
# SOVIET AVIATION AND STRATEGIC TOOLS

# BIRTH OF WARGAMING

Wargaming as a special training session has been adopted by many armies since the Hellenic era to study a battle or a campaign, either before it unfolds to prepare for it, or after it is over to highlight specific factors that have determined success or failure.

Without going into the description one by one of the fundamental stages that have accompanied the development of the wargame from its origins to the present day, we will limit ourselves to recalling some that have certainly marked an extremely significant turning point.

It is therefore certainly worth mentioning the birth of modern military cartography with Joseph de Ferraris who, since the end of the eighteenth century, has equipped armies with detailed maps to highlight place names, waterways, mountain ranges and other natural barriers, roughness of the terrain such as woods and hills, communication routes and of course ideal places for camping.

In the days leading up to the battle of Waterloo, Napoleon, Blücher and Wellington used the maps of Ferraris and his disciples for the accurate study of the battlefield and to develop their respective strategies through the skillful use of the "natural resources" shown on the precious topographical maps. However, since the maps were already "40 years old" both sides will have to deal with some topographical unforeseen events that will prove fatal.

But it was probably in 1887 that the definitive turning point occurred, when Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce, officially includes wargaming in the Naval War College of Rhode Island to train naval officers after they have successfully attended Annapolis.

ALL IMAGES FOR THIS ARTICLE COURTESY OF THE US NAVY AND THE US NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

As we can see from these two historical photos dating back to the twenties of the previous century, two distinct training settings will be created at the Rhode Island training center: one dry and one in water.

According to US Naval War College instructor Evan Wilson:

*The Naval War College was to be, Luce said, "a place of original research on all questions relating to war and to statesmanship connected with war, or the prevention of war." Notably, the Naval War College was not designed to train young naval officers in the basics of their profession—that was the job of the Naval Academy in Annapolis, and navies had been educating officer trainees like that for centuries. Before Luce, there did not exist a plan for educating midlevel officers for the challenges of high command as admirals. Luce's idea was to broaden their minds so that they could tackle the great questions of war and peace. He was one of the founding fathers of what today we call Professional Military Education, often abbreviated PME. What Luce wanted was a place for mid-career officers to uncover the principles of war and strategy; most of all, he wanted a place where officers had an opportunity to think.*

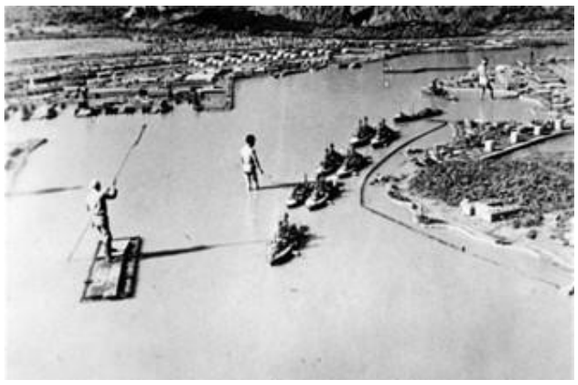
"The Big Three" displayed (l-r) in the previous photograph are Admirals Nimitz, Ernest J. King, and Raymond Spruance were all graduates of the NWC and although it may seem redundant, it is worth remembering the impact these three men had in determining the success of the US Navy in WW2.

If it is therefore not possible to determine with absolute certainty which general of antiquity was the first to employ wargames at least for a use in tactical opportunity, it is certain that at the strategic level the directive for change was dictated at the end of the nineteenth century by the Naval War College.

Later, many other nations followed the American examples.

During WW2, the Japanese developed their own wargaming training sessions and set a developed a special setting to train their officers for Pearl Harbor.

In the following photograph dating back to 1941 we can see the dynamic diorama made for the occasion and used to study in detail the topography of Ford Island and the bay, the position - at least the most probable one they would have had on December 7/8 - of the ships at anchor and prepare in detail the three waves of attack.



It was also thanks to these exercises that the need to equip the Imperial Japanese Navy with new torpedoes capable of operating in shallow waters was highlighted.

And in the same way both the Wehrmacht and the Red Army, starting in 1940, prepared to deal with the possibility of a war along the Curzon Line.

Notably, in the latter case, both the armies obtained results that were identical to the outcome that would occur when the Barbarossa campaign was launched in June 1941.

It was precisely these results that instilled in the German high command the certainty that – read well – it would have be possible and almost certain to defeat the Red Army in a battle of annihilation along the border, if the German armored forces managed to exploit the gaps opened by the infantry with the support of artillery and the Luftwaffe to reach the enemy rear. In particular, the bridges and fords over the Dnieper and the Dvina, so as to prevent the Red Army from escaping annihilation.

Although Stalin was convinced that there would be no German attack in 1941 and that the dispute would be resolved the following year, perhaps with an attack carried out by the Red Army, the consequences of those wargames will be decisive.

But what happened in these two weeks of wargames in Moscow?

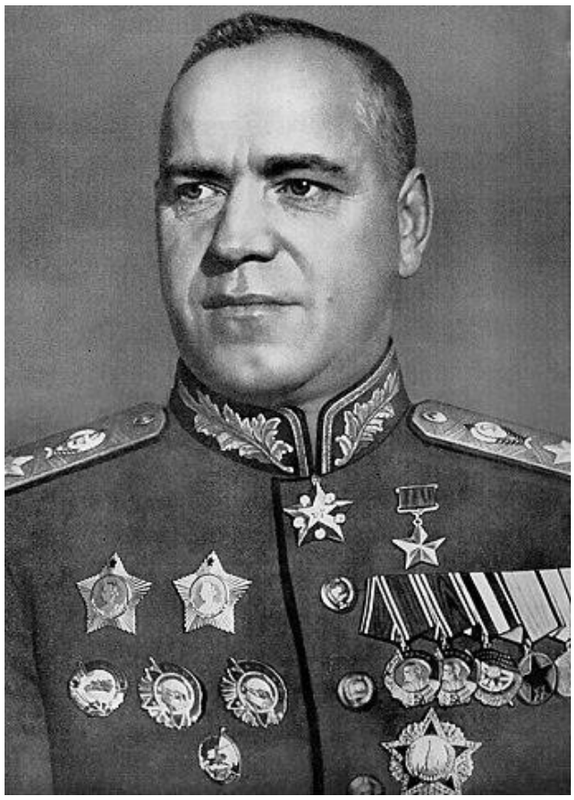
Certainly, something sensational happened, because a few days after their conclusion, already on January 14, 1941, Stalin decided to replace his Chief of General of Staff **Kirill Afanasevich Meretskov** with **Georgij Konstantinovič Zhukov**.


Let's see in detail what happened. The event took place in two separate sessions: one in December 1940 and one in January 1941.

During the first phase that took place in December 1940, the Soviet high command and in particular Zhukov had highlighted the possibility that Germany would attack by adopting its typical strategy based on surprise and the concentrated use of large forces capable of creating a localized breakthrough in some points.

In addition, Lieutenant General D. Kozlov, Chief of the Air Defense Force (PVO) noted the German practice of achieving air superiority by surprise massed air strikes was to be countered by deploying a suitable air force close to the border and ready to engage the Luftwaffe in the skies.

During the second phase in January, Zhukov played two different times as both contenders, managing to win both games.



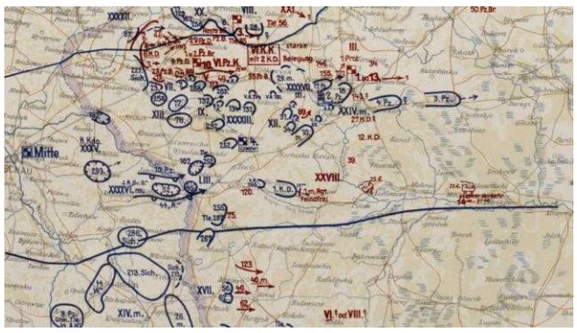
How Zhukov managed to achieve these successes emerges from some correspondence of V. Anfilov in “Bessmertnyi Podvig” who provided a summary of the Zhukov war plan when he played for the Germans.

By that account, Zhukov formed three powerful groupings to launch simultaneous strikes north of the Pripet Marshes.

As it is reported, “Zhukov informs us as a result of his attack, the game abounded in dramatic situations for the eastern side. And they proved to be in many ways similar to what really happened after June 22, 1941..."

The dramatic situations Zhukov alludes to centered around the encirclement and destruction of the Soviet forces grouped around Bialystok and Grodno. The powerful blows of the "Blue" side resulted in a breakout toward Lida, about 70 km east of the frontier. At this point, apparently the game was halted since, "...the "Blues" had succeeded in establishing the necessary prerequisites for a victory. In a swift series of maneuvers, Zhukov had once and for all exposed the fallacy of a forward strategy that placed the main part of the Red Army too close to the demarcation line..."

This analysis provides powerful support for the later development of a defense in depth theory.



But during wargames, how do the generals make decisions and determine who won? Were they rolling dice or were they based only on calculations dictated by military science?

Did they have a full view of the enemy forces, or were they penalized as in reality by partial and sometimes incorrect information?

Was there perhaps a risk that this limited intelligence would condition their choices and the outcome of the battle?

How were these games created?

Was there a possibility that the creators had artfully hidden pitfalls to stimulate the inventive and contingency management capacity in line with what was indicated in 1917 by Admiral Bradley, who first highlighted the importance of supporting the growth of the tactical, strategic and logistical skills of superior officers with an adequate development of inventiveness?

I'll leave it up to you to imagine the answers as we delve into the next chapter.