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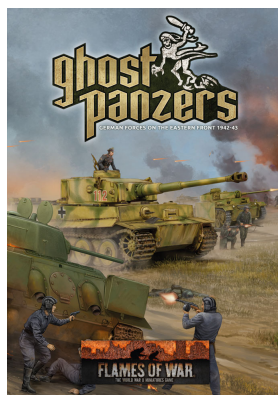
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Battle of the Ukraine November - December 1943

An Axis of Attack Campaign
By Craig Courtis

Ukraine, Autumn 1943.

"In July 1943 after a titanic battle the Soviets successfully defeated Operation Citadel, the Germans summer offensive. They then went on the attack and launched several major offensives designed to drive the Germans from the motherland.



The Germans retreated before the onslaught and eventually withdrew to the Dnieper River, the third largest river in Europe. Here they hoped to stop the Soviets once and for all. However, by late October the Soviets had managed to establish several bridgeheads across the river and the Germans were once again facing a crisis in the east.

In early November 1943 the Soviets launched a massive attack in the Ukraine and recaptured the city of Kiev. They drove a wedge between Army Group Centre and Army Group South and were threatening to encircle the latter army group. The situation was critical. Hitler ordered an immediate counterattack by the 1st SS Panzer as well as the 1st and 25th panzer divisions to try and restore the situation. Their mission to halt the Soviet attacks, destroy the forces before them, and restore the German line along the east bank of the Dnieper River..."

Notes: This campaign utilises the Axis of Attack campaign rules ([Campaigns & Terrain PDF](#)).

German Briefing

The Soviets have crossed the Dnieper, captured Kiev and are threatening to encircle Army Group South. Your orders are clear, destroy the Soviet forces arrayed before you, recapture the city of Kiev and drive the enemy back across the Dnieper River.

Soviet Briefing

General Vatutin himself has ordered you to brush aside the German troops standing before you and cut off Army Group South so that it can be destroyed. We are tantalisingly close to achieving a victory to rival Stalingrad! Do not fail comrade.



Situation Report

At the start of the campaign the Germans are trying to plug the gap in their lines and destroy the Soviet forces that are threatening to encircle Army Group South. The first battle of the campaign is fought over the town of Lisowka as the German counter-attack begins.



Soviet Forces (100 or 135 point Force)

The Soviets had armoured, motorised and infantry divisions and corps involved in the battle so any such force would be appropriate. (See *Enemy at the Gates* and *Red Banner*)

German Forces (100 or 135 point Force)

Panzer, Armoured or motorized panzer grenadier, panzer pioneer companies aufklarungsschwadrons (either standard or SS) would all be appropriate forces for this campaign. (see *Iron Cross* and *Ghost Panzers*)

Examples of German tank strengths at the start of the battle:

- 1st SS Leibstandarte: 95 Panthers, 96 Panzer IVs, 27 Tiger 1s.
- 1st Panzer Division: 95 Panzer IVs, 76 Panthers.
- 25th Panzer: 93 Panzer IVs and an attached heavy tank battalion (25 Tiger 1s).

Three weakened panzer divisions also supported the attack:

- Das Reich: 22 Panzer IVs, 6 Panzer IIIs and 10 Tigers.
- 7th & 19th Panzer Divisions: 40 tanks (unspecified types) between them. (Source: Ripley, 2004: 171)

Terrain

The terrain around Kiev was very different from the open steppes further to the east, with huge forests stretching across the countryside. Small Ukrainian towns sat nestled amongst the woods, on most of the road junctions and around a number of important bridges. Throughout November the temperatures remained around freezing but there were several sudden thaws turned most roads and fields into mud. By December the temperature had dropped, the ground had frozen and snow had settled. Winter had arrived in the east.



December

The ground has frozen solid and counts as cross country for all vehicles.

Time

Each battle assumes a week worth of fighting taking place over the 7 weeks (battles) of the campaign.

Maximum number of battles

Seven.

Weather table (roll before each battle)

November (Battles 1-3)	Air Support Availability	December (Battle 4-7)	Air Support Availability
1. Thaw	No air support	1. Overcast	No air support
2. Overcast	No air support	2. Overcast	No air support
3. Overcast	No air support	3. Overcast	No air support
4. Overcast	No air support	4. Overcast	No air support
5. Clear	Air support	5. Clear	Air support
6. Clear	Air support	6. Clear	Air support



Thaw

An unseasonal thaw has turned the Ukraine to mud.

A dice roll resulting in a 1, there has been a thaw and the terrain has turned to mud:

- All roads become cross-country terrain.
- All cross country terrain requires a Cross test. Streams become rivers, creeks become streams, and marshes become impassable.

Air Support

Players do not buy air support as part of their force. Instead air support is available depending on the weather. In battles where the weather means air support is available air support is automatically allocated to each side:

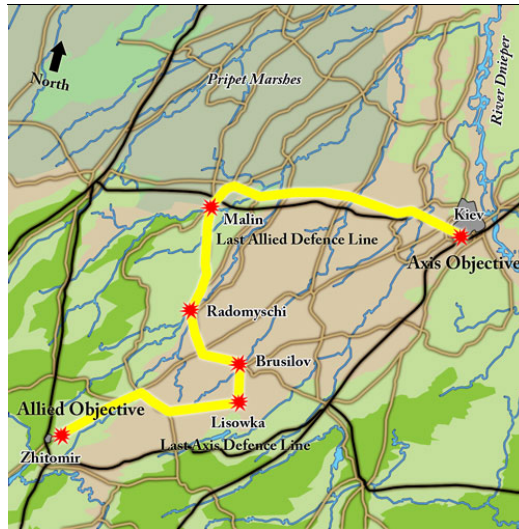
- Attacker: Aircraft arrive on a 4+
- Defender: Aircraft arrive on a 5+

Players may choose the type of planes that are available (from those available to their force).



Starting the Campaign

The campaign starts with the German drive on Lisowka (battle 2). Play a No Retreat mission with the Soviets defending. Unless otherwise noted use the mission selector to determine the battles.



The Battles

1. Zhitomir (Last Axis Defence line)

An important rail junction communications centre, Zhitomir is an important strategic objective for the Soviets. The Germans need to the town to secure their lines of supply.

Terrain: A large town (6-10 buildings) with a railway line running through it.

Victory: If the Soviets capture Zhitomir they have successfully fought off the German counter attacks and are able to renew their offensive. Ultimate victory is now a small step closer.

2. Lisowka (First Battle)

This small town is the initial objective of the southern pincer. The Germans have to clear Soviet forces from the town so that they can link up with the northern pincer at Brusilov.

Terrain: Plenty of woods, a small stream and the village (4-8 ruined buildings) in the centre of the board.

Mission Suggestions: No Retreat.

Total Air Superiority: For the first battle only the Germans require a 4+ for Aircraft arrival, while the Soviets must roll a 6 to get their aircraft support the defenders.

Weather: For the first game the weather is assumed to be clear.

Game 1 Soviet Victory

Should the Soviets win the first battle, they are given two choices:

1. They can continue to hold the village in which case replay the again mission.
2. Pull back. High Command has ordered the forces to retreat. Replay the mission but this time as a *Rearguard mission*.

3. Brusilov

The Germans sought to trap the Soviets around the town of Brusilov in a pincer movement but the Soviets launched many desperate counter-attacks to try and prevent this from happening. However, a number of Soviet forces were trapped in the envelopment and destroyed in the battle which lasted the best part of a week.

Terrain: Small town in the centre of the table, woods, fields and a stream or two.

Mission Suggestions: When the Germans first attack the town the capture the Soviet forces in a pincer movement. Use the Bridgehead mission to represent this.



4. Radomyshi

From Brusilov the Germans pivoted westward and attacked the town of Radomyshl on the river Teterew. A Kampfgruppe led by Jochim Pieper and consisting of the Liebestandarte's panzer regiment and reconnaissance battalion supported by Tiger tanks, punched a hole through a Soviet PaK front and surrounded the town and the remnants of the Soviet 60th Army.

For a week fierce fighting took place but in the end pressure to the northwest, where fresh Soviet armoured forces were gathering, forced the Germans to call off the attack on Radomyshi to deal with the developing threat.

Terrain: The town is in the centre of the board on the south side of the river which is impassable except at the bridge.

Mission Suggestions: Jochim Pieper managed to surround the town and besiege it for the best part of a week. Use the *Bridgehead* mission to represent the siege.

5. Malin

A town on the north bank of the River Irscha. The Germans sought to gain a foothold across the river at this point but, in reality, the attack was repulsed.

Terrain: Town on the north bank of the (impassable) river, plenty of forests. River may only be crossed at the two bridges across the Irscha. On the northern edge of the board is a railway line. Cutting the rail line will disrupt Soviet supply lines and earn 2 additional victory points for the Germans.



6: Kiev

An important communication centre. Kiev is the objective of the Germans.

Terrain: Urban battlefield.

Mission Suggestions: No Retreat.

Victory: Should the Germans capture this town they have successfully caught the Soviets in a huge pocket and destroyed the bulk of their forces west of the Dnieper, relieving pressure along the front.

Actual Outcome

"The battles in the Ukraine raged throughout November and most of December with both sides throwing considerable forces into the engagements. The Germans never managed to recapture Kiev. By the end of December the German panzer divisions were worn down while the Soviets launched another major offensive on Christmas Eve forcing the Germans, once more, onto the defensive. However, the Germans managed to contain most of these attacks and the Soviets suffered considerable losses. On the 29th of December for instance the Soviets attacked with 150 tanks against the Leibstandarte's front. Leibstandarte was only able to put four tigers, eight mark IVs, seventeen panthers, fifteen StuGs IIIs and 4 marders into the line to meet the attack but even so managed to drive off the attack destroying approximately 59 Soviet tanks in the process. However two days later, in the face of overwhelming pressure, the Germans were ordered to retreat.

In the end the Soviets failed to break the rail link with Army Group Center or envelop Army Group South but they had succeed in liberating Kiev, had broken the Dnieper line, and inflicted massive casualties on the 4th Panzer Army. The Germans, for their part, had destroyed several sizable Soviet formations and kept the vital rail link open.

Leibstandarte was withdrawn from the line to rebuild in early January and was able to repair some of its damaged vehicles before it was once again called on to act as a firebrigade and called on to plug another gap in the sagging German lines..."

Victory Points

Use the victory points system in the Axis of attack rules to determine the campaign result. I hope you enjoy the campaign, I intend to write several more.

~ Craig

Sources

Ripley, T. (2004). *The Waffen SS at War*, Zenith Press: St Paul.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kiev_\(1943\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kiev_(1943))



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