

# TAC NEWS

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## KHALKIN-GOL

### The Nomonhan Campaign 1939



During the late spring and summer of 1939, Japanese and Soviet forces fought an intense, undeclared war along the Mongolian steppes that resulted in a crushing defeat for the Japanese Kwantung Army. In May, Mongolian cavalry crossed into the disputed border

region between Japanese-controlled Manchuria and the Soviet client state of Mongolia near the Khalkin Gol River (or Halha). Japanese maps showed the border being defined by the Khalkin Gol, while the Soviets claimed that the true border was several miles farther east, near the Manchurian village of Nomonhan.

However, the Japanese were in for a rude surprise. Instead of encountering only lightly armed Mongolian cavalry as they had two weeks before, they were opposed by Soviets forces reinforced with motorized infantry, armored cars, tanks, and field artillery. Although the Recon Regiment was initially able to penetrate Soviet positions, it was stopped short of the Khalkin Gol bridges, surrounded by elements of the 149th Motorized Infantry Regiment, and all but destroyed. The supporting infantry battalion was stopped short of the linkup by the determined resistance of Mongolian cavalry and Soviet armour.

Units of the Japanese Kwantung Army were assigned to drive the lightly armed Mongolian cavalry back across the river, and did so with little opposition. The Japanese, considering the matter settled, retired from the battlefield, leaving the crossings across the Khalkin Gol unguarded. Once again, Mongolian cavalry crossed the Khalkin Gol, reigniting the dispute. The border clash quickly escalated with both Japanese and Soviet forces converging on the Khalkin Gol. Kwangtung Army commanders, refusing to believe the Soviets could reinforce on a massive scale, planned to expel the Soviet forces with elements of the untested 23rd Infantry Division.



On May 28th, a Japanese force comprised of two separate battle groups from the 23rd Infantry Division set out to capture the bridges spanning the Khalkin Gol north of its confluence with the Holsten River. The unit assigned to the mission, designated the Yamagata Detachment, and was split into two distinct columns. The Division Recon Regiment was ordered to drive south along the eastern bank of the Khalkin Gol, establish a blocking position near the bridges and cut off any Soviet retreat. The second task force, centered around the 2nd Battalion of the 64th Infantry Regiment, was to drive through Soviet forces on the eastern bank of the Khalkin Gol and link up with the Recon Regiment. Any Soviet forces caught between them were to be destroyed.

In early June, the Kwantung Army fed additional units of the 23rd Infantry Division into the battle, as well as the elements of the veteran 7th Infantry Division and two tank regiments. The Soviet 57th Corps, now under command of General Georgy Zhukov, received substantial reinforcements, including a full tank brigade, three infantry divisions, heavy artillery, and a considerable number of Air Force units. Both sides spent the remainder of June consolidating their positions and launching probing attacks while air battles raged in the skies above.

The next major Japanese effort took place during the first week in July, with a two-pronged offensive intended to drive the Soviets permanently across the Khalkin Gol. The northern force, Kobayashi Force, was to cross the Khalkin Gol near the Fui Heights and overrun Soviet forces on the west bank of the river. The southern force, the Yasuoka Detachment, containing two of

the Kwantung Army's three tank regiments, some infantry, and field guns, was ordered to sweep south along the east bank of the Khalkin Gol and capture the bridges north of the confluence with the Holsten. The Kobayashi force, containing no armored units and very little anti-tank capability, managed to capture a crossing over the Khalkin Gol and advance several miles through enemy positions. Counterattacking Soviet armor, although unsupported with infantry, soon stopped it cold. While the Kobayashi force was subsequently able to extract itself from its predicament by crossing back over the river, it suffered additional losses from Soviet infantry and armor attacking from three directions.



The Yasuoka Detachment tank regiments, attacking at night and without infantry support, initially penetrated Soviet lines. But, after just two days of combat operations, both the 3rd and 4th Tank Regiments sustained losses approaching 50 percent. The Japanese armor was vulnerable two main reasons. First, Japanese armored units typically operated without infantry support, making them easy prey for Soviet anti-tank guns. Second, the Japanese tank guns in both their medium and light tanks were outclassed in range and penetration by Soviet BT-5s and T-26s mounting a very efficient 45mm gun. Soviet counterattacks during the next few days decimated the lightly armored Japanese tanks, ultimately forcing the Kwantung Army to order their withdrawal in the second week of July.

Japanese efforts to force the issue continued during July employing the existing infantry units supported by heavy artillery regiments drawn from the Kwantung Army reserve. These attacks failed as well, with Japanese casualty rates reaching alarming proportions. Soviet casualties were equally high, but their losses could be made good. The Japanese would have to continue fighting with what they had on hand since the Kwantung Army HQ was unwilling to commit anymore reserves.

General Zhukov, having received additional reinforcements of armor, infantry, and artillery during the first half of August, decided to settle the issue once and for all. His plan was to use his now overwhelming superiority on the ground and in the air to smash the Japanese in a double envelopment. For the attack, Zhukov concentrated two rifle divisions, 2 cavalry divisions, a motorized rifle division, a machine gun brigade, two tank brigades, and two motorized infantry brigades against a Japanese force of approximately two infantry divisions with limited anti-tank capability. The Soviet attack began on August 20th with a massive aerial bombardment, catching the Japanese by surprise. During the next 10 days, Japanese forces were overrun and surrounded by the Soviet blitzkrieg, only being able to launch futile counterattacks. The 23rd Infantry Division practically destroyed by the Soviet onslaught, sustaining a casualty rate of 66%. The 7th Infantry Division lost about a third of its strength with Japanese artillery units incurring grievous losses as well.

Although the senior commanders of the Kwantung Army HQ wished to fight on, the Japanese high command in Tokyo wisely decided to settle the issue diplomatically. The Soviets were content with driving Japanese forces east of Nomonhan, eager to refocus their attention to Eastern Europe where their Germany was threatening Poland sovereignty. A cease-fire was declared on September 16th. The Kwantung Army's Nomonhan adventure was costly for the Japanese. Japanese casualties from May through August were over 17,000, with almost 8500 killed. The Soviets admit to about 9300 killed and wounded.

- George Chrestensen

**WWII Micro Squad Scenario**

**PRELUDE TO DISASTER - July 8th, 1939**

During the afternoon of July 8th, Soviet forces belonging to the 36th Motorized Infantry Division launched limited attacks against the remnants of the Yasuoka Detachment. Elements of the 64th Infantry Regiment and the few remaining tanks of the 3rd Tank Regiment fought separately due to the lack of tactical doctrine for combined infantry and tank operations in the Japanese Army. This would be the last large scale action involving Japanese armour in the campaign before the Kwantung Army HQ ordered the withdrawal of the 3rd and 4th Tank Regiments in the second week of July.

**SCENARIO LENGTH: 15 TURNS**

**TERRAIN SUGGESTIONS**

The map should be approximately 72" (North to South) x 48" (East to West)  
Terrain is open. Maximum sighting distance is 120 inches.

**INITIAL DEPLOYMENT**

1. The Soviet player must plot all indirect artillery fire for game turns 1 through 20. This must be done before any Japanese units are placed on the map.
2. The Soviet player deploys first. All Soviet units are placed on the map anywhere on or south of the Soviet setup line (see map).
3. The Japanese player deploys next. All Japanese infantry and MMG, 50mm mortar, and Company HQ stands are placed on the map anywhere on or north within 12 inches of the Japanese setup line (see map). All other Japanese stands may be placed on the map anywhere on or north of the Japanese setup line.
4. If the Soviet player decides to use the Fire Support Allocation rule, he may place a maximum of eight 122mm impact markers per turn, for a total of 80 (4 x 20) impact markers for the scenario.
5. If the Soviet player decides place any 82mm mortars off-board, they are sited off the south edge of the map. The Light Improved positions allotted to any such mortars placed off-board are forfeited. The Soviet 122mm howitzers are sited off the west edge of the map.

## SPECIAL RULES

### Japanese infantry stands during the Nomonhan Campaign

The Japanese quickly learned that glass bottles, filled with gasoline, were effective close range anti-tank weapons when employed against gasoline-fueled Soviet tanks. Lighting the bottles with an improvised wick (ala Molotov Cocktail) was not necessary. The intense heat combined with the highly flammable nature of early Soviet armored vehicles ensured combustion! Note that this is an extremely close range capability and can only be employed by Japanese infantry stands that are either being overrun or are close assaulting Soviet armored vehicles.

Firepower	Range	Defense	Speed	
3/6		0/20	6**	4F

This unit costs 13 points

### Japanese infantry and tank cooperation

Japanese armored units typically operated without infantry support since tactical doctrine for combined infantry and tank operations was sorely lacking in the Japanese Army. Therefore, Japanese tanks may not belong in any Movement Group with any Japanese personnel stand. In addition, Japanese tanks may not combine fire with any personnel or artillery stand.

**Smoke** is available for the Soviet 82mm mortars and 122mm howitzers

### Optional rules to be used:

- 12.1 Unit Determination
- 12.2 The Hot Shot!
- 12.3 Intuitive Action
- 12.6 It's Jammed!
- 12.9 Fire Support Allocation

### 12.18 Operational Movement

This new optional rule not only speeds up play but also reflects the approach march speed of stands that have not been subject to enemy fire during their advance towards the front line. Personnel stands may move up to 150% of their normal movement allowance, rounding down any fractions, until they are either attacked by direct or indirect fire or come within 20 inches of an enemy stand. Vehicle stands may move up to 150% of their normal movement allowance, rounding down any fractions, until they are either attacked by direct or indirect fire or come within 40 inches of an enemy stand.

## JAPANESE FORCES (ELEMENTS, YASUOKA DETACHMENT)

**Cohesion: 14 / Break Point = 145**

### Elements, 3rd Tank Regiment

- 1st Platoon: 3 x Type 89b Medium Tank
- 2nd Platoon: 3 x Type 89b Medium Tank
- 3rd Platoon: 3 x Type 97 TeKe Type 2 Light Tank
- Company HQ: 1 x Type 89b Medium Tank (HQ)

### 2 x Infantry Companies each with:

- 1st Platoon: 3 x Infantry, 1 x 50mm Mortar (2)
- 2nd Platoon: 2 x Infantry
- 3rd Platoon: 3 x Infantry
- Weapons Platoon: 1 x MMG, 1 x 50mm Mortar (2)
- 1 x Infantry HQ
- 12 x Light Improved Positions

### Battalion Machine Gun Company

- 3 x MMG, 3 x Light Improved Positions

### Battalion Gun Platoon

- 2 x 70mm Howitzer, 2 x Light Improved Positions

### Anti-Tank Gun Platoon

- 2 x 37mm ATG, 2 x Light Improved Positions

### General Headquarters

- 1 x Infantry HQ (+0 GHQ), 1 x Light Improved Position

## SOVIET FORCES (ELEMENTS, 36TH MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISION)

### 2 x Motorized Infantry Battalions

**(Break Point = 191) each with:**

### 2 x Motorized Infantry Companies each with:

- 1st Platoon: 3 x Infantry '39
- 2nd Platoon: 3 x Infantry '39
- 3rd Platoon: 3 x Infantry '39
- Company HQ: 1 x Infantry HQ, 1 x MMG, 1 x 50mm Mortar (3)

### 1 x Mortar Company (off board or on board - Soviet player's option) each with:

- 3 x 82mm Mortar (2), 3 x Light Improved Positions

### 1 x Machine Gun Company each with:

- 6 x MMG, 1 x Infantry HQ, 7 x Light Improved Positions

### 1 x Battalion Headquarters each with:

- 1 x Infantry HQ (+1 GHQ), 1 x Light Improved Position

### 1 x Mobile Force (Break Point = 56) with:

### Provisional Tank Company

- 1st Platoon: 4 x T-26 m1937
- 2nd Platoon: 4 x T-26 m1937
- 3rd Platoon: 3 x OT-130
- Company HQ: 1 x T-26 m1937 HQ (+0 GHQ)

### Heavy Armored Car Platoon

- 4 x BA-10 Armored Car

### Reinforced Motorized Infantry Platoon

- 1 x BA-10 Armored Car, 5 x Infantry '39, 5 x Light Truck

### Divisional Artillery Battery (off board)

- 4 x 122mm Howitzer

## VICTORY CONDITIONS

### Soviet Victory:

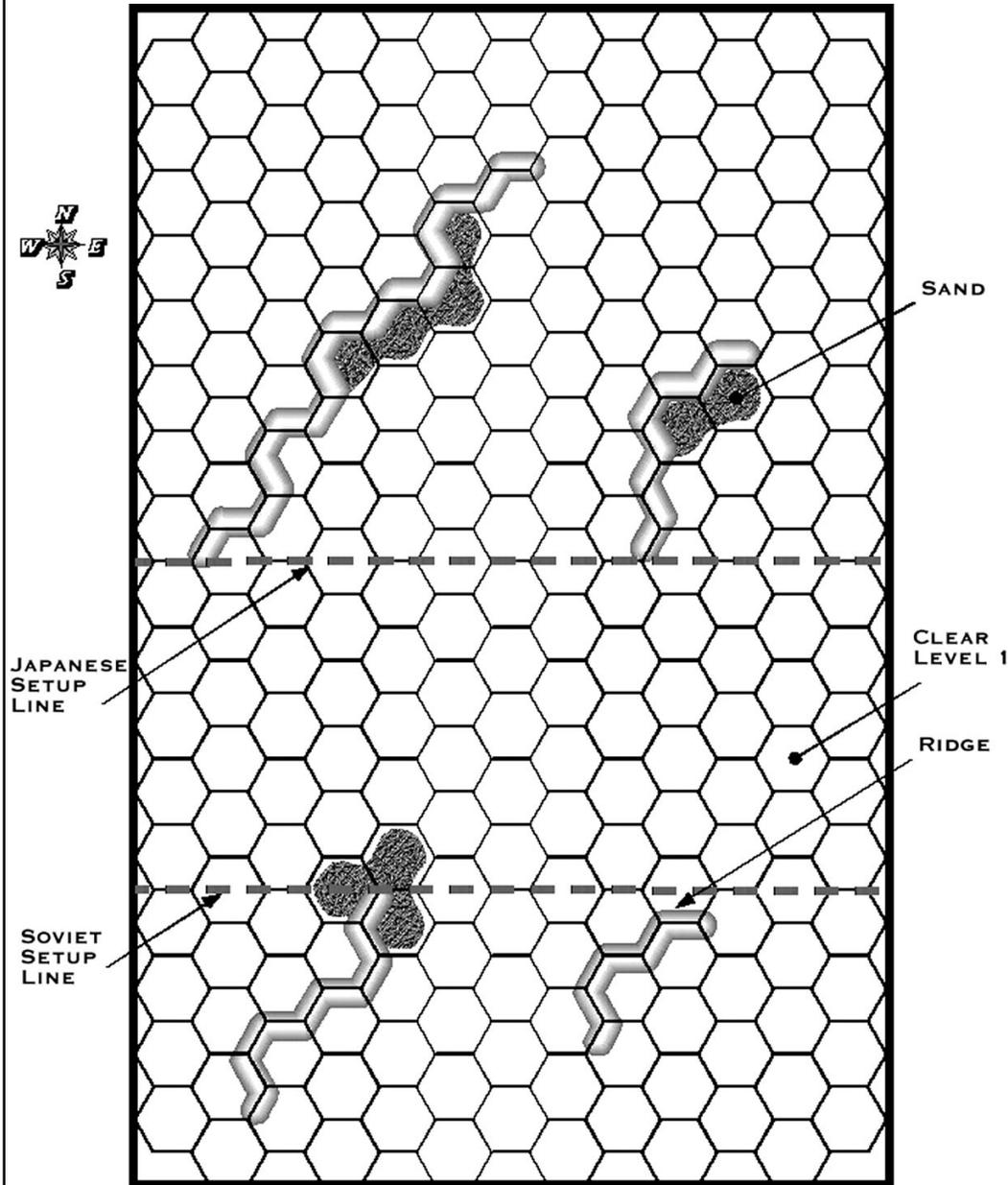
The Soviet player(s) wins if at least half of the stands belonging to the Mobile Force exits the north edge of the map by the end of the scenario. Empty truck stands do not count towards this requirement and any infantry stand belonging to the Mobile Force must exit the map mounted in a truck. If both of the Soviet infantry battalions have reached their Break Points before the Mobile Force exits, the Soviet player(s) loses.

### Japanese Victory:

The Japanese player wins if the Soviet player fails to achieve his victory condition.

# PRELUDE TO DISASTER

July 8, 1939



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

This is a short list of materials available on the Nomonhan Campaign. Each source listed below will help in understanding the battles fought along the Khalkin Gol in 1939.

"Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939", Alvin Coox, Stanford University Press, 1985.

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"Russian Tanks 1900-1970", John Milsom, Galahad Books, New York, 1970.

"Handbook on Japanese Military Forces", U.S. War Department, Greenhill, London, 1991.



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Photos not to scale



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