STUDENT HANDOUT

Kupiansk: The Northern Counterattack

Northern Kupiansk, Radkivka and Kindrashivka, Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine · 22 September to 12 December 2025

Information as of October 2026

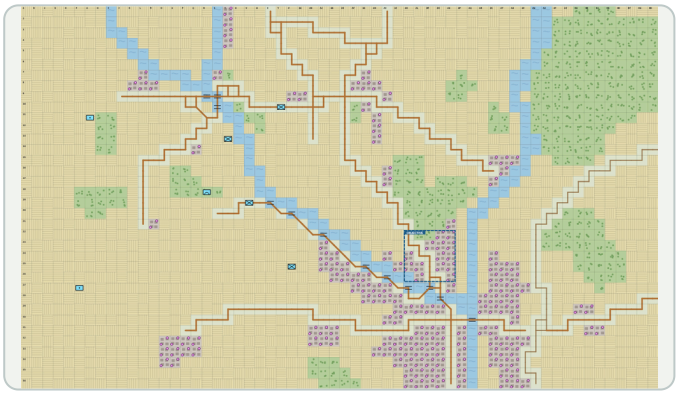
Review provenance

AI reviewed: sources, guide, assessment and model controls. Source attribution and reconstruction limitations remain.

No named human subject-matter reviewer or external validation is recorded. Material completeness is not certification. Instructors should check factual claims, sensitive content, age suitability and local context before use.



Scenario illustration · AI generated



Student map · own side only · Simulation situation map · reconstructed terrain and estimated deployments; not verified historical positions.

Learning objectives

- Locate the river, villages and northern city districts.
- Compare the dated stages of the Ukrainian counterattack.
- Distinguish a local capture objective from the whole campaign.

Run time and a good result

Default run clock: 6 minutes 0 seconds at 1×, excluding pauses, briefing and discussion. Time controls change elapsed play time.

Objective: Retake the marked northern Kupiansk district. This represents the documented local Ukrainian recovery, not the capture of the whole city.

Kupiansk: The Northern Counterattack: Retake the marked northern Kupiansk district. This represents the documented local Ukrainian recovery, not the capture of the whole city. Occupy the marked zone with at least one combat unit and no opposing combat unit for 8 continuous simulation seconds. The authored limit is 360 simulation seconds across 3 stages. Compare objective progress, time, losses, drone expenditure and recorded civilian harm with a second run. A strong classroom result also explains the source evidence and reconstruction estimates; it does not verify a historical casualty count.

Atrocity notice

The UN Commission found war crimes by Russian authorities, including killings, torture and sexual violence, and a small number of violations by Ukrainian forces. Its March 2023 findings are context, including for later scenarios.

These reports describe the wider conflict. They do not establish that every crime occurred in this modeled battle.

Studying or commanding a side does not endorse its conduct. Drone Front never lets players target civilians, hospitals, schools or places of worship. Civilian harm from simulated strikes is counted and shown in the debrief, including nonzero harm. Civilian massacres are never playable operations. Designated terrorist forces and Wagner remain computer controlled; Gaza war events remain excluded from play.

▼ Dated reports and findings

- 2023-03-16 · UN Commission of Inquiry: war crimes in Ukraine

Learn more: the laws of war

- ICRC: Geneva Conventions and commentaries
- ICRC: Customary IHL database
- UN: Genocide Convention (9 December 1948)
- UN: Rome Statute (17 July 1998), articles 6–8

Historical source notes

A reported presence does not establish full control of a city.

The same drone roles could support an advance and a counterattack.

The recovery of northern districts left fighting elsewhere unresolved.

Civilian harm

Reuters documented widespread destruction around Kupiansk and reported the authorities ordering families to evacuate surrounding villages.

Evidence for learning objectives

Reuters reported northern gains on 12 December 2025 while stating that it could not immediately verify the battlefield reports.

The simulation uses a marked objective area; the zone is an authored abstraction, not the whole city.

Reuters's October 2025 report describes families ordered to evacuate; those figures are not civilian deaths or equipment-loss values.

Timings

For 60 minutes, brief for 15, run with pauses for 25 and discuss for 20. For 90 minutes, compare both sides. For 180 minutes, compare the 2023 and 2025 episodes.

Session	Plan
45 minutes	Brief: 10 min; Run: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Review: 15 min
60 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run: 20 min; Collect: 5 min; Debrief and after questions: 15 min; Discussion: 5 min
90 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run 1: with drones: 20 min; Run 2: without drones: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Compare and discuss: 25 min; After questions: 10 min
180 minutes	Before questions: 10 min; Brief and staff roles: 15 min; Run 1: with drones: 25 min; Run 2: without drones: 20 min; Break: 10 min; Run 3: syndicates: 30 min; Collect: 10 min; Seminar replay and debrief: 40 min; After questions: 10 min; Close: 10 min

Staff roles

commander
Track capture and delay goals.

intelligence
Compare dated and attributed reports.

fires
Record simulated effects and civilian exposure.

droneOps
Compare observation and attack roles.

Opposing staff objective

Delay the loss of the marked northern district until the episode ends. Russia did not retain this area historically; this is a limited delay mission.

Decision points

- Opening: where are the northern villages and city?
- October: which areas have changed hands?
- December: what remains outside the local objective?

Before and after questions

1. **What qualification accompanies Reuters's 12 December 2025 account of northern Kupiansk gains?**

   A. All battlefield claims had been independently verified.
   B. Russian full-control claims resolved the city-wide picture.
   C. Reuters could not immediately verify battlefield reports.
   D. The northern recovery established control of every district.

2. **What did Khartiia's 12 December statement, reported by Ukrainska Pravda, say remained unresolved?**

   A. The exact date of Ukraine's 2022 recapture of the town.
   B. Whether any Ukrainian force had entered northern villages.
   C. Whether northern gains had occurred before September 2025.
   D. Fighting in the city centre was still ongoing at that date.

3. **What should a successful take-zone result in the Kupiansk 2025 model establish?**

   A. Success inside the marked northern take zone, without verifying control of the whole city
   B. Independent proof that every city district was retaken.
   C. An exact reconstruction of all bridge conditions in 2025.
   D. A verified count of the city's historical military deaths.

4. **What does Kupiansk 2025's duration=360 and timeScale=1944 represent?**

   A. 1944 seconds of independently timed combat footage.
   B. 1944 represented hours compressed into 360 seconds.
   C. 360 historical hours of continuous northern occupation.
   D. 1944 times each loss to recover the historical casualty total.

5. **How should the families and children counted in Reuters's October 2025 evacuation report be interpreted?**

   A. As a verified count of civilian deaths in this episode.
   B. As military losses added to the equipment-cost measure.
   C. As people covered by an evacuation order, not deaths.
   D. As proof that every resident had already left Kupiansk.

Discussion

- Why did reports of full city control conflict?
- How did observation and attack drones shape both sides of this episode?
- How did continued fighting affect civilian evacuation?

Debrief rubric

Strong
Meets the objective or explains why it was not met; uses the published sources and run evidence, separates known facts from assumptions, compares both sides' losses and cost exchange, and evaluates precautions against civilian harm.

Adequate
Describes the objective and main decisions, identifies at least one source and model limitation, reports losses and harm, and gives a reasoned change for a second run.

Weak
Reports only victory or points, treats teaching settings as real performance, gives unsupported historical claims, or omits uncertainty and civilian harm.

Published readings

1. OSW: The Ukrainian army counterattacks near Kupiansk, 16 December 2025
2. Reuters: Zelenskiy visits Kupiansk as Ukraine retakes parts of frontline town, 12 December 2025
3. Ukrainska Pravda, Yevhen Buderatskyi and Yevhen Kizilov: Ukrainian forces counterattack in Kupiansk, 12 December 2025

Complete source list

Wikipedia: Kupiansk offensive, accessed 4 October 2026
OSW: The Ukrainian army counterattacks near Kupiansk, 16 December 2025
Reuters: Zelenskiy visits Kupiansk as Ukraine retakes parts of frontline town, 12 December 2025
Ukrainska Pravda, Yevhen Buderatskyi and Yevhen Kizilov: Ukrainian forces counterattack in Kupiansk, 12 December 2025
ISW and Critical Threats: Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 13 December 2025
Kyiv Independent, Francis Farrell: With a web of drones and infiltrating infantry, 28 October 2025
Reuters, Ron Popeski: Ukraine authorities order mass evacuations, 14 October 2025
Ukrainska Pravda: Why Ukrainian forces lost Kupiansk and how they recaptured it, 25 February 2026