

THE BATTLE FOR MGA, 22 SEPTEMBER 1942

WAKING THE TIGER

In August 1942, following the dismal failure of the Spring Offensive, the Soviet high command ordered the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts to combine in an offensive designed to break the German stranglehold over Leningrad. The goal was to seize the Sinyavino heights, which dominated the southern shore of Lake Ladoga.

By Eoghan Kelly

The Soviets launched the third Sinyavino offensive on 19 August 1942, attempting to drive toward the Neva River; this was followed by the Volkhov front launching its attack on 27 August. The 8th Army led the offensive with five divisions supported by five independent tank battalions and a tank brigade. This was supplemented by the 4th Guards Rifle Corps (supporting) and the still-reforming 2nd Shock Army. Whilst the 8th Army threw itself against the German positions on the southern side of Lake Ladoga, elements of the 2nd Army moved further south in an attempt to cut German supply lines. Lead elements of the 327th Rifle Division probed south through the heavy woods toward Mga to determine the possibility of crossing the river there. Fighting was heavy all across the Volkhov front, in forested and marshy terrain.

Blocking the Soviet advance were lead elements of the Wehrmacht's 170th Infantry Division, which had forward-deployed the 391st Infantry Regiment.

The Soviets were not aware that their offensive had preempted a German operation named Nordlicht (Northern Light), which meant that the Germans had also been building up resources and that the Soviets had in effect blundered into a much larger force than they had expected. By 10 September, the fighting had all but ground to a standstill with the German defensive lines on the heights absorbing everything thrown at them. On the approaches to Mga, the Soviet troops dug in and prepared to see out the autumn.

On 21 September, their relative tranquility was shattered when the Germans launched a counterattack masterminded by Field-Marshal Manstein. The two-pronged offensive aimed at driving the Soviet forces back beyond their starting positions. In the Mga area, the Soviets of the 1102nd, probing for a route to turn the flank of the German 170th Division, made an alarming discovery...



Advance units crossed the causeway, entering Mga from the north-east. These units consisted of three BA-10 armoured cars and some infantry squads scouting the flanks of the road. As they entered the centre of Mga, sporadic fighting broke out, with German troops firing from their positions, occupying the station, militia barracks, and defensive trenches they had prepared at the outset of the Soviet offensive.

SOVIET FORCES

Placed at the eastern side of Mga:

- 3 x BA-10 armoured cars. Experienced crews.
- 6 x infantry squads equipped with a mix of PPD-40 and PPSH-41 submachine guns. The squads are inexperienced.

Eastern end of the causeway:

- 2 x 45 mm anti-tank guns, model 1937. Crews are experienced.
- 10 x inexperienced squads equipped with a mix of PPD-40 and PPSH-41 submachine guns. Each squad possesses a PTRD-41 anti-tank rifle. Infantry are not dug in and are deployed in three columns: four squads on each side and two squads on the road itself.

A column of early Tiger 1's pass through a section of Russian forest in 1942.

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Alarm! The Communists are attacking! The Soviets approach the village of Mga and engage the Germans.



The Soviets make good time, despite the boggy ground.



Hatches closed and buttoned-up, the Tiger prepares to roll.

Special weapons

Each column has a PM M1910 heavy machine gun being pulled by its crew. The crews are experienced.

A mortar unit is following the infantry. This unit is equipped with three 37 mm spade mortars – although obsolete, these are the only mortars the Soviets could use on the swampy ground. These crews are all average.

Random Soviet troop quality

Once a Soviet platoon has engaged in combat, roll a D6. On a 4 it becomes average quality, on a 5 it becomes experienced, and on a 6 veteran. This reflects the patched-together units of the 2nd Shock Army and how some units vastly outperformed expectations whilst others remained poor. This test is performed only once (although it doesn't have to be after its first combat).

Field works

The Soviets can place a plank trackway on the board. It must start on the eastern side (not edge) of the board and can run to the centre of the board (but not cross the rail line). This plank road counts as open ground for tank movement purposes.

Soviet defensive positions may be prepared once they have



retreated from Mga. A squad may prepare 6" of thick undergrowth in a turn if it does nothing else. This undergrowth counts as difficult going for infantry and may conceal a special weapon or anti-tank gun. It also acts as light cover.

Reinforcements

Once the Germans advance along or alongside the causeway, a reduced platoon of 2 x T-34 M1940 enters play. These are inexperienced and must enter play on a road or a plank trackway.

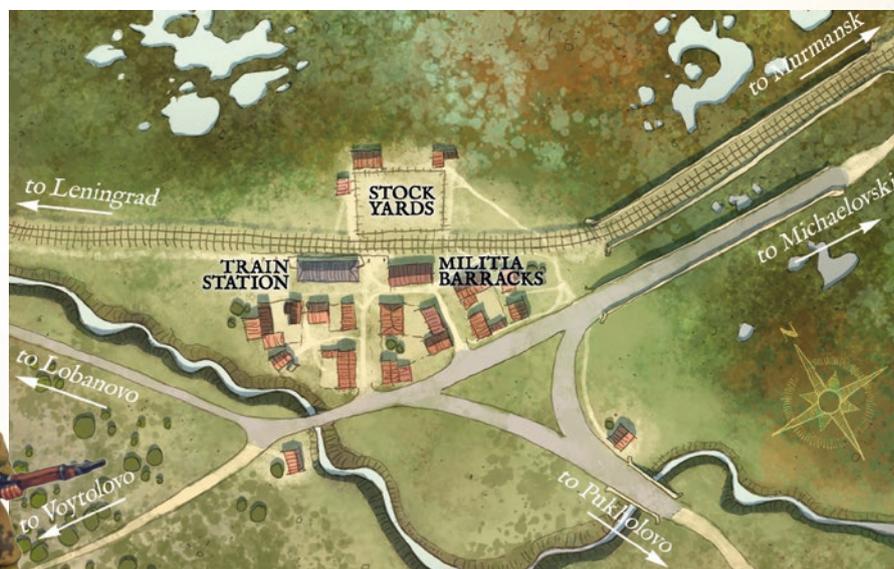
Supply issues

Abysmal roads and some truly awful planning meant ammunition for heavy

weapons, whilst plentiful, wasn't always at the right location. This meant many tank formations were sent into action with little ammunition for their main armament. Check each T-34 whenever it fires. On a 5 or 6 on a D6, it suffer lows ammunition. This will mean the tank has D6 rounds left.

GERMAN FORCES

Deployed in and around Mga town. Half of the squads must be deployed in buildings overlooking the main road. Two squads must be deployed one at each river bridge. The remainder must be deployed north of the railway line.



© Rocio Espin



A line of Soviet T70 tanks roll ever onwards towards Mga, passing their most recent victim, a Stug III.

- 10 x German grenadier squads. Armed with a mix of K-98 rifles and MP-40 submachine guns. Five squads are veteran and five are experienced.

Special weapons

- Four sMG-34 teams (MG34 on tripod). The crews are veteran.
- Two mortar teams equipped with 8 cm GrW/34 mortars.

In the main square

- The ace up the sleeve is a platoon of Tigers from 502 sPzAbt. They are numbers 111 to 114, commanded by Hauptmann Wollschläger (inspired leader). The crews are veteran for morale purposes but green for handling of the vehicles.

Tiger reliability

This was only the second deployment of the Tiger, and technical issues were causing significant problems. As a result, each time a Tiger moves off road, turns (on any surface), or moves at more than half speed (off road counts as double), it will acquire a breakdown point (BP). Each time a BP is acquired, the controlling player rolls 2D6. If the result is equal to the current BP score then the vehicle stalls for that turn. If the score is less than the BP score, it breaks down. Once broken down, repairs can be made – it will take a number of turns equal to the amount below the BP score to repair. For example, a tank with a BP score of 8 rolls 6 and so it will take two turns to

repair. If the dice roll is a double and below the BP value, then it has broken down beyond the crew's ability. If the dice roll is a double and over the BP value, then the vehicle may remove a BP point (but only if the point was acquired off-road).

SCENARIO DETAILS

Weather: Dry and cloudy.

Ground: Anywhere that is not town, railway, or road is swampy scrub land with thin woods and undergrowth. Anywhere not a surfaced highway is poor ground for vehicles.

Plank trackway: Soviet vehicles and infantry may use this as if it is a surfaced road; only German infantry may use it the same way. If a Tiger tries to use it then it will destroy that section of the plank highway and gain another BP.

The game is twelve turns long. The Soviet player moves first.

VICTORY

The Soviets have a major win if they control Mga and both bridges at the end of the game. The Germans have a major victory if there are no Soviets remaining on the board. If a Tiger is destroyed (not broken down), the Germans can only have a minor victory. If a broken-down Tiger is in Soviet hands at the end of the game, then the Soviets will have a minor victory.



AFTERMATH

The fighting around Mga was piecemeal and the use of the Tigers was a surprise for the Soviets as they had assumed correctly that the ground around Mga was far too swampy to use heavy armour. All four broke down, and one was captured. Stubborn resistance by Soviet infantry blunted German attempts to force them from the field, but elsewhere the Germans met with more success and Leningrad would have to wait till 1943 for any reprieve at all. In 1944 the siege was lifted and 2nd Shock Army rebuilt. **WS&S**

Meanwhile, the Tiger drove headlong into the annals of military legend... Our thanks to Ade Deacon for helping with the photos at very short notice. We hope you'll overlook the lack of Panzer Grey on the Tiger!



Oh nein, our Tiger tank has broken down - again! Hans, do you remember your Tigerfibel by heart?

