

Scorpions in a Bottle: Korsun Pocket

Play notes

This scenario is not for the faint of heart. You will have to take lots of painful decisions right from the beginning. You will see encirclements and counter encirclements all the time, and your mood will be in a continuous swing between desperation and euphoria – but you’ll mostly feel desperate, and so will your opponent. Don’t give up. Be creative. There must be a way to break that pocket, or to seal it for good.

Soviet Player

You will see all those fine German divisions and probably be discouraged at the task ahead of you. Don’t. While quality is definitely not on your side (as usual for the Soviets until very late in the war), you have a number of things going for you that you will need to exploit to their maximum potential if you want to win this scenario.

The main one, of course, is quantity – in terms of both units and supplies. This means, don’t be afraid of attacking, never mind the AR disparity. However, you will need to attack with a plan. To win, it’s important to create a pocket encircling most German troops the first turn. A good plan is to follow the historical Soviet attack directions: from the East, push along the road from Shmela towards Shpola. From the West, pierce the German line at B1.11 and run towards Zvenigorodka and again Shpola, around where the two Fronts will meet. You will want to push a few mobile units to occupy the road going north from Shpola and, if you can, seize the airbase in Korsun. If you manage this you will remove the only German patrol zone on the map, and therefore enable your bombers to strike safely.

SCORPIONS IN A BOTTLE: KORSUN POCKET

TURN TRACK

1 FEB Weather: 1-5, Freeze 6, Thaw	5 FEB Weather: 1-4, Freeze 5-6, Thaw	9 FEB Weather: 1-4, Freeze 5-6, Thaw
2 Auto Freeze	6 FEB Weather: 1-4, Freeze 5-6, Thaw	10 FEB Weather: 1-4, Freeze 5-6, Thaw
3 Auto Freeze	7 FEB Weather: 1-4, Freeze 5-6, Thaw	11 FEB Weather: 1-4, Freeze 5-6, Thaw
4 Auto Freeze	8 FEB Weather: 1-4, Freeze 5-6, Thaw	12 FEB Weather: 1-4, Freeze 5-6, Thaw

AXIS DEAD PILE

AXIS OFF-MAP AIR UNITS

AXIS VARIABLE REINFORCEMENTS

1 Free and 1 Alert unit per turn, plus SP based on the die roll below.

Die Roll	Axis Supply
2-5	4
4-10	5
11-12	6

VICTORY POINTS TRACK

START VP: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

GROUND CONDITIONS

FLIGHT CONDITIONS Die Roll

2-5 Auto
6-9 Normal
10-12 Normal

FLIGHT CONDITIONS

SOVIET OFF-MAP AIR UNITS

SOVIET DEAD PILE

SOVIET VARIABLE REINFORCEMENTS

No Repls, just SP based on the die roll below.

Die Roll	Soviet Supply
2-5	5
6-7	6
8-12	7

The Game

← Primary thrust

← Alternative / secondary thrust

It's important that you accomplish all of the above through overruns in the Movement phase: you'll need to remove as many German Reserve markers as possible before they get a chance to react, and air barrage – combined with the special artillery barrage markers available to the Soviets in turn one – is instrumental in achieving this. You should not attack Shpola, but you should encircle it entirely and, again, make sure to DG the 14th Pz stationed there.

Also, remember that nobody gets new supplies on Jan 26, so another reason for the Soviet player to attack a lot is to make the Germans use up all of their SPs – which will effectively paralyze them when their turn comes.

So, should you concede the game if the first turn doesn't go as you expect? Not necessarily, but things will get more complicated after that. The Germans get a couple of good divisions on February 1st. By then, you should have a solid encircling in place around the Korsun pocket and be ready to meet the German relief attempts.

Remember that on Turn 2 you can call in the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps to reinforce your pocket, or to finalize its creation. That is going to be another tough decision, and you must carefully weight the cost (5 VPs – ouch!) versus the potential benefits: the initial attacks weren't so lucky? Call in the Guards and try to close the pocket in Turn 2! The encirclement succeeded but you want to ensure that the pocket stays sealed? Go for it! On the other hand, if you had a good first turn, withholding the Guards can be a good option to try and achieve a sudden death victory early on.

Don't overlook the German units on the Dnepr: they will soon start milking away precious victory points from you. Keep a strong patrol zone to discourage the Germans from dropping SPs to them, and start setting aside troops to destroy them as early as possible. Use a few big infantry divisions bolstered by a few AR4 units. If the Germans keep many units on the Dnepr and move the Kessel HQ there, you might even consider dispatching the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps to the Dnepr (not their historical usage but still).

A final consideration on the initiative determination system: the Soviet player starts with the initiative and can keep it automatically as long as he spends one SP from anywhere on the map. We think this is a great way to show that keeping strategic initiative requires some logistical effort. As the Soviet player you want to keep the initiative for as long as possible, because a German double move can be devastating to your victory chances – especially towards the beginning of the scenario. Therefore, remember to keep 1 SP around to retain initiative if you can. This is not a problem in Turn one as you have plenty of supply, but they will go fast, and you will soon face some excruciating decision-making in that respect.

German Player

The biggest risk for you as the German player is to be overconfident in the superior quality of your troops and assume that victory will inevitably come to you. This is definitely NOT going to be the case: you will have to work a lot, and hope in some timely luck with the dice, in order to avoid a defeat. Turn one is the most important turn of the game, and your first important decision is where to setup the two extra alert units. Do not snub them: these are the only German units that you can place freely, and the decision is a very important one. Will you reinforce the defense of the Korsun Air Base? Or bolster the German line east of Shpola and/or NW of Zvenigorodka? There are other options for you to discover as well. We found that creative placement of the two alerts considerably increased the depth and the replayability of the scenario.

You have six reserve markers, and you should definitely use them all at setup time. Three of them should go on the 3rd and 14th Panzer Division units – just be aware that the Soviets will do all they can to remove those reserve markers before you can unleash them in your reaction phase. The remaining markers should go on some smaller mobile stacks west and northeast. Remember to set them up in Move mode.

You don't have many supplies to start with and remember that you don't get any on Jan 26. You should try to save at least some of those supply for your crucial first turn, therefore you will be facing a lot of

excruciating decisions when defending from the Soviet overruns: will you save supplies and defend at half strength, counting on your almost always superior AR?

In most cases, competent Soviet play with an average amount of luck will see most of your units surrounded and seemingly helpless at the start of your first turn. Don't despair: this scenario is called "Scorpions in a Bottle" for a reason. As long as you have available supplies, you will always have chances to reopen the pocket on your turn, thanks to the better quality of your troops. In the subsequent turns, if the Flight conditions allow it, remember to place a few arriving supply tokens off map, in order to drop them inside the pocket – either to fuel your mobile units or to feed your outposts on the Dnepr.

Speaking of the Dnepr: another *extremely* important decision you need to take early on is, how many German units – and how good – will you leave there in the hope of start scoring VPs starting on February 1st? Consider this: if those units manage to survive until February 1st, the VP gain from staying on the Dnepr will equal the VP loss from their destruction (assuming they are out of trace supply, which they probably will unless you move the Kessel HQ to the Dnepr, more on this later). So that's just as good as sneaking the units out of the pocket. Yeah, that's twisted Hitler logic for you. On the other hand, if you manage to have several units surviving on the Dnepr for 2-3 turns, your victory chances will look pretty good.

If you are big on the Dnepr strategy, you might want to try moving the Kessel HQ towards the Dnepr: if successful, that will allow the units on the Dnepr to stay in trace supply -- therefore negating VPs to the Soviets for killing them **and** not have to roll for attrition and be hampered by the negative OoS effects. You can achieve this in two ways: 1. Remove the Kessel HQ on Turn 1. It will come back on Turn 4 (February 5th), and you can place it anywhere on the map, or 2. Try to move it by itself. The second option is faster (especially if you manage to use Strat Move Mode) but much riskier, and unlikely to succeed against competent Soviet play.

A final piece of advice regarding the Kessel-on-the-Dnepr strategy: if you move away the Kessel HQ, be aware that the infantry units on the western side of the map can become vulnerable to Soviet encirclement, so that might offset any VP gains scored on the Dnepr.

Another viable German strategy, depending on the circumstances, is to leave just a token force on the Dnepr and try to break through the pocket with everyone else as soon as possible. If very successful, this strategy might effectively end the game Turn 3 or thereabouts. But don't count on it: Infantry is slow, and mobile units require fuel which you don't have. This strategy will see your units forming a long line along the Shpola-Korsun road, and the Soviets will have plenty of chances to cut it off, leaving you to hold tight and hope for the relief force coming in on February 5th.

We have been playing this wonderful system for more than twenty years, but we have never seen so much epic OCS concentrated in such a small footprint. *Scorpions in a Bottle* was a blast to test, and hopefully it will be just as fun for you to play. Enjoy!

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