

Friday Night at the Fights: Hard Won Experience. 9th July 1941

With the German armour of Panzer Groups 3 and 4 closing in on the Russian city of Vitebsk a Russian counter attack was ordered, which included both 5th and 7th Mechanised Corps. However, rapid movement forward of up to 150 kilometres in short order left large numbers of the paper strength of the mechanised corps stranded and broken down along roads and tracks, reducing the numbers from 1500 tanks to less than 900, and relatively few of those remaining being modern types.

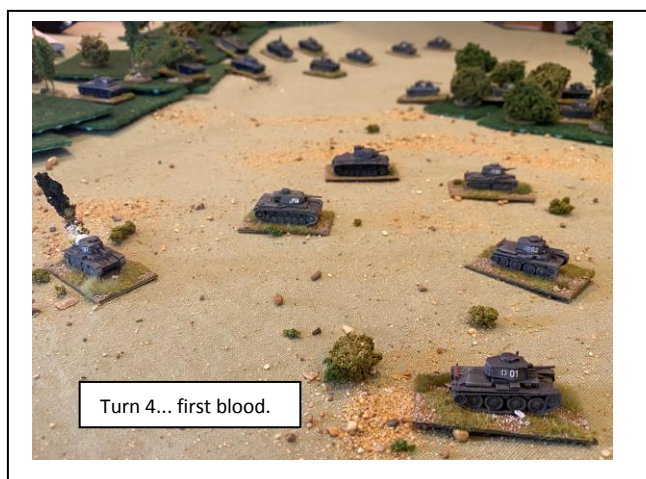
Having 'mislaid' much of the reconnaissance units of the integral tank divisions, there was considerable confusion as the Russian armoured regiments and battalions advanced, as the Germans used effective ground and air reconnaissance to identify the axis of Russian attack. Repeated attempts to break through German 'stop lines' resulted in further painful Russian casualties, and in the case of 14th Tank Division, of 7th Mechanised Corps, it was forced to fall back as German units began to close off its lines of supply.

This scenario covers the Russian heavy tank battalion of 27th Tank Regiment, and the attempt to stop the German armoured advance of 12th Panzer Division on the 9th July 1941.

The play test on this occasion involved one German and one Russian player. On the face of it the Germans had a vastly superior number of tanks, effectively the whole of 29th Panzer Regiment's 1st Battalion, composed of Panzer 38Ts and Panzer IVs. Facing them were five KV2s, dug in across a front of just over one kilometre, and two kilometres deep. The terrain was of benefit to the Russian tanks, though even dug in they rather stood out from the surrounding landscape, largely of scrub and open woodland.

With potentially 22 turns, the German player, unaware of what they were facing... the 'fog of war' rule meaning that the Russian player had 15 counters, five of which were 'real', all placed before the German player arrived for the game, and they were all in positions with good fields of fire.

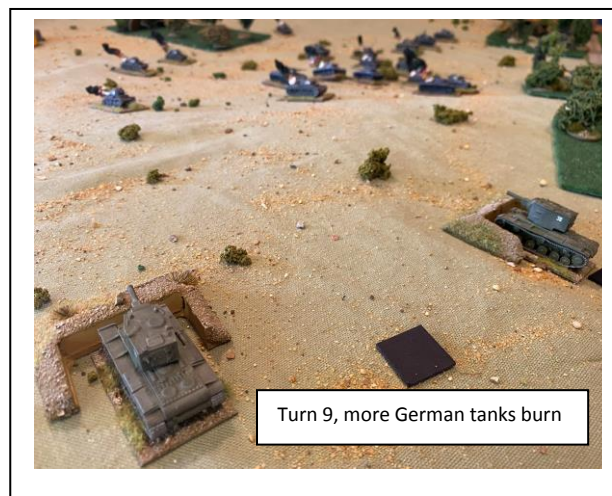
In fact the Germans managed to move for the first 3 turns before the Russians began to spot them, and it was turn 4 before the first tank was destroyed, a Panzer 28T, at nearly 1000 metres, the 152mm round causing catastrophic damage. Unfortunately the rest of the Russian tanks either failed to spot the enemy or spectacularly failed to hit their identified targets.



For the next three turns several more German tanks fell victim to the KV2s, and though the bulk of the German armour by now had spotted the KVs even though they were dug in, there was no chance of their 37mm guns doing any damage to the Russian behemoths. But the German advance continued.



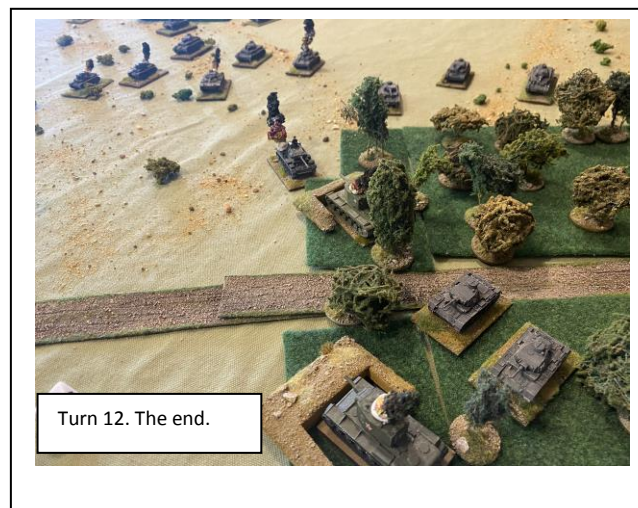
By turn 9 only one German tank platoon had broken under the Russian fire, but the casualties were mounting. The German player kept their nerve though and now was in places within 250 metres of the dug in Russian tanks, the first German fire coming in on the flanks of two KV2s, with, unfortunately no knock outs, but damage to tracks and optics, the tracks exposed at least in part by the hasty nature of the digging in.

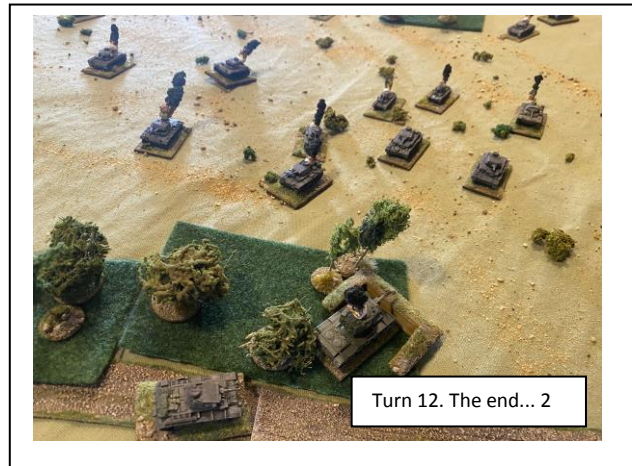


The German player, passing effectiveness test after effectiveness test, continued the charge forward, and by turn 10 the surviving tanks of the first two waves were close to the Russian armour. Repeated hits on the flanks and rear of the enemy resulted in more damage, but no penetrating hits. The weight of accurate fire forced the Russian crews to 'abandon ship'.



By turn 12, the Russian crews failing to get hits on the German armour streaming around them, were overwhelmed by the fire of the German 37mm guns at point back range, the nerve of crew after crew breaking, and four of the KV2s were abandoned, the remaining one attempting to fall back, but itself falling victim to the enemy.





With the game over, it was a win for the German player, and a successful scenario. Historically the Russians repulsed this attack, but though it was a German win, the loss of 15 tanks, most of them total losses, could be best described as a pyrrhic victory. But it certainly did not suggest that the KV2 was a winner of an armoured vehicle, its slow rate of fire being an Achilles heel of the first order, which its heavy armour did not counter balance.