Throughout the history of WWII, the famed “blitzkrieg” plan of operations struggled with the need to maintain a balance of forces in any operational situation. The design of the Wehrmacht was fatally flawed in that the bulk of the army was non-motorized. This limited blitz offensives in time and space due to the inability of the leg infantry to keep up. The result was a chronic shortage of infantry in the key offensive sectors, and a resulting dilution of the main effort caused by the need of the mobile forces to detach ever increasing amounts of force for flank security.

There was an awareness of the difficulty, as is seen in the multiple revisions of the Panzer divisions throughout the war. Each revision increased the proportion of infantry vis a vis tanks in the armored forces. Yet there was also an inability to alter the fundamental flaw of a Panzer army with “short legs” – largely non-motorized infantry. The fall of France provided an illusory success, since the distances involved were relatively small. Yet even in this success, there were moments when the infantry-poor Panzers found themselves pressed.

The scope of Russia brought out the problem in full relief. The distances were so great that the spearheads often found themselves completely out of contact with the following leg infantry. They either had to stop and wait, or press on with ever weaker spearheads.

Following the grievous losses of the winter of ’41, then the debacle at Stalingrad, the German army found itself short of infantry, period. Thus repeatedly we see late war offensives of the Germans hampered by a lack of infantry support. The mobile formations had to not only do the penetrations, but also guard their own flanks. This quickly takes the impetus from any offensive.

Wintergewitter reflects these realities in full vigor. The only leg infantry are the Romanians, of dubious abilities, and even worse capacity for cooperation with allies who spoke a different language. Adding the Luftwaffe division is no help, as these formations also faced serious quality and preparation issues, often requiring rescue themselves. Most of the Luftwaffe field divisions were eventually broken up and used as replacements.

So, we come to Wintergewitter, and its options which allow players to tinker with reality. One of the things which the game and campaign study brings out well is the somewhat half-hearted approach taken to this offensive. Available units were not released, or their release was delayed to the point of uselessness. It seems from simply observing the events that there was a level of trust in Goring’s claims that he could keep the kessel adequately supplied. Thus perhaps Hitler saw Stalingrad as a repeat on a larger scale of the several small pockets from 1941.

This was, however, only 1942, and the German cupboard was not yet so bare as it would soon be. Among the formations sitting in reserve in the west was the 15th Infantry Division. What makes this unit interesting is that it had been somewhat re-equipped in light of the 1941 experience as a “winterized” division. The necessary clothing for winter weather was pre-assigned; even the precious hobnails were removed from the footwear (it was found that these increased frostbite risk by transmitting the cold directly to the foot). It included MGs and infantry guns on sleds, lots of runners supplementing wheels for all kinds of equipment, and even some ski-elements (though not really any whole ski formations). Motor vehicles were equipped with better antifreeze protection and some with block heaters. Unpowered wheels were given auxiliary runners, so that snow above 2 or 3 inches engaged the runner, not the tire. (These were to prove of use as well later during the “rasputitsa” season.) The ultimate plans for the division are not known, but it was hastily shipped to the East Front once the size of the Stalingrad debacle became obvious, and later committed to the “Backhand Blow.” There was nothing critical which prevented its being sent to the front to help in the Wintergewitter offensive. Once the kessel was formed, the supply requirements of AGS actually dropped, as the amount actually delivered to the kessel was a small fraction of what had been delivered before. Thus rail space...
could have been found, had the will to do so been there. Accordingly, as an additional option, the German player may add the 15th Infantry Division to any Wintergewitter OOB. It arrives, 18 SPs per turn, on any turn in which no other units are arriving. The 15th is a non-motorized unit, and pays non-motorized terrain costs, but all units of the 15th move and attack with the German mechanized units in the Mechanized Unit Movement and Combat Segments. In addition these units are considered winterized. When moving, they are unaffected by the icy roads weather condition (treat as “passable” for them). The snowflakes on the counters are a reminder.

Players can negotiate the VP cost of entering this unit; it should be like that of the 16th Motorized Division. The only specific condition we have tested is that if the 15th Infantry Division is added to Gross Wintergewitter, then the Germans must actually deliver the convoys to Stalingrad to win the game, regardless of victory points. The convoys must actually enter a hex within the Stalingrad perimeter.

This is only one division, but its presence will illustrate the benefits of better support; plus, the distances are not so extreme that lack of motorization will actually leave the division hopelessly behind.

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