

DESIGN NOTES FOR PANSSARI SALAMA

By
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Panssari Salama was a Panzerblitz variant published in Grenadier Magazine #21 back in 1984. It brought Panzerblitz to the Russo-Finnish Wars and the author was Michael Benninghof. The article was unique in that not only did it introduce new counters into the Panzerblitz mix but also presented ten fully developed scenarios in the standard Panzerblitz format. Yet for all of its achievements, the article was also full of flaws. Some of these were from the source material that Benninghof was using (we were still in the Cold War era and much source material that had to do with the Russians was still laced with mis-information). Others were based on several false assumptions that Benninghof made at the time. This has made it difficult to convert the Panzerblitz scenarios to East Front. In this case these scenarios are not directly convertible as has been the case with previous conversions of Panzerblitz to East Front. Certain changes had to be made to make them convertible.

The Mapboards

The mapboards used were the standard three boards from Panzerblitz. The only real difference was that Benninghof introduced winter weather rules into the system to simulate the winter conditions of the far north. Seven of the ten scenarios occur during winter weather. So I included the winter conditions in those particular scenarios in contrast to my previous conversions which always occur in perfect weather, regardless of the dates of the scenarios as Panzerblitz has no weather rules.

The Counters

Many of the counters that Benninghof presented posed problems. For one thing some of them (Aerosans and Sleds) do not exist in the Campaign System data base for any nation. I therefore had to convert these to Trucks and Wagons respectively when converting the scenarios. Another example is the Russian ZIS-33 halftrack which Benninghof has included in his scenarios. Yes the halftrack did exist but it was more a hybrid halftrack/truck that could be used as either. (In the summer it was in its truck configuration and in the winter it was in its halftrack configuration.) Also it was never used to carry infantry into combat like the Western halftracks, instead it was mostly used to tow or carry light guns and mortars and their crews. However it was here that Benninghof made a false assumption, in that if the Russians had halftracks, then they had to have mechanized infantry in the early years of the war. This simply was not true. It was not until 1942 that the Russians developed a halftrack to carry infantry (the ZIS-42) and even then it was quickly regulated to towing guns when the Russians started receiving superior Lend Lease halftracks, Brens and scout cars. So in the scenarios that occur in 1939-41, I converted any ZIS-33 Halftrack units to Trucks, or in rare cases, Artillery Tractors for large guns and howitzers.

Another problem was that there were some Russian tanks that Bennighof introduced that are not in the data base (the T-80 light tank and T-100 heavy tank). In these cases I had to use the nearest equivalent tanks in my conversion. Still another problem was that the Red Army was still using older model obsolete tanks to the end of the war, mostly in back water areas and of course in training. Benninghof used this as an excuse to use these tanks in scenarios that occur long after they had been removed from front line service. (While the T-26 light tank was used against the Finns up until 1944 in ever decreasing numbers, tanks such as the BT-2/5/7 series and the KV-2 were gone from the Finnish front by 1942.)

The Finish counters presented problems in that Benninghof gave them vehicles that they historically never had. In some cases this was because of the tainted source material that Benninghof was using at the time. In other cases it was because he was using what he thought was the nearest equivalent AFV to the ones he intended because he had no information on them other than a name and a brief description (like the BT-42). If this is not bad enough, another false assumption that Benninghof made was that the Finns used the company as their basic tactical unit in their armored units like the Russians. Again this was incorrect, the Finns used the platoon as their basic tactical unit, just like the Western nations. As a result, the Finns would have twice as many AFVs in scenarios than what they really had and I had to reduce their numbers down to their historical amounts. Indeed, Benninghof's numbers and tank models were so bad that I ended up using the historical T.O.& E.'s for the Finnish tank units in the scenarios where they were used.

Another problem was the Finnish SMG platoon in Panzerblitz. It was certainly overrated being as powerful as a Russian SMG company. So why did Bennighof make it so powerful, considering that real Finnish SMG platoons were only marginally more powerful than rifle platoons. The answer was the anti-tank squad, Benninghof included it within the SMG platoon. The SMG platoon and anti-tank squad were not in the Finnish data base in the original East Front. They did not appear until the new John Tiller Campaign Series came out. So for every Finnish SMG platoon in an original Panssari Salama scenario generates one SMG platoon and one anti-tank squad in the East Front Panssari Salama scenarios.

Finally there comes the question of morale levels. I am keeping with the historical morale levels in that the Russians have a morale level of 5 in the Winter War, and 6 and 7 (for Guards) in the Continuation War. The Finns have a normal morale level of 7 in both wars, with the Jaegers having a morale level of 8 because of their special status.

The Scenarios

The following are the notes for each of the ten scenarios in Panssari Salama. Note that the scenarios are based on Michael Benninghof's original scenarios from his article, not the ones from Greg's Panzerblitz Site which were converted from Bennighof's ones using a different format.

Scenario #1: This is a straight forward breakout from encirclement situation. Even though the Finns move first, it is the Russians who must attack. Thanks to the expanded unit data base I was able to convert most of the Panzerblitz counters to their East Front equivalents. However, as I said earlier, the Aerosans, Halftracks, and Sleds had to be converted to Trucks and Wagons. Even though the Russian Ski units were experimental during the Winter War and not in great numbers, I gave the Russians what Benninghof gave them, eight companies. (By the way, the Russian Ski platoon counters in Benninghof's article were a misprint, they should be companies and that is how I treat them.) The Victory Conditions were based on Unit Destruction (Finns) and getting units off the east edge of the board (Russian). Unit destruction is an automatic in the game but for the Russian I placed an exit hex on the road going off the east edge, after all its winter and the deep snow is keeping the Russians largely confined to the road.

Scenario #2: This scenario is almost identical to #1, another breakout from encirclement. Again it is the Finns who move first but it is the Russians who are attacking. As before the Aerosans, halftracks, and sleds were converted to Trucks and Wagons for both sides. The Russians were again given eight Ski companies despite this being in excess of what they really had in the battle. The Victory Conditions are the same as those in the first scenario, unit destruction for the Finns and getting off the east side of the board for the Russians, for which I provided an exit hex for them. It should be noted that in reality, the Finns were truly the aggressors in the first two scenarios, attacking the Russians while they were in convoy on the road and essentially destroying them in detail. However in Panzerblitz, because of the nature of the boards and the fact that the Finns are the weaker side in each scenario, they must assume a defensive role in the game and merely prevent the Russian from exiting off the board. This was how it was in the final phases of the real battles being depicted and so the scenarios are not so a-historical as first believed.

Scenario #3: This scenario is a meeting engagement between two opposing ski formations. Both sides enter the board from their respective sides, the Russians from the north and the Finns from the south. The objective for both sides in this scenario is the town of Uschas, which represents the historical town of Saija. The Finns will get there first and so will defend against the Russian onslaught. Victory conditions are based on unit elimination and occupation of the three hexes of Uschas, each which is an objective hex. By the way, this battle was the only time that Russian ski units enjoyed reasonable success during the entire Winter War. In all other engagements during the war they were failures. The reasons were as follows. One they were never issued winter camouflage clothing, so their normal brown uniforms stood out against the white snow, making them easy targets. Two, they had the wrong type of ski where the ski boot were permanently attached to the skis. They had to stop and take them off, switching to their normal boots. This would not be so bad as long as they used the skis for movement and then switched to their normal boots in the attack position before attacking a position. But if caught in an ambush, which was often during the Winter War, they were in a decided disadvantage and were usually destroyed. Three, they used native Karelians from the Russian side of the border in their initial ski units as they were experienced skiers. However these Russian Karelians had relatives among the Finnish and were not too keen on fighting

them. In fact when given a chance to surrender, most would come over the Finnish side wholeheartedly. The Russians then would man the ski units with personnel from other regions of the Soviet Union, mostly from Outer Mongolia where the horse and not the ski was the primary personal transportation during the winter. These soldiers were given quick lessons on how to ski and then sent into battle against experience skiers such as the Finns. No wonder they did so badly.

Scenario #4: This is a combined armored/infantry assault on a portion of the Mannerheim Line near Summa. The Finns are set up on the board while the Russians enter on the eastern side of the board. The Finns are a pretty straight forward infantry/artillery force with forts, blocks, and minefields to aid in their defense. On the Russian side I had to make some changes to Benninghof's order of battle. Although I was able to include all of the types of tank units that Benninghof included, I had the change the four T-34a companies in the Panzerblitz version to four KV-1 companies in the East Front version. The reason is historical, the T-34 only existed in prototype during the Winter War and was not even sent out for any unit or combat testing until the fall of 1940, long after the Winter War was over. The KV-1 was being combat test during the Winter War which why I substituted it. The ZIS-33 halftracks were either converted to trucks or artillery tractors (for the heavy artillery units). The Russian Recon units I made into motorcycle units which were kind of road bound during the winter. One historical note, the Russian T35 heavy tank company should really be a T-100 heavy tank company. However that tank does not exist in the East Front unit data base so I kept the T-35 as it was the closest thing to the T-100.

Scenario #5: This scenario is a Finnish infantry attack, supported by armor, on a Russian position. The Finns start set up on the west half of the board and the Russians are set up on the eastern half. Although the original Panzerblitz scenario set up instructions had the Russians all set up on Hill 132, in East Front this would make Hill 132 so packed with Russians that the Finns would never have a chance to win in the fourteen turns of the game. The original victory conditions depended on Russian units killed and possession of the town of Bednost at the end of the game. I changed this to include the town of Golod also so now the Russian have to spread out on their half of the board in order to defend every thing. This gives the Finns a chance to win. Benninghof gave the Finns three companies of Vickers tanks. This is flat out wrong, historically the Finns only had a company of three platoons of tanks and that is what I gave them.

Scenario #6: This scenario is another Russian armored/infantry assault against a Finnish defense line. This is also the last of the Winter War scenarios. The Finns start the game set up on the board and the Russians enter on the northern side of the board. The Finns have a standard infantry artillery defense although not as strong as in Scenario #4. The Russians again have a strong armor force with a multitude of different tanks. I was able to put all of them in the scenario except for the T-100 company (which is assigned to one of the rifle regiments for support). Again I had to substitute the T-35 for the T-100. Historically the T-35 was never in the Winter War and all Finnish references (and subsequent Germans ones as well) to it being in the war were the T-100 being misidentified as a T-35. The Russian ZIS-33's were again converted to trucks and the

sleds were converted to wagons. In the original scenario the Russians had Guards infantry units. Of course no Guards formations existed at this time so I merely use them as infantry units with improved morale levels. In this case the Russian 245th Rifle Regiment has a morale level of 6 compared to the rest of the Russians who have a morale level of 5. The original victory conditions in the Panzerblitz scenario involved the Russians establishing a four hex wide corridor from the north to the south sides of the board, free of Finnish units or their lines of fire. The Finns win by preventing this. This is impossible to duplicate in East Front so I established a series of objective hexes on each section of the board for the Russians to capture, plus gave them exit hexes on the south side of the board. As usual, the unit destruction on both sides also figures into the victory determination.

Scenario #7: This scenario is a Finnish assault on a Russian defensive line. It is also the last of the scenarios occurring during winter. The Russians start the game set up on the board and the Finns enter on the west side of the board. Both sides have armor and aerosans in this scenario. The aerosans were converted to trucks for both sides with the exception of the two recon aerosan companies on the Russian side which I converted to two armored car companies. The Finns also have sleds which I converted to wagons. The Russian tank units were easy to convert as they all existed in the East Front data base. The Finn armor was a whole other matter. Benninghof's order of battle for the Finnish tanks was so full of errors that I threw it out altogether and instead just used the historical Finnish order of battle for their tank battalion which was in the battle. He had tanks that the Finns either never had or did not have yet because they did not exist at the time. He also included tanks that the Finns had long since scrapped or converted to something else. Some people may disagree with what I did here but the East Front vehicle data base just can not support what Benninghof gave them. The victory conditions in the original scenario were for the Finns to capture Hill 132 and destroy Russian units. The Russian victory conditions were to just kill Finnish units. Like in Scenario #5 the Russians are just too strong for the Finns to capture Hill 132 so I established objective hexes all over the central portion of the board, forcing the Russians to spread out their defense. While the Russian infantry units are set up in Improved Positions as in any defensive situation, the Russian armor units are not as they are in the rear ready to move forward when called on by the Russian player. As usual unit destruction also counts in the final victory point count.

Scenario #8: This hypothetical scenario is a Finnish combined armored/cavalry raid on a Russian position. The Russians are set up in the center portion of the board and the Finns enter on the west side of the board. The Russians have a small infantry force relative to the Finns with a few tanks, guns and mortars. They have forts, minefields, and blocks to help in their defense. In the town there is even a Supply Depot which was the historical objectives of the real life raids that the Finns conducted during this period of the war. For once the ZIS-33 units finally represent halftracks. In this scenario I converted them to ZIS-42 halftracks which was the primary halftrack the Russians had at the time. However I assigned them to towing guns which was their historical role. The Finnish force had the Tank Division and part of the Cavalry Brigade. Again as in the last scenario I opted to use the historical composition of the Tank Brigade of this period instead of Benninghof's

error filled tank Order of Battle. In the Jaeger Brigade, those Jaeger units not equipped with Trucks, instead have Bicycles. Now Bicycles are not in Panzerblitz but they are part of East Front. The Jaegers have Bicycles as personal transport so I included them. One will notice that in this, and the last two scenarios of the series, that Jaeger units no longer appear in the Finnish forces. There is a reason for this. By this time of the war, attrition had worn the Jaeger units down and the replacements were non-Jaeger personnel. What pure Jaeger units were left were shifted to secondary missions such as border patrol, internal security, and anti-guerilla warfare. The named Jaeger units in the regular Finnish formations were combination of the surviving Jaeger and regular army personnel, so Benninghof opted to represent them by combined ratio of rifle to SMG units and I followed suit. The original victory conditions were based on possession of the town of Zabvenia and unit destruction. I have kept these in the East Front version of this scenario.

Scenario #9: Ah the mighty battle of Kuuterselka, at least as Benninghof portrayed it. This scenario is a classic armored meeting engagement although historically it may have started out that way but it ended up being a delaying action. The mapboard is set up in the long skinny way and both side start the game set up on the board. Both sides have strong armored force but the Russian force is far larger. On the Russian side I had to make some changes to the tanks to keep with history. The KV-2 company was changed to a JSU-152 company. The KV-1 companies were changed to JS-II companies. The T-80 company was changed to a T-60 company. The three T-34a companies were changed to T-34c companies so now there are six of them on the Russian side. The ZIS-33 companies were converted to ZIS-42 companies but I have these towing guns again. On the Finnish side I again threw out the entire tank force and used the historical order of battle for the Tank Brigade. As I did in the previous scenario, the Jaeger Brigade gets Bicycles for those units which do not have Trucks. The original Victory Conditions were based on possession of Hill 132 and destruction of enemy units. This really does not work in East Front. The Russians will easily get all of Hill 132 and in force too. The Finns will not be able to take it back. So what I did was establish series of objective hexes for the Russians to capture, starting on Hill 132 and extending all the way to the west side of the board. But this not enough for the Russians to win with, let alone achieve a draw on the Victory Point Level Chart, as all the Finns had to do was exit their units off the board with out engaging in combat. So I added exit hexes for the Russians on the west edge of the board. Now the Finns will have to stay on board and delay the Russians in order to win. However, unit destruction also contributes to the point total and will swing it either way.

Scenario #10: This scenario depicts still yet another Russian armored assault on a Finnish fortified defense line. The Russian force is an armored force with heavy artillery support. I converted the four T-34a companies to T-34c, making a total of eight T-34c companies. (The T-34a was all but gone from the war zones, existing only in training centers at this stage of the war.) For once the Russians receive some real halftracks units. Unfortunately all but one of them had to be used to tow heavy artillery units. The remaining one went to an SMG unit. On the Finnish side the 47mm ATG from the Panzerblitz version does not exist in the Finnish unit data base so I had to convert it to a 50mm ATG which does. The original Victory Conditions stipulated that the Russians clearing a corridor six hexes wide across the board from the east to the west side free of Finnish units or their lines of fire.

The Finns win by preventing this. Again this impossible to simulate in East Front so I changed it to a few objective hexes for the Russians to capture and more importantly, one exit hex on the west of the board. Seems pretty easy for the Russians except that are pressure by a ten turn limit game. As always unit destruction also plays a part in the victory point levels too.