DESIGN NOTES FOR TOLSTOYE WOODS
IN PANZER BATTLES
By
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I recently did a four-scenario series on the battle of Tolstoye Woods for John Tiller's Campaign System. Being satisfied with the finished product I wondered if I could do more with it. I had purchased John Tiller's Panzer Battles: Battle of Kursk; The Southern Front some time ago and had played several scenarios in it. I noticed that the scenarios end with the battle of Prokhorovka, there are no more after that. I found that kind of strange as there were no battles in the Southern Front area after Prokhorovka. Checking various video game sites where scenarios are available for download, I looked at the Panzer Battles listings and found only the scenarios that come with the game. Considering that the game came out in 2015, I was dismayed that no one bothered to create new scenarios for it. So, I decided to change that.

Since I had already made the scenarios for Tolstoye Woods, it would seem easy to convert them from the Campaign System to the Panzer Battles System. However, this proved easier said than done. There are vast differences between the two systems, so it took a while to convert. The following sections below will describe the problems that I had in converting.

Mapsheet

It would seem that the mapsheet would easy. Just block out a section of the Panzer Battles big master map which corresponds to the enlarged Campaign System map of Tolstoye Woods. This was easy to do, after all both have a scale of 250 meters per hex. Of course, when comparing the two maps, they couldn't have been more different. The Campaign System map looks nice with well-defined symbols and the boundaries of the woods and towns closely matching those on a topographical map. In fact, the map was based on topographical maps of the time period of the battle. The Panzer Battle map was on the map from John Tiller's Panzer Campaigns game "Kursk". On those maps the hexes are one kilometer across and the symbols reflect the predominate terrain in each in question. But that does not mean that that terrain fills every space in that hex. Unfortunately, guys who made the master map for the Panzer Battles "Kursk" game did not realize that. On their maps forests and towns occupy far more hexes than what they would in real life. Clear terrain hexes on the Campaign System map frequently have woods or towns in them in their corresponding hexes on the Panzer Battles maps.

Another difference is the relative elevation of the terrain. The contours in the Campaign System map have a 10-meter interval between them. The ones in the Panzer Battles map have a 20-meter interval. Thus, the Campaign System map should more detail in the terrain. However, the given counters of the 20-meter heights (200, 220, 240, etc.) do not match each other between the maps. Again, this is because of what sources the maps were based on. Also, the roads and rivers don't exactly match in their placement on the respective maps, even though they are in the correct general location.

All in all, the Campaign System map is a superior map. But I am forced to use the Panzer Battles map. It would not be so bad if I could make some changes to the map symbol placement, but the map editor in the game does not allow to make changes in the maps, thus these maps are written in stone. All you can do is just carve out a section of them for your scenario and create or delete labels.

For the maps for three sub-scenarios that I created out of the first scenario, I merely sectioned off portions of the map where each battle occurred on the first day.

Order of Battle

    I made a copy of the main "Kursk: Southern Front" order of battle and labeled it Tolstoye Woods. That way I could modified it at while leaving the original intact. I then proceeded to delete those forces on both sides who were not involved in the battle. I then made several changes to the order of battle which I will describe below in separate sections. Note that the OOB file for Tolstoye Woods is used for all scenarios and sub-scenarios in the set.

German Tank Battalion Compositions: Using information from my sources, I changed some of the models of tanks in certain platoons within the panzer battalions. These will not agree with the standard order of battle in the computer game. Now I have seen the sources that the designers and developers of the computer game have used listed in their design notes and I am sure that they are reputable. However, my sources are reputable too. Different order of battles sources on the same unit do not always agree.

Differences Between the Panzer Battles and Campaign System Orders of Battles: These two systems seem to use two vastly different sets of orders of battle. In the scenarios I generally went with the Panzer Battles order of battle for both sides. I only made changes in the compositions of some platoons, either changing the number of vehicles/guns or the type of vehicles/guns. One will notice differences in the battalion compositions as well. For example, one will see that the Russian sapper battalions in the 184th and 219th Rifle Divisions have three companies in my OOB versus two companies in the Panzer Battles OOB. Well, Russian Rifle Divisions (both regular and Guards) always had three-company sapper battalions throughout the war, but most of the time they operated with two, due to casualties. As these two rifle divisions were at full strength at the start of the battle, I gave them three-company sapper battalions. In contrast, the sapper battalions in the 6th and 10th Tank Corps have two companies in my OOB compared to three companies in the Panzer Battles OOB. The three-company motorized sapper battalion was a new organization that only went into effect in May 1943 in the Russian Army, and it took several months for all the motorized sapper battalions in the Army to change over. Thus, many motorized and mechanized formations still had two-company sapper battalions during the Kursk Campaign. Which raises another question, what are those tank corps doing with those sapper battalion in my OOB when in the Panzer Battles OOB they are absent? Well, these sapper battalions were independent sapper battalions under direct control of the Armies at the beginning of the Kursk Campaign. Early in the campaign they were attached to the tank corps and essentially stayed with them for the whole campaign. Hence, I put them within their command structure as a recognition of this fact. There are other examples within my OOB differs with the official Panzer Battle OOB, but I won't dwell on them here.

Russian HQ Tanks: While the original designers provided company level HQ tanks for the Russian tank companies, classifying them as "Combat Headquarters", not full headquarters, they neglected to give the tank battalion and brigade headquarters their own HQ tanks. Considering that German tank battalions have their own HQ Tanks I thought this unfair. In truth, Russian tank battalion headquarters were as much combat headquarters as the company ones were. As the tank battalions took casualties, loosing platoon and company command tanks, the battalion headquarters would take charge of the scattered elements. Tank battalion commanders usually rode in the battalion command tank, leaving the deputy commander to run around in an unarmored light truck. Tank brigade headquarters also had a

two-tank platoon, supposedly for the brigade commander and the second one for an artillery forward observer. But tank brigade commanders rarely rode in their tanks, instead using them an armored guard to protect the headquarters. Still they were a combat element and deserved to be included in the order of battle. When a tank brigade had been through some serious combat and was severely reduced every surviving tank counted and this included the command tanks at all levels.

Obst Decker: The Gross Deutschland Panzer Regiment is commanded by Obst Decker, not Obst von Stachwitz in the Tolstoye Woods scenarios. An Obst Decker unit has been provided for each sub-folder in the German Unit Folder. Players will have to post each one into appropriate sub-folder. Players will also have to make an entry into the German Data File using the Database Editor. Obst Decker has the same values as Obst von Stachwitz. So how did Obst Decker come to command the GD Panzer Regiment? Well, on 10 July, 1943 Obst von Stachwitz was injured in combat and had to be evacuated to the rear. Command of the regiment fell to Cpt Wietersheim, the senior most officer in the regiment after von Stachwitz. (It would seem that all of the field grade officers in the regiment were put out of action early in the campaign, as by the 10th companies were being commanded by lieutenants and battalions by captains.) Obst Decker was the commander of the 10th Panzer Brigade, which nominally had the 39th Panzer Regiment in its structure, but it was detached directly to the GD Division, leaving Decker with an essentially empty command. When the division started sending units to assist the 3rd Panzer Division on the 12th of July, they were put into a sort of kampfgruppe of which Decker was put in charge of. He made his headquarters within the GD Panzer Regiment's headquarters, effectively putting him in direct control of the regiment. Hence, in Tolstoye Woods scenarios, he is in command of the GD Panzer Regiment. Obst Decker did make some questionable decisions during the battle of Tolstoye Woods, which led to a court of inquiry after the battle. One was on 13th of July when he would not let the GD Panzer Regiment attack, requesting numerous delays and later outright refusing to attack until the regiment was reassigned to the attack on the Russian 184th Rifle Division in the late afternoon. Another decision was on the 14th of July when the GD Panzer Regiment was leading the encirclement of Tolstoye Woods. The regiment was on the tip of the advance and had made it to a position behind the Russian 727th Rifle Regiment when abruptly he ordered the entire regiment to withdraw back to the assembly area, leaving the encirclement incomplete. He was however cleared of any wrongdoing (there were extenuating circumstances in each case, unknown to higher command, that led him to make what were essentially the correct decisions in both cases) and would go on to command a division and a corps later in the war.

Scenarios

   In the four scenarios in the Panzer Battles set, I generally set up the units as they are set up in the Campaign System set. They are usually all in the same areas but not in the exact hexes as their counterparts in the other system. This is due to the differences in the two maps. Also, in the Panzer Battles system, infantry units are presumed to back at 100% strength at the beginning of each day while the strength of vehicular and gun units will go down to account for previous losses. While I agree with the treatment of vehicles and guns, I disagree with their treatment of infantry. While it is true that not all casualties are the standard KIA/WIA/MIA, but also soldiers who got lost or separated from their units, or even those soldiers who reached their fear factor and ceased to fight further, not all of these are going to get back to units by the next morning. There will be steady drain of strength, be it mild or severe, over the course of days, just in the scenarios in the Campaign System set. Therefore, I took beginning strengths the of the infantry units in the Campaign sets, which usually have a original strength of 3, 4, or 6 points, and converted them to percentages. I then apply these percentages to the corresponding units in the Panzer Battle sets. Of course, I will randomly add or subtract a percentage

point or two from unit to unit to create some variety.

   The weather (visibility) and ground conditions are based on those from the Campaign sets. So are the Objective Hexes, Victory Points per Victory Level, Entrance and Exit Hexes, and Smoke Rounds available. For Supply sources I used a strength of 90 for both sides and for the supply level in the individual hexes I put the strength at 80 for both sides. Because game turns represent 30 minutes of real time, the scenario lengths represent the actual time length of combat during the each, including lulls in the action. As far as aircraft are concerned, it is only in the first scenario that both sides have aircraft coming in to support. In the rest of the scenarios, only the Germans have aircraft coming it. (The Russians were cutting back due to high losses incurred in the first week of the campaign.)

   After further testing I had to make changes to the first scenario, namely moving up the starting positions for the units of the two Russian rifle divisions. I found that the units in their original starting positions could not move up fast enough to their attack positions so they could attack at their historical time. The fault for this lies in two places. First is the Panzer Battles map. It is over-crowded with town and woods hexes where clear hexes historically were. The second is the 30 minute turns. These turn lengths are excellent in showing the effects of the frictions of war. But the frictions of war are not a constant 24 hours-a-day situation. Troops moving up to their attack positions, unseen by the enemy, are going to move marginally faster than when they are moving up under fire. In the Campaign System version of the first scenario, it only about 10-12 six-minute turns for the units to move from their original set-up positions to their attack positions. But in the Panzer Battles version it took 8-12 thirty-minute turns, meaning that these units would not be attacking until the very end of the scenario, and some could not attack at all. So I adjusted their starting positions so they get into the attack positions and attack at their historical times.

   After finishing modifying the first scenario, I decided to take a page out of Panzer Battles' book and make three sub-scenarios out of the first scenario. Panzer Battles does this with several of its own scenarios, so why not myself? The sub-scenarios are included in this set.

Conclusion

   It is my hope that these are the first of many scenarios to come to Panzer Battles: Kursk; The Southern Front. There were many battles that were over the two weeks of the campaign. The original scenarios only scratched the surface and more than half of them concentrated on the II SS Panzer Corps. Certainly The 48th and 3rd Panzer Corps deserve more scenarios and these four scenarios presented here are a step in that direction.