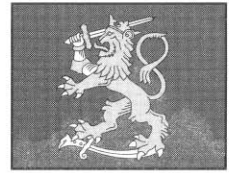


Arctic Storm

The Russo-Finnish Winter War, 1939-40



RBM SketchMap

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MAP LEGEND

- Fortification
- City
- Town
- Road
- Railroad
- Border
- Finnish Major Supply
- Finnish Minor Supply
- Soviet Major Supply
- Soviet Minor Supply

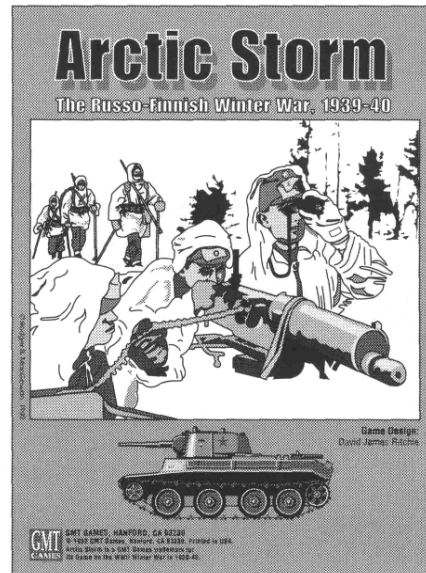
BATTLE REPORT

“Hakkaa Paalle Ringing in my Ears” or “I Confess to a Soviet Disaster in Arctic Storm”

BY JOHN KRANZ

Shortly after *Origins '92*, I had the opportunity to dive headfirst into *Arctic Storm*. My first encounter with this game will always hold a special place for me. Not because of the excellent care that went into refining this game. And not because of how challenging and fun it is to play. The reason is quite simple: it will be a long, long time before I forget the disaster which was to unexpectedly befall me in my first playthrough of this game. Call it *Arctic Suicide*, if you will...

The situation was as follows. Having quickly worked my way through the rules, I faced Dirk Blennemann in my first head-to-head battle: Dirk was the Finnish Player and I led the Soviet forces. At the outset, I committed my first mistake - *not reading the Historical Background* prior to play to familiarize myself with the Soviet historical ap-



proach during the campaign. If I had better educated myself, I never would have ventured off using the strategy (or lack thereof) I initially pursued, and which quickly spelled my doom.

Basically, my plan was to simply advance and engage the Finns across all sectors of the front and advance wherever possible, particularly north of the Arctic Circle line where few Finns were deployed. This plan seemed safe and harmless enough. Following the opening moves, and considering this being my first stab at the game, I would simply select the most attractive and strategic option available once the situation could be assessed more clearly. During the first turn, the Soviets engaged the Finnish forces all across the front, hoping that column shifts for Air Power, Surprise Attack, Divisional Integrity, Soviet Artillery, and Soviet Tank Fright would be enough to overwhelm the Finns and quickly punch a hole in their thinly-held line.

Now enter my second big mistake - *not being thoroughly familiar with the rules*. I was aware that combat results in boldface type indicated a mandatory single-step loss... but I had forgotten that, until Game Turn 4, the Soviets have a 'no retreat' option and must absorb all adverse results incurred. Thus, in short order, I lost the Red Banner Baltic Sea Fleet on an unsuccessful amphibious assault against the Finnish 6th Infantry Battalion deployed in Turku. But wait, it gets even better. The strongest single Soviet formation in the game, the 54th Rifle Division, decided to go it alone against a lone and weak Finnish unit near Rebola. The result? Complete elimination of the 54th. That's when I knew I was going to be in for a long ride.

Just as I was about fully recovered, licking my wounds from my initial foolishness, enter mistake number three: *underestimating the ferocity and maneuverability of the Finnish ski-mobile units*. Beginning on Game Turn 3, the Finnish units are fully ski-mobile and begin maneuvering faster than moths around a light bulb. Before one can say "Hakkaa Paalle," the Finnish battle cry, the Finnish ski-mobile units pocketed many of my advance Soviet units across the front, placing them in *mottis*, or pockets. I wasn't prepared for the horror of seeing several Soviet infantry divisions throughout the front being swallowed up and destroyed - it gets even worse considering I was facing an opponent who thoroughly enjoyed my predicament as the Soviet Commander (Finnish battle cries sound pretty funny with a German accent as well, may I add). Motti after motti, battle cry after battle cry, I soon realized that the Finns were quickly moving toward an Automatic Victory in the game, as the Soviet troops could only stand by watching helplessly.

Just when it seemed things could get no worse, they did. I committed by far the

greatest strategic blunder in the game by not continuing to engage the Finns north of Leningrad. I considered such attempts futile at the time in face of the heavily entrenched Finns. Also, I held back mainly due to the never-ending occurrence of Random Event C: Cloudy Skies and no air points available south of the Arctic Circle for the Soviets. Without proper air support, I considered attacks against the mass of the Finnish troops north of Leningrad purposeless. Furthermore, I had no alternative but to shift several Soviet formations from Leningrad to the central and northern sector to help compensate for the many formations I had lost in battle or mottis. The result: the Finns didn't even have to concern themselves with the entire southern sector of the Front in the area north of Leningrad, and were free to concentrate all their efforts in other sectors.

Finally, the moment came. As the Soviet VP track stood at zero, one more VP loss would result in an Automatic Finnish Victory. Although I was able to withstand five separate Finnish attacks without incurring a step loss, the mark of a new game turn cost the Soviets 3 VPs, and the game.

As mentioned from the onset, I will never forget this game. To say that I had an opportunity to learn from my mistakes would be the understatement of the year. Well, at least I can safely state that I committed *every* conceivable tactical and strategic error available to the Soviet Player in the game (there is something to be said for consistency).

First of all, it is obvious that the Soviets cannot overwhelm the Finns. Instead, the Soviet units need to continuously pound and slowly bleed the Finns north of Leningrad to the point that their replacements can't help them cover the continuous attacks. At first, it appears that only the Soviet units are doing all the bleeding, but with a few good results, the tide will finally begin to turn against the Finns. The Soviets have a big advantage in way of reinforcements and replacements, and they can be continuously fed into the Leningrad/Gulf of Finland district to replace most casualties incurred. Once the shallow water in the Gulf of Finland freezes on Game Turn 11, the Soviets will have a much broader

front to engage the Finns, forcing them to spread out their already thinly-held defensive positions. Finally, as the weather clears, the Soviets are able to provide greater air support as well.

As the Finns begin to wear down, unable to replace the step losses in the Leningrad/Gulf of Finland area, only then should the Soviets begin to increase activities along and north of the Arctic Circle. This will compound the Finnish problem of not having enough formations to cover the entire Front as the southern sector begins to weaken.

During the initial stages of the campaign, it is important to keep in mind that all Soviet adverse combat results must be absorbed as step losses. Thus, any bright ideas like employing the powerful Soviet 54th Rifle Division unaccompanied must be nipped in the bud. Best to commit at least two attacking units in case the Soviets must absorb two step losses. There's nothing worse than losing a Soviet unit, particularly when the Finns become ski-mobile and can start maneuvering circles around the Soviets and begin pocketing them.

Speaking of pockets, they are most difficult to avoid. This is one of the design for effect aspects of the game, and what makes it so much fun to play the Finns in this game. The Finns are certainly portrayed as being more mobile and having incredible intelligence and

command control in having the ability to pocket one Soviet Division after the other—more so than was the case historically. The fact remains, however, that the Soviet player can still help free up any units caught in a motti if maneuverers have been carefully planned. For example, in a second playthrough as the Finns, I was able to lasso more than five Soviet divisions in a single decisive swoop; not very historical to say the least. However, the end result was still only five VPs gained, and the Soviets had little trouble in forcing the Finns to fall back on the immediately following game turn. Thus, although the ski-mobile Finns may in theory appear to be super-humans on ice, in practice balance is maintained from a historical perspective.

Naturally, the above is but a cursory glance of several factors to be considered by the Soviet Player. There are many more options to be weighed by both sides, and play is tense throughout. This article was meant to provide only a quick look perspective shortly after the game's release.

In closing, a week has passed since this Soviet disaster, and even though I am better educated in the campaign and the options available to both sides, *Hakkaa Paalle* is still ringing in my ears.



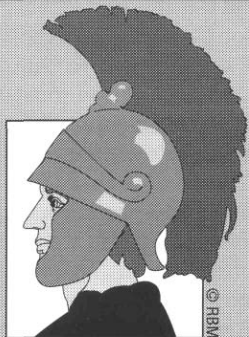
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