

DESIGN NOTES FOR THE “PROKHOROVKA: THE ULTIMATE BATTLE” SCENARIO

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About three years ago I updated the original Prokhorovka: The Real Battle scenario for East Front II with an expanded version entitled Prokhorovka: The Expanded Battle. The expanded version now has over fourteen hundred downloads on the Games Depot website while the original version now has over twenty-five hundred. This is quite an accomplishment for both versions of the battle. But I was still not satisfied with the scenario. My basic problem was the scale of the map, namely 500 meters per hex. This was of course the fault of the original designer Jay Karamales, but then it was the only way that he felt that he could get most of the battle into a playable scenario. Unfortunately this made for a very crowded map board with units having hardly any room to maneuver, let alone move at all. So when I posted the expanded version on Games Depot I said in my design notes that some time in the future I would finished the job with this scenario and this work presented here is the culmination of that desire.

These design notes are supplemental to the previous ones in my first two versions. Points that I have covered in the first two design notes will not be repeated here. The Order of Battle has again been revised but the changes here are so minor that they will be barely noticeable. Below are new questions that have come up on the new version and I shall answer them here.

1. What did you do to the expanded map?

Well I made it bigger by using the scale of 250 meters per hex as it is supposed to be. This allowed the addition of more detail to the map and puts the time scale, the various types of ranges, and the cost of action points for each task back to be what it is supposed to be in East Front II. The amount of stacking points allowed in a hex is still the same, that being 24. As a result, the mapsheet is now four times as large as in the previous expanded version. Now both sides have more room to maneuver.

2. What are all of those extra gullies doing on the map?

When I went over my topographic maps of the area that the battle occurred in, I found that the streams on the board were shorter than those on the map. In fact I found a lot of tributary branches going off in different directions off of the main streams on the maps. However these branches, as well as most of the main streams, were intermittent streams, meaning that they were only filled with water only part of the time and not all of the time. This usually happened during the rainy season when all of the streams and branches are filled with running water. During the hot summer season, the streams, as well as the branches were bone dry, creating shallow gullies. So what does this have to do with the

battle of Prokhorovka? Well in the original map and the earlier versions of my scenario where the scale of the map is 500 meters per hex and the time scale is twelve minutes per turn, the movement effects of the gullies would be pretty negligible, except where they were major enough to be placed on the map as Jay Karamales did in his original maps and I did in the expanded map. However at 250 meters per hex, and six minute turns, these gullies would have a greater effect and therefore needed to be placed on the map, so I placed them. But it was raining on the day that the battle of Prokhorovka occurred so why aren't all the gullies filled in as shallow streams? Well it was raining only part of the day and only off and on when it did. Jay Karamales obviously know this when he made his map and he decided that given those circumstances, the main streams would have water in them all day and the branches would only have water in them when it rained and proceeded to place his gullies based on that premise. I have followed that premise in placing these additional gullies in the new mapsheet.

3. Why do the elevation contours in the new map not exactly match those of the earlier mapboard?

When I cut the scale in half to 250 meters per hex and made the mapboard four times bigger, I realized that one hex on Jay Karamales' map would equal four adjacent hexes on my bigger map. Thus one hex at say 220 meters of elevation on Jay's map does not mean that the four equivalent hexes on my map would all be at 220 meters in elevation, especially in areas where on the old map they border hexes of lower or higher elevation. When Jay made his mapboard he would set the elevation of each hex at the level which one half or more of the area within the hex was at. That's what I do too. However, since I have four hexes for each of Jay's hexes, I had to determine the elevation of each hex and set it accordingly. This caused the contour lines to become more varied than what they were on Jay's map. To assist me I used topographic maps of the area and generally followed the contour lines on the maps to determine the elevations of each and every hex.

4. Why do the towns and woods look somewhat different from what they do on Jay's map?

Again this has to do with cutting the map scale in half. It allows for more detail to be shown. For each hex on his map, Jay would put what was the most dominate terrain feature in his hexes. The only real exception to this was the towns and villages, if there was one in the hex then it would become the dominant feature in the hex, regardless of how big or small it was. On my map towns and villages assume more of their natural shapes on the maps, plus I could put adjoining features to the towns such as fields and orchards, which were absorbed by the town or village symbols on Jay's map. Indeed, all of the terrain features, both natural and man-made assumed their natural shape, at least as they were displayed on the map.

5. Why is the road next to the railroad southwest of Prokhorovka west of the railroad on your map instead of east of the railroad on Jay's map?

Because it really is west of the railroad, that's why. Jay put the road east of the railroad for simplicity's sake because of the lack of room that his map scale produced. Not only that, there are some dirt roads east of the tracks which connect up various villages and structures which Jay did not put in because he did not want to clutter up the map. So he put the main road east of the tracks to act as the main road net in that area. It really did not alter the course of the battle. Because in my map I have more room to work with, I put the main road where it was supposed to be and added the dirt roads east of the tracks to hook up the villages and structures in their own road, which by the way are on the various maps that I used as reference. By the way, the main road west of the rail line was only about 50 to 75 meters away from it, not 250 meters as the mapboard would suggest. However in East Front, one can not place both a road and a rail road running parallel to each other in the same hex using the map editor, so this was a compromise that I had to live with.

6. Are all of the units on the map now set up in their historical locations?

Yes, not just the front lines units but all of the rear area units for both sides are set up in their historical set up locations or areas. As one will see, the artillery units are set up much closer to the front than they were in my previous editions of the battle due to their now true ranges. This brings up the question about my previous statement about the LAH SS Panzergrenadier Division's artillery park in the scenario "Prokhorovka: The Real Battle". Back then when I made the scenario, that's where I thought that it was there during the entire battle. Turns out that I was only half right, the artillery was indeed set up closer to the front line and then during the battle displaced back to the location where I had it originally set up. It displaced itself when Russian armor managed to get tangled up with the forward parts of the front lines early in the battle to avoid possibly being overrun. Unfortunately, it was so far back that the maximum ranges of its howitzers could only reach to the front lines, thus it could not support an advance to the town of Prokhorovka and thus partially contributed to the decision to cancel the planned assault that day.

7. Are there any changes to unit organizations?

I made a few very minor changes, mostly in the spelling or identification of certain units. About the most profound change that I made was in reducing the strength of the Hummel units from six points to five to reflect the five-vehicle batteries that the Hummel units were using at the time.

8. Your version is done in the East Front Gold version. Are the scenarios playable in the Matrix version of East Front?

Yes they are as I have loaded them on to the Matrix version and tried them out. In fact, in the Matrix versions I was able to switch out those Finnish T-34c tanks that are in the German Das Reich SS Division and replace them with captured German T-34c units which the Matrix version has in the German Order of Battle editor. To do so I made the switch in the order of battle file, then using the scenario editor made the trade in the tanks. However, the captured T-34c units only have a maximum set up strength of two, whereas three of the platoons in the two T-34 companies have a strength level of three. To raise those three platoon strengths up a notch I took the scenario file and using Microsoft Word I went into the file, located the platoons in question, and changed their respective strength levels from two to three. This is the only way that I know how to raise a unit's strength level above its maximum set up strength (up to a maximum of six). Also five German engineer bridging companies were added to the Matrix version as these types of units are only available in Matrix. Finally, thanks to the new variable visibility option in the scenario set up program, we can duplicate the effects of the changing weather through the course of the battle.

9. Is this the final version of the Prokhorovka battle?

Yes it is as far as I am concerned. Should any new information about the battle come out in the future I will of course make the necessary changes to this version to reflect them. But I do not plan to make another version. I feel that I am finally given players of the Talonsoft East Front game, and of course its successor the John Tiller Campaign Series by Matrix Games, what they deserve in portraying the greatest tank battle in history.

Conclusion

This concludes a long journey that started over ten years ago, that is to portray the greatest tank battle in history as accurately as possible in East Front. Along the way I have had to strip away the old myths that have grown over the decades about the battle, as well as the new ones created by revisionists in order to justify their positions about the battle, in order to get to the truth about what really happened in the battle. I suppose that the debate about the battle will never end. As the last survivors of the battle slowly pass away, and indeed the entire generation that fought that war fades away with the passage of time, we should be grateful for those who came forward in the last twenty years and attempted to put right the story of what really happened in that battle. It is my hope that this scenario portrays what they were trying to tell us all this time.