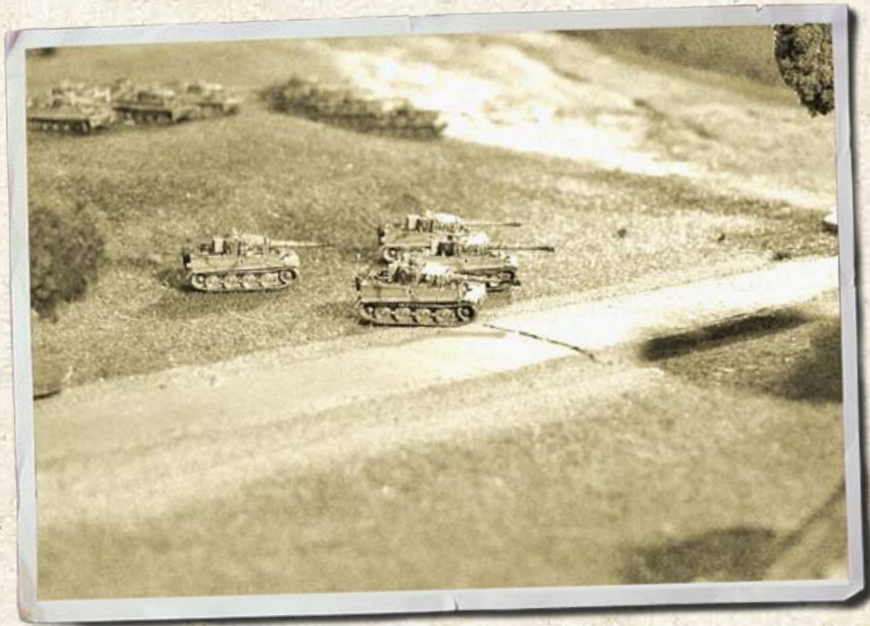
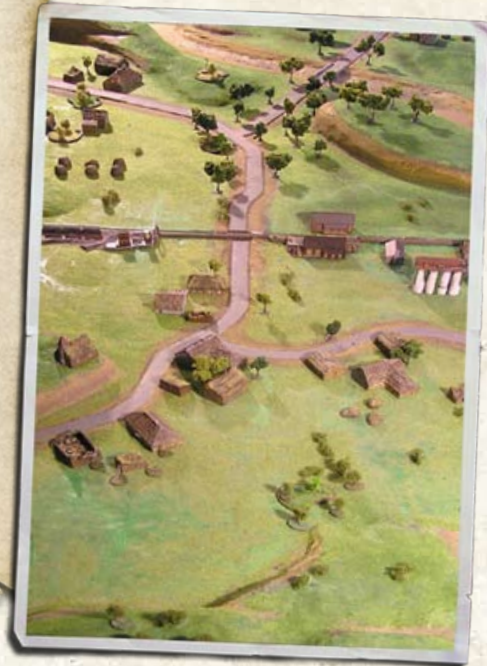


An episode  
near Kursk



This a battle report of a half-day long game using the Mein Panzer system, including the Polish fans' homesicles. We used 1:255 scale models manufactured by GHQ and wargames terrain made by Wargamer (Poland).

I was thinking of a larger battle for some time. As most players I know play mainly with vehicles, I opted to focus on a tank battle. A natural choice for such an engagement was the struggle near Kursk in 1943. My call for support amongst fellow gamers was warmly received by members of 'www.wargamer.pl' forum. We played at the wargamer store (GHQ and ODGW retailer in Poland) in 62 Wilcza Street, Warsaw, on December 9th, 2006.



## Historical background:

After the disaster at Stalingrad (Germans lost the 6th Army led by Fieldmarshal von Paulus in February 1943), Hitler wanted a counteroffensive. In order to regain a strategic initiative at the Eastern Front, the Germans picked Kursk as the place for a breakthrough. Despite initial German success, the large armored battle was decisive for Russia the rest of their campaign. The Blitzkrieg came definitely to an end and from that point in time the Red Army started its march towards Berlin.

We did not choose any specific area of battle (ex. Prohorovka). It was rather 'somewhere around there'.

## Scenario:

Both sides received its own set of 3 orders. Achieving assigned goals was rewarded with Victory Points, which would determine the outcome of the engagement.

## Germany:

German propaganda would like to highlight any success of the famous Tiger tanks in order to improve morale of the 'Heer'. Any 4 enemy vehicles eliminated, broken or routed by Tiger tanks are worth 1VP.

Raid: Intelligence reports there is a major supply dump, not far behind the Russian lines. If any German platoon with at least of 50% of initial strength reaches, at any time during the game, within 6" from the opposite table edge (the opponents side of the table), Germany gets 3VP for blocking the supply lines.

Preserving artillery is a priority. For each artillery unit which is NOT eliminated/destroyed (Wespe and 150mm howitzer), Germany gets 1VP (2 VP in total).

## USSR:

Russian propaganda is eager to prove, 'Tiger' tank is not a 'state-of-the-art' AFV. Any 4 eliminated, broken or routed Tiger tanks are worth 1VP.

Raid: Intelligence reports there is a railway with an armored train used for laying down artillery

support for the Germans. If any Soviet platoon with at least of 50% of initial strength reaches, at any time during the game, within 6" from the opposite table edge (the opponents side of the table) the Russians get 3VP for blocking the railway.

You are ordered to destroy/eliminate the enemy artillery. For eliminating each of the artillery units (Wespe and 150mm howitzer), USRR gets 1VP (2 VP in total, 5VP if as result of counterbattery fire).

The players did not know their opponents goals. The objectives were created to insure that commanders will move their units forward and make the battle less static.

## Order of Battle:

The force selection was made intentionally unbalanced. Germany had tanks of better quality (especially Tigers). USRR put together what was currently at hand and outnumbered the German army in tanks, AT guns and artillery. The Soviets had in total more activations than their opponents. Moreover, the Russian army began in better starting position (nearly up to half of the table), which gives them an advantage at achieving their goals and gives them more cover as well.

All units were Regular.

A Chief of Staff was designated for each side, whom issued orders to commanders fighting alongside him. That person was eventually responsible for achieving the objectives and initial setup. None of the players knew their opponents' arm unit selection in detail.



### Germany:

Konrad „Sosna” Sosinski - Chief of Staff:

150mm howitzer battery with 5dKfz 11 (1+2=2 models)

105mm Wespe self-propelled howitzer, half a battery (1+3=3)

Infantry company:

3 infantry platoons

1 MMG support platoon

1 mortar support platoon

Dorian „Nairod” Kulesza:

1 PzKfW IV H tank company (3+5+2=17)

2 PzKfW III J2 tank platoons (2+3=6)

2 Marder II D tank destroyer platoons (1+3+1+5=8)

1 5dKfz 222 armored car platoon (1+2=2)

Rafał „RaFF” Baginski:

1 PzKfW VI E „Tiger” tank company (3+4+2=14)

### USSR:

Michał „Costi” Koscielak - Chief of Staff:

2 57mm anti-tank gun batteries (3+2=6)

1 T-70 tank platoon (1+5=5)

1 Infantry company:

2 infantry platoons in lend-lease halftracks

1 infantry platoon moving on tanks

1 HMG support platoon



1 mortar support platoon

Marek „Partyzant” Kalski:

1 T-34/76 tank battalion

( $2 \times [3 \times 3 + 1] + 1 = 21$ )

1 T-34/76 tank company ( $3 \times 3 + 1 = 10$ )

1 KV-1S tank platoon ( $1 \times 2 = 2$ )

1 KW-1/year '42 tank platoon ( $1 \times 3 = 3$ )

2 SU-122 assault gun platoons

( $1 \times 2 + 1 \times 3 = 5$ )

Slawomir „Karmel” Brudny:

2 SU-76M self-propelled gun batteries

( $2 \times 5 = 10$ )



Commanders (from the left):

Marek „Partyzant” Kalski (USSR)

Rafał „Raff” Baginski (Germany)

Slawomir „Karmel” Brudny (USSR)

Michał „Costi” Koscielak (USSR) - Chief of Staff

Konrad „Sosna” Sosinski (Germany) - Chief of Staff

Dorian „Nairol” Kulesza (Germany)

## Setup:

### USSR (Eastern edge):

Russians kicked off the game with their units on the table. The deployment zone along the long table edge was limited to a road running across the middle of the table. Defensive positions on the right flank (North) were manned with AT guns, supported by a T-70 platoon. Most of the units started the battle in a forest around a crossroad in 1/3 of the table length from the left (South). Nothing was left as a reserve.



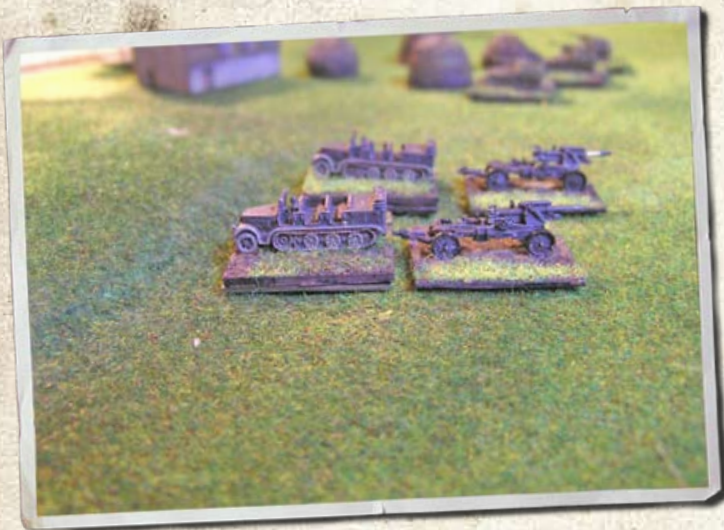
## Germany (Western edge):

German forces entered the battlefield through the western (longer) table edge. Both PzKfw III platoons were spared for joining in later during the game.

## Plan:

### USSR:

All armored troops were concentrated in the south and in the middle, apart from T-70s. Some T-34s were ordered to block a stone bridge over a river flowing diagonally across the south part of the table. The rest of the tanks were focused in holding off any German offensive in the center, backed-up by 1 AT gun battery. The other one is at the northern flank. HMG were spread out as a support, hidden in buildings and awaiting advancing Germans.



### Germany:

The commanders chose the south flank for a breakthrough and sent their Tigers, accompanied by a full Marders platoon and artillery. Most of PzKfw IV company, another platoon of tank destroyers and some infantry were designated to take control over the center. One PzKfw IV platoon, most of the infantry company and both PzKfw III platoons were attacking in the north.

## Battle:

### I Turn

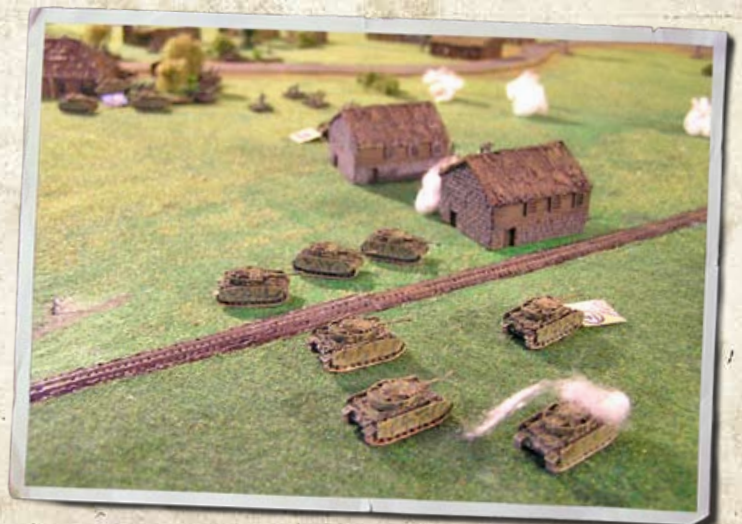
'First blood' was drawn by the Russians. Soon after the German howitzer crew detached the guns from towing two SdKfz 11, they were spotted by a Russian FO, who directed fire of SU-76M battery towards them. The shells started exploding near the gunners, wracking havoc and one soft skin vehicle was disabled by a direct hit.

A struggle in the center of the battleground began with no losses on both sides. USSR had fewer opportunities for firing, as the German tanks were yet to come into the play. 'Panzer' had not much chances for hitting after rolling in and aiming at targets over 24" away.

The distance between the forces in the north was even greater. Germans focused on gaining on some ground, taking cover behind cottages and trees where possible. Russian gunners were unsuccessfully spotting the advancing enemy and T-70s repositioned.

### II Turn

More T-34 reached an edge of the forest in the center. Soviet main tanks were fiercely battling the opposing PzKfw IVs, losing a bit more vehicles.



Marders set themselves in a suitable position on a hill, from which they could see the most of the enemy AFV below. The tank destroyers were lucky to eliminate 2 T-34, but firing from the exposed position drew attention of the remaining tanks. Eventually assault guns took the Panzerjaeger platoon down.

In the north T-70's swept across looking for an arty FO, who was probably hiding nearby and directing suppressing fire on the ATG batteries. Despite shrapnel flying in the air, the Russian gunners were looking out for careless soldiers in Feldgrau uniforms. Germans were moving ahead with caution along the east-west road. In spite of cottages, the attackers used a smoke screen, set by mortar supporting unit firing from the edge of the table. PzKfw III joined the battle on the north flank, too.

The Tiger 'steamroller' was moving slowly onward in the south. The firing ended up with only 1 T-34 immobilized on its way to the bridge. Soviet tanks retaliated with killing one Marder. SdKfz 222 were speeding along the south edge, heading to a ford. After crossing the river the armored cars



could flank Soviets and take down Russian arty.



### III Turn

Tigers had no easy targets and rushed ahead at full throttle. USSR concentrated T-34's near the south-eastern edge of the forest, counting on number of their tanks, allowed to shoot shortly. Marders took a sharp turn to the south. The tank destroyers exposed their sides to the Russians, but luckily the vehicles hid behind a small hill and some PzKfw VIs. SdKfz 222 continued hurrying directly to the east.

SU-76M took out of the combat 1 Wespe and suppressed another, what effectively 'silenced' the mobile battery for a while.

The crossfire among PzKfw IV, T-34, KW and ATG flared up in the middle. 'Panzer' and T-34's crews relied on stationary firing at the same targets where it was possible. The Germans won the round by 2:1.

An impressive salvo of 150mm howitzer battery swayed the balance in that area. Both guns scored hits, eliminating 1 SU-122 and immobilizing another. The center of the battleground was covered with scattered burning wrecks of mostly Russian AFV. The wreckage hampered movement of the fighting vehicles still in combat.

German mortars kept on laying down the smoke barrage, screening the rush of an infantry company accompanied by a PzKfw IV platoon. In spite of worse visibility, SU-76M battery and a mortar platoon were trying to hinder the assault, but managed to score only 1 suppress effect.

The area in the north became an arena for a fight between "middle-weight" tanks: 5 T-70 vs. 3 PzKfw III. Soviet tanks focused on spotting and killing a FO, hidden on a hill. German AFV moved onto better shooting position. The crews counted the frontal armor would withstand the AP shells fired from 45mm gun mounted in T-70s. The second PzKfw III platoon was designated to support the advance of infantry next to PzKfw IV platoon.

#### IV Turn

In the center 57mm ATGs turned out to be murderously effective. The command of the PzKfw IV Company was punished for being recklessly exposed, as it lost 1 AFV and another was immobilized. The smoke layer, blown away by the wind, uncovered German infantry, which became a suitable target for Russian arty and HMG. The end result was that 1 platoon was unable to continue the assault, but the rest of soldiers were still heading towards warehouses and oil tanks (oil dump – one of the German objectives).

In the south Tiger crews full of confidence pushed towards the bridge and some T-34 blocking the passage were easily destroyed. Soviets entered an uneven engagement. 2 T-34 platoons were maneuvering within the forest, playing 'Shoot & Hide' with the opposing 'wildcats'. One T-34 was extremely lucky and found a weak point in the Tigers armor and vehicle no. 123 burned down. The team that took out PzKfw VI was

chosen as heroes of the days and was nominated for being awarded the Lenin's order. In the same area, SU-76M carried on sending salvos onto the Wespe, disabling one of them. SdKfz 222 (similarly to T-70 on the other flank) got as close as it was possible and started looking out for a FO somewhere on a south-eastern hill. The raid was ended tragically over the river bank by an awaiting T-34 platoon – 1 armored car was destroyed near a ford. The other car crew was desperately looking for support from tank destroyers, coming their way. In the north, Germans were the most successful. PzKfw IIIs defeated T-70s by 3:0 in the head-to-head combat, which disorganized the Russian unit and decreased its morale.

#### V Turn

PzKfw III eventually got rid of the T-70's, but entered the firing range of one 57mm ATG, which ended with the loss of one vehicle. Nevertheless, both PzKfw III platoons were ordered to 'roll-over' this flank and approach the buildings occupied by Soviet forces.

Another anti-tank gun registered a clean shot on PzKfw IV from the infantry-supporting platoon. 'Panzer' presented their sideskirts to Russian gunners, who were nervously waiting for such a chance. The unexpected explosion wreaked havoc in the German tanks' lines. The armored platoon fell back and tried to regroup while hidden behind a smoke screen, set up by one of the withdrawing vehicles. 'Panzer' shot back and disabled 1 T-34 and suppressed 1. The loss had not impacted the Feldgrau-wearing infantry, which was gaining ground and reached build-

ings near their target.

In the south T-34 definitely ended a reconnaissance of the armored recce platoon. Marder II in exchange destroyed 1 soviet tank and suppressed another. Some German Panzerjaeger opened fire to some T-34's battling Tigers, but did not succeed.

T-34's gathered near the bridge were fiercely firing to slow advancing colossi (Tiger Tanks). Shells from 76 mm guns were bouncing off the front plates harmlessly (Only 1 suppression caused). This undermined Russian morale greatly! One PzKfw VI platoon rushed towards the bridge, pushing a wreck of soviet tank aside, down to the river. The German steel





monsters were ready for any counterstrike. KW-1 ver. 1942 recklessly drove through the forest, daring to confront and hunt down the Tigers. As soon as the Russian tanks became visible at the edge of the wood, 'Panzers' opened fire, eliminating both of KW-1. The famous heavy tanks were ready for crossing the river....

### **The Outcome:**

The commanders agreed upon cease-fire after 5 full game turns, which took several 'real' hours of playing. Early in the evening Germans got a minor victory. Despite all goals were far from being accomplished, but Germans made some of them come true.

Russians nearly wiped out Wespe battery and 150mm howitzer lost some mobility, but none of the axis batteries was destroyed. That granted Germany 2 VP, while USSR got nothing.

PzKfw VIs were less effective than both sides expected before the battle. Tigers disabled 5 soviet AFV, losing 1 vehicle, and gained 1 VP. Russians had not been able to eliminate at least 4 heavy Panzers (no points).

If we would continue fighting, axis tanks would have gotten through to USSR-occupied river bank in the south. Also in the north Germany had advantage and definitely would get near the opposing players longer table edge. Only the final result of the armored engagement in the center was not easily predicted. We bet on a draw, because the weakened AFV units were backed up by ATGs and an infantry company in APCs was heading there as a support, too.



### **Remarks from the referee:**

As a result dice rolls by both Chiefs of Staff, USSR surprisingly won Initiative in all game turns. There were many hits in front armor (also due to hitting the same target and firing from the spot), but not many caused any sustainable damage ("15+" rolls).

Soldiers on both sides were devoted to fighting off the enemy and prove their morale. It is worth stressing, none of the unit taking part was broken or rallied (only Steady or Shaken status).





After the battle:

Michał „Costi” Koscielak (USSR) - Chief of Staff:

Our plan was quite simple - we shall concentrate most of our armored forces in one place on one half of the battleground, and leave some ATGs for keeping the other flanks safe. A raid in large numbers towards the western table edge would grant us points, and we would have an opportunity for killing German AFV from side or rear from short distance. Unfortunately,

the trees around the road in the middle of the table turned out to be a part of a wood, which hampered heavily any movement of our troops and blocked LoS. Due a misunderstanding our 'rush assault' landed in the forest, where T-34 were stopped by PzKfW IVs and Marders. Continuously poor To-Hit rolls had not helped us in achieving a breakthrough.



Infantry was a burden throughout the 5 turns. We ordered it staying behind, taking cover in the woods and not to be taken out by any armored sharpshooter.

SU-76 battery, led by 'Karmel', performed very well. Effectively taking the Wеспе battery out of action and did some damage to the 150mm howitzer battery.

57mm ATGs carefully overwatched the foreground. The gunners were not very busy on the right flank, as the most of the enemy AFV attacked in the center. Nevertheless, the crews scored some vehicles, including the commanders of PzKfW IV company.

After the game we discussed the setup of our forces and I believe that charging in the open through the bridge was not the best option for us, especially if we consider the opposing PzKfW VI company. T-34 stalled quite fast there, blocking the road with wrecks, but it was only a partial success. It would pay more if we sent all AFV directly in the center and count on numbers, or assault through the Ford near the south edge of battlefield, where we could rapidly gain ground and pose a threat to the German artillery.

The battle finished with a near draw, but the result was not impressive for the Red Army. Depleted armored battalions would not withstand the almost full company of advancing Tigers, which was clearly ready to get across the river.



Konrad „Sosna” Sosinski (Germans) - Chief of Staff:  
We mutually agreed the deployment of the Tiger company was less favorable than we expected before the game. Heavily armored but clumsy tanks had little chance of spotting a suitable target for opening fire. Moreover, due to their weight, the vehicles could get to the other river bank only over the bridge, which was easy to be turned into a bottleneck or for setting up an ambush. It seems we could have gotten more out of them if we had sent the Tigers in the center, while PzKfW IV's would be ordered to the south or north

flank.

Unfortunately we gathered our army in the south. Both batteries were quite easily recognized by a FO and drew fire SU-76M battery. We should definitely send these units to the north, where they would be less exposed to counterbattery fire.

The breakthrough objective was harder to achieve, as our forces entered the battleground in the first turn and our units had more ground to cover (under enemy fire).



Referee:

Radoslaw „Rademon” Kabacinski

Authors:

Text: Radoslaw „Rademon” Kabacinski, rademon@tlen.pl

Photos and graphics: Rafal „Raff” Baginski, rbaginski@supermedia.pl

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