

Baltic Gap Rules & Campaign Notes (15 January 2010)

An effort was made to sprinkle the game rules with helpful hints, but now that **Baltic Gap** has been released I have noticed a few areas which could stand more emphasis.

1. The Leningrad and Königsberg Boxes essentially overlap Entry A and Entry G respectively. So an SP or infantry division in Entry G can be shipped from Königsberg, etc. The Air Boxes have the same relationship with the Entry Hex to which they are linked, and that's how they load/unload cargo.
2. The large Soviet artillery divisions have two counters. Treat *each* counter as a division (and there is no requirement to have them stay close together). Furthermore, note that division-sized units cannot get fuel the cheap way (from a fueled HQ), so artillery divisions always need to receive fuel by the "1T per phase" method.
3. Note that the multi-step German brigades *can* get fuel the cheap way (they aren't treated as actual divisions).
4. No more than 1 VP is ever scored per turn, regardless how much under or over Soviet progress is relative to the turn's POP Target.
5. The POP Target is a steady increase based on time. It is tied to the overall campaign, not to specific historical dates when the various POP locations fell. As such, there will be times when one side seems to score the VP pretty easily, and other times when it is harder.
6. The Soviets are pushed pretty hard by POP Targets, in part because the VP approach has potential for some borderline "gamey" abuses (if the German player packs victory locations with troops and SP) and partly because they're being judged

against the very successful chain of historical events. As such, players might want to experiment with giving the Soviets 1/2 credit (round full POP totals normally) when they have a combat unit adjacent to a POP location that isn't in normal trace supply.

7. One thing that I should probably have mentioned is that the Victory Conditions are designed to determine which *player* wins, since it's pretty much guaranteed the Soviets are the overall winners in 1944.

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The errata to date is mostly related to mismatches between counter strengths and the scenario listings. Definitely not my finest hour as an editor! Looking back, I can see that as some combat strengths were changed during development I didn't always make the changes to the scenarios and hopefully I'll do a better job next time.

There are a couple of significant changes in the errata. I thought these merit some extra attention.

Chief among them is giving SP to the enemy when one side wins the turn's VP. I think this has historical merit, builds in a balancing mechanic, and mitigates some of the extremes that might come from some bad luck or tactical decisions. We don't want mistakes made in July to ruin the whole campaign, and I only wish I'd thought of it long ago.

There were two scenarios that I really messed up in the published game that needed major fixing, 5.5 and 5.8. To better reflect the Soviets being vulnerable at Tukums at the start of the August Campaign, I've decided to have the Germans go first on 1 August and make the weather "no flight" on that turn (historically, this was the big moment for the ship-to-

shore barrages, so it makes sense). Similarly, I've decided that the October Campaign works much better if the Germans don't get a turn on 5 October (this reflects the strategic surprise achieved in shifting the attack axis 90 degrees from Riga to Memel).

I will take this opportunity to suggest an interesting variant to the published game. As OCS veterans may have already noticed, **Baltic Gap** uses German breakdowns modeled after **Hube's Pocket** rather than **Case Blue**. (The ones in **Hube's** are faster in Move Mode.) This was done mostly because I didn't want it to be too easy to pocket a lot of Germans — that's how this campaign can be broken. But one of the game's central points is supposed to be that the German army is moving slower now, so I may have let my concerns for balance get in the way of a better simulation. As such, the adventurous among you may want to pull out some AR4 breakdowns from **Case Blue** and see how that goes.

Note in an upcoming OCS game, **Beyond the Rhine**, we'll be taking the German mobility problems one step further, and give breakdowns a Combat Mode MA of just '2'. I don't think we'd want to go this far in the East, where the air interdiction wasn't quite as big a problem, but just thought you'd be interested in how that game's designer, Roland LeBlanc, views the issue. I was fortunate to have someone with his in-depth knowledge to call upon for help and advice when wrestling with various questions that helped me sharpen my modeling of 1944.

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The Baltic Operation was important, but was still a secondary campaign from the Soviet perspective. As such, the Soviets are doing things on what

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seems like a shoe-string. Don't expect to be able to conduct a broad-front offensive. There is some degree of attrition-oriented attacking, but the Soviets must usually operate as the Germans do in 1941, and make sure that their targeted offensives are backed by sufficient reserves to exploit success and by adequate supply dumps to sustain each drive to its logical conclusion.

The main effort the first four turns or so will be the attack on Polotsk and the advance south of the Daugava River. I rarely make any attacks with the 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts during these turns.

Turn 1 is very important. The goal is to pierce the Panther Line, and there are really two possibilities: either at E9.05 or near E11.05. You'll want a mix of troops and artillery ready for both Combat and Exploit attacks in both areas.

An interesting decision revolves around the Arty Ammo marker. You will want to do some heavy arty barrages, in hopes of a step loss here or there, but those are really expensive without the Ammo discount. But ideally you also have an Ammo marker for use when 2nd and 3rd Baltics get going, so it's a tough call.

One thing that's really important to keep in mind, especially when there are two Soviet players, is that it's expected that some SP from Entry B get trucked over to the Polotsk attack in June. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of taking Polotsk quickly. This frees the Pontoon unit to advance with the spearheads south of the river, and puts the 4th Shock Army in position to threaten a drive NW toward Ludza, possibly trapping Germans defending Idritsa.

An interesting early decision concerns 1st Tank Corps. Deployed north of the river, it can create the kind of pocket that can

lead to long-term success. But the important POP objectives are to the west, and not getting bogged down on the drive through Panevezhys and Shiauliai is equally important, since you need to complete the Deep Operation before the panzer divisions arrive.

As the German player, it's better to retreat too early than wait until it's too late. Once Polotsk falls, the general idea is to fall back to a new line that runs roughly parallel to the road from Daugavpils to Pskov. So you've got a lot of ground to give on your right.

Daugavpils itself cannot be held too long, given how easy it is to surround, so the next switch line is the one running from Pskov through Krustpils.

The Daugava River is the critical terrain feature in this game. It is very difficult to cross, and thus offers that hanging German flank a fair degree of protection. The Soviets will of course want to run HQs up to the river (as well as the Pontoon), but have to telegraph these moves. Also even when bridgeheads are made deep penetrations are usually restricted by supply-throw problems.

My advice to the German player is to guard the printed crossing points and don't worry about other crossings except where a stack might be hiding an HQ or pontoon. You only have so many fingers to stick in the dike, and don't really have the luxury of anticipating dangers too far in advance.

The Germans have a handful of armored units that represent their chief counter to Soviet breakthroughs. I think it's more important to mass these in potential trouble-spots north of the Daugava River rather than south. To keep Ludza open, and to shield the retreat toward Rezekne, you

need to fight a pretty intense tank battle in that open ground.

Historically, the Germans shifted several divisions from their left to their right during the early going. Don't be too aggressive about this, because you don't want to lose your anchor on Lake Peipus.

In August or September there will come a time when troops near Estonia won't be able to run back to Riga fast enough to prevent the door slamming shut behind them. Again, better to retreat too early than too late, as preservation of force is critical.

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I want to mention how grateful I am that, thus far anyway, no one's asked for my head on a pike. There were a lot of screw-ups in **Baltic Gap**, and most are traced directly to me. There is a funny line that comes from the period in which the NKVD was shooting stragglers: "It takes a very brave man to be a coward in the Red Army." Likewise, let me say that it took a ton of effort to produce a game with the amount of errata that we have thus far. I'm really proud of the game, warts and all, but what I learned from my **Baltic Gap** experience is that I should have worked even harder.

Finally, there is another book to add to the **Baltic Gap** reading list: "Hitler, Dönitz, and the Baltic Sea". Its coverage of the military campaign is pretty spotty, but does give a very good (albeit very repetitious) summary of the thinking that led Hitler to make the Baltic coast a very high priority. Sure Army Group North had been isolated and it was a crisis, but that's not the only reason there were more panzer divisions committed to Doppelpkopf than were present during the 1941 drive toward Leningrad.

— John W. Kisner