

## Knocking The Other Guy's Block(s) Off A Replay of EastFront by Gary E. Smith and Alan Emrich

With the release of Columbia Games' *EastFront*, a new dimension has been added to what many wargamers have less than seriously sneered down upon as "those wooden block games." While their *Rommel in the Desert* was a quantum leap from the wooden block classic *Napoleon*, *EastFront* is another great advance beyond *Rommel in the Desert*. The proof, however, is in the playing. To that end, we present this replay account of an actual *EastFront* game.

### Prelude

There is a classic Donna Barr cartoon with a picture of a German soldier standing in the desert in full winter clothing. His kit has a travel sticker on it reading "To Stalingrad." Two of his comrades are standing nearby in their Afrika Korps garb as one comments to the other, "It looks like Fritz won't be complaining about the heat anymore."

Welcome back to Stalingrad, brother wargamers. This time presented by through the auspices of those little wooden blocks that many have seen, some have played, and a hard core few truly enjoy. (All too few, by the looks of things). Add us to the latter category of those who truly enjoy this game system. After playing *EastFront*, we're definitely sold on wooden block games!

While it has long been Alan's philosophy that "real wargamers play the campaign game," *EastFront* has proven to be the exception he allows. The game breaks up the Russo-German war of 1941-45 into half-year scenarios of summer and winter campaigns. We opted to play the winter '42 scenario: Operation "Uranus," The Stalingrad Counter-Offensive. The game lasts six months, from December, 1942 through May, 1943. Each month begins with a replacement/reinforcement phase followed by two game turns. Each game turn is composed of two player turns with the Russians going first in the Snow and the Germans going first on Mud and Dry weather turns (much like a "flip-flop" turn in *Third Reich*).

### Building Blocks

For those folks who may not have seen this type of game before, the 14 counters" are, of course, wooden blocks 3/4 X 3/4 inch square by 3/8 inch thick. The backs are blank (either black or red), the fronts have decals applied to them indicating whether the unit in question is armor, infantry, cavalry, mech, etc. The effect is very similar to *Stratego*, in that unit strengths are hidden (although this "*Stratego* stigma" has made it tough for these wooden block games to be taken seriously by we grognards). The beauty is that each edge of the hidden side of the block has a descending strength value on it; from 4 (or less) down to 1. As a unit suffers casualties or receives replacements, the block is rotated to its new strength. Once you reduce it to 0 or less, it's off to the dead pile.

Mayhem is visited on units by a very simple, clean combat system. On the attack, units roll a six-sided die for each strength point ("Combat Value" or "CV") in the attack. A 6 results in a "hit," with one or more hits required to inflict a step loss (depending on defender's terrain and the attacker's supply situation). Combat sees air strikes resolved first, defensive fire, then the attacker's units roll for effect. Armored and Russian "Shock" units hit on 5's and 6's, units in swamps get defensive fire on a 5 or 6 and so forth.

Movement is also cleanly handled. In Dry weather, armor, mech and cavalry move three hexes, everybody else moves two except Russian shock armies, which always plod along at one. In Mud, everyone moves one hex except cavalry, which moves two. During snow turns, armor, mech and cavalry move two hexes, the rest one hex. Hexes measure 1 1/2" across on a beautifully done 22" X 34" map covering the front from Warsaw in the west to Astrakhan in the east.

Movement of pieces is also highly restricted by the expenditure of Headquarters Commands (the unit's 4.steps" or "CVs"). Since a unit can only receive one replacement CV per month, and month consists of two player turns, using Headquarters CVs wisely is half the game. The ebb and flow of the game hinges entirely on one's HQ CVs. With them, you're going places and doing things. Without them, you pray for bad weather to bog things down or anxiously wait for the Production phase to acquire more. As a brilliant twist in the game's design, HQ CVs are also a major source of Victory Points, thus reinforcing the need not to expend them frivolously.

Simply put, unless you expend a HQ supply step, your pieces cannot move and when they attack, the defender requires an extra hit before being reduced. To move, one's pieces must be within the supply radius of a HQ unit. The supply radius equals the HQ's current CV. As an HQ goes from having a CV rating of 3 to 2. It's supply radius also drops from 3 hexes to 2. Thus, not only the ability to move or attack in supply lessened, but only the units closer and then closest to the HQ can be activated.

To make matters worse for the Germans, their headquarters are "disrupted" during the snow turns (i.e., have their effect reduced by one) and replacement steps cost 50% more during the winter of '42-43\*. Since "mud is neutral," both side's HQs are disrupted during mud turns. [\*WGA note; This scenario rule was dropped in rule version 2.0 and remains so through the last version 3.02]

### The Sides

Alan played the Germans while Gary played the Russians. It was agreed that, if time permitted, we would continue the game past the scenario end. (The scenarios are flexible and can be extended another six months when completed or made into their own mini-campaign games, a wonderful feature). Playing time, set-up to take down, ran 4 1/2 hours including much time spent taking notes in preparation for this article. A straight, sit-down playing would probably have only taken about 2 1/2 to 3 hours for a winter campaign, and about an hour longer for a

summer campaign. *[Ed note: The Designer comments are in italics.]*

## Alan's German Set Up

As I sat at OKH reading the reports, it was "good news, bad news." The good news was that no formations began the game in the dead pile. Each unit there is a straight loss of Victory Points, so at least I wasn't starting "in the hole." So much for the good news.

The bad news was that most of the boys are not long for the map. Virtually every unit will begin the scenario reduced, and I can't begin strong anywhere. Strong, mobile reserves are my only hope, and so I concentrated my forces in the eastern Ukraine. Powerful tank and mechanized infantry units were positioned north of Kharkov, with a lowly "1" value headquarters. During the snow, that's disrupted down to an effective "0," meaning that only the boys in the hex with the HQ will be able to move. Of course, Gary doesn't know that, so I've placed mechanized infantry reserves in Kursk and Rostov which look threatening, but will be relegated to a primarily defensive role due my lack of HQ steps.

I've covered the line with infantry, with the siege guns deployed around Leningrad (although they won't be able to really do anything before summer). My only full strength HQ (a "III") is deployed at the extreme southern end of the Caucasus' Front. Their job is to try to call back the boys in good order. Yep, we're planning a retreat from the word go.

After 15 years as my best friend and earstwhile opponent, I know that Gary likes to shake the "history" out of a new wargaming experience. Since neither of us have played this scenario before, that means that he'll hit me along the same axis as the Russian hit the Germans, in the South. My plan, therefore, is to have him hitting as much air and as few of my troops as possible down there.

I was forced to deploy a tank and 11 factors of other troops in Stalingrad. which we begin the scenario fighting over. Fine. Three satellite (Italians and Rumanians in this case) are there, along with a single armored unit with a CV (Combat Value, i.e., "strength") of 1. We're abandoning it, too. One of my other few, precious HQ's is there (the only one with a "II" CV) to help evacuate. I kept my OKH HQ up to three for the withdrawal, and the other HQs are all ones, hoping he doesn't push in the north instead of the south. Time will tell.

*German Set Up: Setting up first, the Germans successfully anticipate the Soviet thrust, nullifying a major Soviet advantage. Placing the Satellite units in Stalingrad is questionable: Stalingrad is an obvious target, and destroyed Satellite units (if rebuilt) must remain within their home country, effectively useless. Note: starting "dead" units are historically based, and their initial absence is factored into the scenario handicaps.*

## Gary's Russian Set Up

I don't get all the Russian units to start with. Some begin the game in the dead pile as automatic German VP's if I don't "buy" them out of there with replacements during the course of

the game. Of the rest, both sides get specific numbers of blocks with a certain number of CVs to allocate amongst them. For example, I get seven armored units to total no more than 16 strength points between them. The Russians also begin this scenario with six HQs with an average CV level of 2 each.

So, my units are going to average out at CV level 3, with some 4s, 2s and a couple of 1s (in order to make more 4s at start).

Since this is Operation Uranus, I opt to thin the line out up by Leningrad and Moscow with the 2 and 1 CV units. Having gamed with Alan for 15 years, I leave lots of good troops around Moscow along with a strong unit in Leningrad and a precious "11" CV HQ on her outskirts to forestall a cheap Alan coup. *[Alan's note: He knows me all too well].*

Next, we'll try this scenario out by testing it historically. I set up my best armored, shock and cavalry units south of Voronezh, along with two strong HQ units. By doubling up the HQs, I planned to sustain an attack in this area. Objective: Stalino or Rostov. Obviously Alan expects this, as he's got four reserve blocks, probably mobile, at Voroshilovgrad.

Next, another good HQ and more mobile units were deployed down by Elisra, under the Stalingrad bulge, to attack towards Rostov from the south. The fourth HQ is just southeast of Stalingrad to support the southern lunge or grab Stalingrad fast if Alan decides to depart quickly. The balance of the infantry is parceled out to support these drives. Not as much as I would like, but the rest of the line has to be covered. There's a thin spot in his line up by Voronezh that I might try to pop also.

The one hitch is that Alan can simply do a "blitz" move and retreat out of this potential noose, unlike his historical counterparts who were ordered not to. If I can open up a hole in either spot, it won't help him much. If not, then this game may have to turn into a grinding match to kill Axis units. And so, let the game begin.

*Soviet Set Up: Relieving Leningrad is not a bad idea (re-establishing Rail Supply is worth +6 VPs), but the 2CV HQ near there is wasted (without any effective strength to attack with), while another HQ step would have proven invaluable in supporting the southern drive. Soviet breakthrough prospects are best where they can hit single defenders in open terrain with three or four strong (DF) units (about 50% or 75% chance of four hits respectively). Most of the front is along rivers, where an exploitable breakthrough is unlikely (only 1-2 units can engage per phase), but a cross river Blitz by heavy units should kill single German defenders in two fires (as Gary does south of Voronezh). However, the hexes from Elista south can be hit by four units. Strong blitzes (12+ CV of Tanks/Shock would average four hits per fire) against lone Germans there should result in immediate breakthroughs, enabling two hex exploitation to block the crucial rail junction at Tikhoretsk within ZOCs. With German HQs disrupted and unit speed slowed by snow. this should seal the fate of most of the Caucasus grouping (eight units). The Soviet exploiting units would be out of supply, but the Germans would take massive losses. The hex south of Stalingrad can be hit by three units,*

*and a breakthrough here, coupled with the annihilation of the Don Front, would trap the Stalingrad grouping of six units.*

### **Russian December I**

Arrgh! My drive in the south stalled right on the start line. I wore down his front line units to 1s, but they've blunted my blitz and used a blitz move of their own to bug out! Not enough sixes came my way to crumple the paper-thin survivors. However, using a blitz move up north has shattered a three hex gap in Alan's line and trashed three infantry corps. Dead Germans are worth a lot VPs if he doesn't rebuild them. I'm only over the Don by one hex though. I wish I had one more HQ as a follow-up in this area to sustain this breakthrough. Gee, while I'm wishing, how about a handful of armor blocks at level 4 also ... still, it's a good start for the Russians.

Russian December I: The northern blitz smashes across the Don, but runs out of HQ support at a crucial moment. The Southern attack is too weak and fails to penetrate.

*Illustration The basic front for most of the game. Some reinforcements went into Moscow as well as one in Tula.*

### **German December I**

Whew! the Russians broke through in two places along the Volga river to the north. Fortunately, Gary's blitz to the south of Stalingrad was much less successful. Rather than expending the "III" CV HQ in the south, I used OKH to rail it back to the Don river, just west of Stalingrad, along with the two infantry units furthest south in the Caucasus. Blitz moving with the HQ near Stalingrad, we double marched the boys there out quick as can be, leaving only one 3 CV satellite unit to hold the factories there. There's still a half-dozen vulnerable units left with their picklehauben hanging out, but that is WAY down from how it looked when I started this withdrawal.

I lost three infantry units this turn, with more sure to follow. These are losses which I simply cannot afford. I hope to get a solid line along the Donetz by the time the Russians run out of steam. If I can hold on to the economic objectives in the eastern Ukraine, I should be in a position to fight for a victory. The boys along the northern Caucasus are lost without command (good magazine, that "Command" even with all of Ty's supply rules). I sure hope he doesn't have an HQ down there ready to roll those boys up in the mountains. My HQ CV situation is becoming critical....

*German December I: The German blitz retreat effectively ends the danger of encirclement at Stalingrad, the rear guard left there denying the Soviets the rail line. The rail maneuvers in the south prepare for a successful withdrawal there.*

### **Russian December II**

Well, Alan does the "blitz and splits," around the Stalingrad area, leaving a rear guard to slow me down. He throws a vicious counterpunch in the Rossoch area that bloodies both of us. I activate my second HQ at Serafimovich and cut into the rearguard. In retrospect, I should have deployed this HQ further to the northwest to support the main drive, rather than using it to

uselessly shepherd this part of the fire. I didn't attack along the main northern breakthrough this turn, instead choosing to shuffle in some full-strength units to fill in for the chewed up ones Alan has left me by his counterattack. Next turn, we'll get resupplied and go.

Down south, I clear out the weakened rearguards and move ahead some, but my HQ has a radius of only 1 left and not many troops can go therefore. The HQ next to Stalingrad moves along, incognito for this turn. Now that Alan has blitz retreated, a quick drive in the south isn't too profitable. I'll save HQ CVs to hit him with later... and hard.

As it stands, Alan is running for the Donetz river line. If I attack him out of supply, I'll have to roll two 6s to reduce him one step level instead of hitting him with each 6 rolled. As the defender, he still has to roll only normally on defensive fire to reduce me. I want my 4 CV units to die in manly combat with a good chance to inflict losses on him. He has to stop running and burning supply, or give up too many VP positions.

*Russian December II: It is often profitable to engage a fleeing enemy, even without HQ support. While the initial (unsupported) fire will inflict only half hits, when the enemy retreats, pursuit fire will inflict full hits.*

*Image Opening attack in the South. The follow up arrows show the resultant pursuit to the LowerDon.*

### **German December II**

Thank Thor he didn't have an HQ in Grozny! Still, the Russians popped me .good south of Stalingrad, so he can mop up that whole area as soon as his HQs get going again. I believe he dropped the ball by not committing STAVKA to moving some of the units in the Caucasus. He could have rolled me up like Venetian blinds! Best of all, he could have snapped me in half in the drive on Kharkov, but he stopped attacking!!! Just because he's out of supply (my units all take an extra hit to reduce), he quit pressing. I couldn't have asked for better! Now I don't have to put the fire out there until NEXT turn.

I've fairly well completed the move to the Domitz bend this turn by activating my III CV HQ to move the boys along the northern Caucasus mountains. Next I pulled the Stalingrad evacuees back into that three hex area along the Domitz river. OKH bailed out the headquarters and Rumanians left in Stalingrad proper. There's still about 4 units being left to the wolves (or bears, I suppose, in this case). All totaled, it looks like the "6th Armee" was lost, only this time in bits and pieces spread throughout the front, rather than in history's massive pocket at Stalingrad. Thank goodness the attrition slowed down with Gary's lack of willingness to attack out of supply. I've got the lines shored up, so he's going to have a tough time bashing through now. Things should stabilize quickly, but my losses were still higher than anticipated.

Sizing up the overall situation, it looks like I either didn't manage my evacuation effectively or it was a bad plan to start with. In either case, the game does not bode well for the German

and my chances of winning have been greatly diminished by my unit losses. I need another plan....

*German December II: Alan makes good use of the time afforded him by the Soviet reluctance to press ahead, extricating more units from the Caucasus.*

### **Russian January Production**

I get 62 production points to spend to revitalize my forces. First, all four HQ's get boosted one CV level. That's 4 points right there! The balance of the points get split evenly between rebuilding key units and buying others out of the dead pile. My dead units are as good as German VPs, remember.

*Russian January Production: It may be a little early to worry about dead units. The Soviets need HQ steps (including STAVKA) and punching power (armor).*

### **German January Production**

I rebuilt my four lost infantry units (which must appear back in Germany) in an effort to keep my Victory Point losses down. My front line replacement steps were minimal as most of the rest of my economy went to rebuilding my HQs (at 15 production points per step, thanks to this brutal snow). It's going to be a long winter with my HQs all disrupted.

*German January Production: Ditto, substituting defence (infantry steps) for punching power.*

### **Russian January I**

STAVKA blitz! I activate the Supreme Soviet HQ and go after Alan's troops full force. I can't let him have too long to build up interior lines or I'll never get through. However, aside from moving up to maintain contact, my attack at Rossach gets shredded. Not a single step loss on Alan, but FIVE on the Soviets. OUCH! Apparently Alan has shuffled in some of his hoarded armor. It looks like grind Lime in the north.

Down south, my blitz move has put mobile units up on the Donets and lower Don, at two-units-per-hex strength. One weak mobile unit is across the Don from Rostov itself. These southern territorial gains have temporarily cutoff four German units. This is, however, somewhat elusive as the major fight will be on the Donets where Alan's line is now thinnest.

*Russian January I: Blitzing the High Command HQ is a devastating move. Too devastating. That's why it is prohibited in the rules. Otherwise fast units can move six hexes without supply.*

### **German January I**

The Russians were on the move toward the linchpin city of Rostov this turn. STAVKA blitzed just to keep the Russian stragglers caught up. While my leftover boys were starving in isolation in the Caucasus, I rolled in like a house of fire near Vorszchenz and blunted Gary's shock and guards tank army there. Stopping the Russian winter counter-offensive is a lot like pulling a bear's teeth out with no pliers. The trick is to slap the bear a little silly first, so the loss of a few tmth doesn't wise him up to one's dentistry work...

I only used OKH this turn to clean up some stragglers along the northern Caucasus and fall back to the Kerch straits. I tried to finish off the reduced shock army and guards tank army in the second combat phase, but the dice were with the Russians, so my two tank corps were, literally, ground to a halt. Basically, my boys need rest and rebuilding. When's the next replacement phase again?

### **Russian January II**

On Alan's phase, he slams me at the ongoing battle at Rossach again, but this time he suffers along with me. He activates very few units overall, though. Is he saving HQ CVs to run again or to prepare for a counteroffensive?

I deploy only one HQ this turn, in the Don bend. Again, I must get my people up on the front because I can't afford stragglers. I opt only to bum HQ CVs when the maximum number of troops possible can benefit. If their levels get too low, a player can't do anything except in near futility.

### **German January II**

Well, the Russians are too PooPed to pop right now, and so are the Germans. In fact, to save HQ CVs, I simply passed, not moving a single piece. Bring on the replacements!

### **Russian February Production**

Hmm... Alan looked me right in the eye, grinned and said "Pass." The SS is deploying in Germany up north. You don't deploy the best Axis units up north for a SOUTHERN attack now, do you, Alan? Double hmm.

Anyway, I build up all my busiest HQ units again, moving them up one CV level each. Significantly this turn, I also beef up the two HQs by Moscow, spending the rest of my production points to rebuild dead units.

### **German February Production**

Of my 82 build points, 12 went to replacing two more destroyed infantry corps, 10 replaced a single CV for each of an infantry and mechanized unit, and the remaining 60 bought four HQ CVs. Actually, my HQs are starting to shape up thanks to my conservative play. Still, what does it profit a man to gain his HQ CVs and lose the game?

I'm beginning to look at Leningrad for a surprise attack in case there's a clear weather turn in May. With the SS parizer korps and the assault guns each getting triple fire there, it's becoming very tempting to try to rush in at the last second and weasel a victory. I've got time to think about for now, though....

Alan had Leningrad surrounded the whole game then brought reinforcements up and attacked as noted on the last turn

### **Russian February I**

Over to the attack for the Russians. The Rossach forces punch towards Stalino, into the weakest (looking) part of Alan's line. No great strategy is necessary here; just grind away. In the south, the Soviets are now up on the lower Don in good strength. Again, Alan's head has been fitted for a noose. Does he stay or go?

Results from the Stalino area are good; 6 losses for Alan to only 3 for me. I've managed to stretch the envelope, but no breakthroughs. Damn.

### **German February I**

Hmm... He's pressing hard toward Stalino, but used his HQ near thereto blitz this turn just to grind me up. It worked, but at least there were no breakthroughs. Hopefully, he's spent his wad, but I doubt that.

My move consisted only of committing my one 3CV HQ and shuffling the weak boys out of battle and putting in fresh reserves. It didn't take a lot of brains, but it definitely weakened me around Rostov to support Stalino. I'm beginning to feel the attrition really take its toll. Presumably, he can't sustain this level of attack much longer, and the mud will be here soon anyway. His exhaustion and General Mud are my only two hopes right now of truly stabilizing the situation. For once, time seems with me.

### **Russian February II**

This turn two HQs activate and press at Stalino. I can't imagine that he has too many unit CVs left to keep taking these attacks. Down south, I activate another HQ and jump one lone German unit defending the lower Don. I need that bridgehead there now! Mud is on the way and when it comes, maneuver will bid us a fond adieu.

Well, just marvelous. I was ingloriously shoved back over the Don by an unsuspected armor unit in the south. It was the usual bleed-and-die in the northern "breakthrough." Oh well, dead Germans are Soviet VP's if I can kill them to the point of changing their address to the dead pile.

### **German February II**

He had another HQ CV to commit to the Stalino drive this turn. Gary makes a stab at crossing the lower Don, but my "skillful" rolling(!) causes his river attack to be bloodily repulsed. The attrition continues, with both sides taking losses they can't sustain. I activated OKH to deploy the SS panzers around Leningrad (ain't I a stinker?) and shuffle some more mobile reserves into the Stalino meat grinder. Onward to production and, hopefully, mud.

### **Russian March Production**

Well, looky there! The SS moved to the Leningrad area! Ain't that cute? Probably just vacationing, Alan would say.

It's the usual production plan for me. Put 40 points into the HQ units, etc., etc. One more production phase and my dead pile will not contribute to the German VP totals at all. I have to take a little care on beefing up units, as on Mud turns the Germans go first, then the Soviets.

### **German March Production**

Again, beefing up HQ's sucked up 60 points worth of production out of 80. With the Italian 8th army irreplaceably lost around Stalingrad, there was only one other unit left to

replace. The tank and infantry unit I pulled out of the Stalino grinder both got built back up to 2s.

### **German March I**

We roll the dice and it's Mud! The front is saved for another half month. I'm passing to wait and see what Gary does. Presumably, he'll pass also and this will be a short turn.

### **Russian March I**

Alan passed, and so shall I. With my HQs now disrupted, I'll be going nowhere fast if I try to move. However, he's left Rostov very weak. If we get snow next turn, I'll go first and slap him right there. Alan has burned about the same number of HQ CVs that I have. Since he starts with fewer, and unused CV levels count towards VPs, my guess is that with no dead Soviets, Stalingrad in my pocket and more CV levels, I might have a marginal victory here. Rostov in my control could seal up the game.

### **German March II**

Mud again! He passed last turn, and will no doubt do so again this turn. What a blessing. He's mired in a morass of mud and can't move! Next month is SOLID mud, so now it's wound licking time....

All that I did was to rotate out some wounded boys back for rebuilding from the battle hexes; and do a bit of tidying up. He's definitely planning something, though. I can't imagine what. The mud gives all defending units double firepower (they hit on 5s and 6's) while reducin all attacking units to single firepower (hitting on 6s only). What could he be thinking?

### **Russian March II**

Drat. He secured Rostov. I still want it, so despite the Mud, I launch two attacks at this pivotal city. One right at Rostov with three units and one on the Donets bend at Kamensko. Hey, I can't wait forever! April is automatic Mud and May is 50/50 Dry or Mud. I have to get set up now to either be in position to use the Dry turn or to just keep grinding away in the Mud. If I wait and May is Mud, I won't have the time get anywhere.

### **German April Production**

He breached the Donetz river line where I had the Hungarians stretched thin. Dam it if he didn't get lucky! I couldn't repulse the three boys he threw across the river, so one remained, creating the bridgehead he needed. Fortunately, he was not so lucky with his probing attack on Rostov. No units crossed the river, and three losses were inflicted on his forces there. Things could look worse on the board, and better in terms of the victory conditions.

With only three HQ CVs to replace on the entire board, most of my production finafly went to replacements. Since there were no units in the dead pile to replace, many weakened armor and infantry units were finally passed a few bandages. The assault on Leningrad is shaping up nicely. He'll never see it coming if I can keep from telegraphing my intentions. Heh. heh.

### **Russian April Production**

Again, more HQ CVs are bought, units rebuilt and the dead renewed. We'll continue on by Rostov, though I note Alan riddling with a rebuild or two up by Leningrad. Well, I've got a full strength infantry army in there (the max you can keep supplied in there is one army of any type). I have all my units in front of Moscow at full strength, so if Alan wants to bum CV levels at the odds needed for success, they're his VP's to gamble.

### **German April I**

With Mud guaranteed, I passed to see if Gary has anything up his sleeve.

### **Russian April I**

Alan passes. He's getting good at that, You were expecting something else, maybe? Obviously, he's waiting for the last turn and praying for Dry weather to pop me. Well, I'll press on at Rostov, but I think dw I will save some CV points to see if I have to undo an Alan coup.

### **German April II**

He pressed the Hungarians with all his might, but the four-strength unit held on as a bruised and battered 1 by battle's end. I committed the local HQ to rotate it out and put in two four value units in its place. That should bottle up his bridgehead across the Donetz for a while! Additionally, I used OKH to position everyone around Leningrad in their EXACT rightjump off hexes. If there's clear weather next turn, Leningrad is going to be in deep doodie.

### **Russian April II**

OK, how stupid does Alan think I am? Either this is a great bluff up by Leningrad to try and paralyze me, or he plans to do Manstein's Backhand Blow down the Nevesky Prospekt.

No, it's Alan; it's Leningrad. I have the odds, so I'll adjust the line and wait. I think Rostov is beyond taking right now anyway since he moved units down there. My disrupted HQs won't let me concentrate enough forces to ensure a good chance of success. Why throw away VPs?

### **German May Production**

Interestingly, he spent two HQ CVs just to tidy up his lines, too. Well, clear weather will certainly decide a few things, if there is to be any during the next two turns.

With only the two HQ CVs to replace, that left 50 of my original 80 points for replacements. Troops all up and down the line saw a quick shot in the arm, particularly around Leningrad. The trap is waiting to be sprung, but I've been factoring it out in my head and don't think I'll be able to inflict losses on him fast enough. It'll take two turns of clear weather and a little luck to pull it off. Well, it's worth a gamble as the rest of the front has been stabilized nicely.

### **Russian May production**

I upped the HQ pieces, fixed up a few units around Leningrad and did some more figuring. I have a lock on a Marginal victory. If it's Mud either turn, I can't really make any attacks at this late stage of the scenario that will net me VPs over

the ones I'll bum activating HQ units to get them. If it's Dry both turns, either of us could swing this game around. If there is one Dry turn, Alan will have to attack to win.

### **German May I**

MUD Rats!! Well, so much for Leningrad. I just shuffled some of the replaced infantry corps from Germany (where they were rebuilt) to the Moscow sector of the front (where he's been quietly building up). Gary's gloating. He knew I had something planned.

### **Russian May, I**

The Germans have now reinforced the Moscow sector. If he wants to try for the capital, he won't make it on one Dry turn with the forces I have in front of it. Since it's Mud, I'll pass. That gives the initiative to Alan, but I think he's one turn beyond a victory.

### **German May II**

Clear weather, so the attack is ON! The SS Panzer korps. the Siege guns and two more full strength armored formations conduct a blitz operation against the ancient Russian capitol of Leningrad ("My, what lovely swamps this time of year"). Each HQ CV is worth 2 Victory Points at the end of the game, so I'm risking 4 VPs (to conduct the blitz attack) against 7 for the Russians (6 for Leningrad, plus one for the unit in there when I kill it). 'Me beauty is. that the 7 points for the Russians is more like 13, since I'll get the points for Leningrad, and he'll lose them in the final tally.

Wouldn't you know it? I had four dice left to throw and need two 4's, 5's or 6's. In other words, the whole game came down to a 50/50 toss of the dice. Talk about play balance! Still, I was pretty lucky to get to that last toss of the dice, no doubt about it. Well, throwing the kitchen sink at Leningrad ... WORKED! Heh, heh! Victory has surely been snatched from the firm jaws of defeat.

Also, I made a sneaky blitz attack toward Kalinin. It really wasn't worth it from a purely VP standpoint, but I believe that he will react, counterattack, and thus expending his HQ CVs which will rob him of extra VPs by game's end. In the south, I passed. This might have been a mistake, for he's really built up the south and is ready to explode.

### **Russian May, II**

(NOTE: Have the dice checked after game). OK, he got Leningrad, which was possible, but the attack on Kalinin was a pure surprise. The victory point swing makes this either a Draw or a German Marginal victory. If I counter at Kalinin (since there's NO WAY I can at Leningrad), the odds to retake the place are such that I'd almost be dirowing away more good VP's after bad. There can still be a draw in here for me, so I opt to do nothing and count up the points.

### **German Summary**

Unbelievably. I pulled out a marginal victory thanks to the capture of Leningrad. Without it, a Russian marginal victory

was assured. He did very well because his dead pile was empty and his HQs were nigh well at full strength. That was the deciding element. The mud let him rest, and resting saved him a fortune in VPs when he was allowed to rebuild his massive dead pile and depleted HQs. I should have stood and fought in the south rather than bugging out, if I was ever going to keep his losses and attrition up. Instead, I threw away about a half dozen units and didn't cost him much in return. I'll know that for NEXT time....

Leningrad came down to that miraculous 50/50 shot which I pulled off. Actually, the dice won it for me, but the old adage goes "when you lose it's luck, when you win it's skill." Well, it was a planned attack, after all, even if the odds were somewhat long. *[Gary's note: SOMEWHAT!?!]*.

## Russian Summary

This game ended up a German marginal victory BY ONE POINT! Alan won it on guts. I thought I had won it on observing the victory conditions. Either of us could have come out on top.

The lessons I learned go something like this:

1) If you're going to make a breakthrough, try to have an extra HQ working in close proximity. I spread mine out (especially near Rossach) and wasn't able to activate the units I needed to when a previously activated HQ had its combat radius reduced.

2) Since my plan was to buy out the dead pile to prevent Alan from getting cheap VPs, I should have started some in VP cities as a garrison defense. Alan never could have taken Kalinin if it were occupied. For that matter, Tula was open, also.

Alternately, Alan took Kalinin because the single unit I had on the front line there was a cheap 2 CV unit. Suppose I had left a 4 or even a Shock army there instead? Alan might have tried and thus misjudged the defense, costing him HQ CV levels, which equate to VPs at game's end.

Anyway, the end result was that both of us had strategies that would work and we both executed them nominally well. Still, there was a lot of groping in the dark due to the Fog-of-War nature of the wooden block system, the game went to the last cam and victory was determined by a 50/50 die roll. It doesn't get better than that, folks. EastFront is a great game and comes highly recommended.

*Games's End: Alan's "Leningrad" scheme works to perfection, netting him the victory with a little help from his dotted friends. The strategic conceptions used by both sides were valid, and fate decided the game. Note: I played EastFront with Alan at Origins 91, and the orange dice he got in his game were indeed "bewitched." He vowed never to part with those lucky dice, and he told me those vary same dice were involved in the Leningrad campaign detailed here. So much for probability analysis.*