

# GERMANY TURNS EAST

Strategy in SSI's *Second Front*:  
The German Viewpoint

by Hern The Hunter



**T**HIS GAME is playable... by post! There was a short pause on the dog & bone before I answered, with some caution, 'Well, if you say so....,' followed by another pause before saying, 'OK, I'm willing to try it.' The game in question was *Fighter Command* (Apple). At the time I was involved in selling computer software and one of my customers had rushed round and purchased a copy of the aforementioned game, before I had too much of an opportunity to open the SSI consignment and check all those lovely brand new *Fighter Commands* into the stock. Two hours later he phoned me to propose the 'postal game!'. Nigel has a lot to answer for!

The first six games were played in exactly the same way as any traditional board wargame and before I knew where I was something like 20 games with six opponents were under way (or completed), by the time *War in Russia* (Apple), turned up. It fell in line and somewhere in the region of 30 games with seven opponents were eventually undertaken. When *USAAF* (Apple), arrived it was a natural progression to bring that into line as well. Though in the case of the latter only six games were started with three opponents. It was possible to play these games in this way for the simple reason that the save game routines were in the right places. It was somewhat gratifying to note in a US postal games newsletter that a party located in Canada was looking for an opponent for *Fighter Command* a few years ago.

I mention this facet for the simple reason that it struck me soon after getting down to my first campaign

game of *Second Front* that it could also join the ranks of the small number of computer games that do not require a modem to play them. I always considered *Fighter Command* and *USAAF* to be excellent solo games and even better as two player games. After many sessions with *War in Russia* I considered it to be a very poor solo game because of the abysmal AI while at the same time it was probably the very best of the two player games I have played by post.

Ironically, after playing my third campaign game with *Second Front*, I have to say that although the AI is a marked improvement, it still leaves a lot to be desired. Taking every city on the map, bar Moscow, by the last week of September 1942 is not what I would call too much of a challenge. And I consider myself to be little more than an average level player. Having said that, it could well be the very best two player game on the market at this moment.

A few personal observations from the German viewpoint follow.

Like *War in Russia* it is important to smash up as much of the Russian ground and air force as possible on the first turn of the invasion. Unlike *War in Russia* a casualty report is given at the end of each turn so that you can gauge how well you are

doing, or not, as the case may be. Aim for at least 8000 Russian Infantry squads on turn one, 2000 guns and at least 2000 aircraft. Three quarters of the latter should be smashed up on the ground. The number of tanks and infantry you take out will depend on how many of the Russian units you can pound into the ground. You cannot get them all but you can chew them up something awful if you attack on a independent unit line, rather than set up combination attacks. On turn one, at least, the Germans have a considerable advantage which, for the most part allows them to get away with attacks of this nature. The Russian is very weak along almost the entire attack line.

The data in the table below is from the first two weeks' attacks in my third game. It should be noted that almost 1000 Russian aircraft were destroyed on the ground by ground units attacking HQs in Week One. The Russian air force is also its own worst enemy. It throws units up to deal with superior German aircraft with higher experience levels and this naturally results in heavy Russian losses.

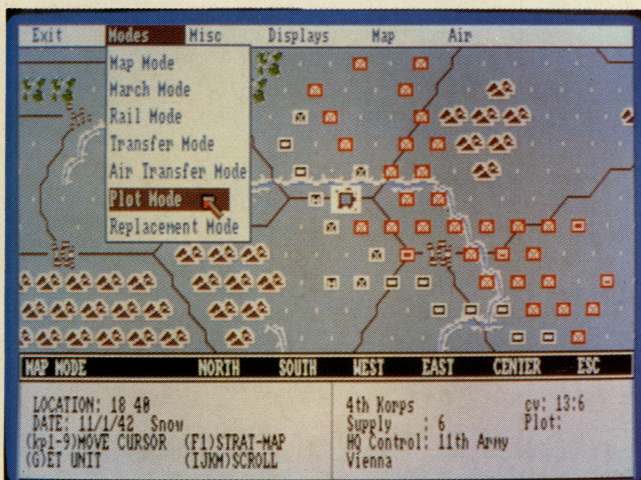
The German player will find that a considerable amount of reorganisation is required. This should be done while on the move. For example there are too many Infantry Divisions in

*Second Front* was designed by Gary Grigsby, and is published by SSI/US Gold

It is available for the PC and the Amiga, price £29.99

	Week 1		Week 2	
	AXIS	RUSSIAN	AXIS	RUSSIAN
Infantry Squads	1721	8043	245	3962
AFVS	260	2083	170	851
Guns	680	2827	112	1476
Aircraft	101	3469	136	1760

some Korps, and not enough in others. The reorganisation of the bulk of the German armed forces is for a simple reason. If you maintain what you are given at the start of the game when the weather turns bad you will be wondering why you don't have enough Korps to form a solid unbroken defensive line from north to south. Further, your advance will be somewhat curtailed as you will not be able to cover enough ground as you charge hell for leather for your primary targets. Having said that the non-German Axis forces need to be dealt with in the other direction.



The non-Germans are weak, with most of them spread out from just south of Lvov all the way down to Constanta on the south coast. One or two Korps should use road mode to move forward to threaten the Russians in front of them and after moving, while still with turn one, a few transfers should be made. There are just enough Italians to form one strong Korps (including the Italians in Venice), rather than have two weak ones; the same applies to the Hungarians and Slovaks. The Rumanians on the other hand have enough units to make up four strong Korps, rather than have six or seven weak ones. In Finland the same thing should be done: three full strength Korps can be formed, but this should be left until Turn Two as the Finns have better things to do on Turn One – like shattering at least one Russian Army; and if you are lucky you can take out two! Shattering is the same as eliminating, or destroying in this context.

As to the regular German Infantry Korps, they should consist of no more and no less than four Infantry Divisions. By doing this the individual Korps will be adequately strong enough to attack and defend and you will end up with enough Korps (in-

cluding non-Germans), to form an unbroken Infantry Line all the way from Leningrad to the Black Sea coast. While on the offensive you should have the other four slots in each of the regular German Korps filled with one or two JPz or Stug Assault Bn's, one or two artillery or one artillery and one flak. When you go on the defence the JPz and Stug units should be pulled back and replaced with one artillery and one flak or if available one AT-gun and one flak or perhaps a Pz Bn. You will not have enough of any of these units, particularly independent AT-guns which are in short supply, to fill all the slots in all of the Korps. However the bulk of them should end up with at the very least seven slots filled, if not all eight. By 1943 you will not only be able to fill all the slots, you may feel the need to create more Korps to hold all your units.

None of the above includes the Pz Korps or the Security Divisions. The latter have other problems looking after the back door. As you advance, they should fall away to take up static positions in or near certain cities. Minsk, Kiev, Lvov and Odessa (even one in Bucharest), will be required to combat un-welcome activity in the rear areas. You may even require more help from the start of 1942 in combating partisans and the timely arrival of a few Luftwaffe ground units could be used to assist in this area. Once you receive a few new Pz Bn's in 1943 I recommend using three or four in an anti-partisan role in spare Pz Korps – this allows them to move through five hexes, clearing away most of the trouble makers in one turn.

The Pz Korps are fine as they are until the beginning of October. In the first couple of weeks of October the bulk of the Pz Divs should be pulled back to conserve armor for one thing and for building large striking forces. The first week of October 1941 will see the arrival of bad weather. DIG IN! Do not be tempted to attack anything, not even a bombardment, regardless of how weak the enemy might seem because all attacks will result in a lowering of readiness values which are hard to recover in bad weather. Everyone needs a rest. You have about eight weeks before the blizzards in the first week of December signal the start of the main Russian winter offensive.

In the first week of October the bulk of the Pz and Motorized Divs should be pulled out of the line and sent to rest with the three Army Group HQs: North, Centre or South. In-

cidental, these HQs should be parked in a city some distance from the forward line, but not too far back, with their replacement levels set at 100. It may take two to three weeks for the bulk of the Pz and Motorized units to recover strength but you have the time and by being in a city readiness recovery is much improved.

With the exception of one of the elite SS divisions, which should be sent to West Front HQ to fill random event requirements for 1942, the rest of the Pz and Motorized units should stay with the Army Group HQs until you find out just where the main thrust of the Russian attacks are going to develop. In short they will become the mobile Fire Brigade to ouse any break in the line. I like to put three Pz and one or two Motor divs in one Korps, with a Pz Brigade and or a few Pz Bns to fill the Korps out. Although tempted to build a Korps with 8 Pz Divs in it to create an exceptionally strong attack force it can also prove to be very brittle and run into trouble at sometime. If the readiness is reduced enough and the unit is cut off...! I dread to think of the drain on the RPL pool if eight Pz Divs have to be rebuilt all at once. Besides it cuts down on your mobility. It's better to have five or six Pz Korps with attack values of around 200 to 300 and some in reserve than to create two or three with triple the strength.

As I have already stated the AI is a marked improvement over **War in Russia**. You can expect attacks just about anywhere along the entire line. Note that according to Gary Grigsby the EVEN setting is for human vs human or computer vs computer play. If you play the computer, you should give the AI some help by changing the play balance in the computer's favour, though this could cause a problem with the play balance. The Axis already have a massive advantage in the early stages of 1941 and giving them even more if you play the Russian is asking for trouble. The same could be said of the Russians in late 1941 and early 1942. I would therefore suggest an EVEN setting at the beginning, giving the AI some help from the start of 1942 regardless of which side the computer is playing.

### Holding The Line

Like **War in Russia** a double line of defence is a good tactic. Unlike **War in Russia**, parking weak Korps immediately behind the forward line is asking for trouble. To begin with infantry can move and attack twice, never mind the Tank Armies, when

they become available, with five pluses. Any retreating unit will be forced to fall back over the second line anyway which will cause more fatigue loss to the retreating unit than necessary. Furthermore the second plus attack will no doubt shatter the weak second line unit. The second line of defence should therefore be set up at least two hexes (or more), behind the first line. There will not be enough Korps available to cover the entire line twice so certain key areas should be covered: cities in particular and rail links in general.

Each Korps in the second line of defence should contain no more than one unit. JPz or Stug Assaults Bns, Pz Bns, maybe the odd spare artillery or flak, if any, a spare Security Div or two and perhaps a couple of fresh Infantry Divs pinched from West Front HQ in exchange for the SS Div sent there. You will also have several new Infantry Divs appearing in the west in the latter part of December and more will appear in January. The 24th Pz Div also becomes available around February 1942.

When a Korps from the first line is forced out of its entrenchments it should fall back to end up one hex in front of the second line. In the following week the retreating units should transfer to one of the second line Korps which should be well entrenched by this time. The unit that held the second line can then fall back two hexes and begin digging in again. In short: hedge-hop backwards when necessary, giving up as little ground as possible. It should be noted that the transfer of units will result in some fatigue, but they will be entrenched again and this should make up for the loss of one readiness point.

Having said all that, if your front is well dug in you will find that the Russians will have to make at least two attacks to budge your defenders. Attacks against entrenched units results in heavy losses to the attacker. For example: a dug in unit at level five, comprising 4 infantry, 1 Pz Bn, 1 artillery and 2 flak smashed up 83 tanks, 172 squads and 29 guns for the loss of 2 tanks, 6 squads and 8 guns, though the attacker knocked the entrenchment level down to 2. With air support another force of 4 infantry, 2 artillery and 2 flak managed to smash up 97 tanks, 331 squads and 57 guns for the loss of little more than 9 squads and 11 guns! It is a good idea to 'tidy up' the line in the first week of bad weather, even if it means losing some ground here and there. Making sure that no more than two units can get at most of your defen-

ders is helpful. Though independent attacks against the line are more likely – a single Russian Army, (or even a German Korps), can have a considerable amount of strength, particularly if readiness levels are at maximum.

### In The Air

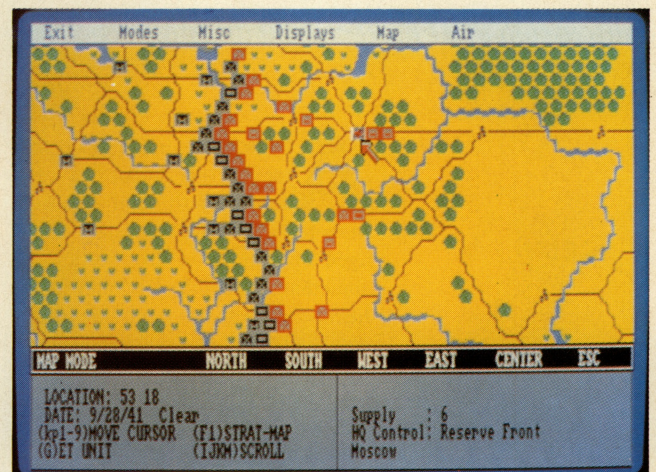
The Ju-52s should all end up in West Front HQ at the start of the campaign. Air strength requirements are counted by numbers, not type. By doing this you will be able to transfer a number of fighters and bombers to the Russian Front where they will be more useful, instead of sitting on their backsides in France.

By the time the USAAF begins bombing your cities you should send some fighter Gruppen back to OKW or West Front HQs to assist in dealing with them. In Finland two of the Finnish air units are flying outdated fighter bombers. It is recommended that one is converted to Bf-109Fs as soon as you have enough in the RPL pool and the other should be given Bf-110Cs or Es. An additional Ju-88 Gruppen in Finland would not go amiss either. The Axis forces in the south could also benefit from better aircraft, but any and all changes should be done on a one unit per week rotation as all new aircraft are deemed damaged on the turn of conversion. Of course any such changes will be dictated by the number of available aircraft in the RPL pool. Note that before making any such changes, it would be a good idea to ensure that the old aircraft are sent on a mission first, then feel free to change the aircraft type.

Air units are unaffected by fatigue, so bad weather operations should be conducted as and when allowed. Never give the Russian airforce a chance to control the skies. Smash them up on the ground on turn one and continue to hit them whenever possible during the advance. If you cannot reach aircraft on the ground, go for ground units in cities. By late August, early September, the Luftwaffe should be so strong that the Russian airforce will be conspicuous by its absence until December, or with luck late January, and when they return they will still be dog meat. While the Russian airforce is absent, it's a good idea to send in Ju-88s and He-111s to visit places like Moscow and Leningrad to damage factory production. If you can get bombers over Stalingrad so much the better, but Moscow is a key target in late 1941.

Then we have the Afrika Korps.

General Von Arnim surrendered the Afrika Korps and its Italian allies to the British and Americans on 12th May 1943. In game terms it might be a good idea to strip the Afrika Korps HQ of all the German units in the first week of May 1943, or, taking no chances, the last week of April 1943. These units should be sent to Berlin for a rest. If you do not do this you will have to rebuild them. As it is the Italian ground units will be lost anyway and the air units (which suffer from heavy losses), will disappear when Italy is invaded. First, there is the short term defense of Sicily. You should consider pulling out from there at the last minute for the same reasons. Once Italian Front proper is set up you can then safely transfer any necessary armor and infantry back into Italy to defend it.



### Finally

Reinforcements, as opposed to replacements, are received on a historical timetable. There is no order of battle provided, which is a bit of a pain as I find myself looking at the main HQs every turn and even calling on certain other HQs from time to time. Unlike the Russian who receives all reinforcements and replacements through RVGK HQ, the Germans will find that although OKH and OKW are the main source of new formations, West Front, Italian Front, along with the Army Groups will provide new units at some point in time. Even the non-German Axis HQs will receive new units at the beginning of January 1942. **SP**

*Next issue Hern The Hunter discusses **Second Front** strategy from the Allied point of view.*