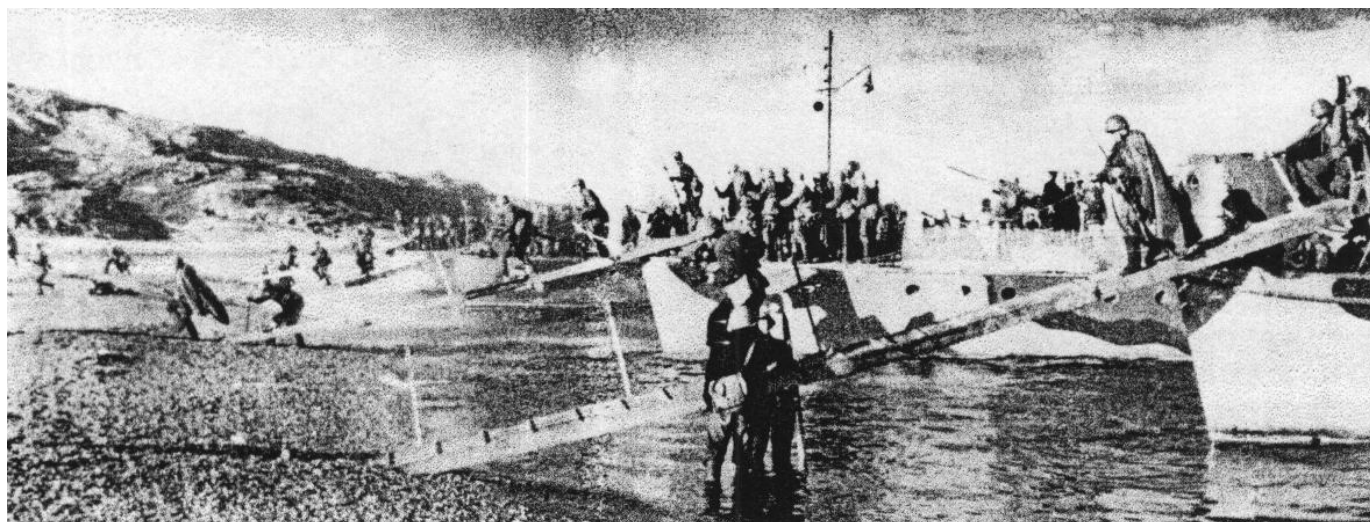


# THE BLACK SEA WALTZ

## Naval Movement Options in *RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN*

By James Lutz



The focus of *THE RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN* game system is clearly on the ground forces involved (along with a temporary emphasis placed on the powerful *Luftwaffe* early in the game). But sea movement capabilities, while relatively limited, are available and important—and at times, may even be critical. Invasion, transport and evacuation can play a strategic and/or tactical role for both sides. When sea movement does occur, it is often dangerous: In the Black Sea there is a chance that the force moving over water will be lost unless all three Black Sea ports are in friendly hands. German sea movement in the Baltic (there is no possibility of Russian sea movement there) is never automatic either, although control of Leningrad will reduce the chance of failure. Partially offsetting the risk involved in some cases is the fact that sea movement never automatically fails; therefore, the opposing player needs to be aware that it is always an option, and what may result from such an operation.

### INVASIONS

Seaborne landings on the coast of the Black Sea are the most dramatic form of naval movement. The German player will normally use his two invasions early in the game. (If he needs them later, the Axis are probably in dire straits.) German invasions are always a threat against unoccupied Russian ports. So long as the German player has an invasion left, Russian units must garrison the ports. Any port left unoccupied at the beginning of the July/August 1941 turn simply invites an invasion by the expendable Hungarian panzergrenadier. The fall of Rostov to an invasion will complicate Russian movement and divert scarce resources to what is, for the moment, a rear area. For the Russian player, Rostov is ultimately more important to defend (if only one unit is available) than Sevastopol, since the latter will fall to the Germans relatively early in most games. Rostov is also important as part of a river defense line once the Germans are across the Dneiper and threatening Stalino.

German invasions can be equally effective in other circumstances. A landing

on the east side of the Strait of Kerch can pre-empt any Russian defense of this terrain... or at least force the commitment of more extensive forces since a solitary 2-7 cavalry can no longer defend the straits. A landing further south (at NN18 or OO17) can penetrate to Krasnodar on second impulse, thereby cutting Russian communications and providing the Axis invader with a supply source if the Russians do not or cannot react. Such an invasion will threaten the capture of the oil well at PP13 as well. A German invasion can also be used to gain a limited tactical advantage: For example, to un-double the Russian defense behind the Dneiper or the Don, or to surround Russian units. Other options include attacks against unprotected worker units in cities such as Rostov, Stalino, Sevastopol or Krasnodar.

By example, if both Sevastopol and Rostov are garrisoned in July/August 1941, the heroic (read: "expendable" Hungarian 1st Corps could attempt to land at HH16, HH17 or HH18, and if successful, attack Stalino on second impulse at 1-to-1 odds. A daring German player might instead substitute the equally heroic (though far less expendable) 40th Panzer Corps for the Hungarian unit to achieve 2-to-1 odds for that second-impulse attack on Stalino instead. A successful foray into this area would cause tremendous problems for the Russian player. Of course, on the negative side, the invading unit could be sunk at sea, be eliminated on the attack (perhaps even without the benefit of an Exchange), or be eliminated by being forced to retreat on its invading turn. However, should it survive to the second impulse before being forced to retreat, it could block the rail line between Sevastopol and the Ukraine, making reinforcement of the Crimea more difficult and the Axis capture of Sevastopol quicker and less costly. The invading unit would probably be eliminated by Soviet units in the Russian phase, although the diversion of the necessary forces to deal with a German panzer corps (or even the Hungarians) in their rear would handicap the defense of the Ukraine or the approaches to Moscow and Leningrad. Perhaps the major disadvantage of an

unsuccessful attempt to eliminate the Worker unit at Stalino would be that one of the two German invasion possibilities would now be gone forever. The threat of German invasion, which can have as great an impact on play as its actual implementation, would be correspondingly lessened.

Just as the German player will likely use his invasions early in the game, the Russian player is likely to need his later (barring an attempt in 1941 to knock Rumania out of the game by a surprise landing on the Rumanian coast, as pointed out by Richard Jarvinen ( "*Barbarossa Repulsed: Expanding on the Viipur Defense*" in Vol. 14, No. 3 of *The GENERAL*). Generally, Russian invasions will support planned offensives, and the Russian offensive capabilities are limited in the beginning turns of *TRC*. The threat of Russian invasions will, however, keep Axis garrisons in Odessa, Sevastopol, and Rostov once they are captured. A Russian landing at an ungarrisoned Rostov could cut German rail lines to the southern portion of the board, and even put Axis forces in this area out of supply.

If the war is going well in 1944, Russian invasions can be used to un-double German river defenses along the Don, Dneiper, Dnestr or Prut (the Bug should be safe against such tactics since it can be anchored by unit in Odessa). Again, the mere *threat* of such an invasion can be effective, since some Axis units must be diverted from the front line to guard against this possibility. For the Russian player at this stage of the game, it is quite possible that the best invasion is the second invasion *that is never used*. Once no further Soviet landings are possible, all available Axis units can move right to the front.

If the war is going poorly for the Russians in the endgame (as is often the case when I take them), an invasion might be undertaken in conjunction with a desperate counterattack somewhere along the coast. If such an invasion is successful in reaching its designated target, a poor 1-to-1 attack against an important German stack could become a much better 1-to-1 "Surrounded" attack by such an invasion.

## TRANSPORT

Moving troops by sea is one way that a player can quickly get units to forward areas or reinforce pockets of resistance. Both the Russian and German commanders can deploy troops to Sevastopol by sea if it is cut off from reinforcement by rail. Sea transport can also be used by the Germans to reinforce hexes in the Baltic or the Black Sea regions which are not accessible by rail due to Russian Partisan activity. Such sea transport can be dangerous if all the Black Sea ports are not controlled. (And there is always a degree of danger in the Baltic, especially if Leningrad has not been captured). One reason to garrison Odessa against a potential Russian invasion is to permit other Axis troops to use sea transport with greater safety. Sea transport is also often an effective means of reinforcing a unit which made a successful invasion on the previous turn. If Axis troops in Finland are threatened, sea transport may be the *only* means of reinforcement. Sea transport is also an effective means of getting German HQ units which appear as replacements in the Spring of 1942 or '43 close to the front while the Germans can still use their Stuka capability. By the time an HQ moves overland to Leningrad, there may be no clear weather left in a given year. Sea movement to Sevastopol or Rostov will also place many hexes within Stuka range much more quickly than overland movement of the HQ unit(s).

## EVACUATIONS

Even isolated units can at least attempt to evacuate by sea. If a unit is out-of-supply, or pinned to the coast where it will be forced to attack at unfavorable odds,

an evacuation attempt is in order; if the unit will be lost any way, there is no harm in taking the chance on sea movement. But judge the moment carefully; if enemy forces are closing in on a unit which is simply out of touch with friendly forces, an evacuation may not be warranted if supply can still be maintained. Units drawing enemy forces away from the front still serve a useful purpose, even if eventually lost. However, units that are out-of-supply or face odds where there is no chance even to exact the revenge of an Exchange should take their chances at sea.

## TIMING OF SEA MOVEMENT

The timing of any type of sea movement can be crucial in a game turn. If friendly units are going to move through an unoccupied Black Sea port that was previously controlled by the other side, wait until after the movement of these units before attempting an invasion, transport or an evacuation. For example, German forces may be able to make an Automatic Victory attack against a Russian unit defending in a port, thereby enhancing the chances of successful sea movement by other German units. Such sequencing of movement can be important in other circumstances as well.

Let us assume, for example, that the Russians are defending behind the Don near Rostov, and the Germans already control both Odessa and Sevastopol, and have at least one invasion opportunity left in our hypothetical scenario. German units move into Rostov to attack the Russians behind the river. Then, *and only then*, a German unit invades at JJ15 or JJ16 to undouble some of the enemy units behind the river, with no fear of being lost at sea (since all three Black Sea ports are

controlled at the time of the invasion). Even if the German player has no invasions remaining, moving into Rostov would permit the sea transport of an additional unit (the about-to-arrive 1st or 2nd SS Panzer Corps, for example) to the front—one that could participate in the attack and change the final odds. Under these circumstances, a major unit can safely be sent via sea movement, since there is no danger of the con voy being sunk. (A logical corollary to all this capturing of ports to facilitate sea movement is, obviously, that the defending player should recognize that protecting ports warrants high priority), even if not necessarily the highest.)

## ONE EXAMPLE

Lest the above comments seem too theoretical in nature, an example from actual game experience will demonstrate some of the above points. In July/August 1941, the Hungarian panzergrenadiers invaded the Black Sea coast, after other Axis units had occupied Odessa. The Hungarians survived the sea movement, and on the second impulse drove on Stalino to attack the unguarded worker unit in that city. The combat result in this second impulse attack was a "Contact". In the Russian move, enough troops were diverted to achieve 2-to-1 odds, resulting in a "DR". There was no Russian second-impulse combat, as none of the Russian units involved had second-impulse movement capabilities.

The eventual Russian costs were heavy, however, because of this invasion... even though the worker at Stalino was not eliminated, and no Russian units were lost in the counterattack.

Since the rail line to Sevastopol was blocked, the Russian had to use sea movement to attempt to get a 6-3 unit to that vital port, but it was sunk *en route*. Axis forces then easily captured Sevastopol, overwhelming the single armored corps defending it during the ensuing September/October turn. The Hungarians proceeded to garrison Dnepropetrovsk, preventing the Russians from creating a secure defensive position in the south, and Stalino itself fell to the Axis in November/December 1941 (with help from the weather). The successful invasion had led to the direct loss of at least one valuable enemy unit and indirect losses of several others, and to a relatively speedy Axis advance in the Ukraine. Though in fact, their loss would not have been critical, in this particular case, the Hungarians even survived to the spring! Thus, careful utilization of sea movement capabilities in this situation probably gave the Axis player at least one extra turn in the game to attempt to win the war outright.

It certainly gives a wise *RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN* player something to think about. Hopefully, this short investigation will have helped to make the reader that wise player.

