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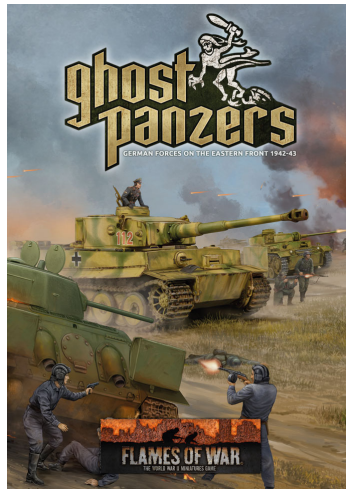
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Axis of Attack: Kursk July 5th-12th 1943

By Craig Courtis

Following the recapture of Kharkov in the spring of 1943 the Eastern front stabilised. One noticeable feature of the front was a huge salient that projected deep into the German lines and which could provide a springboard for the Soviets to launch a summer offensive to destroy Army Group South. For the Germans eliminating this salient became the focus of the planning for their own summer offensive, Operation Citadel, as it was to become known. The goals of this offensive were less ambitious than those of the preceding two summer offensives due to the growing material, and manpower, shortages of the German army. The objective of the offensive was to pinch out the Kursk Salient, destroy the Soviet forces within it, and shorten the German frontline.

The months following the recapture of Kharkov in the spring of 1943 were spent re-equipping the German panzer divisions and awaiting the arrival of the new weapons that Hitler hoped would turn the tide once again in the Germans favour- the panther and tiger tanks.

There is much debate as to whether or not the German generals agreed to the plan but given the success of the previous two summer offensives the Germans probably felt that they could once again destroy the Soviet forces arrayed before them and win an important victory. However several delays as Hitler awaited teething troubles to be ironed out of the new panther tanks gave the Soviets more time to prepare and strengthen their own defences.

Stalin too was keen to launch his own summer offensive but for once listened to the advice of his generals, who recommended that they wear out the Germans in a defensive action, destroy their tanks and then, by utilising fresh reserves, launch their own offensive. Stalin agreed to this plan to "bleed the Germans white" and the Soviets began to prepare an extensive network of defensive fortifications.

The depth of these defences were staggering; they consisted of eight defensive belts with a total depth of nearly 100 miles!

Both sides were aware of the decisive nature of the Kursk operation. Hitler is reported to have said that at the very thought of it made his stomach turn over. He knew that it was the German Armies last chance in the East. The Russians, for their part, had every confidence in their battle plan, but they knew that defeat at Kursk could mean the loss of all they had recently gained. The scene was set then for the greatest tank battle of the war.





Situation Report

At the start of the campaign the Germans are about to launch Operation Citadel, their long awaited summer offensive. The aim is for the two Army Groups to, by means of a classic pincer attack, rapidly defeat the Soviet forces deployed in the Salient and meet at the town of Kursk. The first battle of the campaign is the initial German assault on the Soviet first line of fortifications. The Germans have 7 games to capture either Prokhorovka or Oboyan. If neither side wins within seven games it means a Soviet campaign victory.



German Forces

(100 or 135 point Forces)
Typical Formations include: Mixed Panzer Company, Panther Tank Company, Armoured Panzergrenadier Company. However a number of infantry divisions were also involved in the assault so they too could be used.

Note on German Equipment:

Kursk saw the first use of schurzen, Panthers and a number of other weapons, including Tigers in large numbers. Most equipment in ***Ghost Panthers*** is available. However Ferdinands were only deployed on the northern (9th Army) shoulder so should probably not be fielded.

Here is a list of some of the German Forces involved in the Southern shoulder of Kursk:

XXXXVIII Panzer Korps- General Otto von Knobelsdorff

- 3rd Panzer Division- Lt General Franz Westhoven
- 11th Panzer Division- Major General Miel
- 167th Infantry Division- Lt Gen Wolf Trierenberg
- PG Division Grossdeutschland- Lt Gen Walter Hoernlein
- 10th Panzer Brigade, 39TH Panzer Regiment (panthers)
- 70th Artillery Regiment
- 911th Assault Gun Detachment
- 515th Pioneer Regiment
- 616th Army AA (flak) Battalion

II SS Korps- Obergruppenfuhrer Hausser

- 1st SS Panzergrenadier Division: Leibstandarte
- 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Division: Das Reich
- 3rd SS Panzergrenadier Division: Totenkopf

Soviet Forces

(100 or 135 point Forces)

Typical Formations include: T-34 Tank Battalion, Hero T-34 Tank Battalion, KV-1s Guards Heavy Tank Regiment, Churchill Guards Heavy Tank Regiment, Reconnaissance Company, Motor Rifle Battalion, Hero Motor Rifle Battalion, Rifle Battalion and Hero Rifle Battalions, including Guards versions (command cards), would all be appropriate for the Soviet players. However, it is suggested that the initial defensive line should be manned by Rifle Battalions as this is what, by and large, were tasked with blunting the initial assault (see the STAVKA Reserve special rule below for how to change forces during the campaign).

Note on Soviet Equipment: Kursk saw the first major use of assault guns by the Red Army, these included SU 152s, SU 76s and SU 122s. The battle is said to have been the last major use of KV 1s. SU85s were not available in time for Kursk, nor were the KV 85s or (as far as I can tell) Shermans, although number of other lend-lease tanks, including Churchills, were used. Players should keep this in mind when selecting their forces.



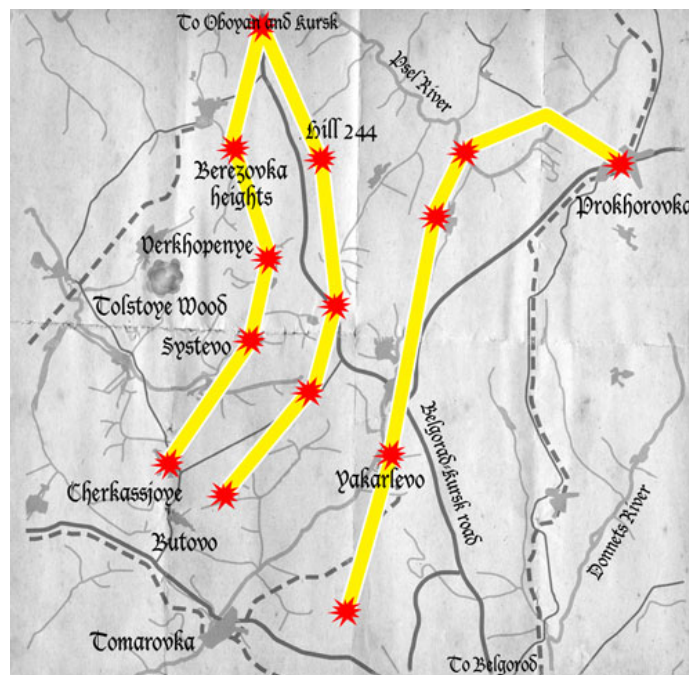
AXIS OF ATTACK: KURSK

[Campaigns & Terrain PDF...](#) (please consult the *Flames Of War* rulebook when considering the effects of terrain)

This campaign can either be played with two players on a single axis of attack or several players can take part playing it on a multiple axes. If playing it as a multi-player campaign then the following rules are recommended.

1. Each German player must remain on the same axis of advance for the whole campaign.
2. Soviet players can swap axis of attack each round (this is purely to allow each player to play a variety of opponents rather than the same opponent each round).
3. Add one extra objective to each mission for each additional player on the table.

	Axis One (Gross Deutschland)	Axis Two (11th Panzer Division)	Axis Three (Totenkopf)
	Soviet Victory	Soviet Victory	Soviet Victory
<i>First Defensive Line</i>	Cherkasskoye	Dubrova	Shopino
<i>Second Defensive Line</i>	Syrtssevo	Breaching the Line	Yakarlevo
	Verkhopenye	Belgorad-Kursk Road	Luchki
	Berezovka Heights	Hill 244	Crossing the Psel
	Counter Attack		
	Oboyan	Oboyan	Prokhorovka
	German Victory	German Victory	German Victory



Recommended missions: Some sectors have recommended missions, these are missions that I feel would best represent the actual situation at the time, of course you are welcome to ignore them and use the standard mission selector charts instead.

First Defensive Line: No Retreat

Should The Soviets Win: If the Soviets win the initial attack the mission should be repeated to represent the second days fighting as fresh German units are ordered to attack.

If the Soviets also win this second battle then the Germans only have reserves for one final effort, if this third attempt fails as well then the High Command calls off the offensive and the Soviets launch their counter offensive early.

In this case roll for the final mission as per usual but the Germans are defending (this situation would warrant a hold the line of Fighting withdrawal) and the campaign ends after this battle.

Second Defensive Line: Bridgehead

The second defensive line, was not quite as formidable as the first line. To represent this, the initial battle fought in this sector should be a Bridgehead with the Germans attacking.

Counter Attack:

Following the capture of Berezovka Heights, Hill 244 or Crossing the Psel the Soviet High Command, alarmed at the depth of the German advance, fed strategic reserves into the battle: their role to counter attack and recapture the lost ground. To represent this, the battle following the successful capture of any of these sectors is a hold the line fought on the same table but with the Germans defending.

If the Germans win this counter attack then the campaign advances to the final battle (Oboyan or Prokhorovka). Failure by the Germans means that the attack has been blunted and the campaign follows the standard rules (i.e. the next battle will be fought on the Verkhopenye, Belgorad-Kursk Rd or Luchki table).

NOTES ON TABLES

Terrain: Rather than suggest terrain for each sector I will make a few general comments and leave it up to the players to determine how best to set up the table(s).

Rolling hills, wheatfields and areas of woods are the typical terrain of the Kursk area, as are the ubiquitous Soviet gullies (Balka's).

Several of the tables are named after towns and villages and these should form a focus for the battle in the sector, typically a collection of 3-6 buildings would suffice, perhaps twice that number for Oboyan.



Belgorad- Kursk Rd

Having successfully broken through the second line of Soviet defences to the west of Syrtsevo the 11. Panzerdivision advanced up the Belgorad-Kursk road towards Oboyan.

Suggested Terrain: Rolling hills with the road winding through a valley, perhaps a few farms and fields.



Crossing the Psel

On the 10th of July elements of Totenkopf crossed the river Psel and established a small bridgehead on the north bank, thus breaching the last defensive barrier covering the advance to Kursk.

Suggested Terrain: The river, impassable except at the ford(s), should be placed so as to be a major barrier on the table and so that the fords can become the objectives. To the north of the river is a small village (2-4 buildings).

Suggested Mission: No Retreat. The river should have one or two fords and capturing these are the objective of the attacker.

Berezovka Heights

Following the capture of Verkhopenye Gross Deutschland pushed their aufklarung battalion supported by an assault gun battalion forward to capture the important high ground around Berezovka Heights. Over the next few days several major counter attacks were launched by the Soviets and the bulk of Gross Deutschland was drawn into the fighting.

Terrain: This sector should consist of several major hills and perhaps the river Pena running across one table edge.

Verkhopenye

The village of Verkhopenye was another important objective for Gross Deutschland as the town had one of the few bridges over the river Pena so it was critical that it be captured to open the way to Oboyan. The bridge should be one of the objectives of the attacker.

Suggested Mission: No Retreat

Prokhorovka

The rolling hills and wheatfields of the region witnessed the largest tank battle of the war. The river Psel should form one of the borders to the battle and the village of Prokhorovka along the Soviets table line.

Suggested Mission: Encounter.

Oboyan

Oboyan was the initial objective of the Germans, but they were not to reach it. Oboyan should be represented by a large town (6-12 buildings) which should be located in the Soviet end of the table.



Special Rules

FOR THE FATHERLAND!

The ferocity of the German assault caught the Soviets by surprise, indeed they were expecting the weight of the main attack to be in the northern sector and the southern assault almost unhinged the Soviet defences.

To represent the unexpected ferocity of the initial attacks the Germans should enjoy a superiority in numbers in first few battles (this only applies in the first battles in the first and 2nd defensive lines- if forced back to the second defensive line for instance this rule no longer applies.)

When attacking Defensive Lines One and Two the Germans may field either:

- 35 points more per player than the Soviets (eg 135pts vs 100pts).
- Or (if there are enough players) an extra company (thus the initial attack could be two players onto one, or three players vs two).

Note: It is recommended that if multiple players are playing on each table that the table size be increased to 8x6ft (or larger).

STAVKA RESERVES

The initial defensive line was held by Soviet infantry divisions but over the following days more and more armoured reserves were fed into the battle, culminating with the tank battle at Prokhorovka on the 12th of July.



To represent this Soviet players should if possible start the campaign fielding Rifle Battalions, however before the start of any battle in the campaign which is not fought in the first defensive zone Soviet players may switch to a another sort of Formation. This force must then be used for the remainder of the campaign although the standard **Reorganising Your Forces** rules apply ([Campaigns & Terrain PDF](#) , please consult the **Flames Of War** rulebook when considering the effects of terrain).

WEATHER

Although it was the height of summer the plains of Kursk were lashed by several fierce thunderstorms during the battle. Before each battle roll on the following table to determine weather for the battle.

1-5 sunny

6 thunderstorms (no air support available)

Strategic Outcome (in multi-player campaigns)

Germans Capture Oboyan and Prokhorovka: Major German Strategic Victory
 Germans Capture either Oboyan or Prokhorovka: Minor German Strategic Victory
 Germans capture Neither Objective: Soviet Strategic Victory

Historical Outcome

Kursk was one of the major turning points of the war. The Soviets managed to hold off the Offensive and then go onto the offensive themselves- just as STAVKA planned- but it was a close run thing. Over the years there has been a lot of controversy as to whether to German lost the battle or the Soviets won it, perhaps in part inspired by Cold War hostilities. On July 10th the Allies landed in Sicily and this may have been a factor in Hitler's decision to call off the offensive on July 13th, following the epic tank battle to Pokorovka.

It is my opinion that credit must be given to the Soviet tactics which proved effective (just), but more importantly to the humble Red Army soldier who endured so much during this and other Eastern front battles, to bring final victory for the Allies one step closer.

Recommended Reading

Osprey Campaign series 16: Kursk- contains excellent maps including 3D maps of Cherkasskoye and Pokorovka

Glantz, D, (2004). The Battle of Kursk- a very detailed account of the battle, including extensive orders of battle and a

post war interpretation of the battle by one of the world's foremost experts on the Eastern Front.

A Couple of Interesting Websites on the Battle:

Soviet Defensive Tactics at Kursk, July 1943, by Colonel David M. Glantz
<http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/resources/csi/glantz2/glantz2.asp>

Battle of Kursk: Germany's Lost Victory in World War II: Nipe, G: http://www.historynet.com/magazines/world_war_2/3035106.html

Final Comments

This Axis of Attack Campaign is designed to be a general framework for a Kursk inspired campaign, individual players and groups are encouraged to tailor it, and add more detail it necessary, to meet their own gaming needs.

I hope you enjoy it, it's always nice to have an excuse to use fortifications on the table!

Craig Courtis

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