

Korsun Pocket – A Strategy Guide for Beginners by Gregor Whiley (SSG)

Introduction

The Decisive Battles system used in Korsun Pocket is one of great flexibility and power, and can be used in subtle ways to deliver devastating attacks, or to frustrate the advance of a superior force. Unfortunately for you, this power and precision is made equally available to your opponent, so any advantage you can get will be beneficial to your cause.

What follows is a set of basic procedures which will help you prosecute a turn, and also some general notes on strategy, aimed at a new player of KP. It supposes that you're playing an email game of the campaign scenario against a human player, with Hidden Units, Unknown Units and Random Weather as options, as this will be the highest test of your generalship.

Strategic Overview

As the game starts, the battle is neatly divided into two halves, the east and the west. In the east, the Russians have overwhelming force and the only sensible choice for the Germans is to retreat in good order. Historically, they didn't (another infamous *no retreat* order from Adolf) and within a couple of days, four understrength divisions were just about annihilated.

The combat in the west is much more evenly balanced, and the Germans can put in local counter-attacks in areas where the Russians are weak, and if they transfer some significant forces from the east they can cause serious trouble. However, with the weight of Russian numbers, the Germans will probably be obliged, eventually, to give up ground and form the pocket.

Obviously, with a little bit of experience, every German player will wonder *why form the pocket at all?* I expect that the German commanders, with the benefit of hindsight, would concur. So, we have provided certain incentives for the Germans to hold the Airfield and the town of Valyava for as long as they can. Put simply, if the Germans run away, they will lose, conceding an enormous number of victory points to the Soviets.

Before You Do Anything On The First Turn In The East

Start up a game as the Russians, just so you can look at the map. Make sure that you have the Town Names display On. Note the major river running down from the top of the map, through the towns of GODORISCHE and VYASOVOK before turning west. This natural defensive barrier has been cunningly continued south by the construction of a line of strongpoints.

The Russian's first job is to crunch through the defensive line that opposes them at the start of the battle and advance more or less due west until they run up against the river/outpost line. There are some objectives along the way, SHPOLA, ORLOVETS and VYASOVOK in particular, which are worth victory and alert points if taken in a timely fashion. Examine the pop-ups for these towns for details, and consult Map One:



Temporarily remove the units, mines and strongpoints from the map (using the 'u', 'm' and 'e' keys and examine the road network. Note that the command economy has ensured that there are no roads running east-west in middle part of the map, which is the axis of your advance. The NKVD can, and will, have someone shot for this, but right now you have to recognise this as a major constraint on your supply and artillery movement, especially in mud turns.

The German's job is to retreat in an orderly fashion, denying victory and alert points if possible, preserving their forces and punishing any Soviet pursuers who get too cheeky. Careful use of detachments is essential to achieve this. Bridges should be blown wherever possible. Even a blown bridge that is repaired next turn still slows movement across it, and the combination of a blown bridge and mud can strand careless Russian troops a long way out of supply. A similar pleasing effect can be

created by interdiction. A Russian force in a mud turn and being supplied along a single road can be severely embarrassed by the Luftwaffe, whenever they can be coaxed into turning up.

Before You Do Anything On The Third Turn In The West

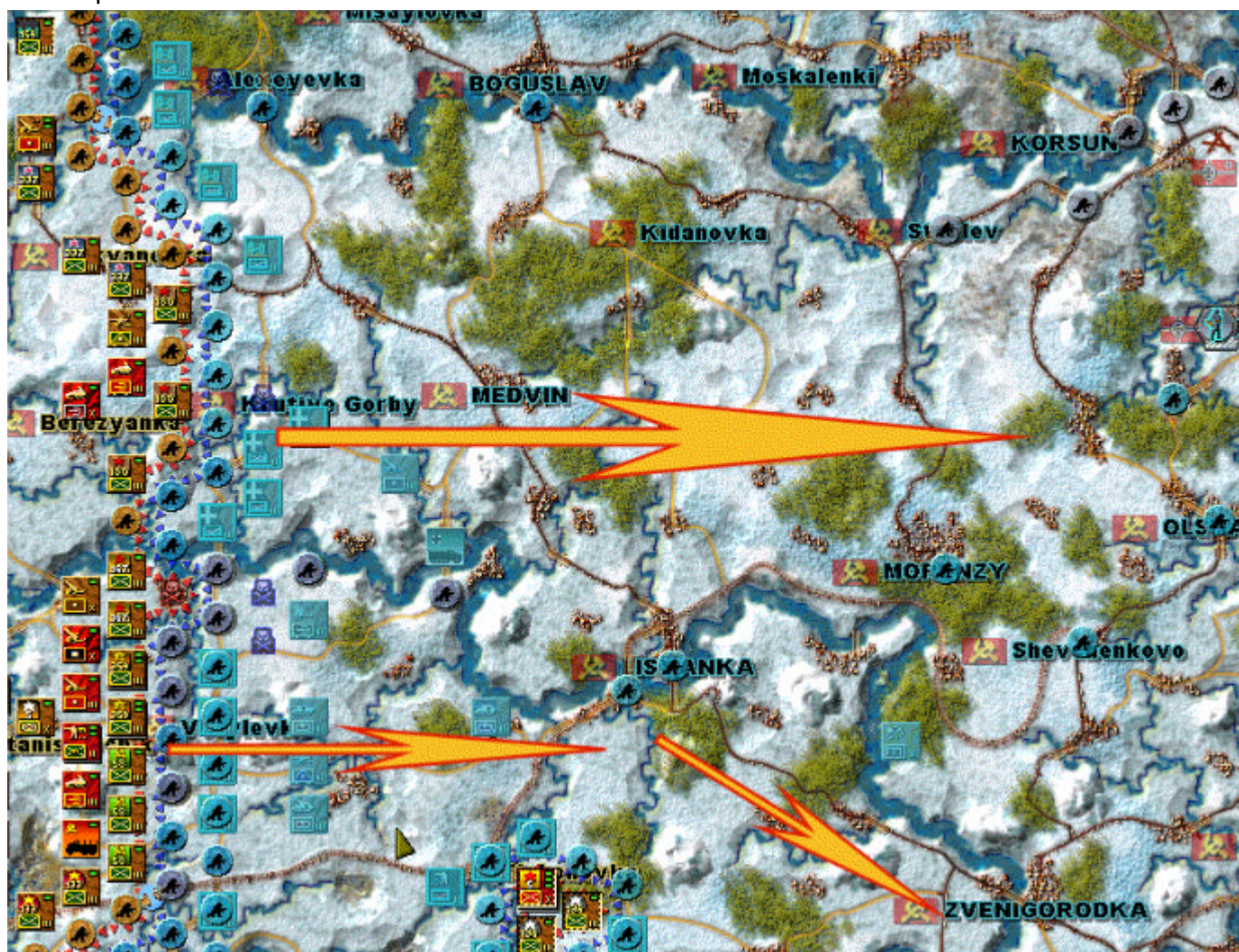
The Russians didn't start the battle in the West until the third game turn because it took the carrier pigeons with the orders two days to fly across the battlefield. No, really! Anyway, the terrain in the west is somewhat more complicated. Three major rivers running east-west divide the battlefield into three operation areas of interest.

The area above the river running OLSHANITSA – BOGUSLAV – KORSUN is unsuitable for major offensive operations, because although you can take KORSUN itself, the major game objectives will be on the other side of the river. However, the Russians can make nuisance of themselves here, and if they transfer fast moving cavalry divisions from the East, they can force the Germans to defend the river line, something that they'd prefer not to do.

An advance in the middle of the battlefield, through MEDVIN to VALYAVA and the other high value objectives seems to be the avenue of choice for the discerning Russian player, mainly because there are no major rivers running north-south to block the advance.

An advance through TICHONOVKA to ZVENIGOROVKA is necessary to force the Germans into forming the pocket, but will eventually run into the major river. Sadly, competent German play will usually prevent the rescue of the heroic Soviet defenders of TICHONOVKA, who will pay the highest possible price for their gallant advance during a previous offensive.

See Map Two:



Another historical note. The initial attacks from Vatutin's forces went nowhere against the tough 34th Infantry division; and about half the 70 odd Soviet tanks were knocked out by lunch-time. So, his mobile forces were switched north and, aided by the panicked flight of the shaky 88th, pressed eastward through MEDVIN and on to ZVENIGORODKA. How the Russians succeeded in this drive is beyond my comprehension. One of the flukes of war, I guess. Soviet players are unlikely to replicate the achievements of their historical counterparts.

Before You Do Anything On Any Turn

The very worst thing you can do at the start of a turn is to move a unit! There are numerous factors that demand to be considered before you can make any movement decisions. What follows is a rough checklist that will be useful on any turn.

Weather

It is sheerest folly to move a single man without knowing the weather, especially the ground condition for the next turn. If your army is advancing, a mud turn will play havoc with your supply lines, and units who were leading the charge may well find themselves out of supply. Being out of supply can be serious, and is sometimes fatal.

As a defender, a mud turn, especially if helped along by enemy interdiction, can render distant parts of your line, especially those in difficult terrain, out of supply. This might well oblige you to relinquish what were otherwise excellent defensive positions.

As a defender, mud will also severely restrict your ability to concentrate reserves and deliver punishing counter-attacks against attackers.

You should always have the Show Supply Truck Area option turned on. That way, selecting a supply truck will show you the area that it thinks it can supply *next* turn. It's only an estimate, since it can't take into account areas that are contested this turn, but will be controlled by you next turn. However, it's a good guide, and if supply looks like falling short next turn, you'll have to move the supply truck and maybe some of your units as well to compensate for the bad ground condition.

Replay

Now is the time to look at the replay of your opponent's turn. Set the system to pause at every combat, and review what happened. Apart from the obvious combat results, you can get a lot of info from the replay. For an attacker to get serious results against a committed defence in KP, he usually needs to commit armoured forces and massed artillery. For instance, in the West the Russian player starts with only one good attacking force, the 5th Mech Corps. Wherever they go is wherever the Russian is serious about attacking.

With hidden units, even if you can't see the artillery units themselves, you can spot where they were committed to a battle in the replay. The replay will also sometimes reveal unit movements that you couldn't otherwise see. All these clues will help you to get a sense of where both attackers and defenders are making serious efforts.

Battlefield Condition

After looking at the replay, remove all the units from the map. Look for places where your underhanded opponent, in an act of criminal sabotage, has blown a bridge. (This can be easy to miss when the map is covered in units). You'll need to ensure that an Engineer unit is tasked to repair the bridge, instead of being caught up in the general fighting.

Also take the time to see if there are areas where your men, heroically defending the homeland, might be forced to blow a bridge themselves.

Objectives and Alert Towns

While the ultimate prize is always the objectives inside the Pocket, there are lots of Victory Points and Alert Points to be gained or denied along the way. Towns and Villages are always good defensive terrain, so defenders should give priority to their defence, and pay close attention to the conditions for their capture. For instance, the town of SHPOLA in the East is worth 25 VPs and 6 Alert Points if captured by the Russians by turn 7, but only 10 VP and 2 APs after that time. That's a pretty clear message from the scenario designer that if the German holds out until the end of Turn 7, he's done well.

Attackers will naturally be wanting to snap up VPs and APs, but they must restrain their enthusiasm. Consider the town of NETSHAYEVKA that is SE of SHPOLA. The Russians do get some VPs for its capture, but they make a gift of Alert Points to the Germans. Excess of zeal here could hand the hard pressed Germans an entire new division and a bunch of replacement points, just when they need them most. Consider this another message from the scenario designers. They can't stop ahistorical play, but they can punish it.

Supply

Having thought about Supply for next turn, it's time to look at your units' supply status this turn. Look carefully at the map. Do any units have a grey or red dot in their upper right corner, indicating that they missed out on supply this turn? These men become special cases, and you must formulate a plan to get them back into supply. Most units have enough bullets to cope with a lack of supply for one or two turns, but some do not, and will quickly become vulnerable to enemy action.

Reinforcements

Let's say you're playing the Germans in KP. Russian Tank Corps are on the rampage, artillery is obliterating all your defences, your men are being ground down and your front line is steadily shrinking. You might stop and ask, why me? Probably because you left reinforcements standing idly on the map edge in a previous turn. Don't do this. Do check every turn, and if you get infantry units as reinforcements, don't forget to use the Truck Pool to get them into action quicker.

Combat Advisor

You're almost ready to move a man. But first, turn on the Combat Advisor. This exceptionally useful piece of code will work out every possible combat on the map, and display the maximum possible odds for each combat. Better still, clicking on an enemy stack will reveal which of your units are needed to reach the maximum odds. Even though there will often be all sorts of reasons why you can't use all the indicated units, just knowing that a certain combat is viable can be very useful.

A particular point worth considering here is artillery. Some Russian and many German artillery units can move and fight in the same turn. The Combat Advisor will find those artillery units that the amateur general has not considered, and should prompt you to do the same.

So You Want a Fight, Do You?

Before your men leave the relative safety of their foxholes and venture into no-man's land, let's consider all the other things that a unit can do with their Combat Capability, apart from combat itself. These are; taking replacements, bridge blowing, using trucks, entrenching, generating a detachment, using extended movement.

Here's an outline of why you would want to do any of these things, instead of fighting heroically.

Detachments

Those defenders actually retreating, should give high priority to generating detachments. A pursuing unit that can't reach you, or that has to use extended movement to do so, can't attack you. Just as important, enemy units attacking from a hex containing a detachment don't earn any tactical shifts.

Entrenching

All defenders need to seriously consider entrenching. It gives a 50% bonus to a unit's defence strength and an extra defensive shift in combat. Even more importantly, a hex with 3 steps in it, at least 1 of which is entrenched cannot be overrun, no matter how many enemy strength points are deployed against it. The importance of this fact cannot be overstated. Apart from those units that clearly need to be entrenched, as a general rule, all units, on both sides that reach the very end of the turn and still have their combat capability should entrench.

Replacements

Both sides need to come to terms with the fact that they will never have enough replacements. The Russians start the game with numerous Rifle Divisions that weren't much good to start with, and which have taken significant losses. It will never be worthwhile giving these men replacements. Use them to assault fort lines and to hold quiet sectors of the front.

The Germans start the game with a number of replacements available, but they have an overwhelming requirement to put as much distance and as many detachments as possible between themselves and the Russians. Since using extended movement and dropping a detachment will both preclude taking replacements, the Germans must use some finesse to juggle these conflicting requirements.

Extended Movement

In the best of all possible worlds, a retreating German player would like to retire just far enough so that Russian armoured forces have to use extended movement to catch up, and Russian Infantry can't catch up. The Russian player, in pursuit mode, will find himself using extended movement extensively, something that can't be done if a unit has already attacked. Leaving units out of attacks preserves them for the pursuit and also frees them up to occupy minefield hexes, thus speeding up the clearing process.

Bridge Blowing/Repair

It should be pretty obvious why you need to do this, and why you need units with their combat capability intact to do it.

Avoiding the MAX button

The MAX button in the combat screen performs as advertised. It gets every possible unit for a combat and shows the maximum odds possible. For all the reasons outlined above, it should be clear that you should only use the MAX button as a diagnostic tool, and not as a selector for the units actually committed to the attack.

Attacking

There are many subtleties in combat, and the topic is worthy of a separate article. However, there are a few basic techniques that can be helpful.

Always look for overruns using the combat odds button. While it may not be tactically feasible to use all the units indicated to conduct an overrun, remember that overrun odds are calculated without artillery, barrages or air support, so a more deliberate attack might also be fruitful.

Consider whether two attacks may not be better than one. A single high odds attack might result in a D1R, with the retreat taking the enemy stack out of reach of further attacks. Two attacks at lower odds may result in two D1s, often a more desirable result notwithstanding the likelihood of higher attacker casualties. If you're attacking an objective or other important hex, make sure that you have a unit that will be able to actually reach the target attack. It looks really bad when the enemy simply reoccupy the hex you spent all that time and effort removing them from.

Defending

The first rule of defending is that Clear terrain is deadly as the Clear CRT has bad results for the Defender at quite low odds. If at all possible, don't defend in Clear terrain.

The second rule of defending is that stack with 3 steps and at least one of them entrenched, cannot be overrun, regardless of odds. If you allow powerful attacking forces to conduct overruns, your forces will simply melt away, so you must do everything possible to ensure that an overrun can't take place. (Note that this fact may have a large influence on your allocation of replacements).

The third rule is that defence without counter-attack is not defence, just delay. An ideal defensive position is one where the defending stacks are in good defensive terrain, and where the attacker must occupy clear terrain in order to attack. Close to this point of attack are sufficient forces (often armoured units) and artillery to prosecute a powerful counter-attack against enemy stacks in the clear.

Take a moment to look at the KP map, and examine the defensive line of strongpoints that runs North-South through the village of CHICHERKAZOVKA at (33,35). The strongpoints are a bonus, but even without them, observe how the terrain in the defensive line is almost all good for defending, while attacking stacks are forced to line up in mostly clear hexes.

The last rule of defending is that less is sometimes more. Large numbers of defending steps, (the actual number varies with terrain, consult the CRT) invite the rolling of double dice. This is usually bad for the defender, and just allows the attacker to do twice as much damage.

Interdiction

Interdiction can be used in a number of ways. The first is simply to slow your opponent down. It's pretty obvious when you're retreating, but can also be used when you're attacking. If you've penetrated a defensive line, you might have some enemy stacks partially surrounded. Those units will naturally wish to retreat to a new defensive line, but interdiction may make that harder, and also may make it harder for supplies to reach them.

You can also use interdiction to try to put enemy units out of supply, by interdicting the roads between the supply truck and the units themselves. This can be especially useful on mud turns.

Lastly, you can try to put a supply truck out of supply, by interdicting the roads between the truck and its supply source (usually a map edge). If successful, this will have an effect on the ability of that truck to supply units on the subsequent turn.

Research

It may seem strange to relate, but the best place for detail info is the game manual. After that, check the SSG website www.ssg.com.au or the Matrix Games website www.matrixgames.com for further enlightenment.