

## **Autumn for Barbarossa—Designer’s Notes**

Dean asked me if I could take my *OCS* research for Smolensk and make it into an *SCS* game for the *Special Operations* magazine. I, of course, said yes, because I saw this as interesting challenge for me to tackle as *SCS* is a very different system than *OCS*. Much of how I approached the topic for *OCS* would not work for an *SCS* magazine game, so I had to rethink a number of things. Now Dean asked me to do the design work, but he was with me helping at nearly every step of the way, and I am very grateful for all his help and instruction. Carl Fung, the researcher extraordinaire, help convert our OB research from the *OCS* title into *SCS*.

I approach design with an eye toward experiential learning; I want players to learn something about the historical situation while they are having fun playing the game. I try to have most of the choices in the game left up to the players so we took a great deal of time working to get the systems to work *without* extra rules that would dictate how the sides could be played.

I knew several things that I wanted the game to show, so I started with those as my goals for how the game would play and feel. I mistakenly first set out to try to incorporate everything from my *OCS* design into the *SCS* version. I quickly had an unplayable beast on my hands, so I listened to Dean and started over. I striped away everything and started testing it to see what happened, and then made changes only as things presented themselves as problems or felt wrong.

### **What I wanted the game to show....**

#### **German Early Success**

I wanted to show that while the Germans had early successes, they were starting to slow down and started to have trouble achieving the huge victories that seemed so easy for them earlier in the summer.

## **Erosion of German Logistics**

At this point in the campaign, the German logistical system was starting to show signs of severe strain. The theater's distances and conditions were eroding the supply arm's ability to keep the panzers moving forward at full strength. Also, lack of replacements was starting to become a problem, not just in men, but also machines, as the Russian terrain took its toll on the German motorized equipment, spare parts in an army with so little standardization became scarce.

## **Russian Counterattacks**

Stalin and STAVKA insisted on counter attacks from the very beginning of the campaign—even if doomed and forlorn. These constant attacks slowed the German offensive and took a toll on the soldiers of the Wehrmacht. The challenge was to make this possible and desirable (i.e. it needed to be a reasonable game tactic) to the Russian player, without making the results too effective.

## **Germans Go Elsewhere**

All of the above led to the mobile forces as well as much of the Luftwaffe support being sent North and South in search of easier victories. This was easy to put into the game, but had to be timed perfectly (with some room for variability) so as to avoid the feeling (on either side) that play didn't have a chance at victory, but that it was just the dang Order of Arrival that determined the game (never a good feeling...especially when you were THIS CLOSE!!!)

## **The Systems/Design Used to Get There....**

### **Unit Strengths**

Starting most if not all units at full strength, while not completely realistic from a historical standpoint, made the game easier to setup and start playing faster, and in the end we were still able to get the outcome of the game to be very close to historical through the other systems in the game. So, if you will, a “full strength” unit incorporates a realistic level of assumed losses...since no one at this point is sporting a full TO&E of everything to be literally “full strength.”

## **Barrage**

Barrage started with the version that you find in many of the newer *SCS* games with artillery having their own counters moving on the map softening targets for attacks. The artillery counters had to limp around the map trying to keep up with the combat forces and almost never got used because they were never where you needed them, so you just moved them around a bunch for nothing and that is no fun. So, we removed them, but soon found that at times the Germans needed an extra bit of kick, and so we added the Air Strikes to replace the effect of the artillery without the needless work. I really enjoy the Air Strike system that evolved here, I say Air Strikes, but they really represent air power, artillery and everything else not represented by counters. By having the number of Air Strikes available shift from the Germans toward the Russians we could show the diversion of German resources during the battle as the front solidified and Russian resistance increased. This situation led to the decisions diverting forces north and south looking for easier targets and bigger/quicker victories.

## **Reinforcements and Replacements**

The rebuild system was another way that we worked to get the feeling of the battle. Because of the way that the replacements are distributed, the Germans have to destroy lots of Russian units at the start or else they will be overwhelmed toward the game’s end, because there is enough reinforcements and

replacements to give the Russians usable offensive power to gain ground after the panzers go away, and if the Russians have been able to save lots of their units from the start of the game, this will be even stronger.

Using the Cup System allowed us to calibrate the rates of return to a standardized baseline that easily indicated how well the player was doing in his game. With an untold number of games under our belts, we could tell at an instant how far ahead or behind the “dead pile” was getting as play went along. Adjusting the rate to hit the sweet spot was an easy matter here.

### **Garrison Units**

A problem that we ran into early-on was that each player never had enough counters to cover everything, and so toward the end of the game it was very tempting to try and make a last turn grab at VP hexes in your opponent’s territory far from the front line. When this did happen, you ended the game with some very unrealistic looking situations generated right at the last minute. The garrison units were an uncomplicated way to give both sides a little more ability to hold VP locations, it also made it less tempting to send units racing out at the end of the game to try and grab them back.

### **Withdrawals**

When we started I had tried to use the same removal of forces from the front for the game used in the *OCS* version, this led to play that was problematic in that knowing *exactly* when certain units were going to leave the game affected how play progressed. We needed to come up with a way that would affect play as little as possible or in a way that felt more realistic. Much of what was making the game play so interesting was the freedom to try different strategies with each side each time you played, and a more prescriptive withdrawal of forces made things way to predictable. We tried several versions of the Hitler Withdrawal rule and in the end decided that a simple variable system worked best to keep both sides unsure of when the event would take place so they could not plan using an exact timing and location of the withdrawals.

## **Two Terrain Effects Charts???**

Having two TECs one for Germans and one for Russians was a unique solution to a unique problem. Russians needed to be able to get around more quickly, often in bad terrain, while the Germans needed to be forced to stick closer to the roads (such as they are) and could not Overrun in certain terrain types. Making a different TEC for each side solved this directly and worked very well to show the different capabilities of these two armies. Both Dean and I expected players to recoil in horror at the idea of having different terrain costs for the two sides, but players accepted the system with aplomb and ran with it...I'm sure they found the effects obvious and easily understood. This simple "oddity" solved some pretty messy issues with almost no effort on the part of the player nor any complex to understand and use common table (with the attendant multiple columns and notes trying to explain which MP cost to use all over it).

## **The Combat Results Table**

The CRT evolved over time such that it could be possible for the Germans to smash things rapidly with Overruns in the right circumstances as well as allowing the Russians to scrape together large masses to strike at German stacks and inflict some damage even with lower odds. The result plays cleanly and has the right balance of effects in each direction.

## **Conclusion**

In the end 'less is more', really was what we ended up with. With very few rules added to the base SCS rule set we were able to create a simple fast game that would give you a feel for the historical situation and hopefully be fun to play for both sides. We hope you enjoy it as much as we did testing it and trying every strategy we could think of... finding some dry holes as well as gushers to enjoy in play.

