent from start to finish, and we long for the opportunity to cross swords again.

