

Struggle for Calarasi

Background

It is 14th July 1941, the Romanian army has struck across the Prut River in an attempt to liberate Basarabia (Moldova); held by the Soviet Union since mid-1940, after its annexation under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Troops of the Romanian 35th Reserve Infantry Division, on the left of the Romanian IIIrd Corps, are struggling, against repeated Soviet counter-attacks (including tanks), in their efforts to gain the Cornești Massif en route to the Basabian capital of Chișinău. They are blocked at the town of Calarasi by elements of the Soviet 95th Rifle Division, with mixed armour support. However, from the north the Romanian 1st Armoured Division, with R-2 tanks (Pzkw 35s) and the 3rd Motorised Rifle Brigade, begin to attack the Soviet right flank.

The game is based on Scenario 2 in the BKC rulebook: **Assault**. It reads as follows:

'An assault is a hasty attack to capture an objective such as a wood, hill or village. The attacker has 50% more points available than the defender and may purchase assets for scheduled artillery and air support. The defender deploys first up to one third of the table and may purchase field defences for hasty defence. The attacker should deploy opposite the defender using mobile deployment and may use flank deployment.

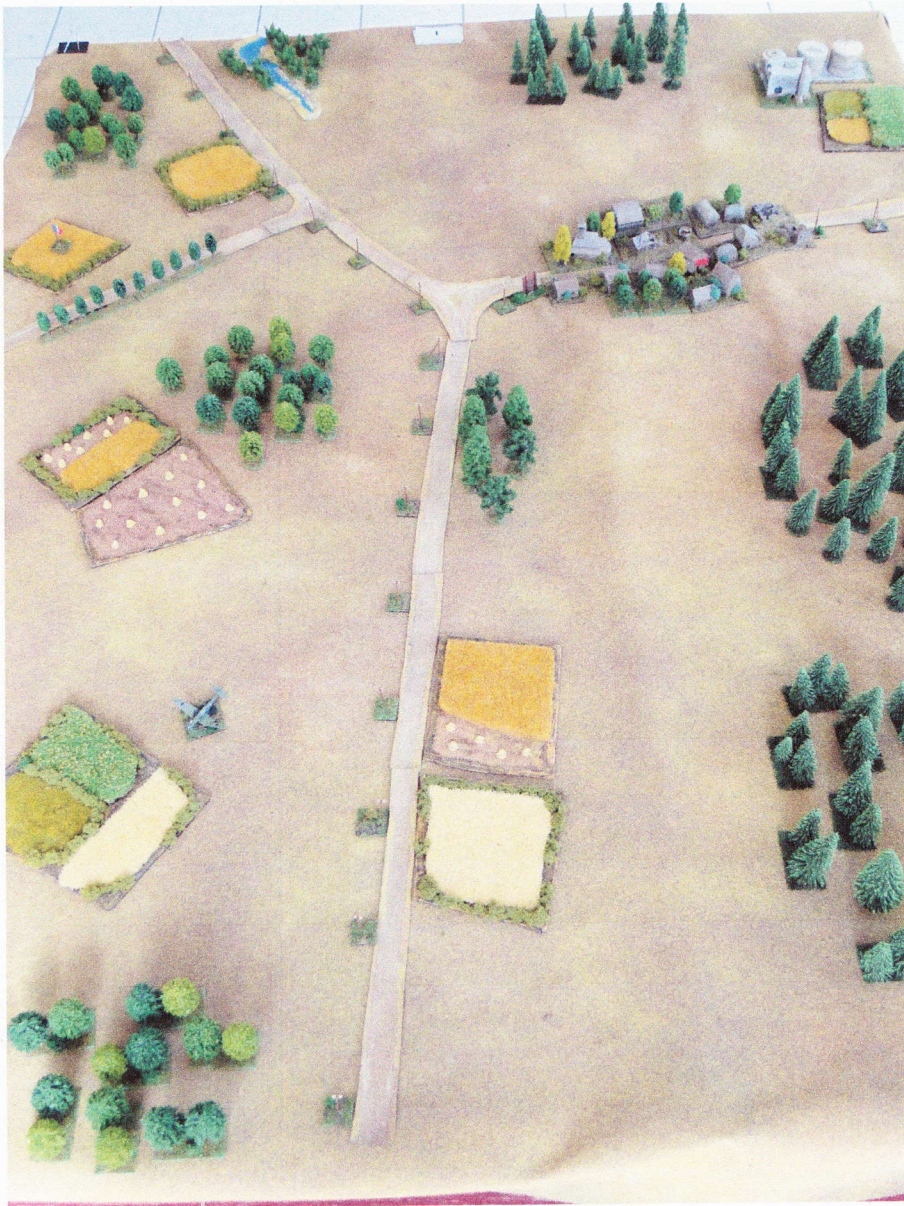
The attacker should occupy the objective within 8 turns to achieve a minor victory and within 6 turns to achieve a major victory. The defender should prevent the attacker from reaching the objective to achieve a minor victory and break the opposing battlegroup to achieve a major victory. The game is limited to 8 turns with the attacker taking the first turn.'



***Romanian forces mass
for their attack.
Elements of the 3rd
Motorised Rifle Brigade***

The Table

The table has low hills on the defenders side, wooded with coniferous trees. Calarași itself is situated to the right-middle of the position occupying a small valley in which the road to Chișinău lies. The approaches for the attacker are flat with farm land and a number of woods to provide some cover on the approach.



The Forces

The Romanian Battlegroup is split into four main formations: an armoured group with ten R-2's (Pzkwfw 35(t)), a motorised infantry battalion, an infantry battalion on foot and an Artillery Support formation. They have scheduled artillery and three 150mm howitzers off board. Circa 3,200 pts, breakpoint at 25.

The Soviets have three formations: one infantry battalion (dug in), some ATGs and artillery support group together (also dug in) and a mixed armoured group with six T-26s (2 x MGs, 3 x 37mm & 1 x flamethrower) and two T-28s. Plus one hidden minefield, circa 2,000 points, break at 15.

Plans:

Romanian (Attackers): The two Romanian infantry formations are set to press directly to the objective. While the artillery support and the AT batteries will move on the flanks to give direct fire support. On Turn 3 a planned smoke screen will land, followed on turn 4 by an artillery bombardment. Following these the FAO will call down fire on the Soviet positions as needed. Meanwhile the armoured formation, set on the Romanian right, will sweep to attack the Soviets from the high ground their left.

Soviet (Defenders): The Soviet commander decides to position his infantry and support weapons in the town in two lines of trenches, hoping that the cover provided will allow them to survive any bombardment. Artillery support is placed to the right of the town and AT guns are placed on the left (both sets of batteries are dug in). The armour is placed in the wood to the left rear of Calarași to act as a mobile reserve. A minefield is placed in the small wood to the left front of the town, hopefully to deny the Romanians the closest cover.

The Battle

Turn One

R1. The Romanians advance in a massed line, with the armour on their right surging head with three successful rolls.

S1. Soviets make no move, other than the firing of the artillery resulting in a blunder (the first of six during the battle).

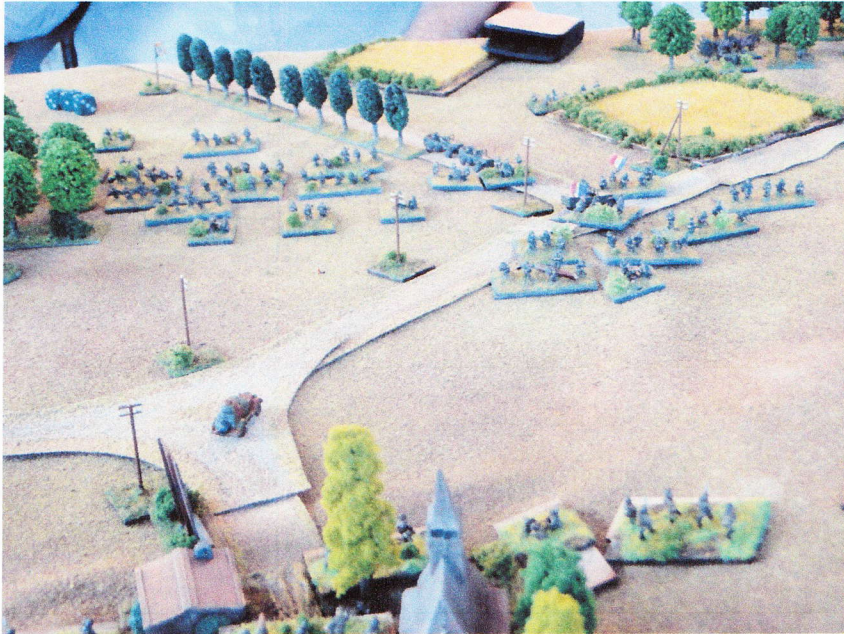


1st Armoured's R-2s on the move

Turn Two

R2. The two infantry formations press ahead (with the motorised deploying), but with no Soviets in sight there is nothing to engage yet other than a BA-20 armoured car.

S2. Suddenly, Soviet anti-tank guns open fire and take out two R-2s, while a HMG platoon is removed by Soviet rifle and MG fire. Again the Soviet artillery guns fail to do anything.

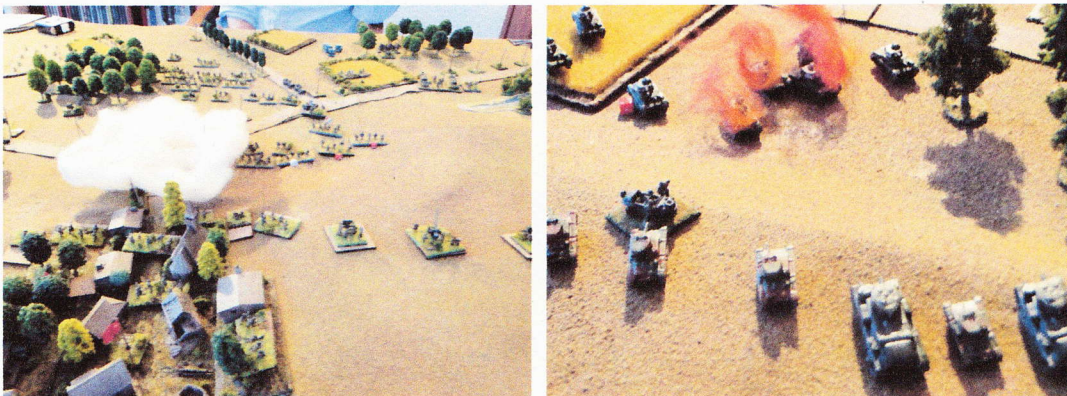


Waves of Romanian troops attack, where's that smoke screen?

Turn Three

R3. As the artillery support deploys the Romanian armour fails to move. But a smoke screen falls to give the infantry some chance to advance.

S3. Soviet armour breaks cover and moves to the edge of the hill, but can't fire. Still, two more R-2s succumb to the ATGs, and the Romanian left battalion is pinned by Soviet artillery fire.



Smoke gives some relief to the attackers and armour clashes in a head-to-head

Turn Four

R4. The boots on the other foot as the R-2s devastate the Soviet armour, four tanks are left burning. And the infantry continue to press on. But some of the Malaxa towed ATGs run into the minefield which halts their movement (one will be destroyed trying to extract itself in the next turn).

S4. The Soviet riposte destroys another two R-2s as the armour fiercely exchange fire at point-blank ranges. But all other command rolls fail, bad timing.

Turn Five

R5. The Soviets lose a further T-26 and an 85mm ATG, they are starting to haemorrhage assets at a consistent rate. While Romanian infantry are slugging it out to get into assault range on the town.

S5. But with opportunity fire (the OT-133 gives nasty burning surprise for one R-2) the Romanian armour is further depleted, and delayed.

Turn Six

R6. At this point the attackers need to be in the town to claim a major victory, but they are still battling in their approach as the Soviet defence fights for every inch of ground and artillery support fails to materialise. However, the Soviets 122mm gun line is completely wiped out by their opposing numbers.

S6. The Soviets are hanging on now, with less and less heavy weapons remaining.

Turn Seven

R7. The OT-133 is taken out by the R-2s and an infantry unit is destroyed by combined HMG and rifle fire. Romanian forces start to redeploy after clearing most of the heavy weapons outside the town. But are they close enough to assault the town next turn; where's that artillery bombardment?

S7. There's panic in the town as the HQ of the Soviet Rifle Battalion makes an 'unexplained' retreat (command blunder), *encouragement* from a friendly Commissar will bring him back next turn. Still the ATGs on the left give good account of themselves and take out a Malaxa and towed gun.



Malaxa towed 75mm's relocate to support the assault

Turn Eight

R8. 1st Armoured clears the ridge, one MG armed T-26 and a BA-6 a/c are eliminated. But the FAO calls an artillery blunder which almost destroys his own batteries. But worse, crucial rolls to move the infantry units fail. They are stalled in front of the Soviet trenches. The lack of support and heavy return fire and the infantry are not too keen to repeat WWI-style attacks! No major victory in sight.

S8. The Soviets retaliate with Rifle and HMG fire and platoon after platoon is eliminated while others recoil. The Soviets can claim a minor victory. But the battle goes on.



Toe-to-toe: Romanian assault beaten back again.

Turn Nine

R9. Finally the artillery comes in rocking the defenders. Plus the remaining troops of the 3rd Motorised now reach the hill above the town and pour fire into the defenders flanks, who lose another platoon.

S9. Bad command blunder (panic is taking hold with both flanks compromised) and the ATGs and mortars retreat from their gun pits; it will be fatal. Trucks from the destroyed artillery battery retreat off board. But the Soviet infantry is still causing casualties.

Turn 10

R10. At last a double barrage and there are suppressed Soviet units everywhere. The ATGs, now in the open, take the full force and after their gallant actions (5 tanks, 2 guns destroyed) are taken out. The Soviets are now past their breakpoint.

S10. It's all over and despite some final shots they fail their break test and retire or surrender.



Mayhem as 150mm artillery bombardments blast the Soviet position. Chance for the Romanian infantry to get in. But its game over, though too late for many of their comrades.

Reflections

It was a very good game with plenty of happenings for each side to deal with. While the town was taken it was with heavy losses and not in time to stop a minor Soviet victory. With a bit more luck it may have been taken earlier, but probably not in six turns with these types of forces. On totalling up the points lost it was very even with: 1,020 Romanian (22 units –break 25) versus 940 Soviet (17 units – break 15) lost. Plus it was satisfying to play to a conclusion (past the 8 turns) to find out what was going to happen.



Romanian column moves out of the liberated town and continues the advance, but at some cost in time and casualties.