

Ukr — Ukraine

UR — Ukreplyonny Raion (Fortified Zone)

Von Chol — Dietrich Von Choltitz, 11th Panzer Division commander. Later commander of Paris who surrendered the city rather than follow Hitler's order to destroy it.

Von Sauc — Dietrich von Saucken, 4th Pz Div commander, later 2nd Army commander.

Werfer — Nebelwerfer rocket launcher

Wesc — Panzer Army staff officer named Wesch.

AGW — Army Group Weapons

Designer Notes

By Antony Birkett

Firstly, my sincere thanks for your purchase of this game. As a designer you hope your recreation of a historical campaign will resonate with gamers. However, the truth is never plainer than if those said gamers part with their hard-earned money to buy your game. So, thank you.

This game was a challenge and one I thought long and hard about. As *The Third Winter* was nearing conclusion, I thought deeply about the Army Group Centre battles in this period. Known by both sides as *The Forgotten Battles*, it covered a series of bloody attacks and offensives in poor terrain. Sources cover the period in less detail than in the Ukraine or the Baltics. One key reason is that, as with some of the 1942 Red Army failures, there were corresponding cover ups. As recently as 20 years ago, without the release of a great deal of new information, this game may have been impossible to complete. An example is the German LAGE OST maps (daily situation maps created by the Operations Branch of the OKH) in 100 Megabyte or above for enlargement and review.

Thankfully David Glantz, who has spent his life studying the Eastern Front, had recently completed his excellent volume titled *The Battle for Belorussia: The Red Army's Forgotten Campaign of October 1943 - April 1944*. This provided the impetus and anchor for my design. I was fortunate to spend a day with the great man who had many sources and

first-hand accounts to answer my design challenges. He also signed one of my proof maps. This game is dedicated to him.

The Forgotten Battles provides the second major game module in my Ostfront Volume I series. *Crimea* is also available as a module to support this series with Guy Wilde's excellent 1941-42 campaign included. Once Ostfront Volume 1 is completed, gamers will be able to explore the entirety of the eastern front during the critical transitional period of September 1943-April 1944. Both armies are evolving in this period. Both have strengths and limitations represented in the games as campaign challenges. Paramount in *The Forgotten Battles* is combined arms in the engagements, with small units often the deciding factor. Local knowledge and the large partisan forces active in this period were also key. Partisans enter my series of games with an impact, but we avoided creating a game within a game. Players should review these rules closely. Partisans can be key in Russian attacks. If not dealt with by the Axis player, with the correct units, they are more than a nuisance. Also, the Penal Battalions used to achieve bloody breakthroughs enter the game series. Plan their use wisely.

Soviet Cavalry Corps were expanded in this period, especially here in the Western Front sector. These needed expanded rules to cover their use of scouting and light tanks in varying terrain. These new rules will form the core of the Cavalry-Mechanized Group rules now being playtested in the 1944-45 games. Glantz stated these formations were the most feared by the German Army, so start to use them wisely.

I am also pleased to have at last reviewed and come up with some answers to the UR Brigades. Often seen as "cannon fodder" or just poor units, this was not the case. I have thought long and hard about how best to represent them. Key to defensive positions in regrouping Fronts, they were heavily reinforced to free up units and to hold the line. They come with new rules and new counters which I hope demonstrate their historical effect.

Finally with Chip's help, the Frontal boundary rules have been tightened and counters produced that I believe help clarify

this area greatly. Many gamers provided input on this area also, so thank you.

For the Axis player, there are a variety of new weapons from "Hornisse" to Maultiers and more. The fragmented operations in the Army Group Centre sector meant I also had to review the Alert Unit structure. Axis Players will see a multiplicity of these to help better represent the small unit actions and the fighting defense of the Wehrmacht. The Luftwaffe can also still strike back in limited flight and over a critical battle if grouped. It still possesses the only air units which can Hip Shoot. This can give your beleaguered panzers and Tigers the support and edge they need.

This is a big game and one that requires focus and planning. Poorly planned and resourced offensives will be punished. Equally, shallow defenses, poorly placed artillery and no reserves will lead to collapsing lines. Without the large-scale armored formations in other games, I am proud that *The Forgotten Battles* demonstrates areas of the core OCS rules that sometimes get overlooked.

As to strategy, the Red Army must attempt to force the flanks early on. Can you break through near Vitebsk with the Guards Armies of the 1st Baltic Front? Can you unhinge and roll up 2nd Army in the Prypet Marshes with 1st Belorussian Front? Time and the weather are against you. There must also be continued pressure down the Rollbahn from Smolensk to Minsk to prevent the redeployment of German reserves. Use your air force widely and in a focused way. You have air superiority where you need it and the grouping of independent air regiments to support an offensive is key. As the game progresses, the exhaustion of the Red Army, and its need to rebuild units for the summer 1944 offensive, weakens Soviet hitting power. At some point, defensive hog building may be needed to allow the Red Army to keep attacking in other sectors.

For the Axis player, defensive lines in good terrain must be held and the flanks kept secure. At the start this is a challenge, as most of Army Group Centre's armor finds itself scattered in swamp terrain in the south. If a line and reserve can be established, there are good units, excellent communication lines

and a useful air force to counterattack in limited flight and bad weather. The longer the game lasts the more the Axis player will find himself able to fight the Red Army to a standstill. One final tip—ensure you run an aggressive anti-partisan campaign during the game.

Now to thank a number of people. I can only capture a few. The rest of the stalwarts, great friends and OCS game and history counsellors are listed in the contributors at the front of the rule book. Firstly, Chip Saltsman. My developer and great friend. Chip and I, as I have as mentioned before, have an author and editor game completion relationship. It is so much more though. He is always available, and while we may often agree to differ, we always move forward in a constructive way. This is one of the core reasons you see such a quality product at the end. Marcus “Hog” Randall, my great friend of 40 years is always checking, catching missed points and tweaking supply. He always has the first complete test game on the table. I must thank the late Dean Essig and Hans Kishel for their map support. Dean also provided the simple blunt truth in his simple blunt manner at times, cutting through to the core of a question. As my Adobe Illustrator skills grow, I hope I can now take over some of the workload from these two great friends. Jeff Leach for his continued research on German Artillery. He and I may not always agree but his input is always appreciated and utilized widely.

Last but not least, my dear wife Helen, who still sees this as a strange hobby but supports me all the time. She knows how important it is to me, so only politely reminds to come in from my design studio for dinner.

Dean Essig

I had known Dean was ill for many months. He had taken me into his confidence and shared a great deal of his illness with me. Yet it remained a huge shock, how quickly he passed at the end. No one game can be dedicated to this giant of the hobby and my personal friend. Rather all my design output for the OST Front series of games owes so much to him. He kept me going with his directness, openness and support through long days. He had only words of encouragement when others disagreed with

an idea. As I have mentioned elsewhere, I will so miss our map talks and design principle chats, between the UK and Homer. Rest in peace, Dean, the work goes on.

Developer Notes

By Chip Saltsman

This is the third game Tony Birkett and I have collaborated on regarding the 1943-44 German-Soviet war. *The Forgotten Battles* is a “northern cousin” to *The Third Winter*, and we found we could easily adapt *TTW*’s concepts to this theatre. Glantz’s book *Battle for Belorussia* was the narrative source for the campaign combined with Tony’s detailed review of Tessin, Lage Ost maps and a wide range of unit histories for detailed information.

Early in development, we were privileged to spend a morning meeting with David Glantz himself to confirm and refine our approach. He was a fountain of information: Did Soviet Fronts shift boundaries periodically? Yes, weekly, let me show you some sample orders from the archives in Russia. What was the loss rate for Soviet tanks? 80% in the first few weeks of an offensive, with mechanical breakdowns and German anti-tank guns the main culprits. Front force compositions changed constantly. We gained a lot of ideas for *Forgotten Battles* from these conversations. One example was the amount of intel the Soviets were able to compile about German units and formations. They often planned assaults to strike at Corps or Army boundaries. Axis mobile divisions were regarded as dangerous opponents and their movements were tracked carefully. Soviet operations were always accompanied by extensive Maskirovka.

The campaign unfolded as a series of Front offensives by commanders who were often jealous or competitive with one another. STAVKA forced them to cooperate and launched several offensives with Fronts operating together. Typically, a Front was given a strategic and operational objective(s), not always realistic, and then prepared a plan with requested reinforcements and supplies. Sometimes the plan was essentially “push

forward until you run out of tanks!” New objectives might be assigned as an offensive evolved. Should a Front objective be reached, they might be tasked with a “Continuation Offensive” (“Continue to press until you run out of SP!”).

When not conducting an offensive, a Front would deploy artillery/machine-gun battalions and set up Field Fortified Regions (UR Brigades). These were not engaged by the Germans, particularly in 1944-45, as they had too many problems elsewhere. These FFR’s started in 1943 and played a significant role in enabling the Soviets to concentrate their forces in other sectors (they would move nearly all the divisions to other Fronts). Glantz devotes a chapter to this in *Colossus Reborn*. His work led us to the evolution in the way UR Brigades work as well as the Regrouping Front Posture rules.

Speaking of Fronts, the 2nd Belorussian Front appears during the entirety of *Forgotten Battles*, when in reality it was formed in February 1944. Rokossovsky’s Belorussian Front covered an increasingly large territory as it advanced and STAVKA recognized this by splitting it into two entities during the campaign. We did so at game start to better reflect the tempo of the campaign and the way the Belorussian Front operated.

Axis players will readily note how a fortified defense combined with local counterattacks works well with the geography of Belorussia. The Germans conducted counterattacks whenever possible, but much of the campaign was a matter of “hanging on by their fingernails.” Rokossovsky’s advance unhinged the southern border, and a similar disaster elsewhere is entirely possible.

There are a variety of units in the Axis OOA which reflect the breakdown of their standard infantry division. The Soviets will find Alert units ubiquitous—when German commanders yelled for help, they weren’t certain what might show up! Axis infantry commanders told to launch a counterattack nearly always demanded some kind of AFV support. This is why there are so many Stug battalions, and frequently just a few assault guns could turn the tide in a hex.

Another headache for the Germans is the Partisan battle. They will need to actively confront these units whenever possible, but

it won't be easy. Partisan activity was "low intensity" compared to normal OCS combat but had a significant role in this campaign. We wanted to show activity undertaken by Partisan brigades in this phase of the war. The Partisan Track markers show the local knowledge and close cooperation with the Red Army. At times, the Axis were forced to devote 10% of their manpower in Russia to defending against Partisans.

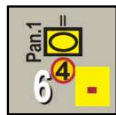
Here are some of the interesting units to be found in *Forgotten Battles*:

LVF – The Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism (Légion des volontaires français contre le bolchévisme) was a unit of the Wehrmacht recruited from French collaborationist movements for the German invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941. Officially designated the 638th Infantry Regiment, it comprised a coalition of far-right political factions which supported Nazi ideology and collaborated with Nazi Germany. The Vichy regime maintained its neutrality, but tolerated the LVF and gave it some endorsement.



the Wehrmacht recruited from French collaborationist movements for the German invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941. Officially designated the 638th Infantry Regiment, it comprised a coalition of far-right political factions which supported Nazi ideology and collaborated with Nazi Germany. The Vichy regime maintained its neutrality, but tolerated the LVF and gave it some endorsement.

Static Panther battalions are the early Panther models phased out after Kursk and emplaced to bolster defenses. Their maintenance issues made them best suited for such a role.



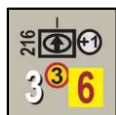
655 Panzer AT Bn – Initially equipped with Hornisse ("Hornet") vehicles, later a mix of Nashorns ("Rhinoceros") and Panthers. Later in the war the unit was transferred to the Western Front and equipped with Jagdpanthers.



519 AT Bn (7)-5-6 – A Nashorn unit, with an 88mm PAK 43 mounted on a Pz IV chassis, which made a powerful, mobile anti-tank gun.



216 Sturm Panzer Co – Brummbär or Sturmpanzer 43. Pz IV chassis which mounted a 15 cm howitzer in an armored casemate. Intended for close infantry support in built-up areas.



The 4-3-6 Track MA yellow-box units represent a mix of Marder III and Stug units that have AT guns. **42/AGC** is equipped with ten-tube 15 cm (5.9 in) Nebelwerfer launchers mounted on a lightly armored Sd.Kfz. 4 "Maultier" half-track chassis. Unlike other Werfer units, it packs a punch in Move Mode, making it very useful in Reserve for breakthroughs.

The **88/17 Nightfighter** was a small unit of radar-equipped Ju.88 and Do.17 aircraft which operated at night. They were sometimes pressed into daytime service.



Soviet Tank Battalions – The 4-3-6 are infantry-support T-34s, generally the 1942/43 variants. The 3-2-5 unit represents Lend-Lease Matilda tanks. A third of all Matilda production was sent to Russia.



Soviet Penal battalions – "Shtrafbats" in Russian. Penal battalion service in infantry roles was the most common use of *shtrafniki* ("punishes," usually deserters, designated cowards or labor camp inmates) and viewed by many Soviet prisoners as tantamount to a death sentence. Over 400,000 soldiers were reportedly sent to these units. Few of them survived the war.



1st Polish Army – Polish communists sought to create a new army, under communist control, out of the many ethnic Poles that remained in the Soviet Union. By 1944 it was a force of 200,000 known as the Polish People's Army (Ludowe Wojsko Polskie, LWP) but colloquially known as the Berling Army after its first commander, Zygmunt Berling. This force played a substantive role in the 1944-45 battles and its components became a part of the newly-created Polish People's Republic.



The Ghost of the 9th Tank Corps – The two Brigade Groups available early in *Forgotten Battles* are the remainder of the 9th



Tank Corps, sent to Ukraine. A significant armor component remained for a few weeks since it was heavily engaged in offensive actions, while the Corps was reconstituted with new equipment.

Units that seem to be in two places at once – Alert gamers will spot several units which seem to exist in two games at the same time. Examples are the 1 Ski Bde, which arrives as a reinforcement in *Third Winter* 1 Nov 43 and *Forgotten Battles* 1 Jan 44, and the Soviet 108th Rifle Division, present in both *Third Winter* and *Forgotten Battles* for several months. What's going on? Partly this is due to source confusion—the Ski Brigade is listed in both locations. Another challenge is the way that STAVKA constantly shifted units around, far more often than is depicted in a player's Order of Arrival. When we create rules for a linked set of games, we plan to have a Master OOA for each side and a mechanism for commanders to make these decisions for themselves. The important point is that the force structures are consistent with history.

AGN/AGS Marker Movement – These markers help with the "edge of the world" problem so that historical off-map activity affects decisions in the game. If you compare the AGS marker locations with the actual locations of units in *Third Winter*, it will seem as if the marker is far behind the movement of the front. This is because the marker really represents two things: where the Axis forces were and the Soviet logistics capability to move and supply units. The AGC-AGS connection had ruptured by January 1944, but the Soviets were also stretched to the point they couldn't take full advantage of the situation.

Kessel HQ time limits – We did considerable research on formations surrounded during the war, as *Third Winter's* Kessel HQs enable a force to hold out indefinitely. The Breakout Rule (*OCS 12.8e*) holds up very well: units that broke out of encirclement immediately often succeeded. Axis forces surrounded in the field could last

up to several OCS turns but were usually destroyed in the process. Kessels defending a City or an Air Base could hold out much longer, but at severe cost to Axis transport capability. Formations in ports (Kurland, Königsberg, the Channel ports) remained for months. Soviet practice was to smother encircled units with artillery and attack them relentlessly until the pocket was destroyed.

The map today – The map portrays what is present-day Belarus and parts of the surrounding countries. We used LAGE OST maps and 1936 place names for this game, but many have changed since the war. For example, Vitebsk is now Viciebsk. The locals call themselves Belarusians. Tilsit (A8.35) is now Sovetsk in the Russian Kaliningrad province, sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania. Intersburg (A5.30) is now Chernyakhovsk. The Kaliningrad Oblast extends east to Vilkavilkis (A15.27). The “Sulwaki Gap” of present-day geopolitics is located between A12.24 and A17.18.

Historical Commentary

By Chip Saltsman

The Forgotten Battles (TFB) covers the desperate fighting from late September 1943 through April 1944 in the Army Group Center portion of the Russian front. This war of attrition around cities and rugged terrain in the Belorussian region of the former Soviet Union has mostly been, well, forgotten. Historian David Glantz was forced to do in-depth detective work to uncover details of the fighting sufficient for his book, *Battle for Belorussia* (2016, University Press of Kansas) which is the only comprehensive account of the campaign.

The stage was set by the Soviet counteroffensive following the failed German assault at Kursk. Operation Kutuzov initially shoved back the Axis forces from Orel to near Bryansk (a few hexes onto the *Forgotten Battles* maps). STAVKA continued pressing forward through August and September, forcing the Germans to commit units to slow the Soviet advance—units sorely needed to defend the Dnepr. As *Forgotten Battles* begins, Soviet

forces have just recaptured Smolensk and Roslavl and are closing in on the cities of Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev and Gomel.

The next seven months saw a succession of Soviet offensives with the potential to break open the front. They were particularly successful in the southern part of the map, where Rokossovsky's Belorussian Front operated in parallel with Vatutin's 1st Ukrainian Front (on the *Third Winter* map). Other parts of the line resisted the Soviet tide, at the cost of soldiers the Axis could not afford to lose and an increasing reliance on fortifications instead of maneuver. The Soviets army possessed lavish artillery but had not yet perfected their deep strike offensive power, although the Cavalry-Mechanized formations delivered excellent results. Each Soviet Front's efforts mirrored the personality of its commander.

Soviet Army



Rokossovsky

1st Belorussian Front (Central Front until 20 Oct 43, then Belorussian Front until 17 Feb 44), commanded by Konstantin Rokossovsky. Rokossovsky was Polish, having been born in Warsaw, and fought with great distinction during the Russian Civil War. In 1937 he fell victim to the Great Purge, during which he was branded a traitor, imprisoned, and tortured. After Soviet failures in the Winter War of 1939-1940, Rokossovsky was taken out of prison and reinstated due to an urgent need for experienced officers. He was instrumental in

many of the Soviet successes during the war: the defense of Moscow, and the counterattacks at Stalingrad and Kursk. Subsequently, Rokossovsky planned and led part of Operation Bagration for which he was made a Marshal of the Soviet Union. He was an inspiring, confident, and innovative leader and very popular with his troops.



Sokolovsky

Western Front, led by Vasily Danilovich Sokolovsky. He was Belorussian, having been born at Grodno (hex A18.12). Much of Sokolovsky's experience was in staff roles and he became a protégé of Georgy Zhukov. Zhukov eventually placed him in command of the Western Front during the battle of Kursk, Operation Kutuzov, and the *Forgotten Battles* time period. His command style was the opposite of Rokossovsky, and most of his offensive plans were unimaginative frontal attacks. These led to severe casualties for minimal gains, and he failed to capture his primary objectives of Vitebsk and Orsha. Glantz assesses him this way (in his book *Battle of Kursk*): "Sokolovsky's reputation as a superb organizer must be tempered by his role in the Mars defeat of November-December 1942 and by his subsequent removal from Front command in April 1944 for his poor performance and the heavy losses incurred by his Front in operations in eastern Belorussia. The survival of Sokolovsky's reputation during the war and his prominence in the postwar years (as Chief of the General Staff, Minister of Defense, and author of 'Military Strategy') was due, in part, to his association with Zhukov."