

DONNERSCHLAG

ESCAPE FROM STALINGRAD



A game by Patrick Gebhardt & Pepito Sbazzeguti



R U L E B O O K

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. SCALE	1
3. CALCULATION CONVENTIONS	1
4. COMPONENTS	1
4.1 Map	1
4.2 Combat Units	1
4.3 Headquarters	1
4.4 Activation Cards	2
4.5 Combat Cards	2
4.6 OKH & STAVKA	2
4.7 Markers	2
5. PREPARATION FOR PLAY	3
6. SEQUENCE OF PLAY	3
7. FOG OF WAR	4
8. STACKING	4
9. ZONE OF CONTROL	4
10. COMMAND	4
10.1 Activation Cards	4
10.2 Command Execution	4
<i>Axis Player</i>	4
10.3 Command Range	5
11. SUPPLY	6
11.1 Supply Determination	6
11.2 Supply Status Effects	6
12. MOVEMENT	6
12.1 Movement Procedure	6
<i>Movement Points</i>	6
12.2 Terrain Effects On Movement	6
<i>River Hexsides</i>	6
<i>Road Hexes</i>	6
12.3 Overruns	7
12.4 HQs	7
12.5 EZOC Effects On Movement	7
13. COMBAT	7
13.1 Combat Principles	7
13.2 Combat Procedure	7
<i>Combat Cards</i>	7
<i>Combat Ratio Determination</i>	7
<i>Die-Roll Modifier Determination</i>	8
<i>Combat Results Determination</i>	8
<i>Retreat</i>	8
<i>Advance after Combat</i>	8
14. DONNERSCHLAG	10
<i>Special Case</i>	10
15. VICTORY CONDITIONS	10
<i>Axis Victory</i>	10
<i>Soviet Victory</i>	10
16. HISTORICAL NOTES	10
17. DESIGNER'S NOTES	15
18. SETUP	16
19. INDEX	17

Formatting

- Useful notes and additional information about the rules is styled this way.

! Exceptions to the rules are styled this way.

© 2022

Donnerschlag - Escape from Stalingrad is manufactured and distributed by VUCA Simulations, a brand of Bruncken & Gebhardt GmbH. All Rights Reserved.

Credits

Designers

Patrick Gebhardt
Pepito Sbazzeguti

Developer & Art Director

P. Gebhardt

Graphic Artists

P. Bazerque
G. Chiesa

Rules Editor

J. Bruncken

Special thanks to

(in no particular order)

Miguel Conceição
Dave Deitch
Daniel Frings
Michael Kirk
Hannes Sperka
Martin Spetz
and last but not least:
Sven "The boy" Weiser



You can find additional information about our games, and helpful materials on:

vucasims.com

1. INTRODUCTION

From December 12 to December 23 in 1942, "Unternehmen Wintergewitter" was in progress. This was the code name for a relief attack by Heeresgruppe Don to free the trapped 6th Army in Stalingrad. The Axis formations entered with 50,000 men and 250 tanks, while the strength of the Soviet formations was reported to be about three times that.

For the enterprise to have any chance of success, the troops in the encirclement had to break out and meet the advancing Axis troops. The breakout had to be precisely coordinated with the advance of the relief troops and was to commence on the cue "Donnerschlag". The breakout was never ordered and the troops in Stalingrad were never able to be relieved. This sealed their fate.

Players will be recreating this episode, with the Axis side attempting to secretly establish and reach a meeting point, thus effectively freeing the 6th Army, while the Soviet will try to impede such outcome.

2. SCALE

One hex equals 4 km. One turn equals 2-3 days. A game lasts, at most, 8 turns. Units are mostly Brigades & Regiments for the Soviets and Romanians, Battalions & *Abteilungen* for the Germans.

3. CALCULATION CONVENTIONS

All fractions are added up until a final sum is obtained. This is then rounded down to the nearest whole value.

4. COMPONENTS

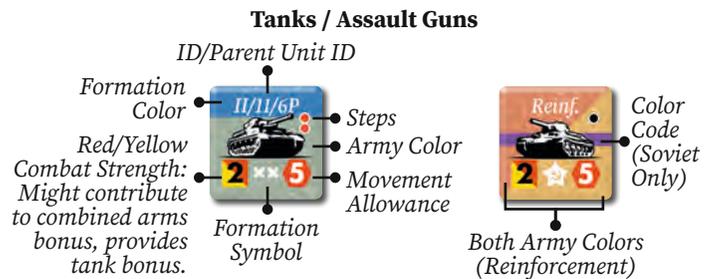
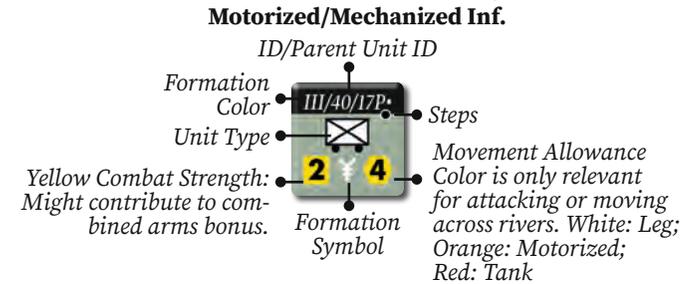
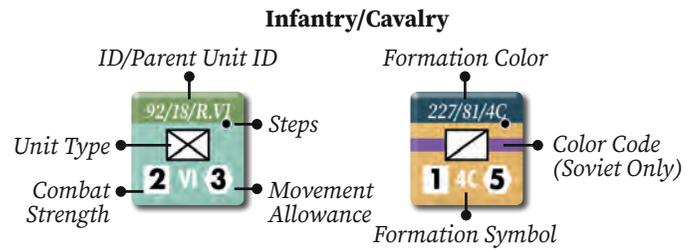
4.1 Map

The game map represents the area of the Soviet Union to the south of Stalingrad where *Unternehmen Wintergewitter* took place. A pattern of hexagons (referred to as hexes in the following) overlays the map to facilitate placement and movement of the game pieces (counters). Supply zones are marked on the map edges: Red for Soviets, Fieldgrey for Axis.

4.2 Combat Units

Combat units represent the military forces that took part in the historical campaign.

Axis Units	
LVII Panzer Corps	6th Panzer Division
	17th Panzer Division
	23rd Panzer Division
	Independent Units
Romanian VI & VII Corps	1st Infantry Division
	2nd Infantry Division
	4th Infantry Division
	18th Infantry Division
Gr. Popescu	5th Cavalry Division
	8th Cavalry Division
Soviet Units	
2nd Guards Army	1st Guards Rifle Corps
	2nd Guards Mech Corps
	6th Mechanized Corps
	7th Tank Corps
	13th Guards Rifle Corps
51st Army	4th Cavalry Corps
	4th Mechanized Corps
	13th Tank Corps
Independent Units	



Unit & HQ Types



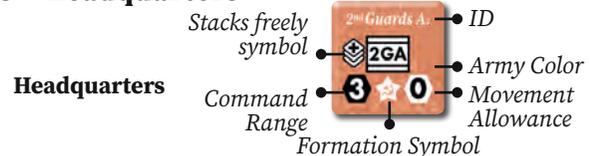
Alarmgruppe

German *Alarmgruppe-Einheiten* units are quickly assembled units. They usually did not have heavy weapons and their operational capabilities were limited. In *Donnerschlag*, the *Alarmgruppe-Einheiten* can only be used for defense. The Combat value in parentheses indicates that they cannot be used in an attack. They do not count against the stacking limit and cannot move.

Optional Silhouette counters

In the counter sheets you will find two counters per Tank unit, one with a standard side silhouette and one with an optional style. Otherwise they are identical, each player may choose which counter set to play with, according to their preference.

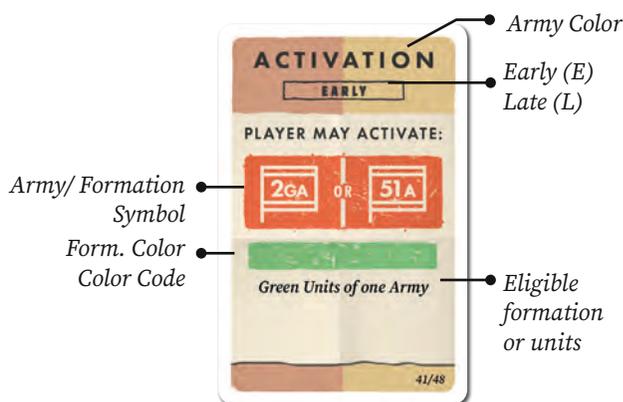
4.3 Headquarters



- ♦ Headquarters (HQs) represent the high-echelon formations that historically took part in the campaign. HQs are not combat units.
- ♦ Command Range: This rating is used to determine which combat units can be activated by an HQ. Command Range is counted in hexes.
- ♦ At the end of a movement, an Axis HQ must be on a road hex.
- Soviet HQ's only move via an event (Combat Card). The target hex is specified.

4.4 Activation Cards

An Activation Card shows which units can be activated by it. Both sides start the game with five Activation Cards in their hand. This is also the hand-limit. The hand-limit of a player can be increased to six Activation Cards during the game. All Activation Cards must be played in each turn.



4.5 Combat Cards

Both sides start the game with five Combat Cards in their hand. This is also the hand-limit. The hand-limit of a player can be increased to six Combat Cards during the game. All but one Combat Card must be played in each turn. One Combat Card can be kept for the next turn. (This does count against the hand-limit however.) Note that Combat Cards are marked for when they can be played. You can use as many Combat Cards as you like in any single combat. Combat Cards offer **two options, one of which** can be selected when playing the card:



A A General Event, possibly dependent on a successful die roll. In most cases, a successful event will remove the card from the game.

◆ Important: When the two Soviet cards “SWT-40” and “Deadbolt Position” are played together to get the better ‘event’, they are treated as one card. Only one die-roll (DR) is required. They can be placed together in the STAVKA Box.

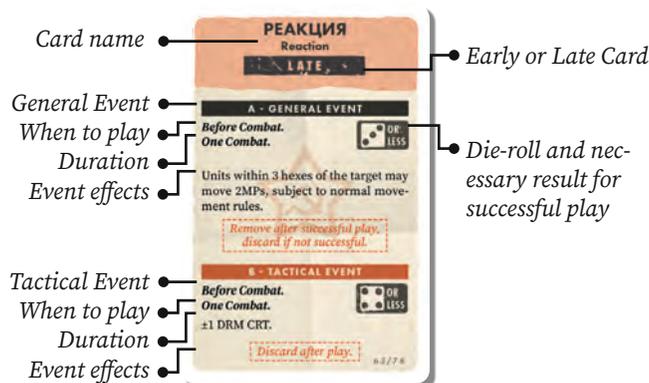
◆ When the two Soviet cards “Naval Rifle Brigade” and “Garde” are played together to get the better ‘event’, they are treated as one card. Only one DR is required. They can be placed together in the ‘STAVKA Box’.

■ It is also possible to place only one of them in the ‘STAVKA Box’ and play it together with the other card from the hand.

B A Tactical Event, also possibly dependent on a successful die roll. On a successful event, the card is not usually removed from the game and gets placed on the discard pile.

Combat Cards are removed from the game only when the respective event has occurred, that is, when the necessary DR was successful or if they are played with the help of OKH or STAVKA. Combat Cards that are removed from the game are not shuffled back into the deck in Turn 4 (and Turn 8, if applicable). (Note that the Combat Card will indicate if it is to be permanently removed from the game.)

When Replacements are brought into play by a Combat Card, reduced (1-step) units can be restored to their full (2-step) strength—or an eliminated unit can be brought into play at 1-step strength. Such units brought back into play appear stacked with, or adjacent to, a friendly unit in supply—but not adjacent to an enemy unit, whilst a 1-step unit may be restored to their full strength (2-step) side even if adjacent to an enemy unit.



4.6 OKH & STAVKA

Both sides have a Highest Command Level: OKH for the Axis and STAVKA for the Soviets. In the Admin phase of a game-turn, a Combat Card from the hand may be placed face-down in the OKH or STAVKA box. They can then be played at any time thereafter in an Action Phase, subject to the timing restrictions on the card. The listed “General Event” OR “Tactical Event” automatically occurs when the card is played. The opponent cannot prevent this. (Not even with the ‘No one answers the phone’ card.) And a die-roll is not needed for success.

The opposing player may never inspect the card in the box, and cards in the box do not count against the player’s hand limit. You may keep the card in the box for the next turn, but if you do, you cannot put a new card in the box. Remember: one card per Turn. (Exceptions: “Sowjet SWT-40”/“Deadbolt Position” and “Naval Rifle Brigade”/“Garde”)

4.7 Markers



Schwerpunkt (Main effort) Marker: When the marker becomes available by play of the corresponding combat card, the Axis player places it on any of his units. It moves with the unit and gets temporarily removed if the unit is eliminated. In the Admin phase of each turn the Axis player may place the Schwerpunkt marker anew with any of his units.

Schlachtenglück: Axis player receives at the start of the game. Can be used in two ways:

1. Reroll any one die-roll (not a die-roll from the opponent, however); OR
2. After the hand is dealt, one card may be selected for discard. Draw a new card from the deck (which must be kept), then place discard back into the deck. (The deck is then reshuffled.)

If the Schlachtenglück Marker is played, it passes to the opposing player. It then returns to the Axis player’s possession at the beginning of each turn.

5. PREPARATION FOR PLAY

- ◆ Set up the units and markers according to the Set-Up Chart and the Reinforcement Holding Boxes on the map.
- ◆ Attach StuG Abt. 228 and StuG Abt. 243 to an Axis formation (the same or different). They remain attached to it for the entire game.
- ◆ Sort the Activation Cards and Combat Cards into Early and Late Decks. The cards designated as Late do not come into play until Turn 4.
- ◆ Shuffle the Early Activation Cards and Early Combat Cards of both sides. Place the Activation Cards and Combat Cards in draw piles for each player, near to them. Deal each player five Activation Cards and five Combat Cards from their respective draw piles.
- ◆ Place the Soviet Ad Hoc Infantry Reinforcement units with their two SNAFU Markers in an opaque cup. Place the Axis Player's *Alarmgruppe* units with their one SNAFU Marker in a different cup. During play, eliminated Ad Hoc Infantry and *Alarmgruppe* units are returned to the cup. SNAFU markers get placed back into the cup immediately after being drawn.
- ◆ Place the Soviet Player's Tank Reinforcements in another opaque cup (with one SNAFU Markers). Eliminated Tank Reinforcement Units are returned to the cup.
- ◆ The Axis Player gets the Schlachtenglück Marker.
- ◆ **HIGH COMMAND:** Both players may choose a Combat Card to begin with.

6. SEQUENCE OF PLAY

1. Admin Phase (skipped in Turn 1)

- 'Schwerpunkt' marker is placed (after becoming available).
- Reinforcements:** Both players receive and place their reinforcement units due for this turn.
 - *German Alarmgruppe and Soviet Tank and Ad Hoc Infantry Replacements are not regular reinforcements and are subject to different rules.*

In Turns 2, 3, 6, and 7: Soviet units appear in Hex 2124 or 0914. They may be placed on any hex which is connected to their entry hex by an uninterrupted road and/or rail line, without entering any hex adjacent to an enemy unit. The stacking limit must not be exceeded in the destination hex.

Soviet HQ's can appear or be moved according to the specifications of a Combat Card. (Note that they CAN be placed in an EZOC.)

In Turn 4: German 17th Pz. units appear in Hex 4607. They may be placed on any connected road hex —without entering any hex adjacent to an enemy unit. The stacking limit must not be exceeded in the destination hex.

- Activation Cards and Combat Cards are dealt for both sides according to the hand-limit of the player.
 - ◆ **OKH/STAVKA:** One card may be placed face-down in the OKH or STAVKA box.
 - ◆ **HIGH COMMAND:** Both players may choose one Combat Card from the deck of early Combat Cards in Turn 1, from the deck of late Combat Cards in Turn 4 and from the discard or draw pile in Turn 8 (not from removed cards however!).
- In Turn 4:** Deal remaining Activation and Combat Cards from the draw piles, add late cards to the previously discarded ones, and then shuffle them together into new draw piles. (One pile of Activation Cards and one pile of Combat Cards per player.)

! *Combat Cards that are removed from the game are not shuffled in.*

- ◆ **Turn 8 Special Rule:** Please see "The last great effort" in rule 14.

- The Axis player may call out "Donnerschlag!" and secretly choose a Meeting Zone (see rule 14). Place the Donnerschlag Marker on the "0" box in the Donnerschlag Advance Track. (In most cases this will happen in Turn 3 or 4.) A Meeting Zone is set secretly. To do so, the Axis player chooses a Meeting Zone's holding box for the 'real' Meeting Zone Marker and places dummy markers in the other holding boxes. (The Meeting Zone Markers remain hidden for the Soviet player.)
- The 'Schlachtenglück Marker' returns to the possession of the Axis player.

2. Action Phase

Activations are resolved alternately by both players, with the German player always going first. For each Activation, a played Activation Card indicates which units can perform actions in this Activation.

An Activation consists of the following four steps:

- Activation:** Play one Activation Card and activate Units.
- Supply:** Check Supply for activated units only.
- Movement:** Active Player can move activated units.
- Combat:** (Includes possible use of Combat Cards.) Active Player may attack enemy units using activated units.
 - ◆ If there are Activation Cards left in the hand, the other player starts with step a.
 - ◆ If there are none, go to step 3.

- Advance the Donnerschlag marker one box. (This also applies to the turn in which it was brought into play.)

If the Donnerschlag Marker reaches Box 4, the game ends and Victory Conditions are checked. If currently on its "6. Army Survival" side and the Axis player does not currently fulfill the victory conditions: the game continues for an additional turn. (That is, the game ends when the marker reaches Box 5.)

- Adjust Turn Track Marker.

SEQUENCE OF PLAY SUMMARY

1. Admin Phase

- 'Schwerpunkt' marker is placed (after becoming available).
- Reinforcements placement.
- Deal Formation Cards and Combat Cards & place Cards in the STAVKA/OKH box
- In Turn 4 (and possibly in Turn 8): Reshuffle and add Formation Cards & Combat Cards.
- Calling out 'Donnerschlag'.
- 'Schlachtenglück'-Marker goes back to the Axis.

2. Action Phase

Resolve Activations alternately with the German player always going first.

An Activation consists of the following four steps:

- Play one Activation Card and activate Units
 - Check Supply of activated units only
 - Movement
 - Combat
- ◆ If there are Activation Cards left in the hand, return to step a.
 - ◆ If there are none, advance to segment e.

3. Advance 'Donnerschlag marker'

4. Adjust Turn Track Marker

7. FOG OF WAR

Activation Cards and Combat Cards in hand —or in the STAVKA/OKH box —are kept secret from the opposing player. After the German player has called out “*Donnerschlag!*”, the selected Meeting Zone also remains secret. However, there is no ‘fog of war’ for units on the map. (*You and God can see them quite plainly.*)

8. STACKING

Two or more friendly units in the same hex constitute a stack. A maximum of two (*whether one- or two-step*) combat units plus one HQ can occupy a hex. HQs cannot be stacked with another HQs.

! *Axis Alarmgruppe units and the Schwerpunkt Marker do not count against the stacking limit. The Schwerpunkt Marker can even be stacked with an HQ.*

- ◆ Units that do not count towards the stacking limit are marked with a special icon: 
- ◆ Axis and Soviet units can never stack in the same hex. The only time a unit can enter an enemy-occupied hex is when a lone HQ is overrun.
- ◆ German units can stack with Romanian Units.

The stacking limit is enforced at the moment reinforcement units are placed on the map, or at the instant a unit finishes its movement, retreat, or advance after combat. It is not, however, enforced *during* these activities.



9. ZONE OF CONTROL

Every combat unit exerts a Zone of Control (ZOC) into the six hexes surrounding it. The only exception is that ZOCs do not extend across river hexsides.

- ◆ Bridges have no impact on ZOCs.
- ◆ HQs do not exert ZOCs.
- ◆ ZOCs affect supply, movement, retreat, and reinforcement placement.
- ◆ Two or more ZOCs overlapping in the same hex have no additional effect, it is the same as a single ZOC.
- ◆ The ZOC of an enemy unit is called an EZOC (Enemy Zone of Control).

10. COMMAND

Most of the time, combat units must be activated by an HQ to move and attack other units. This occurs as per the procedure below:

10.1 ACTIVATION CARDS

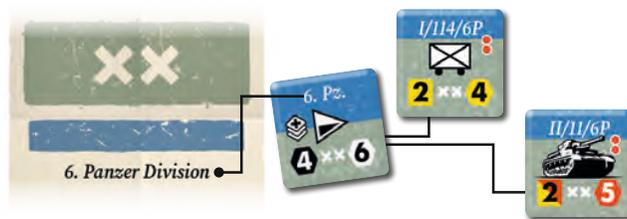
At the beginning of an activation, a player plays and discards an Activation Card. He can then activate the specified units. (*Exception: Turn 8*)

10.2 COMMAND EXECUTION

There are five types of Activation (2 for Axis, 3 for Soviet):

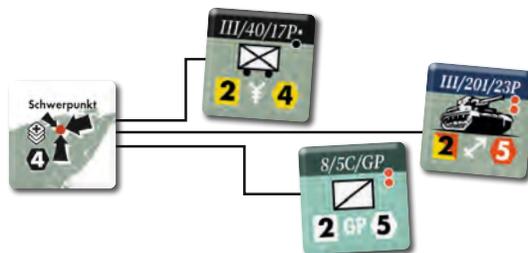
Axis Player:

- A.** A Formation is indicated on the Activation Card. If the Activation Card says ‘Any Formation’, the Axis Player can choose any one formation on the game board. The HQ corresponding to the Activation Card is then activated. This activated HQ can then further activate all combat units of its formation that are found to be within its Command Range. (HQs cannot activate other HQs.)



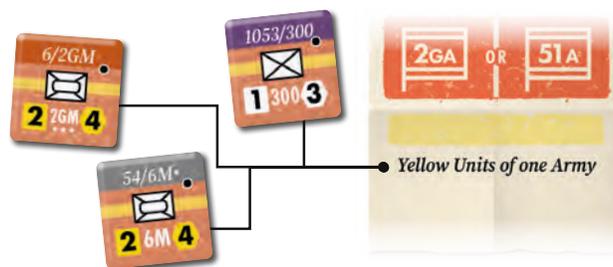
Important: Romanian VI. and VII. Infantry Divisions are activated together. Both formations are activated via the Activation Card “Rom. Inf.”.

- B.** Activate units via the Schwerpunkt Marker. Then all friendly combat units from any formations that are within four hexes of this marker and are currently found to be in Command, can be activated. (No HQs can be activated.)



Soviet Player

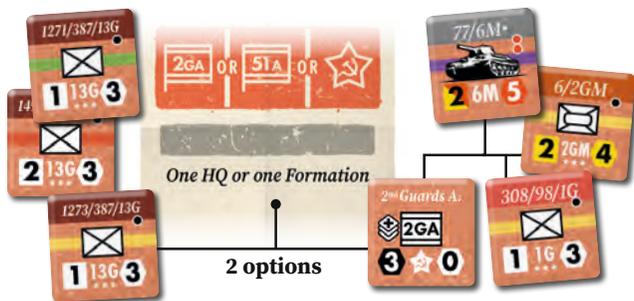
- A.** If a colour code is indicated on the Activation Card, all combat units of that colour in one army are activated (51st Army or 2nd Guard Army —note the colour differences for the different Armies). Note that the HQ Command Range does not matter here.



- B.** If the Activation Card states “Units of one colour from one Army or all units of one Formation”, the Soviet player can choose to activate all combat units of any one colour of one Army or activate all combat units of a Formation, regardless of their colour code. (The Command Range of an HQ does not matter here either.)



- C.** If the Activation Card states “One HQ or one Formation”, the Soviet player may choose to activate all combat units of one Formation, regardless of their colour code (again, the Command Range of an HQ does not matter), or activate any one HQ (51st Army or 2nd Guard Army). Then, all combat units that are in Command Range of the HQ can be activated, regardless of their colour code, Formation or even Army.



10.3 Command Range

Command Range is expressed as a number of hexes, counted from the HQ. The hex of the HQ itself is not counted. An HQ with a Command Range of four can thus activate units of the same formation up to four hexes away (i.e., three intervening hexes).

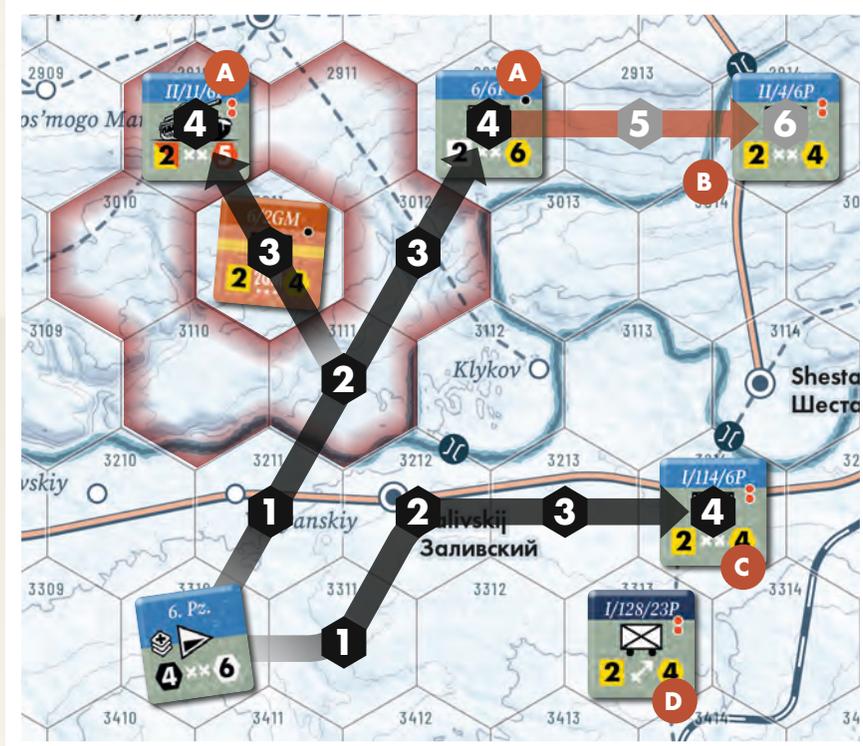
- ◆ The Schwerpunkt Marker can activate all friendly units within four hexes, regardless of formation.
- ◆ Determine Command Range at the instant an HQ or Schwerpunkt is activated: a combat unit may be activated only if it is within Command Range of the active HQ / Schwerpunkt at this moment.
- ◆ Activated combat units may later leave an HQ’s Command Range as a result of movement, retreat, or advance after combat.
- ◆ There are no restrictions on the Command Range. It can be traced through EZOCs, any kind of terrain, or even enemy units.
- Soviet units that get activated by color code or Formation do not need to check Command Range.

COMMAND RANGE EXAMPLE

The 6th Panzer Division HQ may activate the 6/6P, II/11/6P, and I/114/6P, but not the II/4/6P or the I/128/23P.

- A.** The activation of II/11/6P or 6/6P isn't hindered by the position of the Soviet 6/2GM, they may be activated even though 6/2GM's EZOC and the unit itself are present in the Command Range.
- B.** II/4/6P is outside activation range.
- C.** I/114/6P is within range so it can be activated.
- D.** I/128/23P belongs to a different formation so it may not be activated.

If the Schwerpunkt marker had been the source of activation instead of the 6.Pz HQ (in the same hex as the HQ), the I/128/23P and any other Axis units in a 4 hex radius could have been activated.



11. SUPPLY

In the Supply Segment, the Active Player checks the supply status of all Activated units.

11.1 SUPPLY DETERMINATION

A unit is in supply if it can trace a supply line to a friendly supply map-edge. A supply line is a series of adjacent hexes going from the unit to a friendly supply source. There is no limit to the number of hexes a supply line can pass through. However, it cannot pass through an enemy-occupied hex, or an EZOC, unless that hex contains friendly combat units or an HQ.

A supply line cannot cross unbridged river hexsides.

A unit unable to trace a supply line is out of supply and is marked with an **Out of Supply Marker**. There is no further downside to a unit being Out of Supply with regard to multiple Activations. The instant a unit marked as Out of Supply can trace a supply line, the marker is removed.

11.2 SUPPLY STATUS EFFECTS

Out-of-Supply Units have their combat strength and movement allowance halved—and cannot contribute to, or benefit from, a Tank and Combined Arms Bonus, either attacking or defending. (In-supply units operate normally.)

12. MOVEMENT

In the Movement Segment, the Active Player can move his/her activated HQ and all Activated combat units.

12.1 MOVEMENT PROCEDURE

Units are moved one at a time. A unit cannot start moving until the previous unit has completed its move.

Movement Points

Each Activated unit receives a number of Movement Points (MPs) equal to its movement allowance. A unit may use all, some, or none of its MPs. Unused MPs are lost; they cannot be kept from one Movement Segment to another.

4

Motorised movement

To enter an adjacent hex, a unit must expend the MP cost indicated by the Terrain Effects Chart (TEC) for the hex (and hexside crossed, if applicable). A unit cannot enter a hex if it has insufficient MPs remaining.

5

Tank movement

12.2 TERRAIN EFFECTS ON MOVEMENT

River Hexsides

- ◆ No restrictions on cavalry or infantry units crossing an unbridged river hexside.
- ◆ Motorised infantry units must start their move adjacent to the river. They must then stop across the river and can go no further in that Movement Segment.
- ◆ Tank units cannot cross an unbridged river hexside.
- ◆ Crossing a bridged river hexside negates any river movement restrictions above.

Road hexes

All minor road, major road, as well as rail hexes are considered “roads”. They all have the same effects on game play. (They are differentiated on the map for purely historical reasons.) Units that start their movement on a road hex and make their entire movement via such hexes may move one additional ‘bonus’ hex. However, no EZOCs may be exited or entered during the unit’s entire movement to receive this bonus.

SUPPLY EXAMPLE

For the purpose of this example the game board should be considered to end or be blocked at the edges of the vignette.

- 1271/387/13G is In Supply. The river would pose an obstacle but there is a bridged path through.
- 1273/387/13G is In Supply as there are no EZOCs between it and the supply map edge.
- 1275/387/13G is In Supply because it can trace a line to the supply map edge through 1273/387/13G. If it were not present, the supply line would be cut off because of the EZOC.
- 5G/3G/13G is Out of Supply, as its supply line is interrupted by EZOCs.



12.3 OVERRUNS

A moving combat unit can overrun a lone enemy HQ by simply entering its hex (Movement or Advance).

- ◆ Axis Player HQs are redeployed to the nearest unit of their formation currently located on a road hex. If there are several qualifying units, the owning player decides. If there is no unit of its formation on a road hex, the HQ is deployed on any road hex within its command range instead. If there is no unit of the formation left on the map, the HQ is removed from the game. The Schwerpunkt Marker is handled like an HQ for overruns.
- ◆ Soviet Player HQs are removed from the game until a Soviet unit re-enters the hex in which the HQ was located. Then, the HQ is immediately redeployed in the hex (provided there is no other HQ in the hex). Mark the hex with the corresponding HQ Overrun marker as a reminder.



12.4 HQs

Axis HQs must always be on a road hex at the end of their movement. They may leave a road during movement, but must end movement on one.

- *They may end a retreat on a hex without a road however.*

12.5 EZOC EFFECTS ON MOVEMENT

When units enter an EZOC, they must stop moving immediately. At the beginning of a subsequent movement segment, a unit can leave an EZOC. However, it must stop again if and when it enters any other EZOC. Only in this way can a unit move from EZOC to EZOC, or from one EZOC-hex directly into another EZOC-hex of the same or different enemy units.

River Hexsides: Please note that no ZOCs extend across these hexsides—even if there is a bridge.

13. COMBAT

In the Combat Segment, the Active Player can attack enemy combat units adjacent to his/her Activated combat units. Empty hexes or HQs alone in a hex cannot be attacked.

The Active Player is termed the Attacker in the Combat Segment, while the other player is termed the Defender, regardless of the overall strategic situation.

13.1 COMBAT PRINCIPLES

An activated unit can participate in only one attack during any single Combat Segment. Non-activated units cannot participate in attacks, even when adjacent to enemy units.

Combat is voluntary; activated units are not forced to attack enemy units. A single unit can attack only one hex; it cannot attack two or more hexes. However, two units stacked in the same hex may attack two different hexes separately.

A single hex can be attacked only once per Combat Segment.

Units in two or more hexes adjacent to the same hex can attack it together. If two or more units want to attack the same hex, their attack strengths are added together and only one combat is resolved.

If several enemy units are stacked in the hex that is attacked, they must all be attacked. The defense strengths of the units are added together.

13.2 COMBAT PROCEDURE

Combats are resolved one by one, in the order of the Attacker's choice, according to the following procedure:

1. Declare which hex is being attacked and by which units.
2. Play any Combat Cards that state "Before Combat" or "Anytime".
3. Determine the total attack and defense strength, calculate the Combat Ratio, and modify it by any shifts if necessary.
4. Roll one die on the Combat Results Table (CRT) and apply the result.
5. Play any Combat Cards that state "After Combat".

Combat Cards

You can use as many Combat Cards as you decide in any single combat. If so, the Attacker plays and reveals a Combat Card to use (and performs the DR if necessary). Then the Defender reveals the Combat Card he/she wants to use from his/her current hand (and performs the DR if necessary). This is repeated until neither side wants to use another Combat Card. That is, even if one player does not want to use any Combat Cards, the other player may play as many Combat Cards as he/she wants.

Any effects called for are applied accordingly. If an effect contradicts the rules, the effect on the Combat Card takes precedence. (The same applies for Combat Cards that are played after combat.)

- *To be clear, the right to play a Combat Card is never forfeited until both sides no longer want to play one.*

Combat Ratio Determination

To find the combat ratio follow this procedure:

1. Take the base combat figures
2. Apply effects to these combat figures
3. Determine the ratio and the corresponding column on the CRT
4. Apply CRT column modifiers
5. Die Roll
6. Apply DRM
7. Determine outcome.

First combine the attack strengths of all participating combat units from the Attacker and then combine the defense strengths of the Defender's targeted units. The total attack strength divided by total defense strength gives the Combat Ratio.

When calculating ratios, fractions are **rounded down** to the nearest column on the CRT.

Several factors can affect attack and defense strengths and/or provide column shifts on the CRT (**all are cumulative**):

- ◆ **Successfully played Combat Cards (as stated on the card).**
- ◆ **Combined Arms Shift (Tank and Motorized Infantry attack or defend together):** One column shift to the right if attacking; one shift to the left if defending.

- *Units do not need to be stacked together for the combined arms shift. They may attack from two different hexes.*



- ◆ **Tank Shift (Tank unit participates in combat):** One column shift to the right if attacking.
- ◆ **Out-of-Supply** Units halve their combat strengths and cannot receive or provide a Tank- or Combined Arms Shift.
- ◆ **Terrain Effects**



Town: no Tank Bonus.



City: Combat Strength of Attacker halved, no Tank Bonus; no attacking or defending Combined Arms Bonus possible.



Unbridged river: Tanks cannot participate at all (and no Advance after Combat). There is a -1 DRM for units attacking via an unbridged river hexside. (The modifier applies even if only one unit is attacking across an unbridged river hexside.)



Bridge: Negates effects of unbridged river for that hexside only. For any adjacent units attacking via an Unbridged River Hexside, the conditions and modifiers above still apply. To be clear, for tanks attacking via a bridge (and only those), the effects of the river are negated. Tank bonus applies and so does the Combined Arms bonus (if meeting the other conditions). There is also no -1 DRM.

When two combat units stacked in a hex must halve (or quarter) their Combat Strengths, first add them up before halving (or quartering) —and then **round down**.

All ratios above 7:1 are determined on the 7:1 column.

All ratios below 1:1 are automatically considered A1 DR.

Die-Roll Modifier Determination

Several factors can affect the die-roll result—(all are cumulative):

- ◆ Successfully played Combat Cards (as stated on the card)
- ◆ Terrain effects:
 - ◆ Minor village: -1 DRM
 - ◆ Town: -2 DRM
 - ◆ Unbridged river: -1 DRM

Combat Results Determination

Once the final Combat Ratio has been computed, the Attacker rolls one die, modifies the result by any DRMs and reads the final combat result on the corresponding row under the appropriate column of the CRT. All results are expressed in terms of step losses and/or number of hexes to retreat.

—: No effect.

A: The result affects the Attacker.

D: The result affects the Defender.

1, 2, 3: Remove the indicated number of steps from any involved units.

R: All involved units of this side must retreat one hex. A retreat is always only one hex (*Exception: if stacking limit exceeded*).

Step Losses: Remove one step by flipping a two-step unit to its reduced-strength side, or by eliminating a reduced-strength unit (or a unit with no reduced-strength side). The owning player may choose which of his/her involved units take the step loss(es). Eliminated units are removed from the map.

- ◆ If Axis units attack and the modified result is ≤ 1 , the Soviet player immediately draws one random Ad Hoc Infantry Reinforcement from the cup.
- ◆ If Soviet units attack and the modified result is ≥ 6 , the Axis player immediately draws one random *Alarmgruppe* from the cup.
- ◆ These Reinforcements may be placed anywhere on or adjacent to a friendly unit in supply, but not adjacent to an enemy unit.
- ◆ Eliminated *Alarmgruppe*, Soviet Tank Reinforcements and Ad Hoc Infantry return to the cup. (This does not apply to regular reinforcements.)
- ◆ If there are no more units in the cup, no new unit may be placed. (*a designed limit*)

When a SNAFU Marker is drawn, no new unit gets placed. (This marker is placed back into the cup after all units are drawn.)

Retreat

Units affected by a Retreat result must retreat one hex after combat. Retreat is not considered normal movement; retreating units do not expend MPs. Units in a stack forced to retreat can split up and retreat into different hexes. A stacked HQ may choose to perform a retreat with the units even if it does not end its retreat on a road. It must end its next movement on a road however.

Retreat Restrictions: A retreating unit always retreats in such a way as to avoid entering EZOCs. A unit may retreat into an EZOC if there is no other option. If multiple hexes qualify as retreat locations a retreating unit must satisfy as many of the following conditions as possible:

1. Each hex entered is closer to any one friendly supply map-edge;
2. The stacking limit is not exceeded.

Note that Condition (1) takes precedence over (2) if both cannot be satisfied.

EZOCs: Every **stack** of combat units forced to retreat into an EZOC (even if this EZOC contains friendly units) must lose one additional step.

Stacking limit: If a unit exceeds the stacking limit during retreat, it must retreat one additional hex. If it exceeds the stacking limit in this new hex, it must retreat another hex, etc.

River hexsides have the following effects on retreats:

- ◆ Retreating across an unbridged river hexside is allowed only if the combat unit starts its retreat adjacent to the hexside. Tank units are never allowed to retreat across an unbridged river hexside.
- ◆ Retreating across a river hexside is not allowed if there is an EZOC in the hex on the other side of the river (the hex it wants to enter), even if the river hexside is bridged, and even if there are friendly units in the EZOCs.

Units forced to retreat off-map or who cannot perform the entire retreat are eliminated.

A retreating combat unit *cannot overrun* a lone enemy HQ. The retreat must be 'deflected' into a hex adjacent to that enemy HQ. If there is no possible destination hex adjacent to the HQ, the retreat is simply ignored.

Advance after Combat

Only Tank units can perform an "advance after combat".

If an attacked hex becomes empty as a result of combat (the defending units either retreated or were eliminated), the attacking Tank unit(s) may advance into the Defender's vacated hex. Advance after combat is optional; the Attacker may advance all, some, or none of the attacking Tank units. Advance after combat is not considered normal movement. Advancing units do not expend MPs and **EZOCs are ignored**. An advancing Tank unit **can overrun** a lone enemy HQ by simply entering its hex. (*Contrary to a retreating combat unit, as stated above.*)

COMBAT EXAMPLE



The Axis player (Attacker) wishes to perform an attack with a stack comprised of I/11 and I/114 of the 6th Panzer Division (the activated formation), against hex 2413, containing 62nd and 13th Bde of the 13th Tank Corps. The II/114 is also adjacent to the target hex and is also able to take part in the same combat. The Romanian 7/5C of Gr. Popescu has not been activated and so it cannot participate in this combat, even though it's adjacent to 2413.



Next, the Axis player declares he'll be using the 'Sturmpioniere' combat card's General Event (A), and rolls a d6 to check whether it's played successfully. He must roll 1-4 to be able to use the card, and with a 3, he plays it successfully, which will remove it from the game. This card will help negate the penalties for attacking across a river hexside, during this combat, and will allow the I/11 to attack.

The Soviet player now gets to attempt to play the 'M1937' card's General Event (A). She rolls a 5, which is higher than required (1-3), and fails to play the card. She discards it accordingly. Neither player wishes to play more cards, so the combat resolution proceeds to the units' strengths:



The Axis player now adds up the combat strengths of his attacking units, for a total of 6. The Soviet player adds up her units' for a total of 4. The Total Attackers' CS is divided by the Total Defenders', for a Combat ratio of 1,5-1 (no rounding needed).

Modifiers affecting the combat result are accounted for:

Terrain: The unbridged river separating the target hex from the attacking hexes would have provided a -1 DRM after the final die roll, and it would have prohibited the Axis Tank unit from joining the attack, but it's been negated by the 'Sturmpioniere' card, and so terrain has no effect in this combat.

Axis Combined Arms and Tank shifts: I/11 and I/114 are Tank and Motorized Infantry units and so the attacker receives a column shift to the right. In addition, I/11, as an attacking Tank unit, provides another column shift to the right.

Soviet Combined Arms shift: Because the 13th and 62nd Bdes are Tank and Motorized Infantry units, the defender receives a column shift to the left. The 13th does not provide a tank shift because it is defending.

In total, the Combined Arms shifts from both sides cancel each other, and there is a single column shift right, benefiting the attacker. The column to be used when determining the results of the attack will now be 2-1.

Die	1-1	1,5-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	7-1
≤1	1AR	1A	1A	1AR	--	DR	DR	1DR
2	1A	AR	AR	--	DR	DR	1DR	1DR
3	--	--	DR	DR	1DR	1DR	2DR	2DR
4	--	--	DR	DR	1DR	1DR	2DR	2DR
5	--	DR	DR	1DR	1DR	2DR	2DR	3DR
≥6	DR	1DR	1DR	1DR	2DR	2DR	3DR	3DR

The Attacker now rolls the die to determine the combat result. A roll of 6 on the 2-1 column returns a result of DR1, meaning the Soviet units must retreat and also lose a single step. Both units have single steps, so the unit that loses the step will be eliminated. The Soviet player chooses to eliminate the 62nd Bde. The 13th Bde retreats a single hex towards a friendly supply hex, and is able to do so without entering EZOCS or infringing stacking limits.

Advance after combat is possible for I/11 and it takes position in 2413, which has been just vacated by the retreating unit.

Finally, neither player chooses to play any Combat cards for 'After Combat' use, so the situation after the combat results are applied is the following:



- If the German player had not succeeded in playing the 'Sturmpioniere' event, the tanks would not have been allowed to attack. II/114 would have been forced to attack alone in this case.

14. DONNERSCHLAG

With the code word “Donnerschlag”, the breakout of the 6th Army begins. On any turn, the Axis player may call out “Operation Donnerschlag!” in the corresponding segment of the turn and secretly determine a Meeting Zone. Place the Donnerschlag Marker on the “0” box of the Donnerschlag Advance Track.

In each corresponding segment, the Donnerschlag Marker is moved forward one box.

There are five boxes on the Donnerschlag Advance Track. When the Donnerschlag Marker reaches Box 4 on the track, the game ends and Victory Conditions are checked. If currently on the “6. Army Survival” side, the game ends when the marker reaches Box 5 instead.

If the Axis cannot meet the victory conditions in the Victory Check Segment, that means the 6th Army could not be reached. The 6th Army then disintegrates and the Soviet player wins.

- *This usually means, from the moment “Donnerschlag!” is called out, that the Axis player must reach the chosen Meeting Zone exactly four turns later in order to win the game (and must be in Supply and in Command).*

Special Case

The Axis player can extend the survival of the 6th Army by one turn (and only one turn). To do so, he must successfully play the “Air Fleet 4” event. (If “Donnerschlag!” is called in Turn 4 and the “Air Fleet 4” event is played in Turn 7, then —and only then — does a Turn 8 occur. Conversely, if the Axis units are progressing well and “Donnerschlag” is called before Turn 4, there can be no Turn 8.)

- *Assuming the German plays 'Luftflotte 4' and thus unlocks Donnerschlag box 5 for turn 8, but then fulfills the Victory Conditions already at the end of turn 7, the game would end with a German victory.*
- *If 'Donnerschlag' is called out after turn 4, we did not explain this rule well enough.*

There are special rules for Turn 8:

The last great effort

There are special rules for Turn 8—No Activation Cards are dealt. There are only five Activations for each side. These Activations take place as follows:

Axis Player

- ◆ At each Activation, the player decides whether to activate an HQ or the Schwerpunkt Marker.

Soviet Player

- ◆ At each Activation, the player decides whether to activate an HQ, or a formation, or the colour of an army.

15. VICTORY CONDITIONS

Axis Victory

The Donnerschlag Marker must be in Box 4 of the Donnerschlag Advance Track (either side) and at least one Axis unit must be in Supply and in Command in the chosen Meeting Zone at the end of the turn. (Note that if on its “6. Army Survival” side, the marker can be in Box 5.)

Soviet Victory

If the Axis does not meet its victory conditions, the Soviet player wins.

16. HISTORICAL NOTES

On 8 November 1942, Adolf Hitler announced in the Löwenkeller, in Munich, that the city of Stalingrad had already been taken by German troops and that only isolated Russian resistance stood in the way of final military victory. Hitler should have known better, because the day before, the 6th Army radioed the OKH that due to numerous failures and enormous losses, the German troops were no longer in a position to conquer the entire city. The German attack in Stalingrad had begun to falter; the front was effectively no longer advancing.

Against all the advice of his generals, Hitler decided not to break off the fight in Stalingrad. On 17 November came the “Führer's order” that the German troops should now finally fight their way to the Volga.

Neither Hitler, nor the generals, nor German enemy-reconnaissance realised that the ultimate purpose for the Red Army's high readiness was not for the defence of Stalingrad—a city now in ruins—but to delay them in order to plan a counter-offensive.

The Russian leadership knew well the weak points of the 6th Army's flank defences. On 19 November, Operation Uranus began. Despite partial successes by the Wehrmacht, the Red Army was able to advance and soon the situation for the 6th Army turned precarious. Tentative proposals to lead the 6th Army out of Stalingrad were rejected with the Führer's decision: “6th Army holds despite danger of temporary encirclement”.

Then, on 23 November, the two Soviet attack wedges met and the 6th Army was indeed encircled. Their headquarters quickly appealed to the OKH for freedom of action. A “breakthrough to the northwest, albeit at the sacrifice of materiel” was considered possible, and so the high commander also shared this proposal. But a retreat from Stalingrad was out of the question for Hitler.

In the cauldron of Stalingrad there was now disagreement within the German ranks. While preparations were being made for the encircled army to await relief, there were also voices calling for an immediate and unauthorised, total breakout.

The general staff had also informed Hitler that the encirclement could not be held indefinitely—and that a failure to break out would result in a military catastrophe. Feldmarschall Keitel, however, insisted on holding out in the encirclement and Reichsmarschall Göring assured him that the Luftwaffe could supply the encircled 6th Army. Hitler then declared Stalingrad a fortress and ordered the Volga positions to be held at all costs. It soon became apparent, however, that the air supply was not sufficient to meet the needs of the 6th Army, and so the situation in Stalingrad deteriorated daily.

On 26 November, Feldmarschall von Manstein took over supreme command of the southern front in Russia, assuring that everything would be done to break open the encirclement. Reinforcing troops had already been made available for the relief attempt. At the same time, the 6th Army was ordered to prepare forces for a breakout in order to—at least temporarily—open a supply route.

On 1 December, Hitler issued the directive for Operation “Wintergewitter”. It was planned with 20 divisions and the attack was to include two panzer offensives. According to Hitler's conception, the offensive should restore the old front line and the 6th Army would thus be able to hold its position.

The planning staff under von Manstein envisaged, in the event of a successful operation, that the 6th Army would be taken out of Stalingrad and begin to retreat. This outcome would be the greatest possible success; Hitler would later be convinced of this.



According to von Manstein's decree, if "Operation Wintergewitter" were to succeed, then the 6th Army should dare to break out and unite with the relief army. A breakout plan was readied by the staff of the 6th Army on 02 December and given the name "Fall Donnerschlag". According to the staff's assessment, success was doubtful due to the poor condition of the army, further, it would take 4 – 6 days to prepare. Additionally, it would have to be coordinated precisely with the relief troops, since the rearguard defence of the cauldron would have absolute priority.

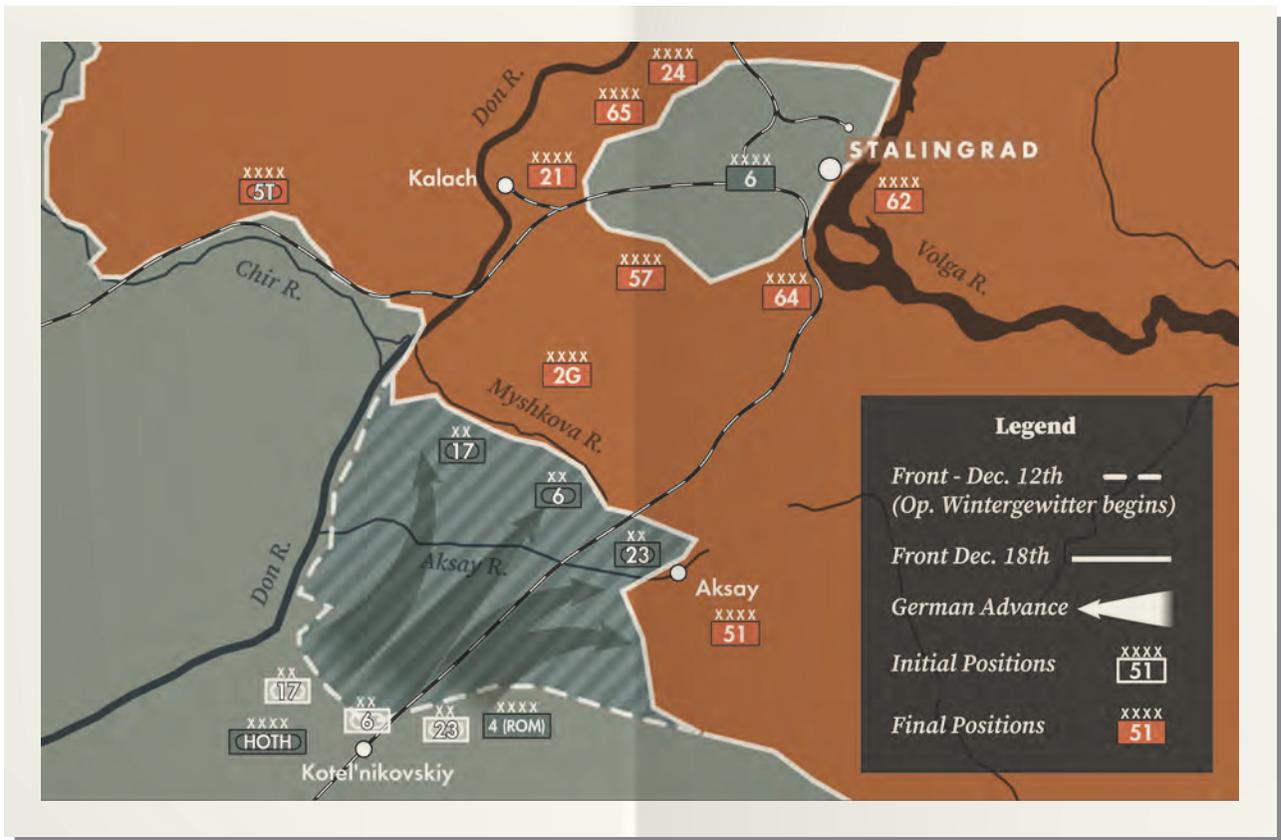
Since the situation in the cauldron was deteriorating daily, and German enemy-reconnaissance reported that the Red Army was strengthening its positions in front of Stalingrad, haste was required. However, they also felt they should wait for the frost period, because then German tanks could advance faster. The operation was planned to begin on 3 December, but not enough forces had been brought in and critically: the onset of frost was nowhere to be seen. Consequently, the start of operations was postponed several times.

When "Operation Wintergewitter" finally began on 12 December, the hoped-for combat strength had not been achieved because numerous relief units could not be built up in time or brought in as quickly as the plans called for. Russian partisan activity and Red Army offensives also contributed by tying up planned reinforcement units.

Thus, only a single tank offensive was carried out, while the 20-division goal could not be reached either. Instead, scattered remnants were brought together and given the name "Panzergruppe Hoth". They acted as the sole spearhead. The tank group assembled in the Kotelnikowo area with 100 kilometres of enemy territory in front of them. The Red Army was not unaware of their deployment, and thus Soviet units attempted to thwart their deployment and advance from the beginning.

At the beginning of this offensive, the German tank group still outnumbered the Red Army's units — so it was necessary to act quickly before the tide turned.





As the armour rolled in, Generaloberst Hoth radioed to Stalingrad “Hold on, we’re coming!”

In the city itself, the Red Army tried to beat the German units *before* the relief campaign could reach them. At this point the fighting flared up once more, with increased ferocity. Critical German reserves for the breakout were used up by hot spots in the cauldron. Furthermore, their soldiers in Stalingrad were exhausted; a successful attempt to break out became increasingly unlikely.

The attack by *Panzergruppe Hoth* was initially successful. Good weather and scant resistance from Soviet troops allowed German units to advance quickly. The first difficulties arose when troops were unable to cross fords in the Aksaj-Kurmoyarsky valley. Without the crossing of the Aksaj River, there could be no further advance. But due to poor Soviet leadership and tactical successes of the Wehrmacht, a crossing was eventually forced and the tank group continued on rapidly.

German reconnaissance then reported Soviet troop movements, so the advance had to be slowed to secure the flanks. In fact, this German attack in force had achieved a level of surprise in spite of the Red Army’s responses. But now the Soviets gathered forces, took up defensive positions and carried out counterattacks. Even though they could be thwarted successfully, the advance of the tank group was slowed. In retrospect, those counterattacks could have been carried out with more force, but Stalin had so far refused proper troop reinforcements.

When Stalin realised that his generals were correct in calling this a full German offensive, “Operation Little Saturn” was ordered. Its aim was to stop this German advance, close a ring around the *Panzergruppe*, plus attack the 8th Italian Army in order to tie up forces there and stab the Wehrmacht in the back.

In the ongoing fight, *Panzergruppe Hoth* managed to break through on a 30-kilometre wide front and advance a total of 50 kilometres. Then, on 14 December, the weather changed and the ground turned to mud. This greatly hampered the German advance. Furthermore, a tank battle took place at the

line Werchne-Kumskij, where strong Russian reinforcements had been deployed. In the end, only a gain of 3 kilometres was achieved, followed by further Russian counterattacks on the flank, which were only beaten back with difficulty. However, operational movements were able to continue.

But with every kilometre closer to Stalingrad, Russian resistance increased. On 16 December, Generaloberst Hoth decided to continue his attacks without regard for sufficient flank protection. Now the initial position for the final advance towards Stalingrad was to be consolidated. For this purpose, the 17th Panzer Division was brought up to compensate for the German losses.

At this point, Hitler continued to reject a total withdrawal from Stalingrad and insisted that a supply corridor had to be created and held.

Meanwhile, the Soviet counterattacks in the Aksaj and Verkhne-Kumsky areas increased in intensity, though they were still repelled. Further reinforcements did not reach the tank group, as they were needed to repel flank attacks by the 51st Soviet Army.

On 17 December, fighting intensified in the Verkhne-Kumsky area. German units were able to make slight gains on the ground, but were unable to eliminate the danger, as Russian reserves were constantly being brought in. The 17th Panzer Division succeeded in advancing further north and formed a bridgehead near Generalovskij. Here both sides engaged in tough fighting.

On the morning of 18 December, a final decision was to be made. However, the danger of incursions on the flanks was everpresent, and no reinforcements could be brought in. The attacking spearheads made only slow progress; every ground gain was bought with heavy losses. In the end, the advance came to a standstill.

On 19 December, forces were concentrated in the Verkhne-Kumsky area and the stalemate was broken only with a massive deployment of the Luftwaffe. The Russian units withdrew. Now, with the vital support of the Luftwaffe, the push towards Stalingrad was to succeed.

A word about Hermann Hoth:

Most people will know Hermann Hoth as the commander of "Panzergruppe Hoth", who desperately tried to free his trapped comrades in the cauldron of Stalingrad. Even against the assessments of his superiors. At least, many films and documentaries paint this picture. However, Hoth belonged to Hitler's obedient generals who expressed in their orders their agreement with the mass murders in the conquered territory of the Soviet Union and left no doubt about their approval of the "extermination" of the Jewish population. In his order of October 17, 1941, he called "their extermination an imperative of self-preservation."

On November 17, 1941, he urged his soldiers to "show no pity or softness toward the population."

Hoth was among the generals who immediately implemented and also passed on both the "Kommissarbefehl" (Red Army political commissars were not treated as prisoners of war but shot without trial) and the "Reichenau-Erlass" (a decree on the deliberate racial ideological war of extermination that contributed to the brutalization of German warfare in the Soviet Union).

Ultimately, Hoth was one of the generals who actively participated in war crimes such as planning and carrying out wars of aggression and extermination, mass murders of civilians and those suspected of being partisans, mistreatment and murder of prisoners of war, occupation crimes, and direct and indirect participation in genocides.



A breakthrough was achieved from the Krugljakov area with heavy losses. But then the river Myshkova had to be crossed before reinforcements of the 2nd Soviet Guards Army could intervene in the fighting. Dramatically, German units managed to take Gromoslavka and form a bridgehead across the Myshkova. Sixty kilometres separated the armoured group from the outermost ring in Stalingrad.

The breakout from Stalingrad *had* to take place soon so that the trapped formations could be taken out. Generaloberst Hoth was certainly aware of the dangers of not being able to protect his flanks, which were unavoidably left in an exposed position. He knew that keeping a corridor open to Stalingrad was something of an unrealistic fantasy. At present, the German troops faced a threefold Soviet superiority and for the breakout attempt to be successful, his relief force would have to advance at least another 20 kilometres.

By 20 December, the Red Army was bringing in reinforcements constantly, while all German forces were needed to secure the bridgehead and flanks. Only minimal terrain gains were made in the fighting. Due to the intensifying resistance, the various Wehrmacht staffs involved were in serious doubt about any possibility of a breakthrough.

On 21 December, the fighting continued with increasing ferocity. A determined German attacking force succeeded in getting to within 48 kilometres of the outermost Stalingrad ring. It was now apparent that "Fall Donnerschlag" had to be declared, but in Stalingrad, Generaloberst Paulus had not yet started any real preparations. Nevertheless, the planned-for 3,000 tons of supplies and tractors were brought in for the 6th Army to facilitate the breakout.





However, the intended advance of the Panzergruppe on 22 December had to be cancelled, as the Red Army threw more and more troops at the vulnerable flanks. At times, the attacking front was in imminent danger of being cut off. Although it seemed this ongoing crisis could be managed, the situation soon became untenable. Due to high losses and the suppression of supplies, holding the entire position became impossible in the long run. Generaloberst Hoth responded by planning a regroup; he decided to try a relief attempt on 24 December in the hope that the 6th Army would meet him.

However — no such order was issued. Hitler, as it turned out, could not be persuaded to let the 6th Army break out. Generaloberst Hoth now hoped that the 6th Army would make a breakout under its own authority. But for Paulus, “obedience was the highest duty” and so he refused to do any such thing without orders. Furthermore, Paulus insisted that he would only be able to cover 30 kilometres with the 6th Army in a best-case scenario and that a unification with Panzergruppe Hoth was therefore impossible.

On 23 December, it became clear that the situation on the larger southern front was becoming critical. The Italian troops were forced to retreat and Panzergruppe Hoth was in danger of being cut off. In fact, the situation of the entire Army Group Don was dire. Feldmarschall von Manstein thus ordered the withdrawal of Panzergruppe Hoth to help stop the Red Army’s relentless counteroffensives.

Generaloberst Hoth asked to make one last attempt to rescue the 6th Army on 24 December and prepared everything for this. But when the day arrived, the attack plan was reluctantly revoked under the continuing pressure of the Soviet attacks. The Panzergruppe was forced to retreat further and further.

And so it was that the “Unternehmen Wintergewitter” came to a standstill in the snow of the steppes shortly before Stalingrad. The “Fall Donnerschlag” was never declared and no more help was possible for the trapped 6th Army, even though all orders for planning the “Fall Donnerschlag” were not officially cancelled until 30 December.

In 1942, the Wehrmacht suffered a series of defeats. As was often the case, adequate strategic plans for the possibility of failure had not been prepared. They did not know how to proceed from this defeat. This is when the National Socialist principle of “sacrifice” was supposed to come into play. One was to fight to the last cartridge, to the death. Any lack of materiel had to be compensated for with an iron will. In short, it was “death or victory”.

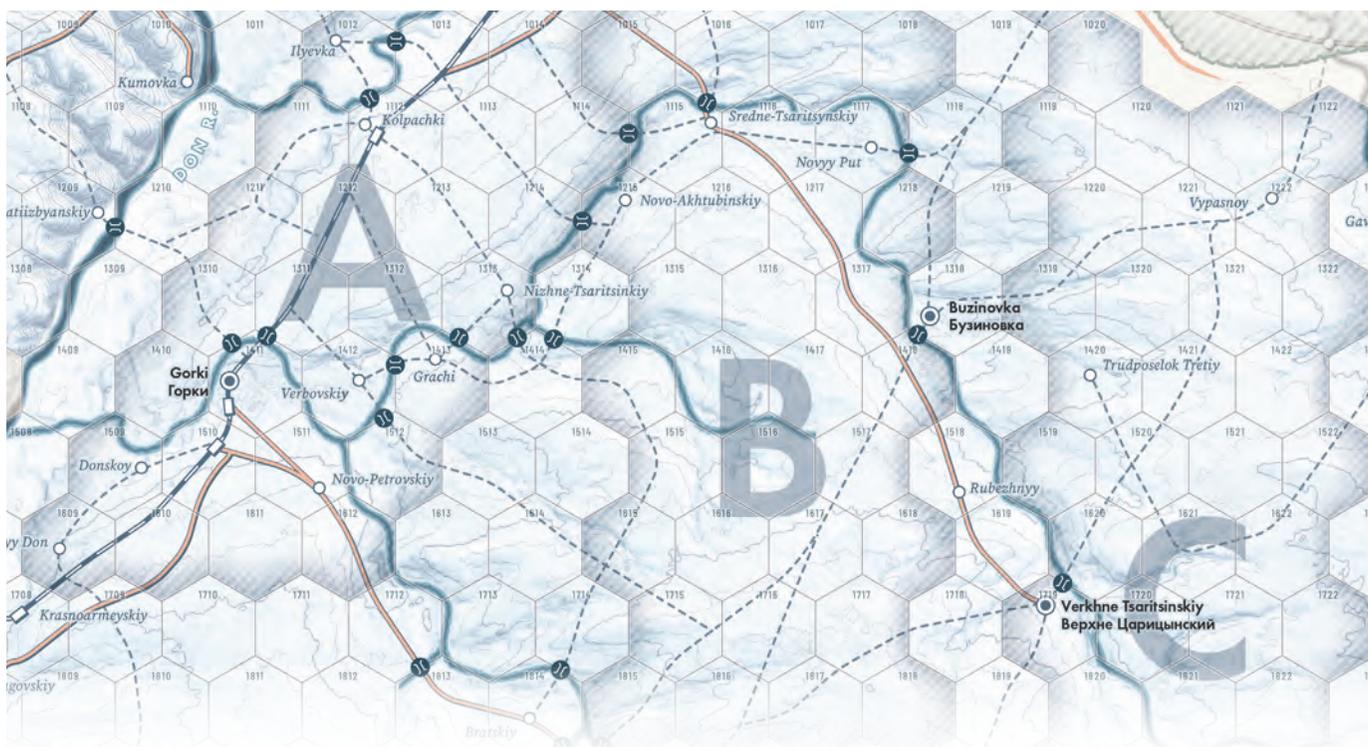


And this permanent slogan was applied in the spirit of a radical fanatical propaganda, over and over again. It was first deployed in a radio message to Erwin Rommel on 3 November 1942, when he was about to retreat in North Africa due to the lack of supplies. Generalfeldmarshall Rommel received the following announcement from Adolf Hitler: “It would not be the first time in history that the stronger will triumphed over the stronger battalions of the enemy. But you can show your troops no other path than that to victory or death.”

It was only after Rommel withdrew his troops with heavy losses — despite the above order — that Hitler took the true military situation into account and gave his blessing for the withdrawal.

And so it was at Stalingrad. The situation on the southern front was indeed critical, yet Hitler’s plans did not include any option for retreat. Positions had to be held — if necessary to the death. In contrast to North Africa, none of the generals on the Volga had the courage to make their own decisions. The result was a slow and agonising death for the trapped Axis soldiers of the 6th Army, for surrender was certainly not an option. And to take this to the extreme, on 30 January 1943, Reichsfeldmarschall Hermann Göring gave a speech on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Adolf Hitler’s appointment as Reichskanzler. His speech was completely overshadowed by the imminent dissolution of the forces trapped in Stalingrad. In an obvious deflection of this devastating defeat for the Third Reich, Göring cynically referred in his speech to the death of the Greeks in the battle of Thermopylae against the Persian hordes, as well as to the Nibelungen. Thus, the total annihilation of the 6th Army was revealed to the public without clearly naming it. Even phrases such as “heroic effort”, “unswerving perseverance”, or even “heroic struggle” and “heroic defence” allowed no other interpretation than that the battle was lost and involved immense losses.

An interesting aside here is that because of this major failure on the Eastern Front, a personal speech by Hitler on this significant occasion was clearly out of the question. “Der Führer” was never supposed to speak in connection with a clear defeat. For this reason, Hermann Göring had to take over this thankless task.



17. DESIGNER'S NOTES

After many years in the hobby, my enthusiasm for historical board games and conflict simulations continues unabated. And I like to sit at a table with my fellow players. Games are only good in company and I have laughed so many tears in some game situations, but also cried so many inner tears. And especially in conflict simulations, the sense of community usually goes as far as solving tricky situations together during a game. You really play with each other and not against each other.

Everyone will be familiar with adapting, refining, smoothing or extending the rules of games. The so-called "Houserules". From these "Houserules" often ideas for a new game system develop and from this then perhaps the idea for a new game. That's how it was for me with "Donnerschlag".

I like games with interaction. I get bored when I have to watch my opponent endlessly moving his units without being able to react. That's why the activations in "Donnerschlag" take place alternately. Game systems should also not be too complex and should have a high replay value. That's why I tried to write simple rules and deal with many special rules via cards and not include them in the gamerules. I know that many players don't like it when the luck factor is too high, but especially the high luck factor (I prefer to call it friction) in "Donnerschlag" guarantees a high replay value. At this point, I'm also happy to admit that if things go very badly, a game can be over early. Then you just had bad luck. But according to general experience, the luck factor balances out in a game and the games are more or less balanced.

With a little experience a game does not last longer than six hours, so that nothing stands in the way of an early revenge. You just have to know the rules and the cards, but that's not a big thing with "Donnerschlag". And the revenge is then again a completely different game. VUCA Simulation tries very hard to live up to the motto "Easy to learn - hard to master". We hope we have succeeded.

Besides planning and resource management, what I like about conflict simulations is that I - as a player - have to make decisions all the time. Automatism is necessary, of course, but too many of them undermine the fun of the game. And in "Donnerschlag" I constantly have to make new plans and decisions. When do

I play which Activation Card, what do I activate, do I collect my Combat Cards for an accumulated attack or do I use them up individually in smaller actions? Do I take the Event or the Tactical Effect, do I use my "Schlachtenglück" right now, and so on and so forth?

And although you have to make decisions all the time, you also need a certain amount of luck. Do I get the right activations, do I roll the right events, do I get enough ad hoc reinforcements, and if so, the right ones? And am I playing vabanque or playing it safe? This combination of decision pressure and luck is what makes a good simulation for me and I hope VUCA Simulations has succeeded in this with "Donnerschlag".

It's hard for me to give game tips, because every game runs differently. In general, it can be said that for the Axis, speed should not be a sorcery. Terrain must be gained quickly and river crossings must be secured swiftly. Time works for the Soviet. And the longer you can hide your meeting zone, the more the Soviet must divide his forces. For the end of a game you should still have enough forces for a breakthrough, otherwise you will suffer the historical disaster. And don't neglect the Romanian units, because you will need them.

As a Soviet, you can only disrupt the Axis advance at the beginning of the game. But as the game progresses, you become stronger and stronger. Thus, strong bulwarks can be created and you can think about one or the other counterattack. Especially river crossings should be well defended. And attacks on the flank, are a sure way to annoy the Axis. The more you recognize the approximate meeting zone, the better you can organize the resistance. The Axis "Panzergruppe" is strong, but with proper planning, not strong enough.

I wish all players many exciting games and a lot of fun.

And never forget: Conflict simulation is just a game!

18. SETUP

- ◆ Set up the units and markers according to the Set-Up Display and the Holding Boxes on the map.
- ◆ Attach StuG Abt. 228 and StuG Abt. 243 to an Axis formation (the same or different). They remain so attached for the entire game.
- ◆ Sort the Activation Cards and Combat Cards into Early and Late Decks. The cards designated as Late do not come into play until Turn 4.
- ◆ Shuffle the Early Activation Cards and Early Combat Cards of both sides. Place the Activation Cards and Combat Cards in draw piles for each player, near to them. Deal each player five Activation Cards and five Combat Cards from their respective draw piles.
- ◆ Place the Soviet Ad Hoc Infantry Reinforcement units with their two SNAFU Markers in an opaque cup. Place the Axis Player's *Alarmgruppe* units with their one SNAFU Marker in a different cup. During play, eliminated Ad Hoc Infantry and *Alarmgruppe* units are returned to the cup. SNAFU markers get placed back into the cup immediately after being drawn.
- ◆ Place the Soviet Player's Tank Reinforcements in another opaque cup (one SNAFU Marker). Eliminated Tank Reinforcement Units are returned to the cup.
- ◆ The Axis Player gets the Schlachtenglück Marker.



19. INDEX

Advance after Combat	8		
<i>Overrun</i>	13.2	8	
Action Phase	3		
<i>Activation Cards</i>	4.4	2	
<i>Activation Steps</i>	6.	3	
<i>Game Turn 8 Rules</i>		10	
<i>OKH & STAVKA Cards</i>	4.6	2	
Admin Phase	3		
<i>Admin Steps</i>	6.	3	
<i>Game Turn 8</i>		10	
<i>Schwerpunkt marker placement</i>	4.7	2	
Cards	2		
<i>Activation Cards</i>	4.4	2	
<i>Colour Code</i>		4	
<i>Combat Cards</i>	4.5	2	
<i>Dealing</i>		3	
<i>Fog of War</i>	7.	4	
<i>Formation Activation</i>	10.2	4	
<i>Game Setup</i>		3	
<i>Hand limit</i>		2	
<i>High Command</i>		3	
<i>"Naval R. Bri."/"Guard"</i>	4.5	2	
<i>OKH & STAVKA</i>	4.6	2	
<i>Playing Combat Cards</i>	13.2	7	
<i>"SWT-40"/"Deadbolt Position"</i>	4.5	2	
Combat	7		
<i>Advance after Combat</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Column Shifts</i>	13.2	7	
<i>Combat Units</i>	4.2	1	
<i>DRM</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Out of Supply Units</i>	11.2	6	
<i>Overview</i>	13.	7	
<i>Playing Cards</i>	13.2	7	
<i>Procedure</i>	13.2	7,8	
<i>Retreat</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Segment (Action Phase)</i>	6.	3	
<i>Step Losses</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Terrain Effects</i>		7-8	
Combat Units	1		
<i>Activation</i>	10.	4	
<i>Halving Combat Str. (Stack)</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Leaving Command Range</i>	10.3	5	
<i>Overview</i>	4.2	1	
<i>Retreat into EZOC</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Stacking Limits</i>	8.	4	
<i>Supply Determination</i>	11.	6	
Donnerschlag	10		
<i>6th Army survival extension</i>	14.	10	
<i>Calling out Donnerschlag</i>	6.	3	
<i>Fog of War</i>	7.	4	
Formation			
<i>Activating Formations</i>	10.2	4	
<i>Formation Representation</i>	4.2,4.3	1	
HQ Units	1		
<i>Activation through HQ</i>	10.	4	
<i>Combat (Alone in hex)</i>	13.	7	
<i>Command Range</i>	10.3	5	
<i>Last great effort effects</i>	14.	10	
<i>Movement</i>	12	6	
<i>Movement (Axis)</i>	12.4	7	
<i>Movement (Soviet)</i>	6.	3	
<i>Overrun effects</i>	12.3	7	
<i>Overview</i>	4.3	1	
<i>Retreat (Stacked)</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Supply (countering EZOC)</i>	11.1	6	
<i>(no) Zone of Control</i>	9.	4	
Movement			
<i>EZOCs</i>	12.5	7	
<i>HQs</i>	12.4	7	
<i>Leaving Command Range</i>	10.3	5	
<i>Movement Points</i>	12.1	6	
<i>Overruns</i>	12.3	7	
<i>Out of Supply Units</i>	11.2	6	
<i>Procedure</i>	12.1	6	
<i>River Hexsides</i>	12.2	6	
<i>Road Hexes</i>	12.2	6	
<i>Segment (Action Phase)</i>	6.	3	
<i>Stacking Limits</i>	8	4	
Reinforcements			
<i>From Combat Results</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Overview</i>	6.	3	
<i>Setup</i>	5.	3	
Replacements	2		
<i>Conditions</i>	4.5	2	
<i>Eliminated unit recovery</i>	4.5	2	
Retreat			
<i>Overstacking</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Overview</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Retreating HQs</i>	12.4	7	
<i>Restrictions</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Stacking Limits</i>	8	4	
Schlachtenglück			
<i>Overview</i>	4.7	2	
<i>Setup</i>	5.	3	
Schwerpunkt			
<i>Activation range</i>	10.3	5	
<i>Activation through Schwerpunkt</i>	10.2	4	
<i>Overruns</i>	12.3	7	
<i>Placement</i>	6.	3	
<i>Stacking (freely)</i>	8.	4	
<i>The last great effort</i>	14.	10	
Stacking	4		
<i>Limits</i>	8.	4	
<i>Overstacking</i>	8.	4	
<i>Overview</i>	8.	4	
<i>Retreat</i>	13.2	8	
Steps			
<i>Combat Step Loss</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Replacements</i>	4.5	2	
Supply	6		
<i>Out of Supply Unit effects</i>	11.2	6	
<i>Supply Zones on map</i>	4.1	1	
<i>Victory Conditions (unit status)</i>	15.	10	
Terrain			
<i>Effects on Combat</i>	13.2	7	
<i>Effects on Movement</i>	12.2	6	
<i>River Hexsides</i>	12.2	6	
<i>ZOC restriction (River hexsides)</i>	9.	4	
Victory	10		
<i>6th Army survival extension</i>	14.	10	
<i>Conditions (Axis & Soviet)</i>	15.	10	
<i>Donnerschlag</i>	14.	10	
Zones of Control (ZOC/EZOC)	4		
<i>Effects on Movement</i>	12.5	7	
<i>Overview</i>	9.	4	
<i>Retreat Restriction</i>	13.2	8	
<i>Road Hexes</i>	12.2	6	
<i>Supply Line Blocking</i>	11.2	6	
<i>ZOC restriction (River hexsides)</i>	9.	4	

DONNERSCHLAG

ESCAPE FROM STALINGRAD



© 2022

Donnerschlag - Escape from Stalingrad is manufactured and distributed by VUCA Simulations, a brand of Bruncken & Gebhardt GmbH. All Rights Reserved.

You can find additional information about our games, and helpful materials on: vucasims.com