

TRONSOFT GAMES

WINTERGEWITTER

THE RELIEF OF STALINGRAD · 12–20 DECEMBER 1942

Manual and rules of play. Everything the game does is described here; nothing in it is hidden from you.

1 · THE SITUATION

On 22 November 1942 the Red Army closed a ring around the German Sixth Army in Stalingrad. Hitler summoned Erich von Manstein from Leningrad to break it open. The relief was to be made from the south, from the railhead at Kotelnikovo, by a reinforced 57. Panzer Corps under Kirchner — in practice by Raus's 6. Panzer Division, just off the trains from France and, for a fortnight in December, the best-equipped division on the Eastern Front.

The distance to the pocket was about a hundred and twenty kilometres. The ground was open, frozen and almost featureless: rolling steppe cut by balkas, the dry ravines that carry the spring melt, with villages strung along the few roads. The attack began on 12 December, crossed the Aksay within a day, and then spent five days fighting for a single village — Verkhne-Kumsky — against the tank brigades of Volsky's IV Mechanised Corps, fed in one after another.

By the time the leading battalions reached the Myshkova on 20 December, 2nd Guards Army was coming into the line in front of them and the Soviet offensive on the Chir had pulled the rest of the front away behind them. The relief force won nearly every action it fought and arrived too late anyway. That is the problem this game sets you: not whether you can beat the Red Army in the field, but whether you can do it fast enough.

2 · SCALE AND SEQUENCE

One hex	200 metres
One counter	A platoon – three or four vehicles, or about forty men
One turn	Twenty minutes
One action	8 to 16 turns – a few hours of a short December day

The turn

Each turn runs in this order:

- Reinforcements march on from their entry edges. Off-board batteries are replenished.
- Both sides roll for the initiative. The attacker adds one. The winner activates first.
- The sides alternate, activating one formation at a time, until every formation has acted. If one side runs out of unactivated formations, the other finishes the turn alone.
- When a formation activates, its suppressed stands first attempt to rally, then every stand in it may be given one order.

Why alternating activation

Turn-based wargames traditionally give one side the whole turn and the other side nothing to do but watch. Alternating activation means the initiative roll actually matters, a reserve held back has value — it acts after the enemy has committed — and neither player is ever a spectator for long.

3 · MOVEMENT

A stand has a movement allowance in hexes. Entering a hex costs what the ground costs; a suppressed stand has one point less. Roads halve the cost for anything tracked or wheeled, provided the move runs road to road.

Ground	Costs	Cover	Notes
Open steppe	1	—	Nothing to hide behind
Snow drift	2	—	Vehicles may bog; wheels pay more
Scrub copse	2	2	Blocks the view
Balka	2	2	Hides what is in it; may bog a vehicle
Village	2	3	Blocks the view; the best cover on the map
Rise	2	1	Sees over the flat ground around it
Frozen river	—	—	Impassable except at a bridge

- Moving into a hex next to an enemy stand ends the move at once.
- A vehicle entering a balka, a drift or a frozen crossing must pass a check or stop there for the turn. It may drive out next turn without checking again.
- Infantry and towed guns may mount lorries, halftracks or limbers and ride; mounting or dismounting costs the turn. A gun with no transport does not move.
- A stand that moves and then fires adds two to the number it needs. A stand that has moved cannot stand overwatch.

When you choose Move, the ground within reach is shaded. Hovering it traces the route hex by hex and quotes the cost against the allowance, ringing in brown any hex that may bog you and in red any hex covered by an enemy standing overwatch. The route is a promise: that is the ground the stand will cross, and where it will be fired on.

4 · WHAT CAN BE SEEN

A sight line is traced hex by hex between two stands. Villages and scrub block it. Higher ground blocks it unless one of the two ends is at least as high. Smoke blocks it. A stand in a balka cannot be seen at all except from an adjacent hex or from higher ground — which is what a ravine on open steppe is for.

Cover raises the number a firer needs. Villages give the most, scrub and balkas less, a rise a little. Open steppe gives nothing, and there is a great deal of open steppe.

5 · FIRING

Fire is declared against one target stand. The firer throws dice equal to its rate of fire and needs the target number or better on a ten-sided die. Every die of ten hits regardless; every die of one misses regardless.

The target number

Starts at	6
Short range	-2
Long range	+2
Firer moved this turn	+2
Firer suppressed	+1
Veteran or elite crews	-1
Green crews	+1
Target in cover	+1 to +2 by the ground
Target is troops in the open	the weapon's own bonus, up to -3

Against armour

Each hit is compared: the firer's penetration against the armour it actually struck. A vehicle's front arc is the three hexsides it faces; anything else strikes the flank. Short range adds two to penetration, long range takes two away. Throw a ten-sided die and add the difference:

10 or more	Knocked out
7 to 9	Crew check – only if the round nearly penetrated. Failing it means the crew bails out.
4 to 6	Struck and shaken – suppressed
3 or less	The rounds turn

The gating on the crew check is the heart of it. A round that cannot get through does not frighten a crew into abandoning a working tank. A Pz.III firing at a T-34's frontal armour at any range beyond short simply cannot hurt it — not unlikely, cannot. Closing to short range for the penetration bonus, or working round to the flank, is not a refinement of German tactics in December 1942. It is German tactics in December 1942.

Against troops

Troops and soft vehicles have no armour. Hits force one quality check, worsened by each hit beyond the first. Failing it removes the stand — not necessarily killed, but no longer in the battle. There are no instant kills against infantry, and infantry in a village is very hard to shift with tanks alone.

6 · QUALITY, SUPPRESSION AND COLLAPSE

Rating	Passes a check on	Cohesion	To hit	Extra dice
Green	7+	2 hexes	+1	—
Line	6+	3 hexes	—	—
Veteran	5+	4 hexes	-1	—
Elite	4+	4 hexes	-1	+1

A suppressed stand moves one hex less, needs one more to hit, and cannot stand overwatch. It tries to rally when its formation next activates.

A formation that has lost two thirds of its stands tests. If it fails, everything still standing leaves the field. Battalions do not have to be destroyed to be beaten, and a formation that breaks takes its surviving tanks with it — which is why the second half of a battle costs so much less than the first.

7 · OVERWATCH, ARTILLERY AND SMOKE

Overwatch

A stand that neither moves nor fires may stand overwatch. When an enemy stand moves within range and sight, the watcher fires at it during the move, before it can reply. One shot per watcher per turn. This is how a thin defence is held, and how an attack across open ground is bled without the defender ever taking a turn.

Artillery

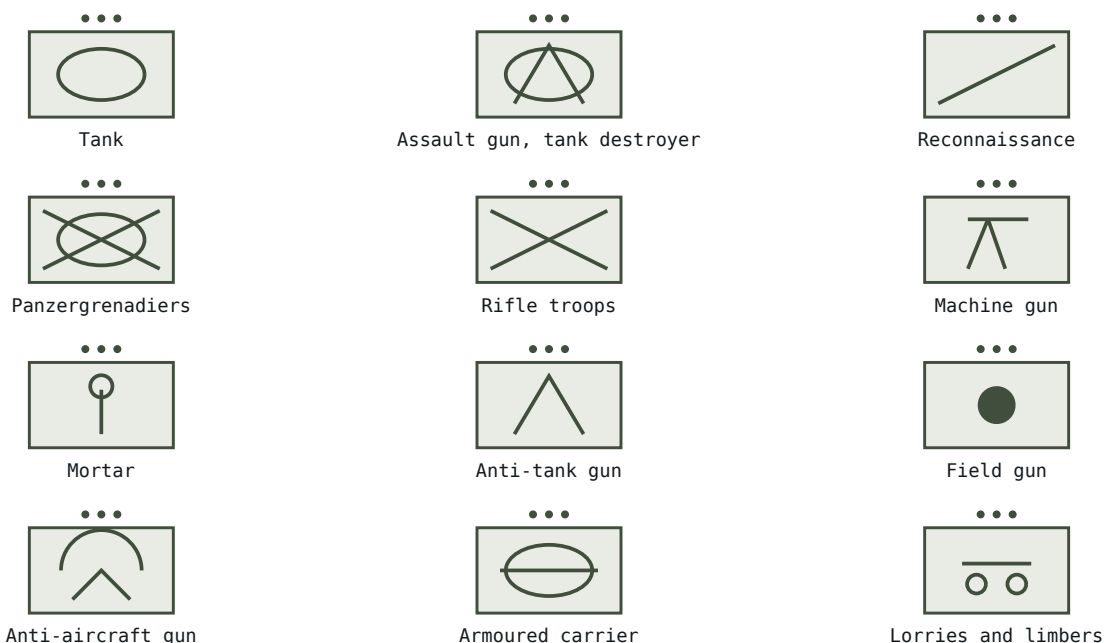
Off-board batteries are called by the button in the orders panel and then by clicking the ground. Somebody on your side must be able to see the target. The rounds are not always available. What lands covers the hex and its six neighbours — Katyusha sheafs cover more — and each stand under it is checked: troops in the open may be destroyed outright, troops in cover and armoured vehicles are shaken and suppressed.

Smoke

A battery may put down smoke instead. It blocks all sight through those hexes until your next turn. It is the cheapest way across open ground in front of an anti-tank gun that you cannot outrange.

8 · READING A COUNTER

Counters carry tactical symbols rather than pictures. Three dots above the box mark a platoon, which every stand in this game is. The code beneath the box is the equipment; the figures above it are the company and the platoon. A tick out of one side of a vehicle shows the way it is facing — its front armour covers that arc. A bar across the box means suppressed; a dot in the corner means standing overwatch.



Each stand also carries the designation its parent formation was written under — 1. Zug, 2./II./Pz.Rgt. 11 or 3 Plt, 1 Coy, 234 Tk.Bde. — and the signals traffic in the console names units that way rather than by equipment.

9 · UNIT DATA

Movement and range are in hexes. Armour is front / flank. These figures are the game's own abstraction, chosen to produce the documented tactical relationships of December 1942.

German — 6. Panzer Division and attached

Unit	Move	Armour	Pen.	Dice	Range	vs troops
Panzergrenadiers	2	—	3	3	1/2/3	+1
MG 34 section	2	—	—	4	2/4/6	+3
8 cm mortar	1	—	—	1	3/8/12	+3
7.5 cm Pak 40	—	—	10	3	4/9/15	—
2 cm Flak 38	—	—	3	4	3/6/9	+2
Opel Blitz	5	—	—	—	—	—
SdKfz 251	5	1 / 1	2	3	2/4/6	+2
Pz.II F	5	3 / 2	3	3	3/6/9	+2
Pz.III J (lang)	5	5 / 3	6	2	4/8/13	+1
Pz.IV E (kurz)	4	5 / 3	4	2	3/6/9	+3
Pz.IV F2	4	6 / 3	10	2	4/9/15	+2
StuG III F/8	4	7 / 3	10	2	4/9/15	+2

Marder II	4	2 / 1	10	2	4/9/15	–
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Soviet — 51st Army, IV and XIII Mechanised Corps

Unit	Move	Armour	Pen.	Dice	Range	vs troops
Rifle platoon	2	–	3	2	1/2/3	–
SMG platoon	2	–	3	4	1/2/2	+2
Maxim section	1	–	–	4	2/4/6	+3
82 mm mortar	1	–	–	1	3/8/14	+3
45 mm M-42	–	–	5	3	3/6/10	–
76 mm ZiS-3	–	–	8	2	4/9/15	+2
Horse limber	2	–	–	–	–	–
GAZ-AA	5	–	–	–	–	–
BA-10	5	1 / 1	5	2	3/6/10	+1
T-70	5	4 / 3	5	1	3/6/10	+1
T-34/76	5	8 / 5	8	1	4/9/15	+2
KV-8	3	9 / 8	4	1	3/5/8	+2

10 · THE SEVEN ACTIONS

#	Date	Action	Turns	Decisive	Held field
0	3 December	The Probe	9	6 km	3 km
1	12 December	Across the Aksay	12	26 km	18 km
2	13 December	The Graveyard	14	24 km	17 km
3	14 December	Gruppe Remlinger	12	14 km	10 km
4	15 December	The Maelstrom	16	28 km	20 km
5	17 December	The Railway	10	14 km	10 km
6	20 December	The Last River	14	26 km	16 km

- The Probe, 3 December — an optional prologue. Shapkin's cavalry corps comes at Kotelnikovo before the division has finished detraining. It teaches the rules and is worth six kilometres of confidence.
- Across the Aksay, 12 December — the opening of Winter Storm. Get over the river at Saliyevsky before the crossing is wired.
- The Graveyard, 13 December — Verkhne-Kumsky. Two tank brigades of IV Mechanised Corps come at the village from the north-east. Raus named the ground for the seventy wrecks left on it.
- Gruppe Remlinger, 14 December — an ad hoc battlegroup holds both banks while the panzers refit. You decide whether to commit them anyway.
- The Maelstrom, 15 December — the decisive day, and the one on which the ground keeps secrets. Ravines under the snow are found by driving into them.
- The Railway, 17 December — 23. Panzer, fifteen runners, holding a bridgehead against a tank corps. Kampfgruppe Hünersdorff can be called, but every hour it spends here is an hour not spent taking Verkhne-Kumsky.
- The Last River, 20 December — Vasilyevka on the Myshkova, thirty-five kilometres from the pocket, with 2nd Guards Army marching to meet you.

11 · THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign is one number: how far north the relief force got. Each action awards kilometres by result, and the advance ribbon down the right of the map shows the road from Kotelnikovo with your leading elements on it and 2nd Guards Army coming down to meet you.

0 km	Kotelnikovo
12 km	Pokhlebin
40 km	Aksay river
58 km	Verkhne-Kumsky
82 km	Hill 95.6
110 km	Myshkova river
145 km	Stalingrad pocket

95 kilometres puts you across the Myshkova before the door closes. Falling short by twenty means your leading battalions can see the river valley and get no further; by forty-five, the division is fought out on the steppe and Winter Storm is called off.

Branching and consequences

- A decisive result at Verkhne-Kumsky secures the flank and removes the bridgehead action from the campaign — a day saved is worth more than a day won.
- Losing badly on 15 December can end the drive short of the river altogether.
- What an action costs you carries into the next morning as fewer runners, up to a fifth of your armour.
- Before some actions you are asked to decide what the real commanders decided. There is no right answer, only a price.

How victory is judged

Objectives count for three times their face value; wrecks count for what they are worth. The margin between the two sides is read against thresholds that were not chosen by feel: every action was played out tens of thousands of times by the computer against itself, and the bands were set from the measured distribution so that the median machine result is a minor German victory. A decisive win means genuinely beating the machine. That is why the campaign is hard, and why history — winning every battle and arriving late — is the ordinary outcome rather than a scripted one.

12 · THE SCREEN

- Formations lists both sides. Clicking one of yours activates it. The bar shows what is left of it.
- Orders offers the picked stand its move, its shot, overwatch, mounting and holding, and ends the activation.
- Contact report is the printed slip of the last shot: every modifier by name, the dice, and the verdict.
- Signals is the traffic — timestamped, terse, and by unit designation.
- Advance ribbon is the campaign in one column.
- Hovering any stand raises its card. With one of yours picked out, the card of an enemy also prints the shot you would take and whether it can hurt him at all.

Camera and keys

Drag	Pan
Wheel or pinch	Zoom about the pointer
+ - 0	Zoom in, out, fit the map
Arrow keys	Pan
M	Move
F	Fire
Space	End the activation
Esc	Put the order down

Saving

The position is kept in your browser as you play; the opening sheet offers to resume it. Nothing is downloaded and nothing is sent anywhere.

13 · A NOTE ON THE HISTORY

Every action in this game happened, on the date given, between the formations named. The ground is drawn from the real geography of the Kotelnikovo-Myshkova corridor — the Aksay and Myshkova rivers, the crossing at Saliyevsky, Verkhne-Kumsky and the hills around it, the railway at Krugliakov — simplified

to a hex grid at two hundred metres.

What is not history is the rules set. The system here was written for this game; the vehicle figures are abstractions chosen to reproduce documented tactical relationships rather than measurements taken from any published table. Where the game departs from the record, it departs in the direction of giving the Soviet player a real chance to do what his historical counterpart did: not win the battle, but cost the relief force the days it could not spare.