

WJ & WD GO TO WAR



A Blitzkrieg Commander Battle Report
Rich Jones May 2004

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A not so serious report on the day Rich 'WJ' took on Pete 'WD' using his new set of rules!

Wargames Journal and Wargames Directory are arguably the two biggest non 'company' players wargames wise on the net. I have spent many an hour on WD 'discussing' the pros and cons of various wargame concepts. SO it was time we had it out on the battlefield, no holds barred, no quarter given!

Well actually when I was net chatting to Pete about his new rules Blitzkreig Commander we arranged for him to come over to my place for a nice social game and a yarn over a few cups of tea! The fact that Neil was going to sack me if I bought WJ into disgrace by losing only resulted in me scouring the net for loaded dice - specially loaded to rolls ones, slipped them to Pete and then realised the game uses double ones as a super hit!

So Pete arrived and threw the opening salvo, which landed smack in my lap – not only were we to play Eastern Front, but it was going to be early war. WHAT no Panthers or Tigers, those Panzer II things can scarcely be called tanks for goodness sake, and I'm sure there must have been some panzerfausts being tested somewhere, no ... damn – what was I to do!!

The scenario we used was out of the rule book and is entitled 'Pursuit' – the defenders set up in the middle third of the table with the play going lengthwise. The attackers deploy using the 'mobile deployment' rules; this means that the command stands are placed on the edge of the board as a successful command role is made the formations move on from the command stand. The attackers objective is to prevent defending stands exiting the far table edge, while destroying as many as possible. An ideal scenario for say, the 'Falaise Gap'. However for this battle it was the Germans pursuing the Russians in 1942.

The Russians have half the number of points but get 'hasty' fortifications, basically they started in cover or hull down. The forces are as follows:

NOT IN LIGHT VERSION SEE WJ WRITE UP

The Germans meanwhile had 3 companies of motorised infantry and appropriate support from tanks and the airforce, as well as being able to pull in some artillery support.



The Russians set up as above:

Two companies of infantry were ready to leg it over the hills and far away, while I suspect the rest of the forces were spaced to enable a fighting withdrawal. Both sets of armour covered the centre and middle 'flanks' while the other infantry company were set up in the farm complex which was about mid board.

“Commander Peterov surveyed his hasty defences. A smile spread over his face as he spotting

the KV1s sitting proudly on the hills, the smile came from the knowledge that the Germans had little to harm these beasts. With the hills able to hold the Germans off Peterov had positioned his forward infantry to cover the road. If the Germans were foolhardy enough to sweep down the road the infantry would be able to hold for a fair while. Plus there was an unpleasant surprise in the form of a AT gun (45mm) waiting in ambush in the bushes. He sent out orders that these forces were to hold while the rear infantry withdraw to safety. When this was achieved they infantry in the farm complex were to start drawing back. The accursed Germans would flounder taking the hills and the farm complex and enable most of his forces to slip away. Maybe this would see his long awaited decoration”

Meanwhile I had split the German forces into 3 ‘formations’ each based around a supported company of infantry. The command teams were put on the base edge, roughly one to the center and one to each flank, using the hills and woods to shield the deployment from the unwelcome attention of the Soviet armour, which ‘early war novice’ that I may be I knew would be hard to crack.

“Commander Reicharden sent out his orders. His trusted company commanders had served under him through Poland, France and now Russia. Reicharden knew enough about the Russians by now to calculate that they would have a hard time mobilising their forces away from the central plan. If he could catch them so they had to react quickly to the unexpected, then the forces were likely to become confused. He folded the map away, reached into his bread bag. Breaking a piece of stale dark rye bread he tossed it to the birds in the bushes by his side. Inside his head he knew that the key to capturing the Russians would be daring ... and he had always been daring.”

One feature of BKC is that it allows you to very effectively (but with simple mechanics) recreate the nuances in the higher level command structures at different periods of the war. During this period the German commander has a value of 10, which means you can pretty well count on him getting out 2 orders (for an overview of how the command rolls work see my review in the relevant section), more than this though the German HQ stands have a value of 9. This enables them to effectively control their formations to do fairly complex turn sequences, independent of the overall commander. In contrast the Russian CO stand is only an 8, making two orders sees you just having stats on your side, any more and you are pushing it. However with a command of only 7 getting the Russian HQ stands to issue one command will be a nail biting prospect, forcing them to act in bigger groups under the command of the CO to assure action. To me this mirrors what was happening at the time.

The Germans were pioneers in the use of motorised infantry. The tactics used so effectively in by the fully half-tracked late war Panzergrenadiers, had been honed by the truck and lorry motorised units of the early war period. Playing at a level well above Company level allows you to begin to replicate these tactics on the table. The tactic I was planning to use for our encounter was the ‘Kesselschlacht’; this can be translated as, ‘Cauldron Battle’. Classically this involves the motorised infantry pinning or ‘distracting’ the enemy center while two formations outflank and surround. Once surrounded the enemy position is akin to being in a cooking cauldron as the noose is pulled tighter and tighter. Only a slight variant was needed I felt and if all went well there was a possibility of catching some of the rear infantry as well. But the plan depended on somehow occupying the Russian center and keeping the armour from hindering the flanking formations.

“The German formations moved into position, Commander Reicharden looked anxiously at his watch, Stein was supposed to be in position on his right flank by now, Becks on his left flank had already started deploying amongst the trees, the Artillery FO moving into position. Reicharden gambled, if Stein was close then he could risk deploying the reserve platoons now, starting them up the left flank. He ran to the radio truck and barked his new

commands out. He smiled as he could see his orders being carried out immediately as the trucks sped out around the base of the hill. To stop this being akin to a suicide mission, as they were in front of the Russian defensive tank line, Reicharden launched straight into the biggest gamble he was going to make on the day. The Russian center had to be forced to react, if he left them to opportunity fire, then target the flanking forces the whole operation would be likely to bog down as the formations would be suppressed. He gave the signal for the Eins Company, led by a light panzer company to advance swiftly up the road. If they caught the Russians off guard they could encircle the farm complex right away. The worse result the operation could bear would be the formation making it to within strike distance of the Russian center – drawing their attention inwards. Reicharden fondled his Iron Cross in his fingers.”



Turn one saw the first German HQ fail its first command roll and not even come on (Stein's force), the left flank only made one command roll and moved gingerly into position. The CO formation only made 2 rolls but the mad dash up the road and the sudden flanking movement did make Pete look a bit perplexed and a teeny bit worried.

“Peterov noticed the dust clouds rising from the road and the hills to his left. The Germans were supposed to be miles away, so he concluded that it must be other Russian troops making a withdrawal. He turned his attention to the company of infantry getting ready to move out on the hillside behind him. Peterov shook his head in disgust, they looked as if they thought they had all the time in the world. Suddenly a runner burst into the command area. Through spluttered breaths he reported that at least a company of German armour was moving up into wooded areas on the left flank, also there were reports from patrols of infantry transport moving quickly out of the woods. Peterov acted instantly commanding the runner to go and tell the dug in tanks to move to the flank and open fire. The runner sped off, leaving Peterov to wonder if it was too late to get them activated. Suddenly his attention was pulled to the road leading to his center. He looked twice just to make sure ...no the vodka was not playing tricks with his eyes, there was a column of German transports and armour advancing up the road. He barked out orders for his tank company to close in and engage. Confusion reigned, most of the crews were either carrying out repairs or resupplying’

The Russian turn one was a non event – the low command values saw nothing activate. Now Pete could have opportunity fired at the transports. However if they were left in a state of ‘supression’ (this may happen when you open up with opportunity fire – this reflects you giving away your position and being the recipient of return fire, which isn't modelled mechanically game wise – it actually makes Op fire more realistic command wise, you have to figure if you are better off waiting til your go) he would be stuffed big time. Don't worry the

following turn was going to make up for it!!

“Commander Reicharden’s heart quickened, his plan seemed to be taking the Russians completely off guard. He heard the crackle of the radio – Stein had arrived and had his forces already moving up the right flank. Reicharden barked out that he wanted Stein’s tank company, which comprised of Pnzer IV tanks to branch left and keep the Russian armour on the hill occupied. He watched as the tanks almost immediately pushed there way through the long Russian grass towards the rising hill, obviously thought they had trouble spotting the Russians as their guns remained silent. On the left flank it appeared Becks recce unit had spotted some dug in KV1 tanks. As his tank support was all light Pnzer II and Pnzer 38t then it was hardly surprising that he was being rather cautious. However Reicharden realised that caution would not trap the Russians and sent orders for him to continue after calling in some air support on the hill. The FAO was busy relaying the co-ordinates of the hill side on the right flank, Reicharden trained his binoculars on the hill as he heard the familiar sounds of the 105 shells overhead. However the barrage appeared hit over the hill crest – the FAO barked corrections into the radio.”

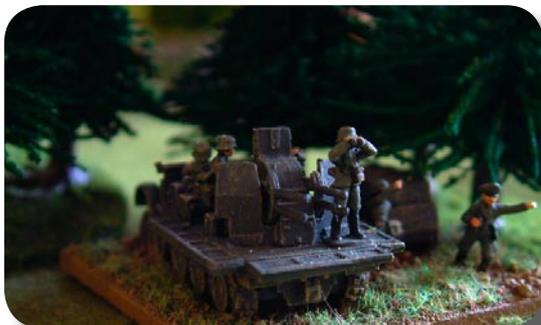


Turn 2 started well for my Germans, I tried to bring the arty on to the KV1 and it appeared but wandered off slightly, didn’t suppress any of the 4 units it caught but still. Then the right flank formation appeared and they consolidated the right flank movement. My heavier tanks went for the KV1 while the transports headed up the board, using terrain to cover them as much as possible. I was confident that a second order on a roll of 7 or less would be achieved and it was – the infantry and light tanks kept going while the tanks opened up to try and suppress the Russian tanks to keep them from wrecking the transport convoy. Loads of hits on the KV1 and a couple on the T-26 but remarkably managed NOT to suppress them. This is when the turn nosedived. The left flank formation failed to make their 9 and under roll! At least the Stukas arrived – but even they overshot and only caught the Russian CO for no lasting damage (again I failed to suppress). Although the center movement was doing its job and occupying Pete’s attention I really needed to get them either to move behind the Russian line of fire or to pile into the farm complex – I rolled a 11 for the command roll meaning they just sat there, two more cm and they would have been in initiative range and I wouldn’t have had to worry, as I could have activated them in the initiative phase ... never mind.

“Commander Peterov looked sky-wards when he began to hear the whine of the dive bombers siren – the Command post staff all ran for whatever cover they could find as the bombs whistled down. Peterov shook the soil off his jacket and turned to carry on giving commands. The runner had delivered the command to the line of dug in tanks, even with

the lack of visibility it entailed the tankers buttoned up and searched for targets. Out of the forest came some Panzer IV. The Russian tank commander smiled from ear to ear, there was nothing he liked better than the smell of burning German armour. He had spent the last few weeks drilling the tank crews on rapid loading and firing techniques, now he would see if it paid off. Round after round poured into the German armour, smoke billowing into the sky showed they had been effective. Meanwhile the infantry in the rear could hear the sound of battle coming closer and closer, then a patrol returned, they had spotted German transports and light tanks seemingly coming from their left flank. They at last began to move out towards the new marshalling point in the rear. Peterov ordered his formation to open fire on the German center thrust”

Well like I promised Pete was about to make up for not doing anything in the first move. My inability to throw the right dice to suppress the Russians was about to make me pay. I could have withstood one lot of fire and the Russian command value was low enough to make it tough to pass two or more. BUT then Peter rolls a double 1 – this is BKC's equivalent of a critical hit – all units commanded get two actions. So two lots of fire hit my tanks and took 1 out before I could op fire, then he passed another order with another fire action, finishing off another two tanks. In the rear although the Russian forces started off the hill they only moved 10cm and it looked liked I may have a chance of cutting all the Russians off. My center thrust was about to take fire, but I was pretty sure there would be enough left to push on the attack the next move. Then Pete's rolls struck



again, another double 1 command roll, now that was 2 double ones in 3 rolls ...mmm. So my center force got splattered – luckily Pete's suppression rolls were not as good and hopefully I would press in next go.

“Reicharden was surprised by the ferocity of the Russian defence. However he realised that his right flanking move was working as if it was out of the training manual. A quick word on the radio to Stein saw him split the formation, sending a platoon of infantry and a couple of light tank squads into the flank of the Russians in the woods while the rest skirted on around the forested area. The lead platoons could see the Russians moving away down the hill and this spurred them on. The lead recce unit and a Panzer II squad opened up with long range fire onto the hill side. Further infantry units flowed around the forest and into the rear of the farm complex.

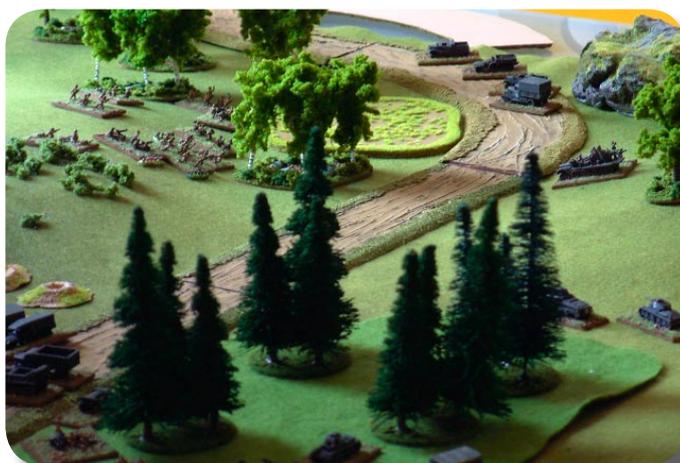
Commander Reicharden looked to his left to see Beck's formation moving out the woods to engage and hold the Russian right flank. The Russians were being drawn into engaging his units, a smile crossed his face. Artillery rained down upon the Russian left flank, while Stukas dived out the sky onto the retreating infantry in the rear. Looking down onto the farm complex the commander could see his disciplined units beginning to assault the outer areas. The dwindling number of medium tanks on his right flank were engaging the dug in tanks with revenge lust."



Turn 3 saw the plan get back on track. The flanking movement was working like a dream with units splitting off to engage and pin the Russians, denying them any chance of withdrawing easily. The left flank was doing it's job, Pete couldn't risk breaking cover in front of them. The artillery was landing but not really being effective. However the air-strike and shots from the lead flank units had pinned 4 Russian infantry units on the hill. This could well be very decisive as not moving next go left my units with every chance of getting between them and the base line in their next turn. The initial assault on the farm saw my units being repulsed, even though supported as Pete managed to get a few hits on the units as they were going in. These hits are carried and count towards the combat resolution result. However with my troops now behind him in the forest and the farm complex, as well as the KV1 on the left flank being suppressed it was not looking good for Pete.

"Peterov was in the thick of the fighting, reports were not sounding encouraging. The realisation that he could have left it too late to pull back his center formations began to form in his mind. Both flanks were in confusion while the retreating infantry seemed to be in a cloud of smoke. Locally the troops were still fighting well, but on a strategic level his commanders seemed to be failing him."

Turn 3 was the beginning of the end for Pete's Russians. Initiative fire and movement was all he achieved with the center and right flank, failing all the other command rolls. The retreating infantry that were not suppressed



only made one roll making just 10cm towards the base line. The initiative fire however nullified any real threat by the center thrust – the units were suppressed and made to fall back. They had done their job well though and the units in the rear of the farm complex were about to reek their revenge. The right flank tank units exchanged fire with my troops in the woods but to little real effect. Again I feel this is where the rules work well to give the game a real higher level feel, although his troops failed to do any of their real orders they continued to fight on a static local level.



‘Stein was high on adrenalin. He surveyed his two detachments making surprise assaults on the Russians center and left flanks, the farm buildings and the woods covering their movements until it was too late. The majority of his force however were speeding along the road and cutting off any possible exit. Stein radioed Reicharden and heard that the rest of the battle was also going to plan.’

Turn 4 saw me reap the fruits of the overall plan. Using initiative moves units had assaulted and destroyed a number of Pete’s units on his left flank and in the farm complex. My light tanks on my left flank were still keeping the other Russian tank units from being able to force a way out of the cauldron. While the KV1 tanks were being hard to destroy they were being pinned. Result of the turn came when the left flank 38-t units actually managed to ‘destroy’ a KV1 by suppressing it in initiative fire and then pushing it back more than 10cm in normal firing. The real cherry on the pudding though was the fact that the bold flanking movement had completely cut off the rear Russian units from their base line. It would take some doing for Pete to get through them and off the table.

‘Peterov tried in vain to rally his troops around him. Too many were just keeping their heads down. Communications had been effectively cut and the individual HQ were desperately trying to fathom out what the overall situation was. This was mainly resulting in them doing nothing but holding and firing when possible. Vadoff the company commander of the troops trying to withdraw desperately tried to get the Platoons to quickly move around the base of the hill and thus avoiding the waiting Germans. Fear and confusion reigned however and the troops only milled around, eventually heeding his command ... but Vadoff could see it

was too little too late, the Germans were bearing down on them.”

Pete’s forces were suffering badly, caught in the cauldron there was little he could do. The infantry was being whittled down by the cauldron effect. The tanks were now getting little chance to do anything to help and the last ditch try to get around my troops on his baseline failed.

“Commander Reicharden allowed himself a moment. He pulled on his pipe, using a small amount of the tobacco he had been saving. His training instructors would have been proud of him today. He radioed his superiors to tell them the news, apart from in the early part of the battle he had lost only a small amount of troops, considering the carnage they had inflicted. Orders were sent out to round any prisoners left from the final assaults into the farm complex. Reicharden then sent work back to the supply units – the men were to get extra rations tonight, for a job well done.”

This turned out to be the final turn, the retreating Russians had been all but wiped out and the rest of Pete’s units were surrounded and mainly suppressed. Pete threw the towel in. The game had been thoroughly enjoyable, Pete was an excellent person to play against! The rules worked like a dream, I could actually visualise the battle at a higher level of command. When all was worked out it resulted in a major victory for the German forces – more importantly though, well for my immediate job prospects anyway, Wargames Journal had wupped some WD butt!!!

