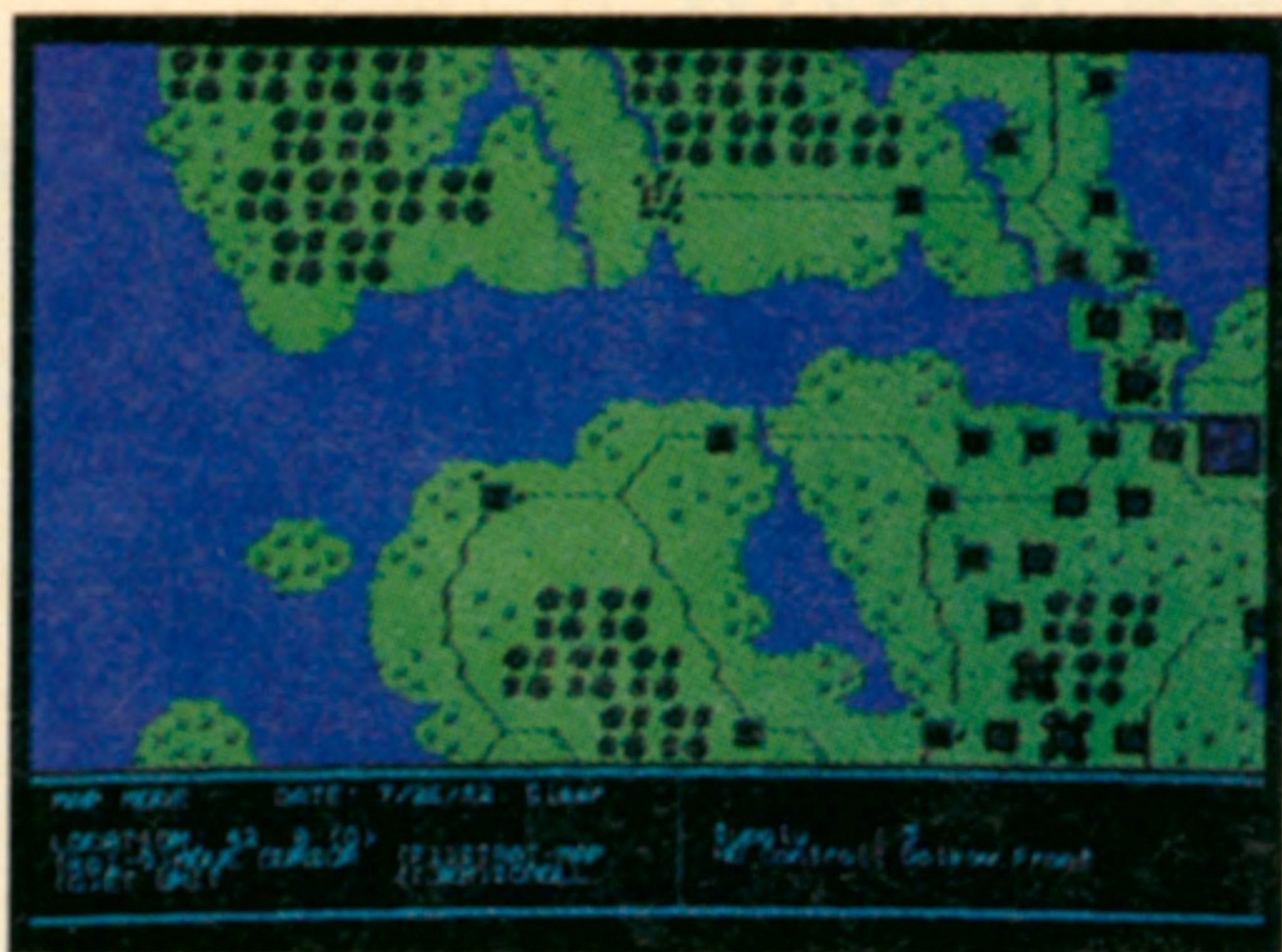


SECOND FRONT

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

In terms of scope, ferocity, and impact on the post-war world, no campaign of World War II comes close to the apocalyptic death-struggle between Hitler's *Wehrmacht* and Stalin's Red Army. Winston Churchill was not engaging in idle hyperbole when he spoke of the Red Army "tearing the guts out of the German war machine." It was a fight to the death between the biggest army on Earth and the most mechanized; between totalitarian regimes each of whose ideologies were, to a large extent, predicated on the extermination of the other; between generals who believed that superior training and technology could offset sheer numbers, and generals who did not flinch before casualty figures that would have toppled any Western government overnight.



The moment of truth at Leningrad. Will you assault the city (and risk a bloodbath of casualties) or surround it as Hitler did?

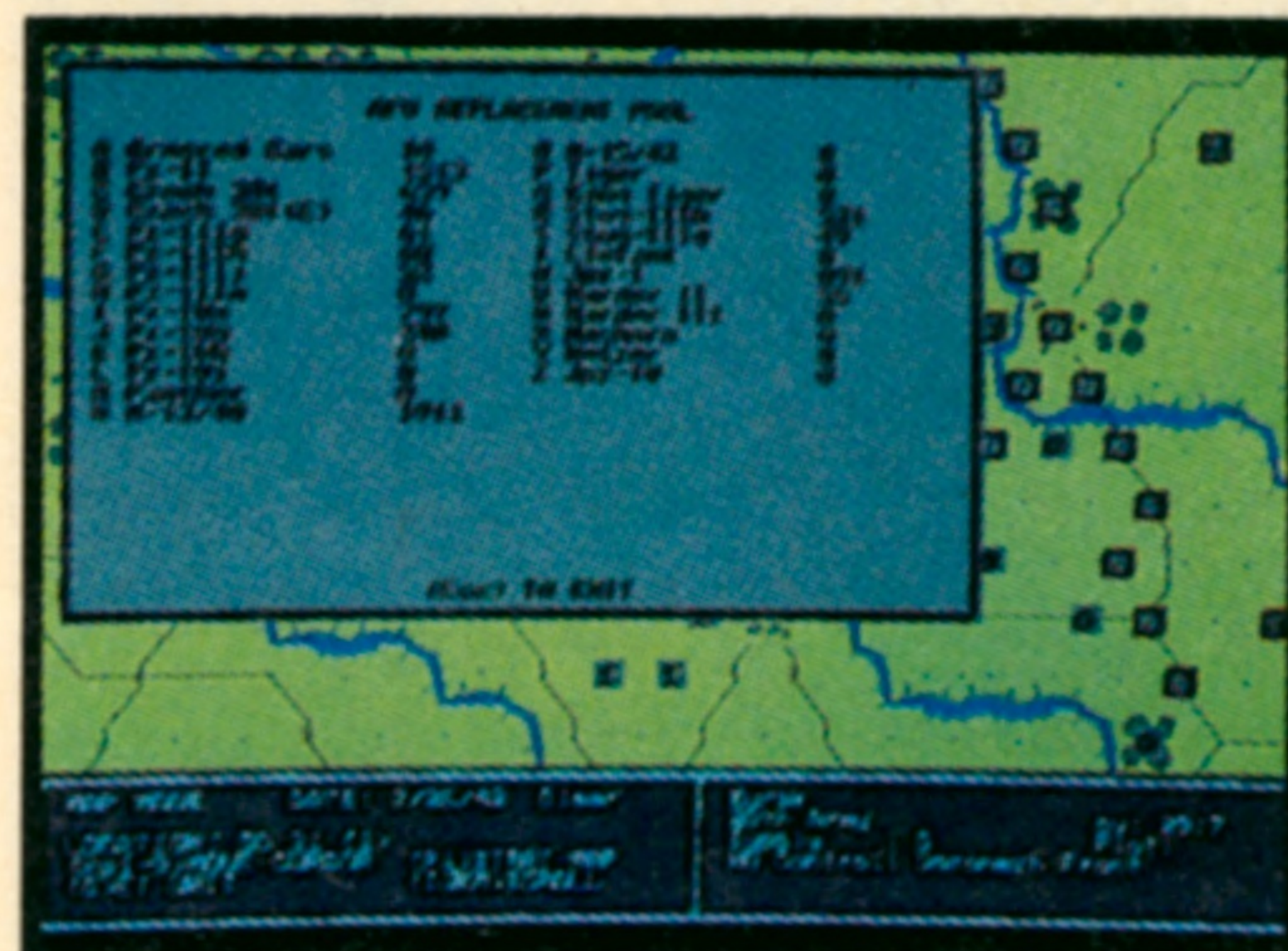
It was a war whose 1200-mile front stretched from the sub-arctic fells of Lapland to the majestic peaks of the Caucasus. The ebb and flow of its campaigns was like a cycle of tidal waves, devouring hundreds of miles and reducing entire cities to smoldering heaps of rubble. In all, some 350 divisions fought on both sides with a savagery that produced more battlefield deaths in any given week than the United States suffered during the entire European campaign. Before it was over, the war on the Eastern Front would claim the lives of 20 to 30 million people.

The campaign exerts a basilisk-like grip on the imagi-

nations of war-gamers not just because of its drama, but also because a convincing case can be made that, if it had not been for Hitler's increasingly deranged interference at a number of critical moments, the German generals almost certainly could have won — with staggering consequences for future history.

Good tactical-level Eastern Front simulations abound in the PC format — both *Fire Brigade* and *Panzer Battles*, for example — but in SSI's new *Second Front*, veteran war-game designer Gary Grigsby has done something never done before in any format, board or computer: He has created a simulation that conveys both the epic sweep and the ask-no-quarter bloodiness of the campaign on both the strategic and tactical levels, and he's wrapped the whole awesome thing into a game-system that is positively hypnotic in its playability.

Second Front's map is based on an invisible hex-grid system (still, after all these years, the most satisfying system for war-gaming), and depicts everything from Berlin in the east and Lake Ladoga in the north to Sevastopol and Baku in the south. Each hex represents 20 miles of terrain. An exception-



A quick glance at the AFV replacement pool shows enough Pz-IVg's to upgrade two panzer divisions. But which two, and where?



June 28, 1942: The start of the Stalingrad scenario as displayed on the strategic map.

ally logical system of invisible zones represents command control and supply (and a toggle key superimposes on the map all hexes that are considered "in supply" by the computer — an enormous help to the field marshal who specializes in double envelopments).

Most game players will probably start out trying to see if they can do better than Hitler. *Second Front* goes deep in this regard, permitting you to put Germany on a "total war" footing from the beginning by assigning production priorities that insure a flow of new, improved hardware to the front, by allowing you to upgrade the equipment of mechanized and aerial units more expeditiously and rationally than Hitler's system provided for, and by allowing you to appoint commanders according to their abilities, not their sycophancy. The better the corps' commander, the less likely it is that a unit will be "shattered" by a severe enemy blow.

There are two "campaign" scenarios: The original Operation Barbarossa (starting in June, 1941), and the 1942 campaign that culminated — disastrously — in the debacle of Stalingrad. Battle scenarios include the struggle for Moscow (winter, 1941) and that for Stalingrad.

Each game-turn represents one week of real time, so if you begin one of the campaign scenarios, don't expect to finish it the same day (or even the same week).

The units symbols represent corps, but a couple of simple keystrokes let you go as deep into the organizational levels as you want, to examine the experience, readiness, and equipage of individual battalions. A similarly "layered" approach has been used to show combat results: You can get a strategic read-out, which tells simply the net result in win-lose-or-draw fashion, or you can access reports down to the level of how many tanks,



It's easy to access detailed information on any unit. This division looks ready to go and can be expected to perform well in battle.

planes and gun batteries were involved and lost. The games speed by much faster at the former level, but few gamers will be able to resist watching a crucial battle develop as each division reports its losses or gains.

As supreme commander, you can also set replacement levels for each headquarters (and if you're playing on the German side, you'd do well to crank those up to 100 percent) and transfer divisions from the Italian or Western fronts. Don't overdo the latter, however. We

tried gutting the reserves in France and Italy and massing about ten new corps for an all-or-nothing offensive on the Stalingrad front and succeeded in taking Stalingrad all right, only to have the computer inform us that the Allies had just staged a landing in France about two years ahead of D-Day.

There are many, many options with which you can tinker to give your chosen side an extra edge when and where it's needed, but the program won't allow you to distort history by giving Hitler jet aircraft two years early or Tiger tanks in 1941. You can do anything that was feasible according to the resources and technology available at the time, but you can't indulge in science fiction.

For instance: Hitler insisted that the Messerschmitt Bf-109 remain in production long after it should have been replaced by the better-armed and more durable Focke-Wolfe 190, due solely to the political influence of Willy Messerschmitt. If you elect to run the German war effort, one of your first strategic decisions should be to take your Messerschmitt plants off-line and retool them for Fw-190s, then start upgrading your fighter squadrons as soon as you can (and don't forget the Romanian and Finnish squadrons, who begin the war with obsolescent Fokkers and G-50s). Do this, and tactical air supremacy is virtually assured for the first two years.

Hitting the Alt-P key displays the current Replacement Pool, showing a tally of all new and repaired tanks and planes available during a given turn. Make a habit of upgrading the firepower and armor of even the small tank-hunter and self-

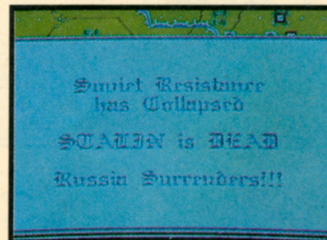


By placing the cursor over an HQ unit, you can mount powerful air attacks against tactical or strategic targets.

propelled gun battalions attached to your infantry divisions. For the German commander, such attention to detail can spell the difference between holding on through the winter and being shattered by the repeated sledgehammer blows of the Red Army.

The graphics in *Second Front* are as handsome as the game-system is elegant. When the autumn rains come, the map turns a soggy brown; when winter arrives, all lakes and rivers turn white, and white shading appears on the land. And when the dreaded blizzard of '41 strikes, the entire front suddenly and dramatically appears to be covered with ice crystals.

Formidable in its depth, beautiful in its presentation, utterly spellbinding as a game-playing experience, *Second Front* is one of the best war games ever published for home computers. And it is, without question, the big Eastern Front game a lot of people have been waiting for.



November 8, 1942: Operation Rhinegold brings a dramatic turn of events — not to mention a drastic rearrangement of history....

GP

Hardware requirements:
640K minimum memory for EGA graphics; 512K for CGA graphics.