

DESIGN NOTES FOR THE PROKHOROVKA BATTLES

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Over the years I have done a series on the battle of Prokhorovka in the video game East Front. Each new rendition of it would reflect on the current thinking of what happened in the battle at the time each rendition was made. Also with each rendition, the scenario itself has gotten bigger, to the point where it can be considered a monster scenario, too big for one or two people to play and more suitable for teams of players on each side. This has been considered one of its biggest faults among players, that it is too big. In answer to this I have broken down the battle into its four major engagements and made each one into its own smaller scenario. This will make it easier for two people, or even a single player against the AI, to play it out. Hopefully this will silence the complaints against the original's vast size.

Before proceeding forward with this article, I wish to make one thing clear. These are historical scenarios, not tournament scenarios. For those players who play nothing but tournament scenarios, these scenarios are not for you, so stop complaining about how unbalanced they are. Few battles in history have ever been balanced and a true measure of a player's worth is his or her ability to take either side of an unbalanced scenario and play well with them, even to the point of victory.

Mapsheets

The mapsheet for each scenario is a section of the big Prokhorovka 5 mapsheet. Each one represents the actual area where the said engagement took place. The edges also represent the maneuver boundaries that the attacker had in the battle. Players will notice blacked out areas on the maps where the hexes are prohibited. These are areas where the players can not go because of a physical barrier (like the Psel River) or because of the presence of friendly and/or enemy forces in them that would prevent maneuvering through them. Now when players compare the maps, they will see some overlap of one or two hexes between the edges (A good example is between the Hill 252.2 and Vassilievka maps.) Maneuver boundaries are not always absolute, sometimes during the course of an operation units will wander outside their boundaries before being called back in by higher command and I am allowing for that. Players will also notice a big overlap between the the Vassilievka and Hill 235.3 maps where the town of Vassilievka and part of the area north of the Psel River are on both maps. This is on purpose as the scenarios in which these engagements occurred, happen at different historical times and would not interfere with each other.

Orders of Battle

The orders of battle for each scenario are based on the main order of battle for the Prokhorovka 5 scenario. Each scenario will have the main historical attacking and defending forces of each engagement, plus some additional forces holding down the flanks (these will be explained in greater detail later). Both sides have artillery assets, even though that are off-map, that historically supported the engagement in question. Some scenarios even have reinforcements. But what you get in the scenario, regardless of which side you are on, is all you get. There is no shifting of forces from one side of the map to the other because of a player's foreknowledge of when the enemy is going to attack like in the big scenario.

The Scenarios

There are a number of issues to be addressed here.

Artillery: I have kept the German artillery at 40% availability in all scenarios as this is about the average that they operated with the whole day. For the Russian artillery in the Hill 252.2 and Vassilievka scenarios I have kept them at 30% availability, just like in the main scenario. But in the Kalinin and Hill 235.3 scenarios I have reduced the availability to 10% to reflect the historical situation.

Game Length: The game lengths range from forty to sixty turns. If I wanted to be historically accurate they would be sixty to one hundred turns in length. But the Campaign Series does not portray the friction of war very well. Units and soldiers never tire, mistakes among the soldiers never happen, vehicles never run out of fuel or ammunition, and also they never break down. All the little things that can cause or contribute to lulls in the action. Plus the attacker in day long battles frequently had to pause and regroup in preparing for the next assault. Thus I eliminated the number of historical turns that would have been lulls in the action. This partially makes up for the lack of the friction of war, but does not totally correct it.

Ground Conditions: In the Hill 252.2 and Vassilievka scenarios I have set the ground conditions to normal. In the other two scenarios the ground conditions is soft. Historically the ground started off as soft at dawn in the 12th of July. But as the sun came out in early hours of daylight, quickly burning off the morning fog, it also cause the ground to harden to normal status. The composition of the Russian soil in that region was such it could go from soft to normal in an hour or two of sunlight or go from normal to soft in an hour of moderate rain. In the big scenario I had to go with the ground condition that predominated in the early part of the battle, namely normal, even though this would be inaccurate in the later turns. But in these sub-scenarios, I went with the predominate conditions that were historically present during each scenario.

Visibility: In the two morning scenarios I merely copied the visibility values from the big scenario to reflect the last burning off of the morning fog, the partly sunny skies in the morning, and the onset of the afternoon rains. The afternoon scenarios happen the rains that lasted off and on through the rest of the day. While light rain was the general rule, occasionally a thunderstorm would come through the area. I therefore set the visibility at 10 hexes, the lowest setting for light rain. For those who want the possibility of those summer storms showing up or a possible break in the rains (which did occur for short periods during the battle), I would recommend using the variable visibility rule.

Peripheral Forces: Players will note in three of the scenarios, some forces that are on the side, usually frozen in place for the duration of the scenario. This has to do with the attacker in two of the scenarios and the defender in three of the scenarios. The purpose of these forces are to prevent the opposing side from doing a wide flanking maneuver, moving along the edge of the playing area to get behind the opposing force. The reason for this is because the small strip of area would be occupied by forces in another scenario, preventing such a maneuver in real life. Let's look at these peripheral forces in the scenario.

1. Hill 252.2: The units of the Russian 136th Guards Rifle Regiment (the 42nd Guards Rifle Division) which are on the 29th Tank Corps' right, historically moved down the Psel River Valley behind the 18th Tank Corps. Their presence in the valley would have prevented a German move in that direction. On the 29th Tank Corps' left is the units of the 169th Tank and 58th Motorized Rifle Brigades (2nd Tank Corps). Historically these units stay in position until about

12:00 PM (Game-Turn 35) when they commenced a limited attack on the town of Storoshovoye in support of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps's attack further south. Also to the 29th's left are the 53rd and 55th Guards Tank Regiments. Plus some odd units from the 2nd Tank Corps itself. The two tank regiments were the 2nd Tank Corps's final reserve and thus would not be involved in the 29th Tank Corps's attack. The rest of the units are just locked in place holding the 2nd Tank Corps's second defense line. On the German side there is near the southwest corner of the map a lot of frozen truck units. These are for the units deployed off-map in the Smoroshevoye Forest and would not move unless the passenger units were threatened. Also, the Tiger platoon (along with Lt Wittman) and a unit from the armored recon battalion is frozen near that same corner. This is because they were historically involved in that combat in the Psel River Valley.

2. Vassilievka: In this scenario it is the Germans who have the peripheral forces. Near the southeast corner there are frozen units from the 1st SS Panzergrenadier Regiment. These would be supporting the units in their regiment which are located off map to the east. Also, north of the Psel River, there is a line of frozen German units from the 2nd Battalion, "Thule" SS Panzergrenadier Regiment in improved positions. These are defending the bridgehead against the off-map Russians to the north. By the way, although the Germans are the nominal defenders in this scenario, they do have to do some attacking themselves in order to push the German out of Vassilievka itself and destroy as much of the pocketed Russian as they can, if only for the victory points.
3. Hill 235.3: In this scenario both sides have the peripheral forces. In the first four columns on the west side of the map, there are frozen units of the Russian 97th Guards Rifle Division and the 31st Tank Corps. These mission of these units was primarily defensive in nature during the battle, although historically they did do some probing attacks against the Germans to keep them off balance. In the village of Vassilievka that are two German battalions frozen in place. These units are defending against the 18th Tank Corps which is off map.
4. Finally, another reason that these units are frozen in place is that no player is going to follow historical script and move these unit off-map to their historical mission or leave defending units in place. He is going use them in the current scenario, even if it violates history.

Aircraft: I basically divided the number of airstrikes that each side has in the big scenario in half and apply the resulting numbers to the Hill 252.2 and Vassilievka scenarios. (Besides, most of the airstrikes of the day occurred in the morning when it was partly sunny.) For the two afternoon battles I gave each side five airstrikes. (A few airstrikes did occur when there were temporary breaks in the afternoon rains.)

Conclusion

I hope that players will find enjoyment in these sub-scenarios from the main Prokhorovka 5 scenario. These scenarios are less intensive, can be played by just two players instead of a whole team, and will most likely be concluded in a markedly less time than the main scenario.