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2301 Gallows Road, P.O. Box 157
Dunn Loring, Virginia 22027

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this study was to analyse combat experience in World War II on the eastern front, to attempt to detect characteristic patterns of behavior of Soviet military commanders and staffs under a variety of combat situations, in order to acquaint United States officers with the decision making process of Soviet commanders, introducing them to the ways the Soviets think and act under combat pressure, so that they may be better prepared to estimate potential Soviet combat decisions and action.

The first chapter of the report describes the basic elements of the Soviet system of command and control in combat operations in World War II, including planning procedures, normal pre-combat preparations, and the use of command posts, observation posts and mobile command posts during combat.

Five case studies are included. They are:

The Fifth Guards Tank Army in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy Operation, January-February 1944

Combat Operations of the III Guards Mechanized Corps in the First Phase of the Byelorussian Offensive, 24-30 June 1944

Breakthrough Operations and Advance of the Soviet XV Rifle Corps South of Brody in the Ukraine, July 1944

Offensive Operations of the XVI Rifle Corps West of Lublin (Poland) Including Assault Crossing of the Vistula River in the Pulawy Area, July-August 1944

Offensive Operations of the 90th Rifle Division toward Tsekhanuv (Poland), 14-16 January 1945

Using Soviet publications as the basic source, each of the operations is described from the point of view of the commander of the attacking Soviet force. His participation in the planning and preparation and the major tactical decisions he had to make as the combat proceeded are discussed. Each case study includes comments on aspects that are distinctive or particularly important as indications of the commander's thought or performance.

A final chapter discusses ways in which postwar developments have altered the conditions under which a Soviet combat commander would operate in a future war and elements in World War II performance that are of particular relevance in current conditions. While emphasizing the great importance the Soviets put on detailed study of their performance and the performance of their enemies and allies in World War II, it is noted that the Soviets stress that in future combat the lessons from historical example must be applied creatively with due consideration for modern weapons.

*Resident
Account
of
Soviet
Commander's
Thought
and
Performance*

The case studies tend to contradict prevalent notions in western military circles about the inflexibility and lack of initiative of Soviet commanders in combat. The need for flexibility and initiative are emphasized in Soviet training and exercises, and frequently stressed in Soviet military publications.

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study was to analyse combat experience in World War II on the eastern front, to attempt to detect characteristic patterns of behavior of Soviet military commanders and staffs under a variety of combat situations, in order to acquaint United States officers with the decision making process of Soviet commanders, introducing them to the ways the Soviets think and act under combat pressure, so that they would be better prepared to estimate potential Soviet combat decisions and action.

The report has been prepared almost entirely from Soviet publications, both books and periodicals, and illustrated with maps drawn from Soviet maps. The use of the only other primary source for these operations, the captured German records of World War II, proved impractical because of gaps on both sides which made it prohibitively time-consuming to try to match opposing forces for which records on both sides are available. It was also deemed of doubtful value to make much use of German reports for this study, which focussed on the Soviet commanders and the information available to them during an operation.

It must be pointed out that, although Soviet material is abundant and the operations of which case studies were made have been published in detail, Soviet publications are uneven in their coverage. It will be noted, for example, that some of the case studies are accompanied by a series of statistical and descriptive tables, while few such tables are included in others.

Where Soviet maps did not locate all the places mentioned in the narratives, United States maps have been searched in order to find them. Scales have been supplied when possible when Soviet maps did not include them.

The report is organized in three parts. The first is a description of the basic elements of the Soviet system of command and control in combat operations. It has been derived from a survey of a number of Soviet studies on related subjects, as well as from the five case studies that make up the second part of this report. It is intended to describe how a typical operation was directed, from the inception of the plan to the operation in the field. Much of this process may be expected to follow a similar pattern in a future war, modified as necessitated by the increased emphasis on mobility on the contemporary battlefield and by the availability of different weapons and advanced means of communication.

For the second part of the report five operations were chosen, viewed from different levels of command. They are described in detail, from the point of view of the commander, emphasizing his participation and the decisions which he made before and during combat. It is, of course, not feasible to follow his every move and record his every decision, since the Soviet commander no less than the American is faced with routine decisions at every turn, and little information about them is published. Rather an attempt has been made to portray his

participation and that of his staff in planning the attack and the changes that he had to make as the battle developed.

The final chapter of the report contains some observations on how the patterns of command and control described in the case studies may be altered by postwar military and technological developments.

Although the report does not call for conclusions, it is worth noting that while the Soviet Army in several of these operations had only a relatively small superiority in numbers of men and equipment over their German opponents, their commanders were able, by skillful massing of forces in their selected zones of attack, to achieve a decisive superiority where they intended to break through the German defenses. Even so, when the Germans were in well organized and fortified positions and led by skillful commanders, they were able to slow down the Soviet advance significantly and frequently to force changes in Soviet tactical and operational plans. Conversely the Soviet commanders persistently overestimated the capabilities of their own forces or underestimated the capabilities of the Germans, with the result that in these cases they seldom achieved their goals on their original schedules. It is important to note, however, that when faced with unforeseen difficulties and delays Soviet commanders showed great initiative and flexibility in changing plans and tactics in order to accomplish their missions.

While, as is discussed in the third part of this report, the modern Soviet soldier and his commander are better trained and better equipped than his World War II counterpart, it should be remembered that the combat effectiveness of the former was comparatively low, and that although his successor may be expected to perform better, his abilities must not be overestimated.

I

STANDARD SOVIET COMBAT PROCEDURES OF WORLD WAR II

This report includes case studies of five Soviet ground operations in World War II, focussing on decisions made by the commanding officers of five army units at various command levels in very different situations. It is, of course, impossible to discuss all the decisions any commander is called upon to make during combat; most of them are routine, following a standard operating procedure that has been developed to ensure that no significant measures are overlooked in preparing and executing combat operations, and that no time is lost. Even the personalities of the commanders will have little influence on this kind of pro forma decision. This chapter is intended to give some idea of standard Soviet organization and routine procedures in World War II, to provide a background against which the five case study operations can be seen in perspective.

Soviet analysts, who have written extensively about their command and control system during World War II, emphasize that the exigencies of war required changes in the system that existed when the war began. They also assert that, in accordance with the dynamic laws of the development of military art, the system has changed since the war and should be expected to change during any future combat. Nevertheless Soviet military theorists believe that it is as true now as it was in World War II that a commander can make proper combat decisions only if he understands the nature of combined arms combat operations, correctly comprehends the proper utilization of new weapons and equipment, is strong-willed, has good morals and high morale, and is well-versed in Marxist-Leninist theory. They believe that a study of World War II operations is an essential prerequisite to the development of these qualities. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, Soviet commanders today are strongly influenced by World War II experience.

Planning of Soviet Combat Activities

Stavka* and General Staff

In World War II the overall direction of Soviet combat operations was exercised by the General Staff as the main operating element of the Stavka--

* Members of the Stavka in World War II included several members from the Politburo, the Chief of the General Staff, and a number of prominent generals

the Supreme High Command of the Soviet Armed Forces. The most important task of the General Staff was to draft the concept of strategic operations, providing for coordination of the activities of army groups--fronts--and of branches, rear services, operational and strategic transportation, and command structure deployments. General orders were issued directly to army group commanders by the Stavka, and detailed orders by the General Staff, covering such things as the general concept and objectives of an operation, the directions of the main efforts, composition and missions of the attacking forces, time and place of commitment of tank armies and cavalry-mechanized groups, air support, cooperation between services, and logistic organization. The General Staff also dealt with problems pertaining to the organization of the armed forces, execution of operational-strategic troop movements, and control over establishment of new formations.

The Stavka often sent a representative, with a small staff, to an army group to participate in the planning of an operation and coordination of the army group's activities with those of other army groups and services. The representative would act as liaison with the Stavka, either procuring prompt answers to the army group commander's questions or making decisions himself. Zhukov, Vasilevskiy, Voronov, and Voroshilov were the Stavka's representatives in the most important operations.

Army Group

The Stavka sent its concept of an operation to an army group headquarters in a directive, normally 25 to 30 days before the start of a major offensive. For a variety of reasons this time was often cut to as few as 8 days. The army group commander, with the assistance of his deputies, chief of staff, and senior staff members, would proceed to develop an operational plan, which he then submitted to the General Staff. In the meantime, the General Staff also had been working on its version of the plan. Usually these plans would differ only in details, and the army group could expect to receive approval for its ideas with only small changes. On occasion, however, the General Staff would disapprove the army group's plan and would insist on its own.

This substitution of plans occurred in the Lvov-Sandomir operation, part of which--the participation of the XV Rifle Corps--is discussed in the third case study. The plan prepared by the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group, Marshal Konev, and presented to the General Staff in June 1944, although tactically correct, and from a strictly military view advantageous, was rejected by the Stavka for purely political reasons. The Stavka did not wish to make the main effort against the weaker Hungarian army deployed on the German flank as Konev recommended, for the members believed that the recent occupation of Hungary by Germans would soon turn the Hungarians against the Germans. Thus the Stavka directed Konev to deliver his main blow some 200

with Joseph Stalin as chairman. Among others the group included G.K. Zhukov, K.E. Voroshilov, S.M. Budenny, Basil Shaposhnikov, V.M. Molotov, and N.G. Kuznetsov. Attached to the Stavka was an advisory board which at various times included General N.F. Vatutin, N.A. Voznesenskiy, Marshal of Artillery N.N. Voronov, A.A. Zhdanov, P.F. Zhigarev, General K.A. Meretskov, and A.I. Mikoyan among its members.

kilometers to the north, in the Brody area. The operation was successful. As for the Hungarians, they continued to fight until March 1945.

A plan submitted by an army group for higher approval would in general discuss the proposed army group operations in relation to the overall objective. It would include an evaluation of the situation, based on the army group commander's knowledge of his own forces, the physical and tactical conditions, and the strength and deployment of enemy forces. The composition and missions of the combined arms armies and tank armies would be stated, and requirements for artillery, air support, and logistical support would be specified. The plan would summarize the course which it was expected the operation would follow.

After a basic operational plan was approved, the army group staff developed it in detail, in so doing often making decisions that actually were in the realm of the army or even lower level commands. The army group assigned objectives to its component armies, defined the axes of the main effort, the breakthrough sectors, and the composition and deployment of forces. This enabled it to assure coordination between formations and services and the secret deployment of troops, and to respond more effectively and flexibly to developments during combat. There were instances in which control remained too centralized in the army group, and the functions and command decisions on lower levels suffered from excessive interference from above. In some cases intermediate commanders were bypassed entirely, and orders issued to their subordinates.

Major considerations of concern to the army group commander were: provision of firepower means to suppress the enemy defenses in the entire tactical defense zone, assignment of initial objectives for the combined arms armies in order to achieve a breakthrough of the defense lines, and determining the points at which the tank armies and the second echelon units of the army group would be committed. Coordination among the various elements of the army group was of particular importance, and could be achieved only through comprehensive knowledge of the situation, personal contacts among the various commanders and staffs, an efficient communications system, and continual exchange of information. Frequently war games and staff exercises were held at all levels before the start of an operation in order to ensure smooth coordination of the efforts of the various elements of the army group command.

Beginning in 1943 army group commanders customarily retained direct command of air armies, tank armies, and mechanized, tank, and cavalry corps rather than assigning them to combined arms armies, in order to be able to use them when and where they were most needed. Large artillery groups, however, with heavy and long range artillery, would usually be attached to armies from the beginning.

During the course of an operation the army group commander would make tactical decisions as circumstances required. Whereas armies of the first and second echelons received their initial directives at the same time, if problems developed in the course of the operation, the army group commander often assigned new missions to the second echelon armies, changing the times and axes of commitment, or even committing them piecemeal, when this seemed necessary. Before deciding to change an army's mission, the army group commander would thoroughly analyse the situation, determine the time and place of commitment under the new mission, and arrange for logistic support and coordination with the armies already in action. If a counterattack jeopardised the plan or endangered his

forces he would estimate the size and type of force required to repulse the counterattacks and order the necessary regrouping and reinforcements. Thus, in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy operation, when the Germans cut off two tank corps of the Fifth Guards Tank Army around Kapitanovka, the 1st Ukrainian Army Group commander ordered elements of three other armies to assist the threatened army.

Army

Upon receiving a new mission* from the army group commander--often after having participated in preparatory planning--the army commander made a preliminary decision as to the deployment of his forces and the basic operational plan. Preliminary, or warning, directives were issued in order to provide adequate time for subordinate commanders to prepare for the operation. They were given information about the axes of the forthcoming operation, the jump-off line, attached forces, and timing. The preliminary directive formed the basis for all staff documents being prepared and for the final operation order. Dissemination was strictly limited, however, to those who needed to know for planning, in order to prevent leaks which might reach the enemy and prevent surprise. While the army staff and the commanders and staff of the chiefs of arms and services worked on detailed plans, the army commander and commanders of subordinate formations and units would reconnoiter the front in order to acquaint themselves with the terrain and the enemy's defenses. Meanwhile, the various formations of the army would have received their missions, and their staffs would be working up their plans for approval and incorporation in the army's overall operational plan.

Setting a realistic period for troop readiness for a forthcoming offensive was considered to be a very important element in a commander's decision-making process. Thus, Soviet commanders and their staffs carefully evaluated the state of readiness and disposition of subordinate units and formations, the time necessary for regroupment and for taking up assault positions, and the status of supplies. In order to avoid situations in which troops had to enter combat insufficiently prepared, the Soviet command allotted five to seven days for a corps to get ready, four to five days for a division, two or three for a regiment, and one or two for a battalion or a company.

In practice, however, the timing of an attack was frequently determined by the need for haste, and often the planning process left little time for units to prepare. In the Luck-Rovno operation in January 1944 there were only two days for preparation, 25 and 26 January. Half of the time was required for army and corps planning. Division, regiment, and battalion commanders received

* Before World War II the Soviets had considered that the way to inform subordinates of their mission was through written operations orders. During the war, however, they concluded that time was of such importance that it was preferable to transmit such orders orally in meetings between the commander and his subordinates, and only later send out written confirmation. (This was applicable to all levels of command.) The Soviets also felt that no written order or telephone directive could replace the advantage of giving orders personally, and being able to clarify all issues on the spot.

their orders orally on the day before they were to attack. The division commanders reconnoitered the area during the forenoon of 26 January, and the regiment and battalion commanders that afternoon. The written operational order reached the division and regiment staffs during the night of 26/27 January, after most of the combat decisions had already been made.

Upon receipt of the directive for an operation from the commander, the staff would prepare a number of documents, of which the most important were the operations plan, the battle map, the schedule coordinating the activities of all elements during the operation, operations orders, plans and directives for accumulating and maintaining stocks of ammunition, food, and other supplies, the combat intelligence schedule, and the troop training schedule. Operations orders included the following:

- a brief description of the enemy's deployment and strength;
- a statement of the combat mission as defined by the higher command;
- a description of the combat missions of the adjacent units and a definition of boundaries and responsibilities for securing them;
- a short statement of the commander's plan
- assignment of missions to subordinate units and statement of any attachments;
- assignment of missions of artillery, tanks, supporting air units, and other elements
- plans for antitank and antiair defense
- areas for concentration of reserves
- a time schedule relative to D-day and H-hour
- location of the commanding officer's command and observation posts, and the axis along which they would relocate;
- a schedule for submission of combat reports.

While there was of necessity considerable variety in the concept of operations, plans for the breakthrough of a well-fortified enemy defense usually were designed in three phases.

In the first phase, which was supposed to last one or two days, the army would break through the tactical defense zone, advance, split and destroy the defending forces, and commit a mobile group. The total distance of advance in this phase might be from 10 to 30 kilometers.

The second phase was expected to last two days or more, depending on the situation. Its objective was usually the destruction of the enemy's tactical and operational reserves, and, in cooperation with the neighboring Soviet armies, encirclement of the main enemy forces.

During the third phase, planned to last at least three days, the army troops, in coordination with those of the other Soviet armies, would either mount an operation to destroy the encircled enemy forces or continue to advance in pursuit of the retreating enemy. This phase would end with the capture of an important objective deep in the enemy's rear, and consolidation in preparation for future operations.

The army staff would prepare detailed plans only for the first of the three phases. At this stage subsequent phases were usually planned only in general

terms. Selection of the axis of the main effort was of paramount importance to commanders on all levels. It depended on the character of the enemy's defenses, his troop deployment, the terrain, the intention of the higher command, deployment of the Soviet forces, a unit's mission, the quantity and quality of supporting elements, and the degree of cooperation with adjacent units. Normally the most vulnerable and weakest sector of the enemy's defenses would be selected for the major effort. But in some instances the terrain, the necessity for attacking from a restricted bridgehead, or political considerations dictated that the main attack be launched against a strongly fortified area.

The initial breakthrough was usually planned to be made with the army's combined arms striking force, composed of infantry and DIS (direct infantry support) tanks. After the breakthrough was accomplished a tank army or tank and mechanized corps would exploit the success, usually by advancing rapidly, attacking enemy flanks and rear. In this way the success of the operation would be assured. However, the tank force was often used to complete the breakthrough because the striking infantry force had too few DIS tanks. This, of course, was undesirable, because tank formations so used usually suffered heavy losses, which diminished their striking power in operations in the depth of the enemy defenses in subsequent phases.

Coordination and Cooperation

The Soviets stressed that the success of an operation depended on whether or not commanders were given their missions in time, how well the coordination of all elements was organized, and how well the coordinated plans were carried out. Soviet commanders spent considerable time and effort on trying to assure that all units involved would have a thorough mutual understanding of all such factors as axes of advance, objectives, and timetables. On the average a commander of an army or an army corps would spend no less than two days on coordination, a division commander would spend up to two days, and regiment and battalion commanders at least one day.

After operations maps, charts, and schedules had been prepared, a commander, usually accompanied by his operations, intelligence, and communications officers, and the chiefs of arms and services, would visit subordinate commanders to explain how the operation was to proceed and how coordination and cooperation among all elements was to be maintained. A corps commander needed at least six to eight daylight hours to organize coordination for each of his divisions. A division commander required the same length of time for each of his regiments. And a regiment or battalion commander required at least three or four hours of daylight to organize coordination for each of his battalions or companies.

Commanders, in working out plans with their subordinates, gave particular attention to protecting their flanks and boundaries. Measures were taken to ensure careful and continuous observation of vulnerable areas, covering fires and engineer obstacles were placed in critical positions, and anticipatory orders were issued to reserves, second echelon elements, artillery, and tanks concerning countermeasures to be taken in the event of an enemy breakthrough on a flank or along a unit boundary.

Soviet doctrine stressed the importance of direct observation of the battlefield by commanders at all levels. It was considered highly desirable to obtain adequate tactical intelligence as deep as possible--by late 1943 25 to 30 kilometers behind the enemy front line--since rapid advances sometimes would push Soviet attackers that far in a day or less. The commander himself decided on the special areas of intelligence which he needed and assigned the forces to carry out the reconnaissance, transmitting his orders to the intelligence officer through his chief of staff.

Combat reconnaissance was usually carried out by forward rifle battalions, or by reconnaissance groups composed of a company or battalion reinforced with artillery, mortars, tanks, and combat engineers. Procedures were deliberately varied in order not to establish a pattern, thus increasing the effectiveness of reconnaissance operations.

Command Posts

Three criteria were normally observed in selecting the site for a command post: convenience for organizing and maintaining communications with higher command and with subordinate staff; protection, natural or by camouflage, or both, from the enemy's ground and air observation; and adequacy for carrying on the command work. In offensive operations command posts for rifle regiments were one to two kilometers from the front line; for rifle divisions two to four. For rifle corps the distance was three to six kilometers; it was eight to twelve for combined arms armies, and as much as forty to fifty kilometers for army groups. In the Bobruisk operations in 1944 and Warsaw-Poznan in 1945, for example, CP distances from the front lines were:

	Bobruisk	Warsaw-Poznan
Rifle regiment	1.5-2 km	1-2 km
Rifle division	2-4 km	1-3 km
Rifle corps	4-9 km	3-6 km
Combined arms armies	9 km	8-12 km

When armies were on the defensive their command posts were placed well behind the front line. At Kursk, where the defenses were built in three concentric zones, the first echelon army CPs were from 20 to 50 kilometers from the front. The Forty-eighth and Seventieth Armies and the Sixth and Seventh Guards Armies had their CPs between the second and rear defense zones. The CPs of the Sixty-fifth, Sixtieth, Thirty-eighth, and Fortieth Armies were in the rear defense zone, and that of the Thirteenth was behind the rear defense zone. The second echelon Sixty-ninth Army was farthest back of all, 45-50 kilometers from the front.

When the exercise of command from the CP was difficult or impossible, particularly when the offensive zone of an army was very wide, an army commander would organize an auxiliary command post (ACP). This practice was more common in the first year and a half of the war. In the offensive operation at Rostov, for example, in November 1941, the commanders of the Fifty-sixth and Thirty-seventh Armies, Generals F.N. Remizov and A.I. Lopatin, commanded their respective troops from ACPs located about three to five kilometers from the front. In the battle for Moscow in December 1941 and January 1942 many army commanders operated from ACPs two to four kilometers back from the front line.

As a rule Soviet units had two command posts, with the combat command elements of headquarters forward and the other elements to the rear in the "second echelon" CP. The distance between these echeloned CPs was, for rifle regiments, usually 5 to 7 kilometers; for rifle divisions, 8 to 12 kilometers; and for rifle corps, 25 to 30 kilometers. The first echelon CP of combined arms armies was as much as 40 kilometers behind the front line, and the separation between the two echelons was only 10 to 12 kilometers. The forward CPs of combined arms armies and tank armies had as many as 300 to 400 men, 80 to 100 vehicles, 20 to 25 radios, and 8 to 12 communication aircraft. Rear echelon command posts would have 500 to 600 men, about 80 vehicles, 7 or 8 radios, and as many as 150 horses.

The size of a CP, or the area that it covered, depended on personnel strength, the combat situation, terrain, communications facilities, and the length of time it was likely to remain in one place. If it was expected to stay fixed for a considerable period a rifle regiment's CP might occupy up to 0.5 km², that of a rifle division or corps up to 1 km², and that of a combined arms army as much as 3 km². If a CP was expected to move soon, its components would deploy in a much smaller area and sometimes remain in marching column.

Since each unit in the chain of command had its CP, there were often large numbers of them clustered in a very small area. In the Warsaw-Poznan operation in January 1945, for example, the Sixty-ninth Army of the 1st Byelorussian Army Group, with a 15 kilometer front, had 1,270 command posts, of which 750 were combined arms and 520 artillery, an average of 84 CPs per kilometer of frontage. The Fifth Shock Army in the same operation had 83 command posts per kilometer a total of 1,000 on a 12-kilometer front. In the Yassy-Kishinev operation in August 1944 the Thirty-seventh Army had 350 CPs on a 6-kilometer front.

The headquarters group of a rifle division consisted of 140 to 160 men. It was divided into two echelons. Usually the first echelon, at the forward CP, included the division commander, deputies for political affairs and combat training, chief of staff, one or two officers from the political branch, the operations and intelligence sections, the communications and cryptographic sections, the chiefs of services (artillery, engineers), and a security detachment. The second echelon would have the political branch, rear services, personnel section, administrative and supply sections, the military prosecutor's office, military court, the staff's transportation section, and security elements.

The headquarters group of a tank or mechanized brigade or corps was composed of three basic elements: the command group, the communications center, and the service and supply group. The composition of the group at the command post varied with the size of the formation, the availability of means, and the combat mission. Usually, at the command post of a tank brigade or corps would be the commander, his deputies for political affairs and training, the chief of staff, the operations and intelligence sections, the commander of the artillery with his staff, the communication and cryptographic sections, replacement and personnel sections, transportation and supply section, security detachment, and sometimes a combat engineer unit.

On the average the number of men and equipment at headquarters was as follows:

	Brigade	Corps
Men	80-100	150-200
Vehicles	20-25	30-40
Radio sets	8-10	12-15
Communication aircraft	-	2-3

In order to improve control and decrease the size and vulnerability of the staff at the command posts of tanks and mechanized formations, the commanders would often form mobile operations groups which would advance behind the forward elements on the axes of the main effort, using radio to communicate with the combat units and the main CP. In brigades these operating groups would include the commander, operations officer, intelligence officer, artillery commander, chief communications officer, and one or two staff officers, with four or five vehicles and three or four radio units. In corps they would include the commander, deputy for political affairs, operations and intelligence officers, commander of artillery and another artillery officer, and the chief communications officer with two or three others, equipped with six to eight vehicles and five or six radio sets.

As a rule only one such operations group was organized. However, on occasion there were more, as for example in the III Mechanized Corps during the Byelorussian operation in June-July 1944, where there were two, because there were two axes of advance. The commander followed the axis of the main effort, while his deputy headed the operations group on the axis of the auxiliary attack.

Forward of the first echelon command post Soviet commanders maintained observations posts (OPs). They were located on the axes of the main effort, and during breakthrough operations particularly the commanders and their senior staff members spent most of their time there, while the staffs remained at the CP to carry on their work. OPs were established as close as possible to the front line. In the Bobruisk and Warsaw-Poznan operations, for example, distances of OPs from the front line were as follows:

	Bobruisk, 1944	Warsaw-Poznan, 1945
Combined arms army	1.5 km	2.5-3 km
Rifle corps	1-1.5 km	1.5-2 km
Rifle division	0.8-1.5 km	1-1.5 km
Rifle regiment	0.5-0.8 km	0.3-0.5 km

It should be noted that all elements of an attacking force maintained OPs. Consequently many of them were clustered in the best areas affording both observation and cover, and were frequently spotted by the Germans. For example, during the Vitebsk offensive in the summer of 1944 the Forty-third Army's rifle element alone had 361 OPs on a front of about 15 kilometers. This dense net of OPs sighted 70 German artillery batteries, 25 mortar batteries, 68 antitank guns, 383 machine gun emplacements, 268 bunkers, 42 OPs, 12 CPs, and 28 minefields. This amounted to 70% of all such targets in the first German position.

The CPs of combined arms formations during combat operations displaced forward as the combat progressed. Usually the CP of a combined arms army made its first move after the troops had advanced 20 to 25 kilometers. The distance

moved depended on the rate of advance of the FEBA. CPs and OPs moved alternately in order to maintain uninterrupted command and control. Although the CPs of a combined arms army normally stayed in place for one or more days, there were cases when two or three shifts were made in one day. The Thirty-third Combined Arms Army in close pursuit of the enemy during the Vistula-Oder operation was constantly on the move, displacing its command post ten times between 14 and 31 January 1945. The average move was 40 to 50 kilometers. The Eighth Guards Army in the same operation moved its command post 13 times in the same period, its moves ranging from 30 to 70 kilometers.

Since mechanized formations usually advanced more rapidly than rifle formations, their CPs and OPs made considerably longer moves. In the Sandomir-Silesia operation the displacements of the X Guards Tank Corps ranged from 7 to 108 kilometers. Between 12 January and 25 March 1945, the distances of corps CP displacements were as follows:

7-8 km	3 times
18-20 km	11 times
32-35 km	6 times
40-50 km	3 times
more than 100 km	2 times

During the preparatory period the command posts of tank and mechanized formations were in concentration areas, usually as much as 70 to 100 kilometers from the front line. Shortly before the start of an operation, and during the breakthrough period, the formation commander and his mobile command group would move either to the OP of the combined arms commander, or to his own OP near by. As soon as the formations were committed, their commanders followed them closely, sometimes operating CPs on the move. In brigades the CPs would be two or three kilometers behind the forward units. In tank and mechanized corps they would be five to six kilometers behind, and in tank armies 10 to 12. However, if the forward units were advancing rapidly the CPs might be as far as 25 to 30 kilometers behind.

Command and Control

Although army commanders had access to intelligence information at all times, upon arriving at an OP they would normally seek out the latest data on enemy activities, changes in German deployments, numbers of prisoners taken and information gained from them. They would also check on the state of the Soviet forces and any recent developments. Then the commanders would discuss the combat situation with subordinate commanders by phone in order to obtain more specific and timely information about the situation and the readiness of the troops for combat.

Although all army commanders sought all possible information before making operational decisions, their procedures varied. General P.I. Batov, commander of the Sixty-fifth Army, and General M.I. Kazakov, commander of the Tenth Guards Army, for example, immediately upon arrival at his OP called not only the corps commanders but also division commanders and sometimes regiment commanders. The army commanders asked for reports of the situation, the readiness of the troops for attack, reconnaissance activities, and especially reconnaissance in force.

Then they received the reports of the members of their operations task force. By this method they identified and eliminated problems more rapidly than by more orthodox command procedures.

After the main force was committed to battle many army commanders remained at their OPs, using them in fact as forward CPs. They kept in constant personal touch with corps, division, and regiment commanders participating in the main attack as well as with their staffs at the main CPs. The commanders received their reports directly from the battlefield, and hence were able to obtain specific, current information about various aspects of the progress of the breakthrough. In case of delays they were able to take appropriate measures very promptly. This procedure was used very successfully by General Batov at Bobruisk in June 1944 and Berlin in April-May 1945, by General Kazakov during the advance in the Baltic states in July-September 1944, by General K.H. Galitsky, commander of the Third Shock Army in the Nevel operation in September 1943, and by General V.V. Glagolev, commander of the Thirty-first Army in the Vitebsk-Orsha operation in 1944.

On the first day of the Nevel offensive, 6 October 1943, the 28th Rifle Division, commanded by Colonel M.F. Bukshtynovich, unexpectedly broke through the first German position. Upon learning of this, General Galitsky immediately decided to increase pressure in this sector to exploit the breakthrough. He promptly committed the 21st Guards Rifle Division and the 78th Tank Brigade to that sector. At 1230 on 6 October the army's artillery and the attached 240th Fighter and 211th Ground Attack Divisions started support fire, and the new elements soon moved forward. The prompt introduction of new forces was instrumental in breaking German resistance. At about 1600 the Third Shock Army's advance forces burst into Nevel and quickly cleared it of the enemy.

At Bobruisk, in June 1944, General Batov talked with the commanders of the 15th, 69th, and 37th Guards Rifle Divisions before committing his mobile group through their sectors. Thus he was able to identify the best time and place for the commitment, with the result that the breakthrough was considerably accelerated.

At Berlin, Batov had direct radio links at his OP with battalion commanders of the 186th, 108th, 37th Guards, and 15th Rifle Divisions, which were the first to cross the Oder River. Only 36 minutes after the crossing began he knew that a battalion of the 238th Regiment of the 186th Guards Rifle Division was already fighting in the first German trench. With this sort of information he was able to influence the progress of the breakthrough effectively.

On the other hand, in the Crimean operation in 1944 General G.F. Zakharov of the Second Guards Army and General Ya.G. Kreyzer of the Fifty-first Army usually limited direct communication to their corps commanders, very seldom speaking to their division commanders. They were of the opinion that the corps commander should have the latest and most exact information about their divisions at all times. Although this at first glance seems logical, and it left more initiative to the corps commanders, actually, during the breakthrough, when General Kreyzer was talking only with the commanders of the rifle corps, artillery support was late, and other arms were not committed rapidly enough to exploit the situation adequately.

The dynamics of combat and the necessity of maintaining momentum made it imperative for the army commanders to be abreast of the situation during a breakthrough operation, to evaluate it correctly in a very short time, to make decisions promptly, and to pass them immediately to the subordinate commanders. Hence in the heat of combat army commanders often assigned missions personally to their subordinates either by phone or radio, or by personal visit to the subordinate commanders' OPs or CPs. Routinely, however, there were "direction officers" (liaison officers assigned from the staff to subordinate commands, whose chief task was to be acquainted with all combat details of a specific unit) who relayed the army commander's orders, and whose presence ensured that the orders were carried out.

At the end of each day of combat an army commander usually called a meeting of his military council (a group of high ranking staff officers) at his observation or command post, to receive short reports from the chief of staff, chief of the intelligence branch, commander of army artillery, and chief of rear services. He also listened to their proposals in regard to future combat. After giving careful consideration to these presentations, the army commander decided what the activities should be during the night and the next day. This decision was submitted by phone or radio to the commander of the army group for his approval. Once this was received the decision (modified as necessary) was put in writing and distributed to the subordinate commanders. Meanwhile, preliminary orders were issued by phone as soon as possible.

After the meeting of the military council the army staff drafted the daily summary report of combat activities. It was signed by the army commander, the chief of staff, and the chief political officer, and sent to the army group commander.

To give first echelon units time to rest at night, the army commanders usually assigned night operations missions to second echelons of regiments and divisions which had not yet participated in combat. This was done, for example, in the Twenty-second Army at Yassy-Kishinev, the Thirty-first in East Prussia, and the Third and Fifth Guards Armies in the Vistula-Oder offensive. However, sometimes circumstances called for all forces to continue the offensive during the night. This was the case during the Vistula-Oder offensive, when the commander of the Fifty-ninth Army, General I.T. Korovnikov, was ordered to assist the Sixtieth Army and to capture Krakov. After weighing all the pros and cons Korovnikov decided to advance with his main force at night.

Army commanders usually took advantage of night hours to displace artillery forward, and to move ammunition up closer to the forward infantry formations. Routinely at night units would regroup, and when necessary arrangements for coordination between army units were improved. When combat continued through the night, troops were often unable or unprepared to continue an advance that had been planned for the next day. When this happened, army commanders, with the permission of army group commanders, would postpone the planned offensives for several hours.

Committing Mobile Formations

By 1944 Soviet mobile formations--tank armies, tank corps, and mechanized corps--had intrinsic motorized rifle units. In earlier years such units had been attached to them from combined arms armies. Mobile formations, or groups of formations, were usually committed through a breakthrough zone about four to six kilometers in width, and assigned at least two routes of advance. Under favorable conditions it would take a mobile group two and a half to four hours from the time it was ordered to advance to move up to the line of commitment. While approaching this line it was imperative that the group be covered by air and protected against enemy counterattacks.

After an army or army group commander decided to commit his mobile group he would assign the final missions to the group's commander, the commander of the army artillery, the chief of the army engineers, and the representative of the supporting air army to support the commitment of the mobile group to combat. Actually these missions had always been pre-planned, and unless there was some major change in the situation or plan, the army commander had only to set the time and define precisely the mobile group's line of departure and commitment. He would inform the commanders of formations already fighting in the breakthrough zone so that the routes of advance would be cleared and cover provided.

Since the commitment of the mobile group was a particularly crucial element of combat troop command, usually staff officers were sent to the CPs or OPs of these commanders to assure liaison and coordination.

Rather than holding an army's mobile group to exploit a completed breakthrough, often the group was committed to combat to expedite the breakthrough itself. Whether a mobile group would be committed during or after the breakthrough depended upon such things as the number of tanks assigned to the rifle divisions of the first echelon for direct infantry support, the degree of success achieved, the depth of the suppression of the enemy defense system by the artillery and air force, the composition of the mobile group, the proficiency of the army command, the type of terrain, and the strength of enemy resistance.

The first successful introduction of tank and mechanized elements into early phases of combat took place in November 1942 during the Soviet counter-offensive at Stalingrad. There, army mobile groups were introduced on 19 November 1942, the first day of the offensive. Working with the rifle divisions of the first echelon, these mobile forces completed the breakthrough of the German tactical defense zone and advanced 18 to 40 kilometers. On 23 November, toward the end of the fifth day of the offensive, three of these mobile groups met in the Sovetskiy and Kalach area and surrounded the German Stalingrad force. The army commanders not only made the decision to commit the groups to assist in the breakthrough, but followed up their decisions, taking personal charge of the security of the groups as they moved up to their lines of departure. In the sector of the Sixty-fifth Army in the 1944 Bobruisk operation, early on the first day of the offensive, on 24 June, General Batov decided to commit his mobile formation, the I Guards Don Tank Corps. He wanted to increase the advance rate of the first echelon formations and expedite the breakthrough of the German tactical defense zone. At 1600, three

hours after the decision had been made, the corps, supported by artillery and air, moved out from the line Rakovichichi-Petrovichichi. Its swift forward thrust was exploited by the rifle divisions of the first echelon, substantially increasing their progress forward. Toward the end of the day, army troops broke through the heavily fortified defense zone and advanced about 20 kilometers.

The mobile formation of General N.I. Gusev's Forty-seventh Army was committed at Kovel under very different circumstances. During the night of 5 July 1944 the German command withdrew its troops from the Kovel Bulge to rear positions that had been prepared in advance, leaving only a small covering force in the Kovel area. Immediately upon discovering the German withdrawal, Gusev launched an attack with the forward detachments of his three first echelon rifle divisions. With no difficulty they defeated the weak German covering force and captured Kovel and nearby villages. On the basis of the information available to him, Gusev concluded that the Germans had started a general retreat. Reporting this to Marshal Rokossovskiy, commander of the 1st Byelorussian Army Group, he requested permission to commit his mobile formation, the IX Tank Corps, to combat. Having received permission, Gusev summoned the corps commander, General F.N. Rudkin, and ordered him to start a close pursuit of the enemy. However, neither the army nor the corps commander nor their staffs undertook adequate reconnaissance or prepared properly coordinated support plans with the artillery and air units.

At 1100 on 8 July the tank corps moved out. It was soon taken by surprise by heavy German artillery and tank fire at close range, with the result that it suffered heavy losses and was unable to fulfill its mission.

Committing the Second Echelon

Usually the second echelons of attacking combined arms armies were assigned the mission of exploiting success in the sector of the main effort. Often they were committed on the second or third day of the offensive, after elements of the first echelon had broken through the tactical defense zone. Sometimes, however, the commitment of second echelon units might be made as late as the fourth or fifth day.

Second echelon units could have a variety of missions. They could be committed to complete the breakthrough of the main defense zone, to break through the second defense zone, to capture the enemy's rear defense zone, to widen a breakthrough sector toward one of the flanks, or to exploit a breakthrough in a new direction.

When contemplating the commitment of his second echelon forces, an army commander had to determine both the time and the place where they should be committed, in order not only to maintain the momentum of the offensive, but also to intensify it. Thus when, in the first day of the Bobruisk operation, 24 June 1944, the main effort of the Third Army had advanced only one to one and a half kilometers, while the secondary effort had gained three to four, the army commander, General A.B. Gorbatov, decided to transfer his mobile formation, the IX Tank Corps, to his right flank for commitment through the secondary effort, and to move the army's second echelon, the XLVI Rifle Corps,

up behind it. Having received the army group commander's approval, Gorbатов personally assigned these missions, organized the schedule for the regrouping, and assured the timely arrival of the troops at the jump-off point.

In the morning of the second day the army resumed its attack. The IX Tank Corps moved forward 13 kilometers. The following day the XLVI Rifle Corps was also committed, with the result that the German tactical defense was completely broken.

During the second day of the Yassy-Kishinev operation, at about 1400 on 21 August 1944, the assault task force of the Thirty-seventh Army, led by the army's mobile formation, the VII Mechanized Corps, broke through the German second defense zone. A wide gap opened between the VI Guards Rifle Corps, which was following the mechanized corps in the main effort sector, and the XLVI Rifle Corps, advancing slowly on the army's right flank. General M.N. Sharokin, the army commander, decided to commit his second echelon, the LXXXII Rifle Corps, into this gap, ordering it to attack and destroy German forces in front of it and to proceed into the enemy's rear defense zone.

The LXXXII Rifle Corps attacked in two echelons in a sector ten kilometers wide, after a short artillery preparation and air attack on the remnants of German strongpoints. This timely commitment of the second echelon resulted in the destruction of the German reserves and a breakthrough into the German army's rear defense zone. By the end of the day the corps had advanced 25 kilometers and made contact with the VII Mechanized Corps on its left. The enemy was unable to regroup and organize his defense in the rear defense zone.

General Comments

Soviet commentators point out that World War II experience, such as the examples discussed above, illustrates that troop command is a creative process. Decisions depend on the specific circumstances of combat and the skill of the commanders, who must react quickly and effectively to changes in the situation, make well-founded and expedient decisions quickly, and assign clear missions to their subordinates.

The Soviets stress the importance of rapid collection and correct interpretation of data, and strongly encourage direct contact between commanders and subordinate commanders at all levels. Personal contact, they believe, not only facilitates prompt assignment of missions and exchange of information, but also provides opportunities to assure that orders are clearly understood and to ascertain that they are being properly executed. The Soviets also stress the necessity for constant reconnaissance in order to learn as much as possible about the enemy. Soviet analyses of World War II operations emphasize that these successful command techniques of that war are still relevant.

II

THE FIFTH GUARDS TANK ARMY IN THE KORSUN-SHEVCHENKOVSKIY OPERATION January-February 1944

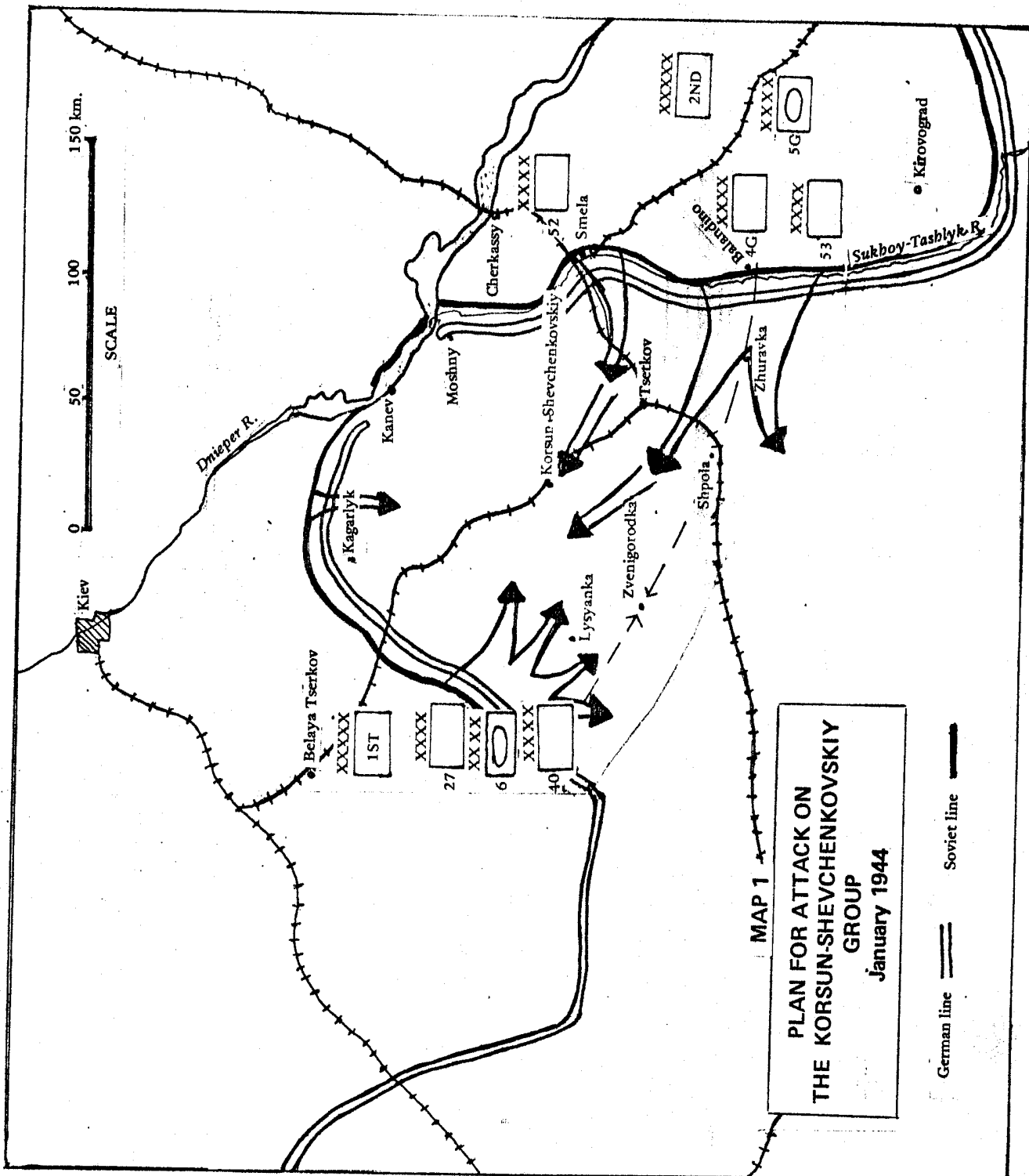
General Situation

At the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944, German Army Group South, being unable to stop the Soviet offensive in the Ukraine, was forced to withdraw westward.

On 14 January, the 1st Ukrainian Army Group, commanded by General N.S. Vatutin, after an advance of 80 to 200 kilometers in three weeks, halted its offensive. By reaching a line from the Dnieper River to Zhaskov, the army group's left wing partially enveloped German forces which were still entrenched on the western bank of the Dnieper River in the vicinity of Kanev. To the south the 2d Ukrainian Army Group, under General Ivan S. Konev, which had begun its offensive on 5 January 1944, captured Kirovograd and reached the southern flank of the same German force, subsequently known as the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy group. The salient which this group created in the Russian line, with the 1st Ukrainian Army Group on the north, and the 2d on the south, presented an opportunity for encirclement. German troops deployed in the bulge formed a wedge between the 1st and 2d Ukrainian Army Groups, pinning down their flanks and endangering future operations. In addition, the Dnieper River was useless as a navigation artery as long as Germans were sitting on one of its banks.

The Soviet Supreme Command considered the liquidation of the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy bulge to be extremely important. Losing no time, on 12 January 1944 Generals Vatutin and Konev were ordered to encircle and destroy the German forces in the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy area. Concentrating their main striking forces at the base of the salient (see Map 1), both army groups were to advance in converging directions and link up near Zvenigorodka. The operation of the 2d Ukrainian Army Group was scheduled to start on 25 January, with the 1st Ukrainian Army Group jumping off the next day, and it was to be completed on or around 17 February. The one day difference in the attack dates was planned because of the unequal distances the army groups had to cover to reach Zvenigorodka: the 1st Ukrainian Army Group 50 kilometers, the 2d Ukrainian Army Group 75 kilometers.

The Germans also fully realized the importance of the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy bulge, for they intended to use it as a springboard for future operations aimed at reestablishing the front line along the western bank of the Dnieper River. Thus all out efforts were made to organize the salient as a strong defense area. The terrain favored the defenders. Many rivers and streams, sheer-sided ravines,



MAP 1
 PLAN FOR ATTACK ON
 THE KORSUN-SHEVCHENKOVSKIY
 GROUP
 January 1944

German line  Soviet line 

numerous villages, and towns contributed to the defense. A number of hills, especially in the Kanev area, assured good observation.

The Germans constructed their most solid defense line on the north side of the bulge where the 1st Ukrainian Army Group attack would come. In the stretch between Moshny and Smela the front line was built in a marshy area. There the defenses were built around separate strongpoints established along the main roads. To the south of Smela, facing the 2d Ukrainian Army Group, the defense was organized in two zones. The first zone, some five to six kilometers deep, consisted of strongpoints and centers of resistance connected by trenches. Inside each strongpoint there was an elaborate system of trenches and communication trenches as well as earth and timber pillboxes. Strongpoints and centers of resistance were protected on flanks and in the front by minefields and wire obstacles. The forward edge of the first defense zone ran along the Sukhoy Tashlyk River and the hills nearby.

The second defense zone was organized on the line Tashlyk-Pastorskoye-Tishkovka. Along the Olshanka River between Mleyev and Topilno the Germans built a switch position facing southeast.

The Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy salient was defended by the right wing elements of the German First Panzer Army and the left wing elements of the German Eighth Field Army, composed of nine infantry divisions and one panzer division, one motorized brigade, and several independent panzer and assault gun battalions.

The Soviet Command considered all of the German forces to be suitable for combat, despite heavy losses suffered in previous battles. Most of them had been on the eastern front for a long time and had had excellent combat experience.

The Pre-offensive Preparations

After receiving the directive for the operation from the Supreme Headquarters, General Konev and his staff prepared a detailed plan of the engagement and sent it to Moscow for approval, which was granted without substantial changes.

On 15 January, General Konev held a conference at his command post at Boltushki, to which he called the commanders and chief political officers of the subordinate armies (Fourth Guards, Fifty-third, Fifty-second, Fifth Guards, Seventh Guards, Fifth Guards Tank, and Fifth Air Armies) and the Commander of the Fifth Guards Don Cavalry Corps, for briefing and preliminary orders. Present at the meeting also were all members of the Army Group's Military Council, and chiefs of arms and services.

General Konev informed all present about the mission assigned by Supreme Headquarters and about his preliminary concept. He started by explaining that in planning for the new operation he and his staff had taken into consideration all the information received from intelligence sources after the Kirovograd battle, which had ended only a short time before.

Sectors most heavily defended by the Germans were to the west and northwest of Kirovograd. The German Command apparently believed that the next Soviet blow would be delivered just there, and for this reason it had deployed a large panzer force in that area.

Considering the situation, the Army Group Commander had decided to direct his main effort north of Kirovograd, where the German defense system was weaker and troops less numerous. The attack was to be executed by the adjacent flanks of the Fourth Guards and Fifty-third Armies, a total of 14 rifle divisions supported by most of the Fifth Air Army.

After breaking through the German defenses in the 19 kilometer breakthrough sector between Verbovka and Balandino (on the Sukhoy Tashlyk River) the divisions would advance in the direction of Shpola.

The Fifth Guards Tank Army, commanded by Colonel General of Tank Troops Pavel Alekseyevich Rotmistrov,* was to be committed to combat in the Fifty-third Army zone (Army Commander Lieutenant General I.V. Galanin). The Tank Army's mission was to complete the breakthrough, and then, exploiting the success, swiftly thrust forward. Toward the end of the first day of combat it was expected to capture Zhuravka and Tishkovka and by the end of the second day to reach Shpola. Then the Tank Army was to continue to Zvenigorodka, where on the third day of the offensive it was to link up with units of the Soviet Sixth Tank Army of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group, which would approach Zvenigorodka from the northwest, thus closing the ring around the German forces in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy bulge. The Fifty-third and the Fifth Guards Tank Armies were to establish an outer front, south of the encirclement corridor--a line of circumvallation--preventing German troops from outside the pocket from breaking through the ring to help the surrounded units.

The Fourth Guards Army, commanded by Major General A.I. Ryzhov, after breaking through the German defenses was to advance westward in the general direction of Shpola. In cooperation with the Fifty-second Army under Lieutenant General K.I. Koroteyev, and the Army Group's reserve (the V Guards Don Cavalry Corps under General A.G. Selivanov), General Ryzhov would establish the inner encirclement front (contravallation line) facing German units inside the pocket.

* Rotmistrov was born 23 June (6 July) 1901, in Skorovino village in what is now the Kalinin oblast. He enlisted in the Red Army in 1919, and in the same year became a member of the Communist Party. In 1924 he entered an officer's training school and in 1928 the Frunze Military Academy (War College). After graduating, he held various command and staff positions. From January 1938 to the Finno-Soviet war he taught at the War College for Motorized and Mechanized Forces. During the Finno-Soviet war he commanded a tank battalion and was chief of staff of a tank brigade. At the start of the Soviet-German war, Rotmistrov was chief of staff of a mechanized corps. At the battle for Moscow he commanded a tank brigade. In March 1943 he became commander of the Fifth Tank Army, which he commanded until August 1944 when he became Deputy Commander of Soviet Armored and Mechanized Troops. In April 1942 he was promoted to Major General, in December 1942 to Lieutenant General. He was promoted to Colonel General in November 1943, to Marshal of Armored Troops in February 1944, and to Chief Marshal of Armored Troops in 1962. At present, Rotmistrov is Chief Inspector General in the Soviet Ministry of Defense.

General Konev decided also that, in addition to the main effort, two secondary blows would be delivered: one by General A.C. Zhdanov's Fifth Guards and General M.C. Shumilov's Seventh Guards Armies in the area west and southwest of Kirovograd; and the other by the Fifty-second Army toward Gorodishche. Whereas, as Konev pointed out, the attacks of the Fifth and Seventh Guards Armies were diversionary only, intended to distract the Germans from the main effort, the assault of the Fifty-second Army would take place in close cooperation with the main attacking forces. Thus this Army would take an active role in the annihilation of the German Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy forces.

The V Guards Don Cavalry Corps was to remain in Army Group reserve in the rear, and operate in cooperation with the Fifth Guards Tank Army against German forces in the rear areas.

The ground combat operations were to be supported by the Second Air Army of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group and the Fifth Air Army of the 2d Ukrainian Army Group, commanded respectively by Lieutenant General S.A. Krasovskiy and Lieutenant General S.K. Goryunov. Bomber, ground attack, and fighter formations were to support the breakthrough operations and the exploitation of the breakthrough, destroying the German Luftwaffe units, and protecting the advancing troops.

General Konev also commented briefly on the role of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group. Its striking force for the envelopment operation was composed of the Twenty-seventh Army under Lieutenant General S.G. Trofimenko, the newly organized Sixth Tank Army under Lieutenant General A.G. Kravchenko, and part of the Fortieth Army commanded by Lieutenant General F.F. Zhmachenko. This force was to jump off from the area southeast of Belaya Tserkov toward Zvenigorodka, thus enveloping the enemy from the northwest and west.

Before closing the meeting of the military council, the Army Group commander pointed out that there was little time left, for the offensive must start on 24 January, and all the preparations must be made in utmost secrecy, in order not to reveal the plans to the Germans. Especially important, General Konev emphasized, was the secret transfer of the Fifth Guards Tank Army from the Kirovograd area to the new concentration area east of Balandino.

Preparatory Activities of the Fifth Guards Tank Army

After returning to his headquarters, General Rotmistrov discussed the new Army Group order with his Chief of Staff, Major General of Tank Troops V.H. Baskanov, and summoned the army's chiefs of services and arms, high ranking staff officers, and commanders of the tank corps. When they arrived he explained the new task to them and instructed them to prepare plans for the secret regrouping of the army in the new concentration area east of Balandino.

At that time the Fifth Guards Tank Army was greatly understrength. It had only 22,301 men and 179 operational tanks,* plus 80 in short-term repair

* In the book Dorogami Pobedy by P.Ya. Yegorov et al. (Moscow, 1969) it is stated that as of 21 January 1944 the Fifth Guards Tank Army had 156 tanks and self-propelled assault guns operational, and that 80 tanks and 11 self-propelled assault guns were in repair.

in the army's repair facilities, which General Rotmistrov hoped to have in line for the offensive. (Actually, 218 were ready.) The army also had 19 self-propelled assault guns (18 operational on the eve of the attack), 6 armored cars, 122 guns, 189 mortars, 27 BM-8 and BM-13 multiple rocket launchers, and nearly 1,300 trucks.*

The tank army was composed of three tank corps, one AAA division, one artillery regiment, one tank destroyer regiment, one multiple rocket launcher regiment, one engineer battalion, one communication regiment, one avio-communication regiment equipped with Po-2 aircraft, one motorcycle regiment, one transportation regiment, two repair and maintenance shops (depot), and various rear facilities.

Comment: The standard Soviet tank army in World War II--and few if any were up to strength--had about 616 tanks, and 40,000-65,000 men. It had two tank corps of 11,900 men each and one--occasionally two--mechanized corps of 17,400. There was one antitank artillery brigade, three artillery brigades, one rocket launcher regiment, two self-propelled artillery regiments, a bridge construction brigade, an antiaircraft brigade, signal regiment, and rear services. Each tank battalion had about 21 T34 tanks, each brigade about 65, each tank corps about 217, and the mechanized corps about 182. Each corps had 63 self-propelled assault guns. The tank army of the 1970s has over 2,200 tanks.

Shortly after the meeting ended, General Rotmistrov and the corps commanders, the chiefs of artillery and army engineers, and several staff officers left to reconnoiter the routes to the new concentration area.

In the meantime, based on the directives issued by the tank army commander, his staff prepared all the necessary preliminary instructions dealing with the secret regrouping of the army, including the necessary deception measures to insure secrecy.

On 16 January, after his return from reconnaissance, General Rotmistrov signed the order for regrouping (prepared by the operations branch) from north of Kirovograd to the area east of Balandino. Movements of troops and equipment were to take place at night only, in groups not larger than brigade size, to a distance of 20 to 30 kilometers from the front line. The army staff organized control of the march, and assigned special traffic controllers to all crossroads. In the Balandino area, the arriving units were to be met by staff officers who would direct them to their respective assembly areas.

In view of the very bad roads, General Rotmistrov ordered his chief of engineers to construct lateral routes where necessary. During the next four days army engineers constructed 135 kilometers of hard-surfaced lateral roads.

In accordance with the emphasis always put on concealment of Soviet regroupments, to deceive the Germans the army commander ordered the preparation of five dummy concentrations of tanks and artillery in approximately the same

*Voyenno Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, No. 7/67, p. 49.

area where troops were then concentrated. Engineers quickly constructed 126 wooden tank models and 36 wooden gun models. The 31st Tank Brigade was ordered to feign the arrival of fresh troops at the present concentration area. Radios continued to work on the same wave lengths and at the same intervals as before. The army staff prepared several false combat orders and operational reports which were transmitted by radio to give the impression of large tank concentrations in the Kirovograd area.

To conceal the noise of tank engines, the operational section of the army staff prepared an elaborate schedule of artillery fire. In addition, in the areas of dummy tank assembly, mufflers were taken off the tractors, and engines were turned on.

Later, Chief of Staff General Baskanov reported to the Army Group Staff that the measures seemed to be working. As a proof he cited the fact that the Germans often shelled and bombed the dummy concentrations of tanks and artillery.

Whereas General Rotmistrov and his staff had had reasonably good data on the Germans in the Kirovograd area, their information about the enemy facing them in the new sector was very sketchy. This, in view of the short time available for the preparation of the offensive, was a matter of great concern. Thus, immediately after receiving General Konev's order, General Rotmistrov directed the army's intelligence officer to establish contact with the intelligence branch of the Fifty-third Army and request from them all the available information on German deployments and defense systems. The intelligence officer was also ordered to reconnoiter the most suitable observation points in the areas of the expected breakthrough and establish a dependable observation system.

While the tank army was marching to and concentrating in the new assembly area, General Rotmistrov, his chiefs of artillery, engineers, and communications, and the heads of the operations and intelligence branches of the army's staff, left to reconnoiter the breakthrough sector. They were accompanied by a group of staff officers from the Fifty-third Army, headed by that army's chief of staff. During the reconnaissance, General Rotmistrov pointed out where the main and secondary efforts would go, the jump-off positions, and the character of the German defense system. The tank army commander had decided that the best sector for the main effort was just south of Balandino, despite the fact that fortifications there were quite strong. The Germans had strung a continuous line of barbed wire obstacles in front of their first trench and had heavily mined all the approaches. Many other antitank and antipersonnel obstacles were built inside the defense system. However, General Rotmistrov, being aware of standard German tactics, reasoned that these strong fortifications meant that there were not many troops in the area, and that the Soviet blow should be delivered there.

After his return to headquarters, Rotmistrov met briefly with the corps commanders and informed them about the preliminary decision which he had reached during the reconnaissance. The final order, he pointed out, would be issued after his decision was approved by the army group commander. He directed the operations branch and other staff branches to assemble data and prepare maps and charts delineating his decision and plans for carrying out

the attack. He then proceeded to army group headquarters, where he reported his decision to General Konev. After a short discussion, the army group commander approved.

General Rotmistrov expressed to General Konev his concern about shortages of ammunition, fuel, and rations in his army. He was assured that in time for the operation the Fifth Guards Army would be supplied with two units of fire for each weapon, three units of fuel, and nine days' rations. (See Figure 1 for units of fire values.)

Figure 1

Rounds per Gun per Unit of Fire

<u>Weapon</u>	<u>Rounds per gun</u>
45mm gun	200
122mm howitzer	80
152mm howitzer	60
105mm gun	107
76mm gun	120
Self-propelled assault guns	
SU-76/SU-76M	60
SU-85	48
SU-100	34
SU-122	40
ISU-122/ISU-122S	30
SU-152/ISU-152	20

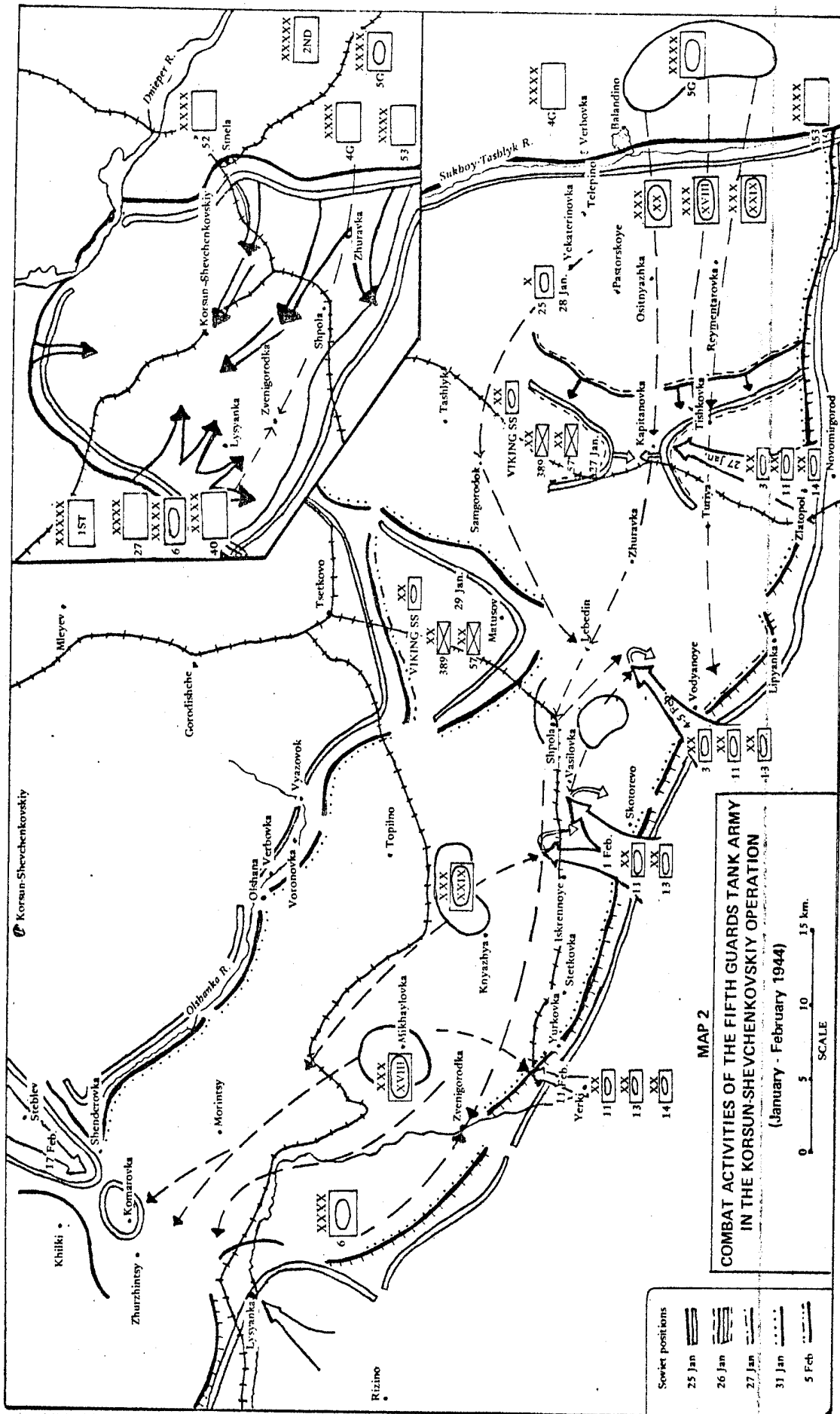
(Sources: P. Morozov, They Were Not Mentioned in the Combat Report, Moscow, 1969, p. 123; Voyenno Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, 1977, No. 1, p. 29.)

With his plan approved, General Rotmistrov returned to his headquarters, where the corps and brigade commanders and their deputies were already assembled, and issued the following directive (incorporated in the Fifth Guards Tank Army Operation order dated 21 January 1944): (Map 2)

The Fifth Guards Tank Army will attack on 25 January in two echelons. Deployed in the first echelon will be the XX and XXIX Tank Corps; in the second echelon, the XVIII Tank Corps; in reserve, the 689th Tank Destroyer Regiment, the 76th Multiple Rocket Launcher Regiment, and the 25th Tank Brigade.

The XX Tank Corps, deployed in the sector of the XXVI Rifle Corps (Fifty-third Army), will advance toward Zhuravka. Toward the end of the first day of the offensive it will take Zhuravka. Its forward detachment will continue to the Lebedin area.

The XXIX Tank Corps will advance on the left of the XX Tank Corps, in the sector of the LXXV Rifle Corps. By the end of the



first day of operation the Corps will take Turiya, and its forward detachment will continue to advance to Lipyanka.

The XVIII Tank Corps will advance behind the XXIX Corps and cover the left flank of the Tank Army.

General Rotmistrov ordered the corps commanders of the first echelon to attach from three to five tanks to forward rifle battalions of the Fifty-third Army which would carry out the reconnaissance in force. That phase of the operation was to take place on 24 January, a day before the main assault. These tanks would revert to their respective tank corps as soon as the forward rifle battalions penetrated German defenses to the depth of three to six kilometers.

Although the Soviet Command realized that attaching some of the tanks of the tank army to the rifle battalions would weaken the striking power of Rotmistrov's forces when they were used in the breakthrough exploitation phase, it had no other choice, because there were not enough DIS (direct infantry support) tanks. Without tanks, the infantry might not break through at all.

After the meeting the corps commanders returned to their respective headquarters to prepare their corps for action, and the tank army staff started to draw up final orders and instructions. A combat operations schedule was set up and approved by General Rotmistrov. Liaison officers were sent to the tank corps, not only for control purposes, but also for immediate reporting to the tank army staff, or if necessary to the tank army commander, of any difficulties the corps were facing, so that these could be swiftly eliminated.

A special order was issued, directing the corps commanders to organize short seminars for officers on all levels, during which they would discuss how the forthcoming offensive would be fought, learn as much as possible about the terrain in the breakthrough zone and behind it, and become acquainted with the German defense system.

Comment: Even when time was very short, the Soviets tried to organize special seminars, lectures, war games, etc. for the officer corps, to acquaint them with the type of operation, terrain, enemy, and so on which they might face in the forthcoming battle. The troops were also put on a more strenuous training schedule.

The Chief of the Repair and Maintenance Branch was instructed to prepare a plan for effective evacuation and repair of combat vehicles damaged during the battle.

Comment: This is very characteristic. The Soviets always made an all out effort to evacuate from, or repair on, the battlefield as many damaged tanks as possible. Despite high tank production (annual average during the war was 23,744 tanks and self-propelled assault guns) there was still a shortage of them because of heavy losses.

Under the personal direction of Major General Grishin, Chief Political Officer of the tank army, a major effort was made to inspire the officers and men with combat spirit. Political officers on all levels discussed examples of heroic achievements in past battles. Great emphasis was directed toward indoctrination of the young replacements, most of whom had been drafted from the newly liberated areas. All forms and methods of party and political work were aimed at the fulfillment of the combat mission.

The Battle of Stalingrad was widely cited as the best example of an encirclement operation. General Rotmistrov, who had participated in the Stalingrad offensive, in his first briefing with high ranking army officers underlined the extraordinary relevance of the Stalingrad Battle for planning the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy operation, and explicitly ordered all the officers to study the lessons learned at Stalingrad.

The chief of the rear services reported that because of bad roads and a shortage of trucks, and the limited time available, there might be difficulties in moving all the ammunition, equipment, and supplies for the troops to the new concentration area in time. This might postpone and endanger the entire operation, and General Rotmistrov ordered that if necessary local civilian transportation facilities should be used, in order to have the ammunition and supplies ready for the offensive.

Comment: The Soviet Command, chronically in need of transportation, customarily solved this problem by exploiting all the available local means.

While his staff was preparing the final operation order, General Rotmistrov and his operations officer went to the headquarters of the Fifty-third Army to clarify the following major points:

- coordination and cooperation of tank and infantry units during different phases of the battle;
- delineation of the breakthrough sector;
- the exact advance routes of the tank formations, including their initial and subsequent objectives;
- engineer assistance in securing the safe passage of tank units through the German defense zone, including clearance of minefields;
- assurance of continuous exchange of intelligence data;
- security for the flanks and junctions of both armies;
- coordination of the artillery preparation and of artillery support during the advance;
- the order in which the roads would be cleared for the tank army after the rifle formation succeeded in the breakthrough.

On 20 January 1944 General Rotmistrov met with his corps commanders at his headquarters to discuss their plans. Also present were Generals Grishin and Baskanov, and senior staff officers.

The Commander of the XX Tank Corps, Major General I.G. Lazarev, reported that he had decided to attack in two echelons (which was the usual Soviet deployment). In the first echelon he had deployed the 8th Guards and 155th Tank Brigades, reinforced with the 1895th and 1834th Self-propelled Assault Gun Regiments and with one battery of the 1505th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment. In the second echelon General Lazarev had the 7th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 291st Mortar Regiment. In his reserve the corps commander was holding the 80th Tank Brigade, the 406th Guards Multiple Rocket Launcher Battalion, and one battery of the 1505th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment. After assigning tanks to the Fifty-third Army the corps had 51 operational tanks and self-propelled assault guns.

General Lazarev explained that, if necessary, he would help the rifle formations of the Fifty-third Army in the last phase of the breakthrough of the German first defense zone, and then advance rapidly toward Lebedin and Shpola. To assure a strong first blow and high rates of advance the best and strongest brigades, in terms of numerical strength and equipment, were assigned to the first echelon. At the same time the second echelon and the reserve gave him sufficient strength to exert decisive influence on the course of the battle, and effectively increase the momentum.

General Lazarev pointed out that, taking into consideration bad, and in some places impassable, roads and capricious weather, the rates of advance ordered by the tank army were quite high. In the first three days of the offensive the corps was to advance on the average 24 kilometers per day in order to reach the Zvenigorodka area, where it was to link up with the Sixth Tank Army of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group.

The Commander of the XXIX Tank Corps, Major General I.F. Kirichenko, reported that he too would attack in two echelons, having two tank brigades in the first echelon and one in the second. By the end of the first day the corps expected to take Turiya and then advance toward Lipyanka. His corps had 42 operational tanks.

The Commander of the XVIII Tank Corps, Major General V.I. Polozkov, reported its readiness to advance behind the XXIX Tank Corps. The corps had 49 operational tanks.

All three corps commanders were concerned with the newly arrived tank commanders', drivers', and mechanics' lack of combat experience, and reported that they had started an intensive training course to remedy this deficiency. In training, a lot of attention was also being paid to the operation and tactics of German tank units and individual tanks.

After a short discussion, General Rotmistrov approved the tank corps commanders' plans without major changes. In his review he noted that the corps commanders had strictly followed the detailed instructions issued by the army staff.

Since the artillery cover for the commitment of the tank corps was to be carried out by the Fifty-third Army, General Rotmistrov had already sent his commander of artillery to the commander of artillery of the Fifty-third Army to prepare a coordinated fire support plan. Subsequently, the commander

of artillery reported to General Rotmistrov that, based on artillery reconnaissance conducted by the Fifty-third Army, and information received from the army group, firing data had been prepared, a communications plan agreed upon, and all the details of the artillery preparation worked out. The artillery preparation was to last 55 minutes. Its aim was the neutralization of German firepower and troops, and destruction of fortifications. In case the reconnaissance in force conducted on 24 January by the forward rifle battalions was successful, the artillery preparation would be called off and a ten minute artillery barrage substituted.

General Rotmistrov and his staff paid great attention to the organization of close cooperation with the Fifth Air Army. General Konev, too, strongly emphasized that in this operation cooperation with the Air Force must be better than it had been in previous operations, where there had been numerous failures. A group of senior tank army officers discussed with the representatives of the Fifth Air Army the role of the air force in supporting the attack of the Fifth Guards Tank Army. A possibility of supplying the tank army with fuel and ammunition by air during the battle was also taken into consideration. Liaison officers from the air army were attached not only to the Fifth Guards Tank Army headquarters, but also to all three tank corps and the tank brigades.

The Offensive Operations of the Fifth Guards Tank Army

The Soviet reconnaissance in force started at 0630 on 24 January 1944. This was approximately two hours before sunrise, just at the beginning of a two-hour period of twilight. General Rotmistrov, General Grishin, the operations officer--Colonel F.M. Belozеров--and several staff officers had arrived at the observation post of the Fifty-third Army an hour earlier, to observe the combat and to be in position to coordinate all the developments quickly with General Galanin. General Rotmistrov had also ordered the commanders of the XX and XXIX Tank Corps to join the commanders of the respective rifle corps at their observation posts in the sectors which their tank corps would be committed.

Generals Galanin and Rotmistrov suspected that the Germans were keeping only a small force in the front line and that their main defense zone had been withdrawn somewhat to the rear. Thus, to avoid a prolonged artillery preparation against only a covering force, they were undertaking this reconnaissance in force with several rifle battalions, each supported by a few tanks and a company of combat engineers, to ascertain the enemy strength and the precise location of the main defense zone.

The forward battalions successfully crossed the Sukhoy Tashlyk River, engaged German forces in heavy combat, and by the end of the day had penetrated the German defenses some two to five kilometers on a 16 kilometer front.

Shortly before daybreak of 25 January (approximately 0835) the main forces of the Fourth Guards and Fifty-third Armies were committed to combat. Because of the forward battalions' success the previous day, the 55 minute artillery preparation scheduled for the 25th of January was called off. Instead, General Galanin ordered a ten minute artillery barrage for 0645, after which the main forces of the Fifty-third Army and forward elements of the XX and XXIX Tank

Corps jumped off. At the same time, the main force of the Fourth Guards Army also moved out. The advance was supported by ground attack aircraft of the Fifth Air Army with groups of four to eight planes neutralizing the German fire system.

Soon after the attack began, the Soviet forces encountered very strong German resistance. Reports of fierce fighting arrived at the tank army OP. Each hill, hamlet, or village was contested. The infantry troops trying to take Ositnyazhka and Reymentarovka encountered still resistance and were thrown back.

At 1400, in consideration of the difficulties the rifle divisions were facing in trying to break through the German defenses, General Rotmistrov, after consulting with the commander of the Fifty-third Army, decided to commit the main forces of his tank army to the battle, and requested General Konev's permission to do so. General Konev concurred. Subsequently orders were sent to the XX and XXIX Tank Corps to move forward immediately.

Comment: In the Soviet view the best time to commit tank forces was after the infantry had cleared a path through the defense zone. However, it has already been noted that General Lazarev's XX Tank Corps was prepared to move in in the last phase of the breakthrough to assist the rifle formations. When it became apparent that the tanks which had been attached to the forward infantry units were not adequate to break through the German defenses, Rotmistrov weighed the circumstances and the risk of losing many of his tanks before the breakthrough was made, and decided that if the tanks did not move up to support the infantry the operation might collapse and there might not be an exploitation phase. His decision was justified.

Upon receipt of the order from General Rotmistrov, General Lazarev directed the Commander of the 155th Tank Brigade, Lieutenant Colonel I.I. Proshin, to bypass Ositnyazhka on the south. The tank brigade, with a successful flanking maneuver, enveloped the right wing of the German forces defending that area. The German commander, fearing encirclement, ordered his troops to leave Ositnyazhka. By evening (sunset was at about 1750, followed by two hours of twilight) the Soviet rifle units, after heavy battles with counter-attacking elements of the German 3d and 14th Panzer Divisions, had advanced four to ten kilometers, thus breaking through the first defense zone. At the same time the commanders of the XX and XXIX Tank Corps reported to General Rotmistrov that during the five to six hours since their commitment to the battle their tank brigades had advanced 18 to 20 kilometers. They had broken away from the rifle formations and were fighting along the line Kapitanovka-Tishkovka.

During the evening briefing, the intelligence officer of the Fifth Guards Tank Army reported that the German second defense zone was defended by remnants of the German 389th and 106th Infantry Divisions, and that the 3d and 14th Panzer Divisions were being moved quickly to the Kapitanovka and Tishkovka areas.

After a detailed analysis of the situation reported by General Baskanov and the chief of the rear services, General Rotmistrov decided not to wait for the rifle formation to close the gap between the infantry and tanks. Instead, in the early morning of 26 January, with only his own tank forces, he would exploit their successes of the preceding day and assault what was left of the German defenses in the second defense zone, then continue to advance toward Lebedin before the Germans could reinforce the area.

It was clearly an opportunity to maintain momentum, and try to prevent the Germans from bringing up reinforcements. Consequently, Rotmistrov proposed, and Konev agreed, that the tanks should not stop and wait for the infantry to catch up, despite the element of risk involved.

General Baskanov immediately prepared the necessary orders and sent them to the commanders of the XX and XXIX Tank Corps. The XVII Tank Corps was alerted for the possibility of entering combat the following day.

General Rotmistrov spent the early morning hours of 26 January at the XX Tank Corps headquarters, observing the progress of the attack, which from the start was very successful. General Lazarev informed General Rotmistrov at noon that the 8th Guards Tank Brigade, under Colonel V.F. Orlov, supported by the 183d and 1895th Assault Gun Regiments, had pushed the Germans from the eastern outskirts of Kapitanovka and in pursuit was approaching Zhuravka. At the same time the 155th Tank Brigade had enveloped Tishkovka from the north and had just reached the eastern outskirts of Zhuravka. At 1515 General Lazarev reported that in a joint attack the 8th Guards and the 155th Tank Brigades had captured Zhuravka at 1500, and that the corps was advancing toward Lebedin. General Rotmistrov was satisfied with the corps's progress and urged Lazarev to take Lebedin by the end of the day. By 2300 the fight for Lebedin was over. The remnants of the German troops were withdrawing toward Shpola.

During the entire forenoon reports from the XXIX Tank Corps reaching General Rotmistrov were worrisome. The corps was advancing very slowly. At 1300, while visiting the corps headquarters, General Rotmistrov was told by the corps commander, General Kirichenko, that his troops were encountering extremely heavy resistance in the second defense zone, and had been able to advance only five to six kilometers. Turya was captured, but strong German counterattacks made it impossible to move forward. According to intelligence reports, strong new German panzer forces were counterattacking from the Zlatopol area toward Turiya. General Kirichenko asked permission to turn to the defense. General Rotmistrov, realizing that--since the infantry was far behind--a German breakthrough might cut off the XX Tank Corps, agreed.

Comment: General Rotmistrov, who earlier had made the decision to take advantage of the apparent opportunity to maintain momentum, now showed his flexibility and changed his mind. It had become obvious that the XXIX Tank Corps could not make progress against a superior German force. The corps was much below its T/O strength at the start of the operation, and further combat under most unfavorable conditions could have been disastrous. In view of these considerations he decided to approve the corps commander's request and order the XXIX Tank Corps to the defensive. The XX Tank Corps would not halt its offensive, despite the danger to its

flanks and rear. This indicated that Rotmistrov believed that the XXIX Tank Corps's difficulties were temporary and that pressing the advance of the XX Tank Corps would improve the situation in the XXIX Tank Corps sector. He also believed that at that point it would be too early to commit his second echelon, the XVIII Tank Corps.

In the evening of 26 January, General Baskanov informed General Rotmistrov that, according to intelligence reports received from the Army Group, the Germans were bringing up fresh reserves to the breakthrough area, and that strong counter-attacks could be expected at any time.

General Rotmistrov concluded that the German Command had already determined the direction of the Soviet main thrust and that it had recognized in it a deadly danger to the entire German force. Thus, he thought, the German Command would not spare any effort to annihilate the advancing Soviet troops. At this point the commander of the tank army had to make up his mind whether to turn temporarily to the defense and wait for the rifle divisions to arrive, or, in spite of considerable risk, push forward with his tanks. The question was discussed at the meeting of the tank army's military council. After listening to different points of view Rotmistrov decided that early on 27 January the XX and XXIX Tank Corps would continue the offensive. Immediately after the decision was taken, directives were sent to both tank corps. The XX Tank Corps was ordered to advance toward Shpola and Zvenigorodka, where it was to link up with elements of the Sixth Tank Army of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group. The XXIX Tank Corps was to attack and destroy the German forces in front of it, and advance to the line Vodyanoye-Lipyanka, where it was to take up defensive positions facing southwest, thus securing the left flank of the XX Tank Corps.

Comment: Expediency continued. With evidence that the Germans were preparing to make a major effort to strengthen their defenses and put a halt to the Soviet breakthrough, the vulnerability of tanks without infantry again had to be weighed against maintaining momentum. Rotmistrov's decision was to continue with the XX Tank Corps attack and put the XXIX Tank Corps, which thus had only a few hours of defensive posture, back on the offensive. His decision to do so was a good one, and the XXIX Corps advanced as hoped for.

Shortly after receiving the directive for the advance on Shpola, General Lazarev reported to General Rotmistrov that he had decided to continue the attack with the two tank brigades of the first echelon, the 9th Guards and the 155th. The remaining units and the arriving elements of the XXVI Rifle Corps were committed to the defense of Kapitanovka and of the grove northwest of Tishkovka. General Lazarev also informed General Rotmistrov that according to the latest intelligence data Shpola was prepared for all-around defense. Its garrison consisted of one infantry regiment and one training battalion. The corps commander suggested that a surprise night attack might prove to be very successful. His tank brigade commanders were of the same opinion. General Rotmistrov agreed and ordered him to leave one motorized rifle battalion for the defense of Lebedin and to concentrate the remaining units secretly at the southern and southeastern approaches of Shpola.

Comment: General Lazarev's request for permission to attack Shpola by night was in keeping with General Rotmistrov's general philosophy of maintaining momentum. Perhaps of greatest importance was the possibility a surprise attack offered to capture the town with minimal losses. A night attack is always difficult, but Soviet doctrine emphasizes its importance. Note that Lazarev was ordered to leave a rifle battalion behind to protect the position at Lebedin.

The night attack was a success. General Lazarev reported that the Germans had not expected a night assault. The tanks and assault guns opened intensive fire aimed at the outskirts of the town, the railroad station, and heavy weapons emplacements, and then burst into the streets. The Germans were unable to put up effective resistance. They retreated in disorder into the center of the town, where they were destroyed. By 1000 on 27 January Shpola was entirely cleared of German troops.

Learning about the capture of Shpola, General Rotmistrov ordered all the remaining forces of the XX Tank Corps to move up to the Shpola area, and to secure the right flank of the corps from possible counterattacks from the north by the German Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy forces. Following this order General Lazarev deployed the 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade, supported by the 1505th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment and the 291st Mortar Regiment, in the area north of the town, thus securing the northern flank of the main corps forces. (The left flank was secured by the XXIX Tank Corps, which by that time had established itself along the line Vodyanoye-Lipyanka.)

In the morning of 27 January, as the XX Tank Corps was fighting in and around Shpola, and the XXIX Tank Corps was advancing toward Vodyanoye and Lipyanka, General Baskanov informed General Rotmistrov that reports from the field indicated that major German counterattacks were in progress, and that the Germans were trying to cut off and encircle the tank forces that had already broken through the German defenses and had pushed forward. Counterattacks from the north directed toward Kapitanovka were being delivered by the German 57th and 389th Infantry Divisions and the SS Viking Panzer Division. Counterattacking from the south also toward Kapitanovka were the 3d, 11th, and 14th Panzer Divisions.

Comment: The T/O of the German infantry division in 1944 called for 12,772 men, organized in three infantry regiments of 1,987 men each. Each regiment had two battalions, each with 708 men, plus an artillery company and an antitank company. The division's artillery of 2,013 men had 33 105mm howitzers and 9 150mm howitzers. The division also contained reconnaissance, antitank, engineer, and signal battalions.

The T/O of the 1944 panzer division included one panzer regiment, one motorized infantry regiment, one infantry regiment, and reconnaissance, signal, engineer, antiair and antitank battalions. There were 14,727 men in the division, 2,006 in the tank regiment, which had 89 Mk-IV and 79 Mk-V tanks.

Rarely was any German division by this time close to full strength.

By midday the situation of the tank corps had become very serious. The Germans retook Tishkovka and the eastern outskirts of Kapitanovka. The German forces cut off the routes of communication of the Fifth Guards Tank Army as well as impairing communications between the tank army command post and command posts of the XX and XXIX Tank Corps. The command post of the XX Tank Corps was cut off from its brigades. To supply the tank brigades with ammunition, fuel, and food became very difficult and in some cases impossible. Small groups of marauding German tanks were intercepting ammunition and fuel trucks and mining the roads. Thus, for all practical purposes the XX and XXIX Tank Corps found themselves cut off from the main striking force of the 2d Ukrainian Army Group and from the second echelon and the rear services of the tank army. At the same time information reaching the tank army staff confirmed previous findings that the Germans were bringing up new reserves from the Kirovograd sector.

Realizing that the success of the entire encirclement operation depended on a) rapid advance to Zvenigorodka and b) beating off German counterattacks from the north and south of the breakthrough corridor, General Rotmistrov decided to continue the attack of the XX Tank Corps toward Zvenigorodka, to continue to defend the Vodyanoye-Lipyanka line with the XXIX Tank Corps, and to commit the second echelon, the XVIII Tank Corps, to stop and throw back the counterattacking German divisions.

Comment: This was one of the most difficult decisions made by Rotmistrov. His two tank corps (XX and XXIX) were totally, or almost totally, cut off from the remaining forces and had only limited supplies. Nevertheless Rotmistrov continued to press forward despite the fact that by that time he must have lost a considerable number of tanks. (No figures are available, but according to Soviet statistics, losses of tank armies taking part in the breakthrough were usually highest--over 40% of total losses--during the relatively short breakthrough period.)

~~General Konev, who arrived shortly after midday at the Fifth Guards Tank Army command post at Ositnyazhka, fully agreed with Rotmistrov's decision. Consequently, General V.I. Polozkov, the Commander of the XVIII Tank Corps, was ordered to leave his deployment area at and around Ositnyazhka and strike toward Tishkovka. General Rotmistrov realized that the XVIII Tank Corps was understrength and might not be able to stop the Germans. Thus, he asked General Konev to give him additional antitank units and rifle formations.~~

Calligraphic
Decision
Process

Comment: Although by this time the situations of both the XX and XXIX Tank Corps were critical, with some units so far ahead that communications were severed or threatened and supply was very uncertain, General Rotmistrov considered the importance of closing the ring by joining forces with the 1st Ukrainian Group was too great to halt the advance. He still had the XVIII Tank Corps in his second echelon, and with that and the XXIX Tank Corps he believed he could hold off the German forces that were trying to cut his forward elements. (The ring was not closed yet and the Germans were trying to restore the front line.) He sought the approval of the army group commander and received from

him additional units to bolster the attack. Had Rotmistrov been less bold he would have awaited the arrival of reinforcements, resting his tanks and consolidating their positions, rather than ordering his men forward at once. His tactics worked, and the ring was closed, albeit a bit weakly in some areas.

General Konev issued an order to transfer to the disposal of the commander of the tank army several* antitank artillery brigades from other sectors of the army group. In addition, he decided to commit the rifle divisions of the second echelon of the Fourth Guards Army right away, and, during the night of 27/28 January, the V Guards Don Cavalry Corps from his own reserve. The Cavalry Corps was ordered to attack toward Olshana, penetrate into the rear of the German forces, and, together with the Fifth Guards Tank Army and the left flank elements of the Twenty-seventh Army of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group, establish the inner front (contravallation) of the encirclement, and in this way prevent the German Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy force from breaking through toward the south.

At 0715 on 28 January, following directives issued by General Rotmistrov, two tank brigades of the XX Tank Corps jumped off toward Zvenigorodka, by this time some 35 kilometers away. Shortly before the attack, the tank army's intelligence officer informed the XX Tank Corps chief of staff that in all probability the corps would not encounter any major German resistance, because the German Command had concentrated its main forces along the flanks of the breakthrough corridor.

Early in the afternoon General Lazarev reported to the tank army staff that at noon, after smashing German forces on their way, the forward tank battalions broke into Zvenigorodka from the east and southeast. Units of the 155th Tank Brigade under Lieutenant Colonel Proshin linked up with the 233d Tank Brigade of the Sixth Tank Army advancing from the west, closing the ring of encirclement.

Comment: Along the 150 kilometer long outer encirclement front the 1st and 2d Ukrainian Army Groups by the end of January had committed 22 rifle divisions, two tank armies (307 tanks and self-propelled guns) and 2,736 guns and mortars. The tactical density of troops was 6 to 8 kilometers per division, and two tanks and self-propelled guns per kilometer of frontage.

As of 31 January the German Command had concentrated in front of the outer ring of the encirclement 14 divisions (of these 8 panzer), an average of one division per eleven kilometers. The ratio of manpower was 1.3:1 in Soviet favor. The Germans had numerical superiority in tanks. (Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, 1669, No. 2, p. 55)

However, the ring was not solid. The success in Zvenigorodka did not ease the difficult situation facing General Rotmistrov in the Kapitanovka-Tishkovka sector. There, the German forces had firmly established a defense line, turned to counterattack, and continued to threaten the forward elements of the tank army. The tank brigades which took Zvenigorodka had broken so far away from the

* Apparently four, but the sources are not clear.

rest of the army that for all practical reasons they were separated from the remaining tank forces. The Germans were still threatening the flanks of the corridor and at any time might cut it decisively. In some places the distance between the inner and outer fronts of the encirclement was no wider than two kilometers.

General Rotmistrov reported to General Konev about the linkup, but advised him that the encirclement was not leakproof and that there were gaps through which it could be expected the Germans would try to break out, or to break in.

During the evening the Operations Branch of the Fifth Guards Tank Army staff determined the width of the gaps between the tank corps and brigades, and reported this to the tank army commander. In the XX Tank Corps sector, the gap between the two tank brigades (8th Guards and 155th) deployed in Zvenigorodka, and the 7th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade defending Shpola was 30 to 35 kilometers. There were no Soviet troops between Shpola and Zvenigorodka.

The gap between the 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade and the right wing units of the XXIX Tank Corps was 10 to 12 kilometers wide.

There was a gap of several kilometers between the XXIX Tank Corps and the XVIII Tank Corps. Major elements of the XVIII Tank Corps, together with elements of the Fifty-third Army, was engaged in combat on the line Kapitanovka-Tishkovka. Especially fierce fighting had developed between the 181st Tank Brigade and German panzer units with up to twenty tanks which attacked the brigade several times.

To force the Germans back, and in this way liquidate the danger to the corridor, General Rotmistrov decided to attack the enemy from the rear. To this end he ordered the 25th Tank Brigade, of the XVIII Tank Corps, which up to that time had been in reserve, to jump off at daybreak on 29 January from behind the right flank of the tank army, and envelop the counterattacking German forces from the north. The brigade, which was concentrated in Yekaterinovka, was to push rapidly toward Samogorodok and then Lebedin. General Konev approved this decision and ordered the Commander of the Fourth Guards Army to take advantage of the tank brigade's drive to assault and take Smela and in this way widen the corridor substantially and consolidate the inner front of the encirclement. The brigade successfully achieved its mission, forcing the German SS Viking, 389th, and 57th Divisions to withdraw to the northwest.

Around noon on 29 January, as soon as the 25th Tank Brigade had pushed its way to the Lebedin area, General Rotmistrov received a call from the commander of the XVIII Tank Corps, informing him that the German Command, fearing encirclement, had started to withdraw its forces from the Kapitanovka-Tishkovka area toward the southwest. At the same time, however, other reports arriving at the Fifth Guards Tank Army CP from the field, and from the 2d Ukrainian Army Group, indicated that the German leadership had no intention of leaving the encircled group to its own fate, and was doing everything possible to extract it from the pocket. Increasing numbers of fresh panzer troops equipped with new "Panthers," "Tigers," and "Ferdinands," had been observed hurrying from the Kirovograd area and from the west to the breakthrough zone. It was

apparent that the commander of the encircled German group had been ordered to organize a continuous defensive front, be ready to deliver a coordinated attack to meet the German forces advancing from the south, and break out of the encirclement ring.

To impede the German design, General Rotmistrov ordered General Lazarev to send a strong task force northward toward Olshana, and, together with the 1st Independent Guards Motorcycle Regiment and units of the V Guards Don Cavalry Corps, which had been attacking on the right of the tank army, widen the Soviet ring and destroy German forces in their rear defense zone.

At the same time General Rotmistrov asked the Army Group Commander to attach several rifle divisions to his tank army so that he would have enough troops to tighten the inner and outer encirclement fronts as well as to withdraw the tanks from their immobile defensive posture and use them for counterattacks against German panzer groups.

General Konev agreed and gave him the XLIV Rifle Corps of the Fifty-third Army, composed of three rifle divisions and one airborne division (84th Rifle, 375th Rifle, 94th Guards Rifle, and 6th Guards Airborne).

On General Rotmistrov's order, at the end of 31 January the 84th Rifle Division took up defense positions facing south between Iskrennoye and Vasilkova, two kilometers southwest of Shpola. To the west of it, the 94th Guards Rifle Division was deployed between Yurkovka and Stetsovka. The 6th Guards Airborne Division was temporarily concentrated in Shpola. General Rotmistrov intended to deploy it to the right of the 94th Guards Rifle Division.

During the night of 1 February General Konev ordered General Rotmistrov to transfer all of the units under his command to the outer encirclement front, and take up defense positions in a 60 kilometer sector along the line Zvenigorodka-Yurkovka-Iskrennoye-Skotorevo-Vodyanoye-Lipyanka. To prepare firm defenses the 5th Combat Engineer Brigade from the GHQ Reserve was attached to the Tank Army. Combat operations were to be supported by the I Ground Attack Air Corps.

Konev's decision was based on the fact that major German panzer forces were deployed outside the ring. Their mission was to break through to the encircled troops, open a corridor through which they would be able to withdraw from the pocket. Thus, Konev decided to meet counterattacking German tanks with his tank army.

General Rotmistrov was informed that to his right the outer defense front was defended by the Sixth Tank Army and to the left by the Fifty-third Army. To coordinate the operations of the Sixth Tank and Fifth Guards Tank Armies, at the crucial junction between the 1st and 2d Ukrainian Army Groups, the Supreme Headquarters assigned General F.U. Gastilovich, who with a group of officers would operate from the Fifth Guards Tank Army headquarters.

From intelligence information available to him, General Rotmistrov knew that the Germans had committed three panzer divisions (3d, 11th, and 14th) and several (the exact number not yet determined) infantry units against his

sector. This force was looking for a weak spot in the Soviet defense system and was trying to penetrate the tank army defenses in either the Shpola or the Zvenigorodka area.

At a staff conference attended by General Grishin, General Baskanov, the army operations and intelligence officers, chiefs of artillery, armor and rear services, and the representative of the Fifth Air Army, General Rotmistrov decided to organize the defense in such a way that at any moment he would be able to turn from defense to offense, and deliver crushing counterattacks. Thus he organized his army in two echelons. In the first echelon Rotmistrov deployed the XX Tank and XLIV Rifle Corps and a part of the XXIX Tank Corps. In the second echelon, he put the main force of the XXIX Tank and the XVIII Tank Corps.

The XX Tank Corps was ordered to take up defensive positions on the right flank of the tank army at the western and southwestern outskirts of Zvenigorodka, extending southeast to Yurkovka. To the left of it was the XLIX Rifle Corps and part of the XXIX Tank Corps, deployed along the line Yurkovka-Iskrennoye-Vodyanoye-Lipyanka.

The main force of the XXIX Tank Corps was to move to the Knyazhye area and be ready to counterattack toward the south and southwest. The XVIII Tank Corps was to concentrate south of Shpola in readiness to counterattack toward the south and southeast.

General Rotmistrov also ordered his headquarters moved to Shpola to be more centrally located with respect to the new army front.

Comment: General Konev's directive had changed the direction of attack of the tank army from west to south, to hold the outside of the encircling ring and prevent German counterattacks from breaking through. With the added XLIV Rifle Corps General Rotmistrov's defense was still rather thin.

Rotmistrov was especially concerned with the firmness of his antitank defense. He directed his forces to take advantage of water barriers, forests, solid buildings, and other local features. All approaches to the forward edge of the first defense zone, and all critical avenues by which tanks might approach inside the defense zone, were to be mined. In all brigades and corps, mobile antitank groups composed of combat engineers, submachine gunners, and antitank artillery were to be organized and used in case of a German breakthrough. To strengthen active antitank defenses, antitank artillery regiments were to be brought up close to the front line. The tanks being repaired and serviced, and some of the assault guns, were to be set up in fixed firing positions. Repairs would be conducted directly at their combat positions.

In accordance with the commander's decision, General Baskanov prepared detailed orders and directives which were sent out to all formations and units. General Rotmistrov himself oversaw the execution of many aspects of his order. The situation was not an easy one. The organization of the defense of the Fifth Guards Tank Army was conducted under constant German attacks. The width of the encirclement corridor (the distance between the outer and

inner lines of the encirclement fronts), although wider than it had been two days earlier in many places, still did not exceed 15 to 20 kilometers, and German artillery was covering the entire deployment area of the tank army with fire. In addition, in spite of the increased number of Soviet troops, the Germans were still able to penetrate tank army defenses with small groups of tanks and submachine gunners, disrupting communications and transportation, destroying individual tanks and various items of equipment, and disorganizing the supply system.

Being unable to break through the Soviet defenses in the Kapitanovka-Tishkovka sector, the German Command regrouped its forces for an assault in other areas. In the morning of 1 February, General Rotmistrov received a report from the XXIX Rifle Corps of an imminent German attack by a large group of German panzer and infantry forces assembled southwest of Shpola. General Baskanov immediately got in touch with the commanders of the XXIX and XVIII Tank Corps and ordered them to be ready to deliver strong counterattacks in case of a German breakthrough.

In the afternoon of 1 February the Germans attacked toward Shpola and Matusov, trying to break through to their encircled forces. They took Skotorevo and engaged the 94th Rifle Division in Iskrennoye. At this stage, General Rotmistrov committed the XXIX Tank Corps and part of the XVIII Tank Corps to combat. After two days of fierce fighting, units of the two tank corps, assisted by the XLIX Rifle Corps and supported by the Fifth Air Army, stopped the advancing German troops and turned them back to the line from which they had started their attack. Thus, the German attempt to break through to their encircled forces failed, and the Soviets were able to tighten the encirclement ring.

On 3 February the Soviet Command proceeded to the execution of the second phase of the encirclement operation, that is, to the liquidation of the encircled German forces. The pocket was methodically squeezed as the Soviet troops along the inner encirclement front attacked from many directions, breaking up enemy formations, cutting them off, and then destroying individual garrisons and resistance centers.

At the same time, along the other encirclement front, the Fifth Guards Tank Army and other formations of the 2d Ukrainian Army Group were engaged in heavy combat with attacking German forces attempting to reach the encircled group.

Early in the morning of 4 February, the intelligence officer of the tank army reported to General Baskanov that a force of some 130 German tanks of the 3d, 11th, and 13th Panzer Divisions, supported by bombers, was advancing from the Vodyanoye area toward Lebedin. General Rotmistrov immediately ordered the XXIX and XVIII Tank Corps to counterattack and stop the German advance. Fierce tank clashes developed, but the Soviets were unable to foil the German push. German panzer formations took Vodyanoye and Lipyanka and continued northward. Only 30 kilometers remained between them and the encircled troops in the Vyazovok and Tsvetkovo areas. Soviet resistance stiffened. Heavy fighting continued late into the night. Being unable to advance further, the Germans stopped the attack and regrouped.

At daybreak on 5 February General Rotmistrov received preliminary reports from the field that German divisions had turned again to attack, this time, however, from the Vodyanoye area toward Shpola. After several hours of intense fighting the Germans penetrated Soviet defenses south of Shpola, and to the east of it they reached the line Lebedin-Zhuravka.

General Rotmistrov ordered the commander of the XLIV Rifle Corps to stand firm and under no circumstances let the Germans take Shpola. He also ordered part of the XXIX Tank Corps to that area.

The German Command, after unsuccessful efforts to break through to Shpola from the south, turned their main forces to the east, trying to envelop Shpola from that direction and advance through Lebedin to the north toward Tsvetkovo, to meet there the German 389th and 57th Infantry Divisions, the SS Viking Panzer Division, and a number of smaller units approaching from the opposite direction.

In the afternoon of 5 February, General Rotmistrov reported to General Konev that all of his reserves were used up, and in view of the strong possibility of a German breakthrough he asked for additional forces to be attached to his army. General Konev assented, and during the night of 5/6 February two rifle divisions and several tank and antitank artillery units from the Fifth and Seventh Guards Armies, which were deployed in secondary sectors on the left wing of the Army Group, reported to the Fifth Guards Tank Army. Fierce fighting lasted for the next two days. Toward the end of 7 February the Germans were finally beaten off.

The Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy Battle lasted ten more days, during which elements of the Fifth Guards Tank Army were constantly engaged in heavy tank battles with German panzer formations which were making a final effort to reach their troops in the pocket. On 14 February, after several days of severe fighting, the German divisions attacking from outside the corridor took Lysyanka in the Sixth Guards Tank Army zone, while the encircled troops moved to meet them near Shenderovka. Only a 12 kilometer zone divided the forces, but the Germans were unable to cross it.

During this period the Fifth Guards Tank Army experienced especially great difficulties in supplying its forces with ammunition, fuel, and food. Troops used hundreds of carts drawn by horses, oxen, and even cows. The local population was mobilized to carry shells, mines, and cartridges. Fuel for tanks had to be dropped by cargo planes. General Rotmistrov ordered the troops to attach barrels of fuel and cases of ammunition to the outside of the tanks to have them on hand in case of a total breakdown of the supply system.

The German situation in the pocket was getting more critical with each passing day. Matters came to a head on 17 and 18 February, when remnants of the encircled group made a last desperate effort to break out of the pocket. Massing near Shenderovka, the Germans, under cover of night and in a snowstorm, attacked toward the southwest. Units of the Fourth Guards and Twenty-seventh Armies met them with fire and counterattacks. Only a small group of German tanks and armored carriers with senior officers managed to get through.

* * *

The Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy operation ended in German defeat. Some 55,000 officers and men were killed or wounded and over 18,000 taken prisoner. Practically all weapons and equipment were abandoned on the battlefield.

The Fifth Guards Tank Army alone destroyed 249 German tanks, 311 guns of various calibers, 109 mortars, 1,474 trucks and 22 aircraft, and captured 24 tanks, 35 assault guns, 178 guns, 1,553 trucks, and 27 ammunition and supply depots. The army killed or wounded 16,870 officers and men, and took 2,355 prisoners.*

For outstanding achievement in commanding the operation, Colonel General Pavel A. Rotmistrov was promoted on 21 February 1944 to the rank of Marshal of Armored Troops.

General Comments

1. The most striking aspect of this operation is the determination with which the commander of the Fifth Guards Tank Army pursued his objective under extremely difficult circumstances. As a result, the encirclement of the German forces in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy bulge was a success. Soviet military historians point out that the operation serves as an example of the importance of seizing opportunities, quick maneuver, and bold use of reserves.
2. At the start of the offensive the Fifth Guards Tank Army had fewer than 200 tanks and self-propelled assault guns, about a third of its T/O strength. This hindered the performance of individual tank corps and brigades. The tank army was also required to attach some of its tanks to the forward rifle battalions to assist the combined arms army in the breakthrough, because the combined arms army lacked or was short of direct infantry support tanks. In addition, the commitment of the tank army in the last phase of the breakthrough operation which, as statistics show, was most costly in terms of tank losses, decreased the already weakened striking power of Rotmistrov's forces. Under these circumstances an advance of some 70 kilometers during the first three days of the offensive was a real achievement.
3. It should be noted that at the start of the operation there were almost no German panzer forces in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy bulge. The bulk of them (up to five panzer divisions) were deployed to the west and northwest of Kirovograd. This was a result of a Soviet deception plan which succeeded in making the Germans believe that the main effort of the forthcoming Soviet offensive would be in the area west of Kirovograd.
4. Adverse weather conditions, bad roads, and marauding German troops in the rear of advancing tank formations caused great logistic difficulties.

* Yegorov, op. cit., p. 188. Based on the archives of the Soviet Ministry of Defense.

Local civilian transport means had to be utilized. The Soviet command also used transport planes to parachute supplies.

5. The timely commitment of the second echelon of the Fifth Guards Tank Army (XVIII Tank Corps) was instrumental in protecting the flanks, beating off German counterattacks, and clearing the marauding Germans from the breakthrough corridor. All this secured the advance of the XX Tank Corps to Zvenigorodka.

6. Commitment by Konev of the V Guards Cavalry Corps, which advanced toward Olshana with elements of the Fifth Guards Tank Army, was a decisive factor in closing the gaps in the inner encirclement ring, thus preventing the break-out of the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy group.

7. In view of the danger of a German panzer breakthrough from the south to relieve the encircled forces, thus enabling them to escape from the pocket, the commander of the 2d Ukrainian Army Group turned the Fifth Guards Tank Army around and deployed it along the external front of the encirclement corridor facing toward west and southwest. This was a very difficult maneuver and was performed brilliantly by Rotmistrov.

8. During the first three days of the operation the tank corps fought for a considerable time without infantry support, because the rifle units lagged behind. The XX Tank Corps showed a high degree of proficiency, especially when it was cut off from the main forces of the tank army and found itself encircled by the Germans.

9. Noteworthy was the close cooperation of tanks, infantry, engineer, and air units in repelling German counterattacks. Tank operations were characterized by great maneuverability.

10. The reinforcement of the Fifth Guards Tank Army with the XLIX Rifle Corps, the 34th Tank Destroyer Brigade, and the 5th Engineer Brigade during the defense of the external perimeter of the encirclement ring gave the tank army enough strength to defend its zone and to organize a strong tank reserve and second echelon to repulse German panzer counterattacks.

11. The Soviets always paid great attention to the organization of cooperation between army groups. In this case, as soon as contact between elements of the 1st and 2d Ukrainian Army Groups was established, the Soviet High Command immediately assigned a general officer with a small staff to act as coordinator to insure close cooperation between the units in the field. Such a procedure assured better protection for the army group's flanks, a favored target of German counterattacks.

12. The Soviet emphasis on studying past operations to get a better understanding of the forthcoming battle was well illustrated in this operation. Despite the shortage of time all-out efforts were made to acquaint the officer corps with the Stalingrad battle as an example of a classic encirclement operation.

III

COMBAT OPERATIONS OF THE III GUARDS MECHANIZED CORPS IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE BYELORUSSIAN OFFENSIVE 24-30 June 1944

In June 1944 the Soviet Supreme Command launched a major offensive in Byelorussia code named "Operation Bagration," in which four army groups, or fronts, were involved (1st Baltic, 3d Byelorussian, 2d Byelorussian, 1st Byelorussian), in order from north to south (Map 3).

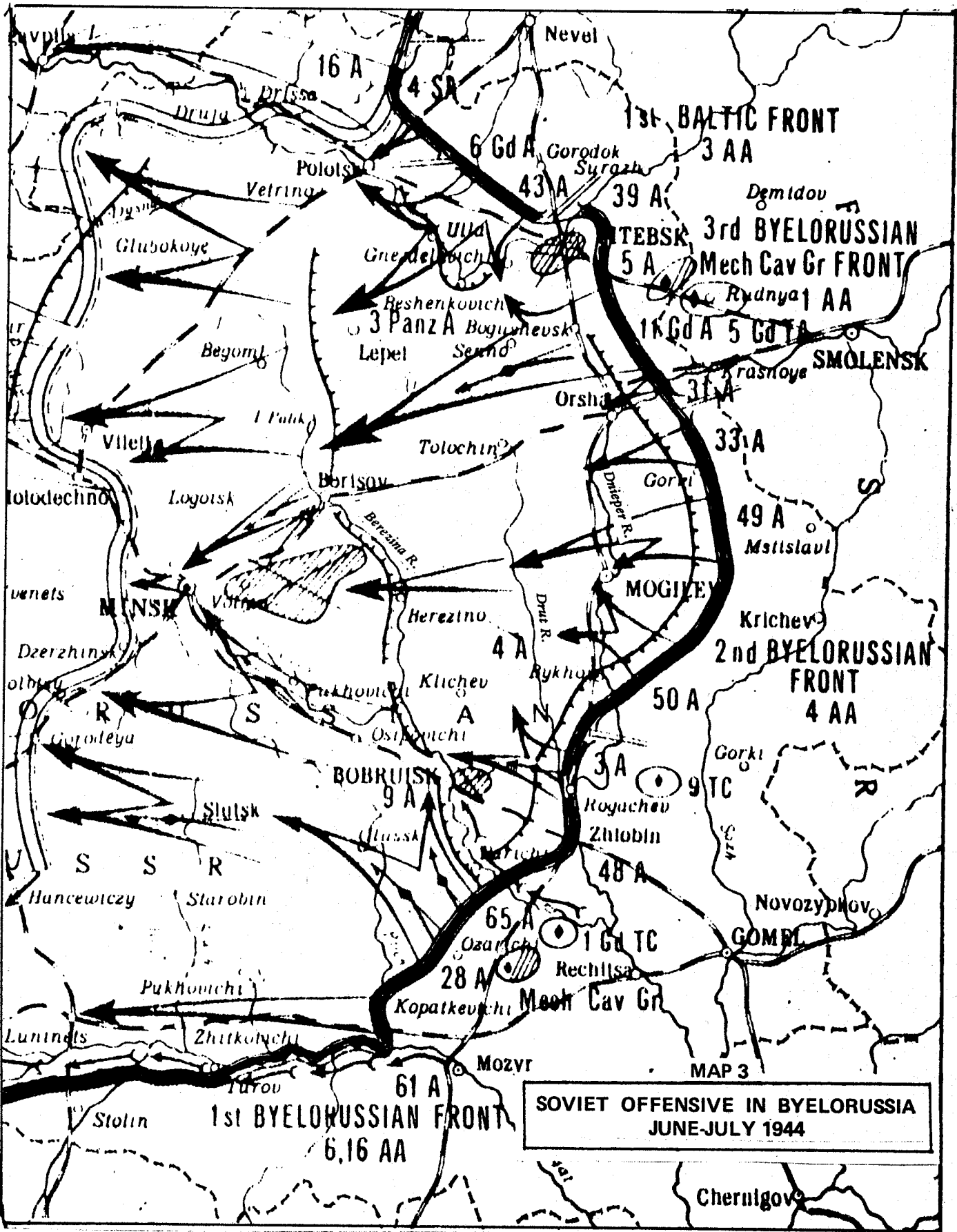
The plan called for an attack on a broad front in which German defenses would be breached in six widely separated sectors. The offensive was to start with converging assaults by the adjoining wings of the 1st Baltic and 3d Byelorussian Army Groups on the German Vitebsk Group, with the objective of encircling it and wiping it out. Simultaneously two assault groups of the Byelorussian Army Group were to envelop the German forces at Bobruysk from south and east and destroy them. Troops of the 2d Byelorussian Army Group and the left wing of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group were to launch two frontal attacks--one against Orsha and the other against Mogilev.

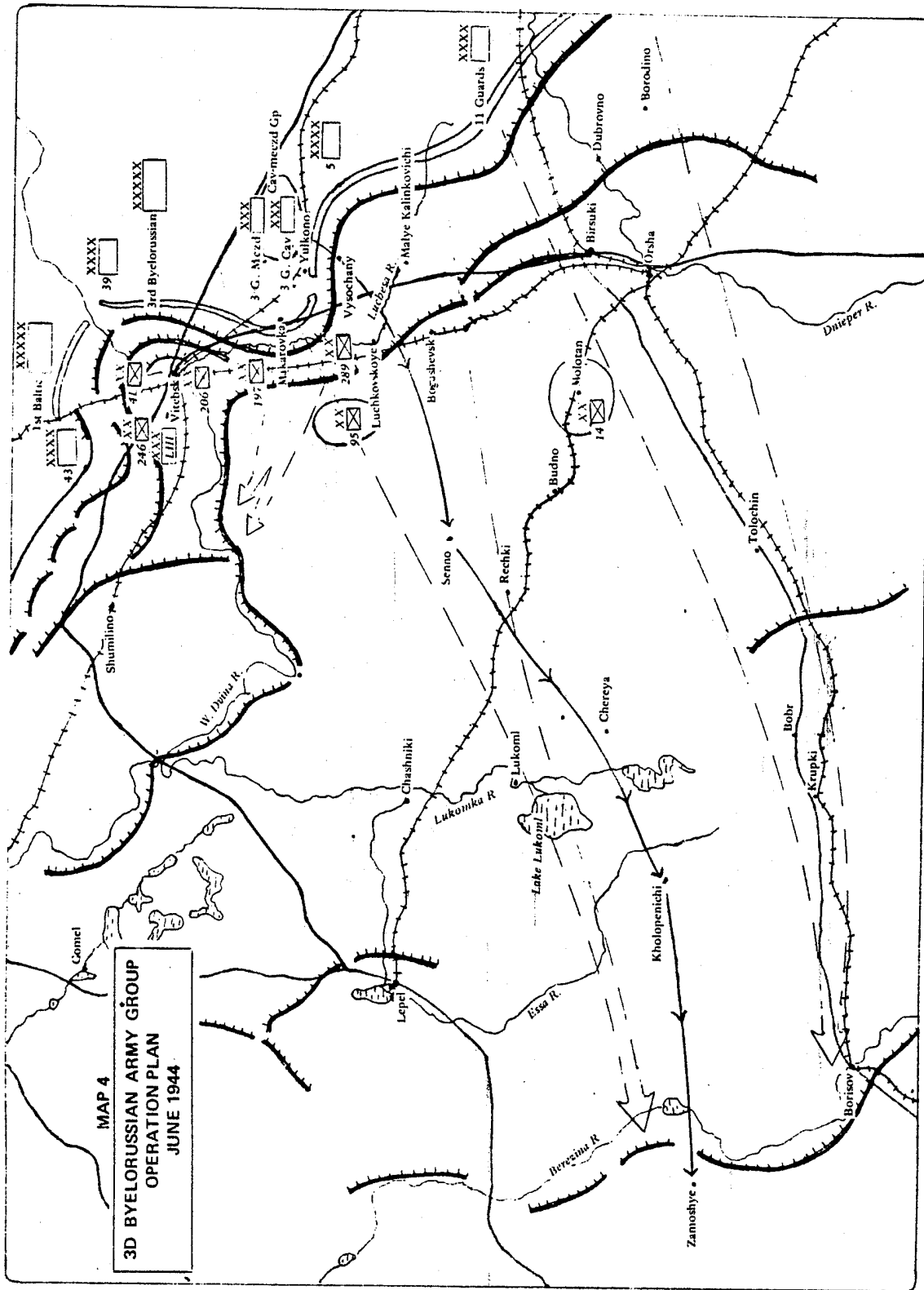
Subsequently, the 3d and the 1st Byelorussian Army Groups were to advance in a pincer movement toward Minsk to encircle the main forces of the German Fourth Army. Then, expanding the frontage of the offensive, the Soviet forces were to advance to the western boundaries of the USSR, liberating all of Byelorussia and parts of Lithuania and Latvia (Map 4).

The offensive was to be actively supported by partisans, whose task was to disorganize the German tactical and operational rear, disrupt the movements of the reserves, and keep the Soviet Supreme Headquarters informed by radio about German posture and movements.

In Byelorussia the front line ran 15 to 60 kilometers east of Polotsk, Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, and Bobruysk and further along the Pripyet River to the vicinity of Kovel. In that area, German Army Group Center and the flank formations of neighboring army groups had all together 1,200,000 troops (including logistical units) formed in 63 divisions and three brigades. There were 9,500 field guns and mortars, and 900 tanks and assault guns. The German ground forces were supported by about 1,350 aircraft.*

* History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-45, (Moscow, 1974) p. 26.





MAP 4
 3D BYELORUSSIAN ARMY GROUP
 OPERATION PLAN
 JUNE 1944

The Germans had built several defense zones, the last at a distance of 250-270 kilometers from the front line. The fortifications were particularly dense near Vitebsk, Orsha, and Bobruysk.

The four Soviet army groups had more than 1,430,000 effectives, 166 divisions, 12 tanks and motorized corps, 21 infantry brigades, one independent tank brigade, and one independent motorized brigade. These forces had 31,700 guns and mortars, 5,200 tanks and self-propelled guns, and about 5,000 aircraft. In addition, long-range aircraft, the Dnieper River Flotilla, and detachments of Byelorussian partisans were to take part in the operation. The partisan armies, about 143,000 strong, controlled some 60 per cent of the territory of Byelorussia.*

Mission of the III Guards Mechanized Corps

The III Guards Mechanized Corps commanded by Lieutenant General Victor T. Obukhov** took an active if not decisive part in the offensive operations of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group.

The corps, after heavy fighting at the Dnieper River late in 1943, was withdrawn from combat, assigned to the Supreme Headquarters Reserve, and ordered to the Kursk area for rest and replenishment. There it spent four months. Then, in March 1944 the corps was transferred to the Tula Tank Military Camp near the city of Tula for further extensive training.

Shortly after 20 May 1944 General Obukhov received an oral order from the Commander of the Soviet Armor and Mechanized Troops, Marshal Ya.N. Fedoranko, to move his corps to the front, where it would be attached to the 3d Byelorussian Army Group. Troops and equipment were to travel by rail to the new assembly area in the woods near Velino, Tishino, and Katyn, some 35 to 40 kilometers west of Smolensk. (See Order of Battle, Figure 2.)

Immediately after receiving the order the corps commander ordered his staff to furnish him with exact figures showing the corps's strength in personnel, equipment, and arms. The Corps Chief of Staff, Colonel G.S. Sidorovich, reported that the III Guards Mechanized Corps had 16,090 effectives, including 1,952 officers, 5,162 NCOs, and 8,976 men. Two thirds of the force (10,766) had had previous combat experience, and 2,344 were holders of various decorations.

* S.S. Lototskiy, et al., The Soviet Army (Moscow, 1971), pp. 221-222.

** Obukhov was born in 1898 in Nikolsk Village, Orenburg Oblast, in a Cossack family. He volunteered for the Red Army in January 1918, and was assigned to the 1st Soviet Cossack Regiment. He took a very active part in the Civil War. In 1920 he fought in Turkestan. In 1934 he graduated from the Frunze Academy. In 1941 he was transferred from cavalry to tank troops. At the start of the Soviet-German War Obukhov commanded the 26th Tank Division of the XX Tank Corps near the western border. He was wounded in the fall of 1941, but returned to the front in January 1942. In January 1943 he was deputy commander of a tank army, and later that year became Commander of the III Guards Mechanized Corps. Communist Party member from September 1918, Obukhov was very active politically.

Figure 2

III GUARDS MECHANIZED CORPS

Order of Battle

7th Guards Mechanized Brigade (Colonel M.I. Rodionov)
(includes 43d Guards Tank Regiment)

8th Guards Mechanized Brigade (Colonel S.D. Kremer)
(includes 44th Guards Tank Regiment)

9th Guards Mechanized Brigade (Colonel P.I. Goryachev)
(includes 45th Guards Tank Regiment)

35th Guards Tank Brigade (Major General A.A. Aslanov)

1823d SP Assault Guns Regiment (Lt. Col. V.V. Yablokov; SU-85mm assault guns)

1510th TD Artillery Regiment (Maj. G.G. Shukakidze; SU-76mm assault guns)

129th Mortar Regiment (Maj. S.S. Barvinskiy)

743d TD Artillery Battalion (Cpt. Bexverkhniy)

62d Independent Engineer Battalion (Maj. G.G. Gotsiridze)

334th Multiple Rocket Launcher Battalion (Maj. A.D. Toruzayev)

1st Independent Motorcycle Battalion (motorcycles and 10 light tanks)

1831st SP Assault Gun Regiment (Lt. Col. A.K. Kulikov; SU-152mm assault guns)

1705th AAA Regiment

11th Independent Signal Battalion

79th Repair and Maintenance Battalion

554th Medical Battalion

28th POL Transport Company

Chemical Company

Aviation Section

161st Field Bakery

Attached:

326th Mortar Regiment

There were 3,589 Communist Party members, and 3,705 YCL members (Communist Youth Organization). There were 10,448 Russians, 3,264 Ukrainians, and 225 Byelorussians; the rest came from various other areas of the USSR. The corps arms and equipment included*:

Tanks and self-propelled assault guns	196
Armored cars and armored carriers	99
Guns and howitzers:	
76mm	41
85mm	12
57mm	40
37mm (AA)	18
Mortars 107mm and 120mm	54
Mortars 82mm	100
Multiple rocket launchers M-13	8
Antiaircraft machine guns	56
Heavy machine guns	139
Light machine guns	382
Submachine guns	5,570
Rifles	5,894
Radio sets	169
Cars	66
Trucks	1,227
Special vehicles	163
Tractors	5
Motorcycles	200

The corps staff consisted of three main sections: operations (eight officers), intelligence (four officers), and signal (six officers), and several sub-sections, including cryptographic, administration, and personnel. All together there were 33 officers in the staff.**

General Obukhov and Colonel Sidorovich met with the chief political officer, Colonel A.F. Andreyev, and the deputy commander for combat, Major General D.N. Belyy, former commander of the 8th Mechanized Brigade, and acquainted them with the directives received from Marshal Fedorenko. In the course of the meeting the code officer brought in an additional directive from the headquarters of the tank and mechanized troops in Moscow, in which the new concentration area, along the Moscow-Minsk highway, was exactly defined.

* A.M. Samsonov, From the Volga to the Baltic (Moscow, 1973), p. 210.

** The standard Soviet mechanized corps in World War II had 17,400 men, in three mechanized infantry brigades, a tank brigade, 120mm mortar regiment, 122mm or 152mm self-propelled assault gun regiment, a self-propelled 85mm assault gun regiment, a 76mm gun regiment, a 45mm gun regiment, and reconnaissance, signal, engineer, and motorcycle battalions. A mechanized brigade had three rifle battalions, a tank regiment, mortar battalion, 76mm gun battalion, submachine gun company, reconnaissance company, engineer company, and anti-aircraft company and 3,743 men. A tank brigade, with 1,306 men, had three tank battalions, a submachine gun battalion, and antitank rifle, antitank gun, and anti-aircraft machine gun companies.

All railroad trains were to be unloaded at railroad stations, all 30 to 40 kilometers west of Smolensk.

General Obukhov directed his chief of staff to prepare plans for the move to the area, and gave him some guidelines. All tanks, track-laying vehicles, heavy equipment, ammunition and supplies, and part of the personnel were to be transported by rail to their destination on flatcars and in box cars. The wheeled vehicles, the staff, and the remaining troops would proceed on the roads along the assigned routes. Loading and unloading of railroad cars, and the entire regrouping, must be done in total secrecy under cover of darkness. Tanks and other equipment placed on the flatcars was to be thoroughly camouflaged. Along the routes of the wheeled columns the staff was to organize control points which would check the observance of light restrictions and the proper order of movement. The departure phase of the regroupment in the Tula area, south of Moscow, would be directed and controlled by a small operations task force headed by the Deputy Corps Commander, General Belyy. General Belyy was also to report daily progress to Marshal Fedorenko.

The first railroad shipment left for the new destination on 28 May and arrived on 31 May. The last shipment arrived on 14 June. On the average three to four shipments detrained daily at the Velino, Tishino, Lelekvinskaya, and Katyn stations.

In a conference with the commander of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group, Colonel General Ivan Kanilovich Chernyakhovskiy, on 31 May, General Obukhov reported on his corps's strength and readiness for combat. General Chernyakhovskiy cautioned about the extreme necessity of concealing the preparations from the enemy, making all movements, including training exercises, at night, and thoroughly camouflaging the assembly area.

To General Obukhov's question as to approximately how much time the corps had to get ready for combat and what mission it would have, Chernyakhovskiy replied that the concrete mission would be assigned later, and that for the time being training should concentrate on preparation for the corps operations during commitment to combat after the breakthrough was achieved by rifle divisions, and exploitation of the success in the operational depth of the German defense. The army group commander stressed that to the best of his knowledge the corps had had plenty of experience in this kind of operation. He informed General Obukhov that as soon as the corps had concentrated in the new area, he (Chernyakhovskiy) would tour the area to acquaint himself personally with commanders and staffs and to check on the readiness of the corps for the forthcoming offensive.

General Obukhov was ordered to keep in close touch with the Commander of the Armored Troops of the Army Group, Lieutenant General A.G. Rodin, and with the army group staff, and keep them informed about the troops' arrival, training, and needs.

After the meeting, General Obukhov and Colonel Andreyev reported to Lieutenant General A.P. Pokrovskiy, the Army Group Chief of Staff, to General Rodin, and to several staff officers, and discussed with them problems related to operational matters, organization, communications, and supply.

After return to his headquarters, General Obukhov summoned his chief of staff and heads of arms and services and informed them about the new directives. Then he instructed Colonel Sidorovich to prepare detailed instructions for the unit commanders which would reflect General Chernyakhovskiy's orders, and establish control procedures to assure full compliance.

In a very short time Colonel Sidorovich issued an order in the name of the corps commander, which included, among others, the following provisions:

- at once after detraining, all the arriving units should move their men and equipment without any delay to their designated wooded areas, where the equipment should be dispersed and thoroughly camouflaged;

- as soon as their forces arrived at the assembly area, commanders of brigades, regiments, and independent units should organize training for officers and men. The corps staff would issue special instructions with regard to training;

- all arms and equipment should be checked and repaired as necessary;

- troops should be lodged in mud huts, dug-outs, and trucks;

- to ensure concealment of the concentration, all movement outside the wooded area during the day was prohibited. Inside the assembly areas of brigades and independent units, only individual vehicle movements were permitted and only at night, strictly observing the blackout;

- building campfires was forbidden;

- to ensure adherence to rules and regulations and to ward off any sneak attacks by German scouts, security detachments would be organized in all units;

- political officers at all levels would conduct thorough explanatory and propaganda work among the troops;

- the corps staff would organize control of the execution of the above.

As it turned out, the corps was successful in concealing its arrival. German prisoners captured during the operation testified that their command did not anticipate the arrival of the III Guards Mechanized Corps.

In the afternoon of 11 June, the Chief of Staff of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group arrived at the headquarters of the III Guards Mechanized Corps, and, in general terms, informed the corps commander what his mission would be. General Chernyakhovskiy had decided to organize a mobile group composed of the III Guards Mechanized Corps and the III Guards Cavalry Corps, with Lieutenant General N.S. Oslikovskiy, Commander of the III Guards Cavalry Corps, in command.

The Mixed Cavalry-Mechanized Group was to be committed to combat in the zone of the Fifth Army, as soon as the army reached the Luchesa River. After its commitment at the Luchesa line, the mobile group would advance toward

Bogushevsk, Senno, and Kholopenichi, and no later than the sixth day of the operation would capture the crossing of the Berezina River south of Lake Palik, some 180 kilometers from the front line, and continue toward Pleshchenits.

The Fifth Army, under Lieutenant General N.I. Krylov, deployed in the northern sector of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group, was to attack with its right flank toward Bogushevsk and Senno, break through the German defenses in an 11.5 kilometer sector between Podnyvye and Vysochany with three corps (nine divisions), and, in cooperation with the Eleventh Guards Army, destroy the German Bogushevsk - Orsha forces. It was intended to reach the Berezina River on the tenth day of the offensive. Thus, General Pokhrovskiy pointed out, the rate of advance of the Mechanized Corps would be almost twice that of the rifle formations. The average rate of advance for the Fifth Army was to be between 12 and 16 kilometers per day.

After reaching the western bank of the Luchesa River, the Fifth Army would secure a zone through which the Mixed Cavalry-Mechanized Group would be committed, in the Luchkovskaya sector. The group would have to fight alone almost all the time, without contact with the Fifth Army troops. It would be the first of the Soviet forces to make an assault crossing of the Berezina River and fight its way to the rear of the main German forces deployed in the Orsha-Minsk sector.

On 12 June, Marshal A.M. Vasilevskiy, a representative of the Supreme Command at the army group headquarters, summoned Generals Obukhov and Oslikovskiy to the headquarters of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group. There Marshal Vasilevskiy, in the presence of Generals Chernyakhovskiy and Pokhrovskiy, and Lieutenant General M.I. Potapov, Special Assistant to Vasilevskiy, acquainted both corps commanders with the general strategic situation at the Soviet-German front, and then in great detail analyzed the missions assigned to them by the Commander of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group.

Toward the end of the meeting Marshal Vasilevskiy once more reminded General Obukhov how important it was to prepare his forces and equipment thoroughly for combat in the difficult marshy and wooded terrain and added: "If the entire plan of the operation is carried out on time, and you and your corps justify our hopes, then nothing is left for me to do but to congratulate you in advance with the Gold Star Medal of Hero of the Soviet Union."*

General Obukhov became very embarrassed and countered with a statement that he was not fighting for the title of "Hero," but for the fatherland, and that this was his duty as a Communist. However, Vasilevskiy asked him not to be so modest, and again wished him good luck.

Next, General Obukhov received lengthy instructions from General Chernyakhovskiy and his chief of staff, dealing with the preparation of the corps for commitment to combat, cooperation with other units and formations taking part in the breakthrough, and the ways of securing the corps advance in operational depth. General Chernyakhovskiy ordered the corps to take up the initial attack position just before morning on 23 June, in the area of Ivankino, Broslav, Kozyulin, and

* Osvobozhdenye Byelorussii (Moscow, 1974), p. 591.

Kolsenikovo. Sunrise at that time of year would come at approximately 0420 and sunset at 2145. Twilight lasted virtually all night.

As soon as the meeting ended, General Obukhov called his chief of staff and ordered him to summon immediately to corps headquarters commanders of the brigades and independent units, commanders of the corps artillery and armor troops, chiefs of engineers, communication and rear services, and the chiefs of the operation and intelligence branches. When General Obukhov returned to his headquarters, all the summoned officers were already there.

General Obukhov informed those present about the mission received from the army group commander. He stressed that there was little time left, and that all the planning and preparations would have to be done under heavy pressure. To assure secrecy, no written orders were to be issued. The corps staff and the commanders of corps units were ordered to reconnoiter the routes of advance to the front line, and to organize combat cooperation and coordination of activities with the III Guards Cavalry Corps and the Fifth Army. The chief of intelligence was to receive from the Fifth Army whatever photo reconnaissance material there was on the German defense system, and distribute it to the brigades and other units. Since the corps would be operating on its own at such great depth in the enemy's rear area, special attention was to be paid by the staff to preparing plans for defense against counterattacks while continuing the assigned offensive activities.

The chief of the rear services reported that the corps artillery had two units of fire on hand, and the tanks three units. The fuel supply consisted of the following: gasoline KB-70, three to four refuelings; gasoline for vehicles, 2.7 refuelings; diesel fuel, 2.6 refuelings. Food rations were on hand for 14 days.*

The chief of intelligence first reported that all his information on the enemy came from the intelligence branches of the army group and the Fifth Army. German defenses in front of the Fifth Army had been constructed well in advance and constituted a well fortified, deeply echeloned defense system extending through thickets, forests, and marshes. The first defense zone was about six kilometers deep and consisted of two to three positions, depending on the terrain, each with three lines of trenches, the first one along the western bank of the Luchesa River. All villages and towns in both defense zones, as well as to the rear of the second, were organized as resistance centers, the most formidable of them being the town of Bogushevsk. In front of the first defense line there was continuous deep barbed wire and antipersonnel and anti-tank minefields.

In addition to the task of breaking through a heavily fortified defense zone, the Fifth Army at the start of the attack would also have to make an assault crossing of the Sukhodrovka River, the Ordezhanka River, and later that same day, eight to nine kilometers beyond the front, the Luchesa and Serokortinka Rivers. On the second day of the offensive the Army was to cross the Obolyanka River, as well as numerous muddy streams and marshes.

* A.M. Samsonov, Ot Volgi do Baltiki (Moscow, 1973).

According to information which was being verified, German forces deployed in the zone of advance of the Fifth Army were composed of the 299th Infantry Division and the 456th Infantry Regiment of the 256th Infantry Division, three reserve infantry and two panzer battalions, one assault gun battalion, and thirteen artillery and two mortar battalions.

Facing the Fifth Army the Germans had concentrated 324 105mm and 155mm guns, 170 mortars, and 36 six-barreled rocket launchers, making an average of 21.2 barrels per kilometer of frontage. In addition they had about 30 tanks and several APCs. Tactical reserves--the 528th Infantry Regiment (minus one battalion) and several special battalions--were deployed some four to six kilometers from the front line, part in the area of Savchenki, Gorovatka, and Shnitki, and the rest in the second defense zone.

Operational reserves were composed of two infantry divisions and one infantry regiment (350th Infantry Regiment of the 221st Infantry Division, defending Bogushevski). One more division, the 14th Infantry Division (minus one regiment deployed in the Bogushevsk area where the headquarters of the German VI Army Corps was located) was in the Senno area. However, these forces were actively engaged in combat against the Senno Partisan Brigade (Commander V.V. Leonov). Thus, it was doubtful that this division could be committed to combat against advancing Soviet troops.

The German 95th Infantry Division was deployed in the Lepel area with its strength concentrated toward the northeast toward the German Vitebsk Group, which was not in the Fifth Army sector. The division was pinned down by partisan brigades of the Polotsk-Lepel group.

As the Soviet Fifth Army prepared to attack it had a superiority over the Germans of 3 to 1 in manpower, 24 to 1 in machine guns, 5 to 1 in mortars, 2.5 to 1 in antitank guns, 7.4 to 1 in artillery over 76mm, 5.4 to 1 in rockets, and 5.6 to 1 in tanks and self-propelled guns. Soviet artillery and mortars were deployed at an average density of 112 per kilometer on the whole front and 200 per kilometer in the breakthrough sector. Tanks were assigned on an average 25 per kilometer, and 35-40 per kilometer in the breakthrough sector.

After answering a number of questions, the chief of intelligence advised that late in the evening a detailed briefing on the German deployment strength and defenses would be held in the corps headquarters for intelligence officers of brigades and independent units.

In the early morning of 13 June General Obukhov, with the chief of the corps operations branch, commanders of corps artillery and armor, deputy chief of communications, and a small group of staff officers, left for the headquarters of the Fifth Army, to discuss with General Krylov problems of cooperation and how the Fifth Army would secure the commitment of the mechanized corps to combat. The problems of supporting the corps during the advance in operational depth should also be considered.

Generals Krylov and Obukhov reviewed all the problems in general terms, agreed on the way the commitment of the corps and its support should be handled, and left the details to be worked out by both staffs.

Later in the day General Obukhov received the representative of the First Air Army, with whom he discussed all aspects of air support. The attack of the Fifth Army was to be supported by the 111th Fighter Air Corps, the 3d Guards Bomber Division, the 213th Bomber Air Division, and the 311th Guards Division. Some of these units would support the commitment of the III Mechanized Corps.

On 14 June General Chernyakhovskiy ordered the corps to advance to the assembly area in the forest near the village of Una, northwest of Liozno, some 15 to 20 kilometers from the front line, and concentrate there toward the morning of 16 June.

General Obukhov was confident that his forces could march to the new area (a distance of 75 to 90 kilometers) in two nights, along two routes, and reported this to the army group commander. Chernyakhovskiy agreed with his estimate, and General Pokhrovskiy issued relevant orders to make sure that the roads would be cleared of all other troops.

On the order of the corps commander, the corps staff prepared all the necessary directives for the subordinate units, organized control points along the way, and ordered the commander of the 62d Guards Engineer Battalion, Major Gotsiridze, to maintain the roads for the march. In the new assembly area, especially delegated officers from brigades and independent units were to lead the arriving troops to their concentration areas.

The move was executed during the nights of 14/15 and 15/16 June, which happened to be very dark, unusual at that time of year. The corps marched in a well dispersed formation. All tanks and vehicles moved without lights.

After reaching the new destination, commanders of brigades and independent units reported in person to the corps commander about the march and about their new deployment. There had been no complications, and all men and equipment arrived safely. (Later it was learned that despite many reconnaissance flights the Germans did not detect the corps movements.)

On 16 June General Chernyakhovskiy, accompanied by Lieutenant General Rodin, Lieutenant General Oslikovskiy, the representative of the First Air Army, and several staff officers, inspected the corps. Generals Chernyakhovskiy and Obukhov visited a number of units and checked on troop performance. Then the final arrangements for coordination of activities of the III Guards Mechanized and III Guards Cavalry Corps were made, and the problems of air support during the commitment to combat of the Mixed Mobile Group were clarified.

After the departure of the army group commander, General Obukhov issued several orders reflecting General Chernyakhovskiy's instructions. Subordinate commanders were ordered to complete all the preparations for the offensive. All the arms and equipment had to be checked and re-checked to make sure that they were in perfect order. The corps staff was to send out to all the units maps, aerial photographs, and other documents needed for the conduct of the battle. All staffs and commanders were instructed not to write any orders with regard to the commitment of the corps to combat, but to issue them orally.

So that all officers would be acquainted with the routes they were to take from the corps assembly area to the front line, General Obukhov ordered the

brigade commanders to organize a thorough program of reconnaissance of the area by all combat officers down to platoon commanders. To conceal its purpose they were to be told they were surveying areas of potential corps counter-attacks. Officers were to change their tank uniforms and insignia to infantry uniforms, in order not to arouse the suspicion of any German observers. They were to go as close as possible to the front lines in order to see for themselves as far as they could in the direction the attack was to proceed.

On 19 June General Obukhov received a coded message from General Chernyakovskiy, ordering him to advance during the nights of 21/22 and 22/23 June to the departure area for commitment to combat. This area was located in the woods 5-10 kilometers behind the front line. From there the corps would be committed to the battle in the sectors of the LXXII and LXV Rifle Corps.

At the same time the corps finally received its exact mission. (See map 4) The III Guards Mechanized Corps was to be ready at a given signal to enter the breakthrough zone in the Zavorotye-Vysochany sector and advance along two routes in the general direction of Shnitki-Strigi-Senno: a northern route through Ivankino, Buraki, Osinovka, Luchkovskaya, Moshkany, and Meleshki; the other route through Krynki railroad station, Vysochany, Luchesa, Kichino, Strigi, Studenka, and Senno.

The initial objective, in cooperation with the III Guards Cavalry Corps, was to destroy the opposing German forces and capture Bogushevsk. By the end of the first day of the operation, the corps was to seize Molchany and Melkovitse. The forward elements were to advance to the line Moshkany-Strigi.

After receiving and reviewing the order, General Obukhov and his chief of staff made the necessary changes and corrections in the old directives, and then summoned all brigade commanders and commanders of independent units and their deputies for political affairs to headquarters. Orders were issued to these commanders to advance with their units during the nights of 21/22 and 22/23 June to the line of departure along three routes already reconnoitered and known to the brigade commanders. By 0300 on 23 June all combat elements of the corps were to be ready to enter the breakthrough sector. Specific directives would be issued by the chief of staff shortly.

From the line of departure, General Obukhov ordered the corps to advance along two routes as specified in the army group order. Column No. 1, on the right, northern route, would be headed by the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade, and followed by the 7th Guards Mechanized Brigade. Column No. 2--which would make the main effort--would advance along the left, southern route, headed by the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade, and followed by the 35th Guards Tank Brigade. The first echelon brigades would each send out in front a forward detachment composed of reinforced mechanized battalions. In addition, commanders of the 8th and 9th Guards Mechanized Brigades would organize special groups, which would advance with the combat formations of the LXXII and LXV Rifle Corps. These groups were to be in constant touch with their respective brigades and assist and lead them during the advance through the breach in the German defenses.

The corps commander directed that officers down to the battalion commander level should be informed of the corps mission.

Next, General Obukhov and Colonel Sidorovich answered a series of questions raised by various commanders. At the same time the chief of operations prepared the final orders and instructions, and the chief of intelligence issued the latest data on German forces.

On 20 June, Colonel Andreyev held a short meeting with deputies for political affairs of brigades and independent units, during which he raised the problem of troop morale and the role of the political officers in the forthcoming battle. With General Obukhov's permission he ordered political meetings organized in all the units in the evening of 22 June to explain to the troops the importance of their mission and responsibility for its fulfillment.

To assure reliable, uninterrupted command during the impending highly mobile operation, General Obukhov organized three command groups. He would be on the axis of the main effort with a small operations group which included the deputy chief of the operations branch, the chief of intelligence (or his deputy, depending on the situation), the commander of corps artillery, representative of the supporting air force, all with one or two officers, and liaison officers from the brigades, the III Guards Cavalry Corps, and the army group.

The Deputy Corps Commander for Combat, General Belyy, with a small group of officers, was to be on the secondary axis of advance. Colonel Sidorovich was to set up the corps command post behind the brigades of the first echelon.

It was also foreseen that in case the brigades and operations groups should break away from the corps command post for a considerable distance, and lose communication with it, an intermediate communications group would begin operating between the operations task force of the corps commander and the corps command post. This intermediate group, headed by Major Shchukin, corps Deputy Chief of Operations, would be equipped with two radios, one for communications with the army group, the other for communication with the corps commander and the staff. This group was to receive all the reports from the field, especially when General Obukhov and the staff were on the move, and secure reliable communication with the brigades in case the link between the corps and the brigade should fail.

General Obukhov decided that, except for unusual circumstances, all command operation groups and the corps staff would assemble each night at a designated spot to discuss the developments and issue orders for the next day.

Liaison officers from the corps were sent to the army group, the Fifth Army, and the III Guards Cavalry Corps. Liaison officers were to come at least twice daily to the corps command post to brief the chief of staff on the situation and deliver directives and instructions.

Shortly before 0300 on 23 June the brigade commanders reported to Colonel Sidorovich that their brigades had arrived at the line of departure area on time and were ready for combat. Upon receiving this report, General Obukhov reported to General Chernyakhovskiy and General Oslikovskiy about his troops' readiness. At approximately the same time, the Political Branch of the Corps delivered to all units an appeal issued by the Army Group Military Council aimed at inspiring the men. The appeal was read to the troops by sub-unit commanders or their deputies.

The Offensive (See Maps 5 and 6)

At 1625 on 22 June, after a 25 minute artillery barrage, the forward battalions of the Fifth Army assaulted German positions along the entire army front. The main attack was made on the right by the LXXII and LXV Rifle Corps. On the left, the XLV Rifle Corps in a secondary attack advanced on a front of 12 kilometers. The objective was to cross the Sukhodorovka River, capture a bridgehead, and secure convenient jump-off positions for the army's main attack to follow. By nightfall the forward battalions had fulfilled their mission. In the LXXII Corps sector, the 63d Rifle Division took Shepechino and the northern part of Staroboblye, occupying the first and second German trenches, and in several places the third trench as well, advancing two to three kilometers. The 277th Rifle Division took Semashkovo and Hill 150. In the zone of the LXV Rifle Corps, the 371st Rifle Division reached Mekhaniki and the 97th Rifle Division reached the grove one and a half kilometers beyond Vysochany.

During the night of 22/23 June the first echelon of the Fifth Army took up jump-off positions on the western bank of the Sukhodorovka River, as close as possible to the German line, and stood ready for the breakthrough assault in the Zavorotyie area.

At about 0400 on 23 June General Obukhov, accompanied by his commanders of corps artillery and armor, the chiefs of his operations and intelligence branches, chief of engineers, deputy chief of communications, and several other officers, arrived at the OP of the Fifth Army, located on a hill one kilometer north of the Vysokoye settlement, about 1.4 kilometers from the German positions. From there Obukhov could observe the breakthrough operation and be constantly in close personal touch with General Krylov.

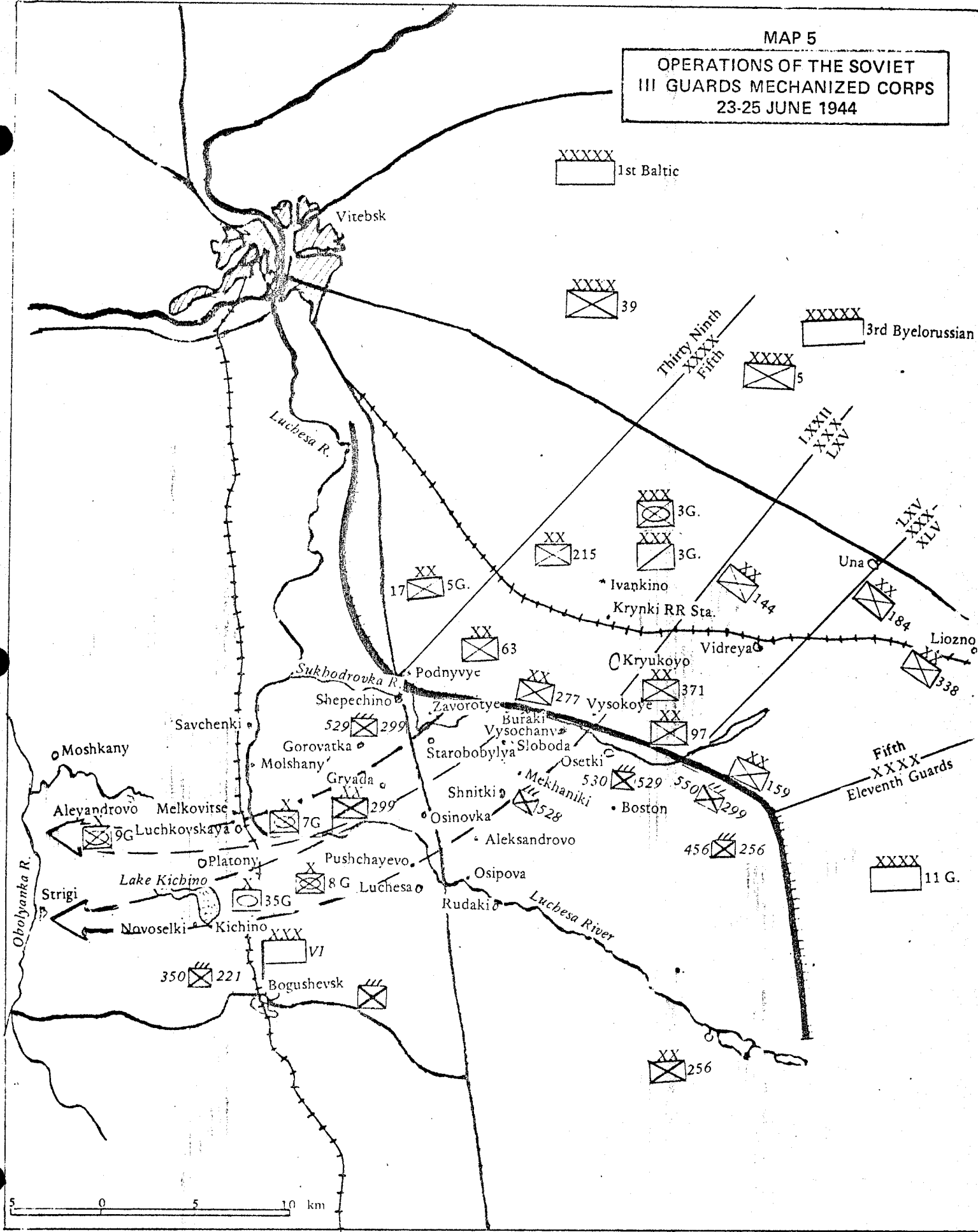
At the same time, following General Obukhov's previously issued directives, the commanders of the 7th and 9th Guards Mechanized Brigades went to the OP of the LXXII Rifle Corps (Commander Major General A.I. Kazartsev) on Hill 180.9, close to the OP of the Fifth Army. Commanders of the 8th Guards Mechanized and 35th Tank Brigades went to the OP of the LXV Rifle Corps (Commander Major General G.N. Berekrestov).

General Obukhov made it clear beforehand that all his officers who were observing the combat from rifle formation OPs should behave unobtrusively, keeping quiet so that they would not hinder the generals and officers of the Fifth Army in their work. He stressed that they were observers only, whereas for General Krylov and his men the "hot day" had already started.

The artillery and air preparation started at 0500 on 23 June. When it was over, the infantry and the supporting tanks jumped off. The German defenders offered fierce resistance. The troops advanced slowly, forced to fight for each dugout and trench. By about 1200, units of the Fifth Army had advanced about five kilometers into the German first defense zone.

In the afternoon General Obukhov was summoned to the OP of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group. There, Marshal Vasilevskiy asked him again about the readiness of the corps. Obukhov reported that the corps was ready to go and could move behind the infantry into the breach at any time. Units of the corps

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first echelon, which were hidden at night in deep ravines, had now formed in columns on the roads. Vasilevskiy, after reviewing the latest situation reports from the Fifth Army and the neighboring armies, advised the army group commander that the time was ripe to move the Cavalry-Mechanized Mixed Group into the breach. Hence, General Chernyakhovskiy ordered the group to advance through the breach, and to be prepared to enter combat as soon as the rifle formations reached the Luchesa River. Then Marshal Vasilevskiy turned to Obukhov and stressed again that, while fighting on its own, it was most important for the corps not to slow down the advance in order to engage in combat with small and insignificant German troops. Instead it should bypass them and advance rapidly into the enemy's rear area.

At once General Obukhov sent a pre-coded signal to the brigade commanders by radio, and the brigades started to move. The corps commander returned to his OP. Before long he started receiving the first reports from his brigades. The conditions in the area through which they were passing were highly unfavorable. Roads were damaged, bridges destroyed, and it was raining.

Toward evening the first echelon divisions of the LXXII and LXV Rifle Corps completed the breakthrough of the first defense zone, advancing 10 to 11 kilometers. Meanwhile, the XLV Rifle Corps had by this time taken Boston. However, the Fifth Army had not reached the Luchesa River and was still unable to create favorable conditions for the commitment of the mobile group. To speed up the advance the army commander ordered the LXXII and LXV Rifle Corps commanders to commit their second echelon divisions, the 215th Rifle and 144th Rifle respectively, at Luchkovskaya and Luchesa.

The infantry with its direct support tank units continued to fight all night, but by morning of the 24th they were still unable to secure a crossing adequate for the mechanized corps.

Meanwhile the III Guards Mechanized Corps was also having its own difficulties in moving forward over the crowded roads. It could not pass through the combat deployment of the infantry and was following it. Being aware of the situation, General Oslikovskiy called General Obukov in the evening on 23 June and ordered him as of 0400 24 June to take up a new jump-off position farther southeast in the areas of Sloboda, Staroboblye, Osinovka, Aleksandrovo, Mekhaniki and Vysochany.

The corps commander, through his chief of staff, issued the necessary orders, and the brigades started to move to the designated areas. The staff organized strict control of the movement. Along the routes traffic control posts were set up, and liaison officers were sent to the new deployment zone to meet the arriving units.

The redeployment of the corps, which took place in the area of the former German first defense zone, was not easy. Because of the marshy and wooded terrain, the corps could advance only on the roads, which already were totally choked with various elements of the Fifth Army moving westward and trying not to drop far behind the forward units. Serious jams occurred at crossroads and stream crossings. To make the situation even worse, the Germans repeatedly bombed and shelled the roads and concentrations of Soviet troops.

In view of these difficulties, the corps did not arrive in the jump-off area until about 0700 on 24 June.

At 1000 on 24 June General Chernyakhovskiy summoned General Obukhov to his OP and asked his opinion as to whether or not the time was right to commit his corps to combat. Obukhov answered that he believed that the situation was advantageous. Whatever the decision might be, he reported, the corps was ready for action.

This was the answer Chernyakhovskiy wanted to hear, and he ordered the corps to move forward. Exactly at 1100 General Obukhov gave the signal, and at once the corps started to advance.

At this point General Obukhov asked his Deputy Chief of Intelligence, Senior Lieutenant I.L. Shamis, to report on the latest changes in the German deployment. Shamis reported that he had sent out several intelligence teams the day before to the forward rifle formations. They were to report periodically to the intelligence branch about the situation. By the time the corps jumped off these teams were to have infiltrated deep into the enemy rear and reported on the movement of German reserves. However, the information received was vague and unclear. Thus Shamis asked for and received permission to advance with the forward elements and personally report about the situation.

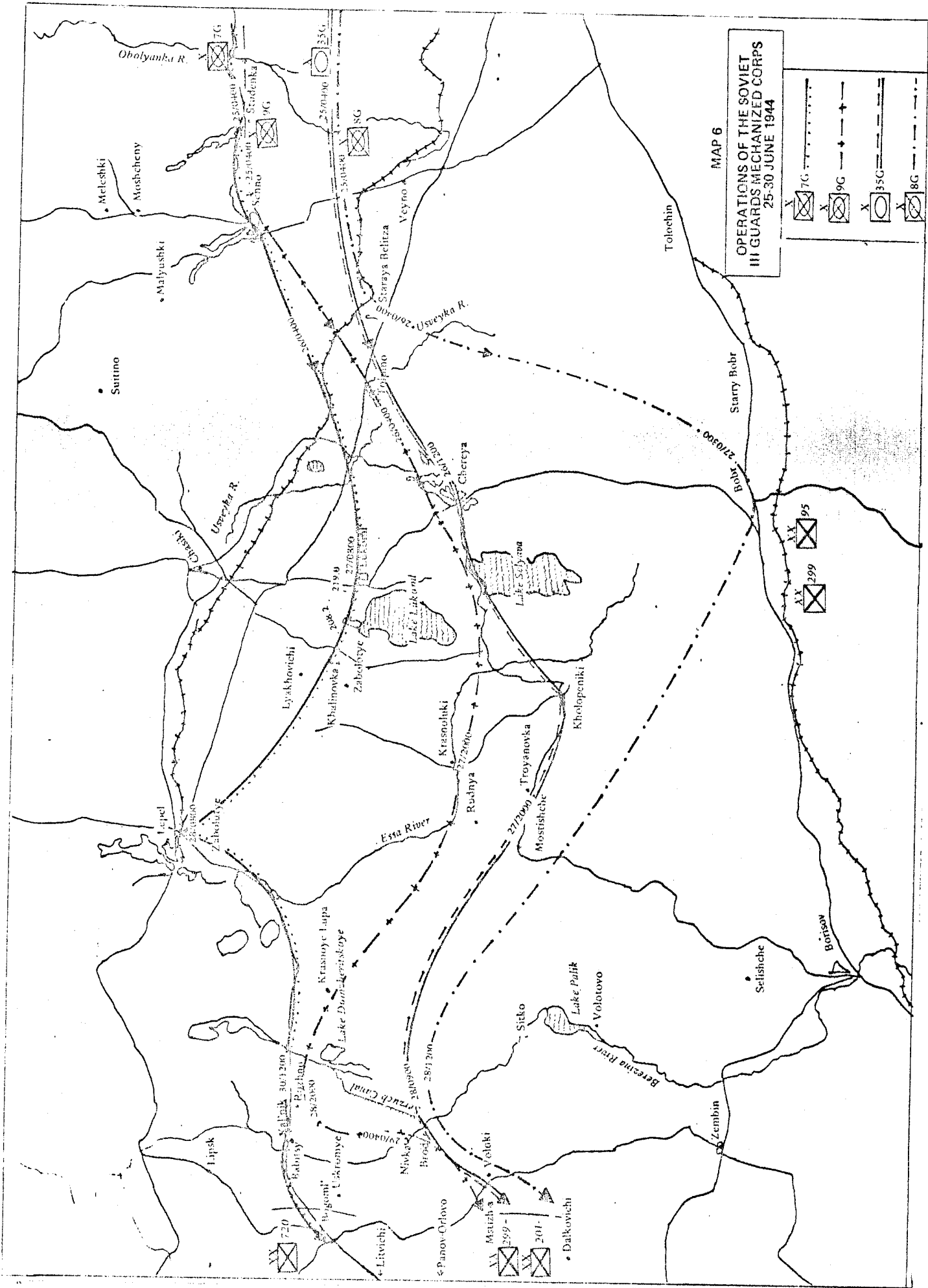
General Baryshev, Commander of Corps Artillery, who had just arrived at the corps commander's OP, reported that once more he had defined precisely to all of his subordinates the artillery's mission in support of the corps's commitment to battle, including matters of coordination with the artillery of the Fifth Army.

Upon moving forward, the mechanized brigades followed the 63d Division at Luchkovskaya. The 8th Mechanized and 35th Tank Brigades were to cross at Luchesa, but the crossing was still not ready. Therefore, General Oslikovskiy ordered the 8th Mechanized and 35th Tank Brigades to shift to a crossing point at Osipova. However, when they arrived they found that the 6th Guards Cavalry Division was crossing there. (Someone had neglected to switch the cavalry.)

The report of the confusion soon reached Major M.I. Semenov, Deputy Chief of the Operations Branch, who was in charge of collecting information from the field. On receiving his report, General Obukhov immediately called General Oslikovskiy. At this General Oslikovskiy shifted the cavalry to a ford southwest of Osipova, giving the mechanized and tank brigades the right of way.

During the afternoon of the 24th, the rifle divisions finally began to make faster progress, having broken through the main German defenses. The 63d and 277th Rifle Divisions in particular were far ahead. By evening of the 24th the 63d, in cooperation with the 17th Rifle Division of the right-hand neighboring Thirty-ninth Army, reached Moshkany. On the left, the 277th Rifle Division crossed the railroad and began to pass south of Lake Kichino.

In the evening of 24 June Colonel Sidorovich reported to General Obukhov that according to the latest reports the brigades had finally passed the rifle formations at the Obolyanka River, some 20-21 kilometers from the old front line.



At 2130 Major Semenov informed the corps commander and the chief of staff that at 2100 on 24 June the forward battalions had made contact with the enemy.

During the night of 24/25 June a stream of reports arrived from the 8th and 9th Guards Mechanized Brigades. General Obukhov, who had not slept at all the previous night, had only a few hours of sleep that night, often interrupted by urgent messages from the field.

On the main line of advance, the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade easily crossed the Luchesa River, passed advance elements of the 27th Rifle Division, and engaged German forces. The brigade's main force was preceded by the forward detachment, made up of the 3d Motorized Battalion (Commander Major I.I. Kukurchenko). With the forward detachment were the 2d Company of the 44th Guards Tank Regiment (Regiment Commander, Lieutenant Colonel A.L. Bondarenko) and assault guns of the 1510th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment (Commander, Major G.G. Shuviakidze).

At first the advance was uneventful. Soon, however, German resistance intensified, and late in the evening of 24 June the fight assumed a protracted character. The forward detachment became engaged in heavy combat for the village of Kichino, where the Germans evidently intended to stop the Soviets. The riflemen of the 3d Motorized Battalion dismounted and deployed for the assault.

The German defense, which ran along the railroad line from Platony to Kichino to Novoselki, had been well organized. The Germans had built a system of trenches reinforced with earth-and-timber pillboxes with clear fields of fire. The fight took place on terrain very unfavorable to the attackers. The road toward Kichino on the other side of the railroad line was a narrow corridor between two heights. On the right side of the road was Lake Kichino, and on the left side there were marshes. The width of the passable area between was no more than 200 meters, fully covered by German artillery, mortar and machine gun fire.

The first unit of the forward detachment to attack was the 2d Tank Company. Unable to deploy for combat, the company advanced in a column with large intervals between the tanks. The Germans opened fire and destroyed several tanks. The company commander was wounded. In the meantime the whole motorized battalion became engaged in combat, suffering heavy losses. As soon as the brigade commander, Colonel Kremer, arrived at the battlefield, he decided to throw his entire brigade into combat, and reported this to the corps. During the night, the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade, beating off fierce German counterattacks, took Kichino and advanced slowly. Later at night the brigade attacked and captured Novoselki and continued westward. German troops, under pressure of Kremer's Brigade, retreated toward Senno, some 75 kilometers from the initial front line.

Reports from the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade, advancing on the right, indicated that the situation in its sector had developed much more favorably. The brigade was supported by the 1823d Self-propelled Assault Gun Regiment. Reconnaissance elements spotted a gap in the German combat deployment between the 96th and 107th Infantry Divisions into which the forward detachment (Commander Lieutenant Colonel A.F. Sokolov) moved, at once followed by the entire brigade, thus departing from the original axis of advance. General Obukhov

approved this change of direction and suggested that it should be followed up by a bold maneuver and pursuit. He thought that if the brigade could swing around and enter Senno from the north, this action might well pre-terminate the successful outcome of the entire operation.

During the night the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade's fighting did not cease. The forward detachment of the brigade continued to pursue the retreating enemy. The Germans left behind small groups of submachine gunners and artillery as a covering force, but these troops were unable to offer serious resistance. By sunrise on 25 June, the brigade, after performing a wide enveloping maneuver, had advanced 45 kilometers and was approaching Senno, even before the retreating German columns arrived there.

General Obukhov was pleased with the reports. He asked his intelligence chief to bring him up to date on the German defense at Senno, and furnish all available information to Colonel Goryachev, Commander of the 9th Mechanized Brigade.

The intelligence officer reported that according to information received from the Partisans and prisoners captured during the night, the Senno garrison consisted of an infantry battalion reinforced with field artillery, three assault guns, two tanks, and one mortar battery. The Germans had turned Senno into a strongpoint. Along the roads leading to the village they had built earth-and-timber walls about 1.5 meters thick with embrasures for weapons. Around the town there were trenches and communication trenches, approaches to which were protected by mines and barbed wire. Inside the settlement, near the church, the Germans utilized stone and brick houses to construct an inner strongpoint well designed for all-around defense and for street combat. All roads leading to Senno from all directions were covered by artillery and mortar fire. The defense was facilitated by the fact that the terrain on both sides of all roads was marshy, forcing the Soviets to advance primarily on the roads.

During the morning hours of 25 June, General Obukhov received a series of reports about the assault on Senno, which started at daybreak. Participating in the assault were the forward detachment of the 9th Guards Infantry Brigade, reinforced by tanks of the 45th Guards Tank Regiment, two batteries of the 1823d Self-propelled Assault Gun Regiment (SU-85), and the brigade's artillery battalion. While it was still dark, tank units enveloped Senno and approached it from the south, east, and west. Shortly before dawn Soviet artillery and mortars plastered the Germans with fire. At the same time tanks and assault guns carrying submachine gunners launched an attack, quickly advanced and engaged the Germans in street fighting. The surprise attack supported by heavy artillery fire broke the German resistance. The town was taken during the morning hours. Two tank platoons cut the remaining routes of German retreat. Thus the entire garrison was destroyed.

At 1020 Colonel Goryachev reported that in the battle for Senno the Germans lost four Panthers, three light tanks, one artillery battery, up to 70 trucks, about 400 officers and men killed and wounded, and 26 taken prisoner. The brigade's losses consisted of 23 killed, 58 wounded, 12 trucks and one 57mm gun destroyed.*

* Osvobozhdenye Byelorussii (Moscow, 1974), p. 509.

At approximately the same time Colonel Kremer reported that his brigade had defeated the Germans near the Studenka settlement, and that the impact of the capture of Senno was reflected in a decrease in German resistance. In front of the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade the German forces had their routes of retreat cut off. The brigade was pressing its advance toward Staraya Belitsa and Bobr.

General Obukhov discussed the situation with Colonel Sidorovich and came to the conclusion that the capture of Senno by the 9th Brigade and the success of the 8th Brigade put the Germans in a very difficult position. He reported the situation and his views to General Chernyakhovskiy. The army group commander thereupon decided that in order to help the infantry formations which were advancing with great difficulties and encountering fierce resistance, and to increase their rate of advance toward Orsha and Borisov, part of the III Guards Mechanized Corps should strike toward the south, envelop the German forces, and fight through to the rear of the Germans, cutting railroad lines and highways. The rest of the corps was to accelerate its advance westward and widen its front.

Having carefully analyzed the army group commander's order and thoroughly studied the situation on the map, General Obukhov concluded that a quick and decisive action on the part of the brigades was imperative. Even the slightest delay might lead to failure. Thus he ordered the 7th Guards Mechanized Brigade to advance toward Lukoml and the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade toward Tolpino and Chereya. The 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade was to advance toward Obchuga and Bobr and cut the railroad line between Borisov and Orsha. For the time being, the 35th Guards Tank Brigade was to remain in reserve and protect the rear of the advancing mechanized brigades.

General Obukhov directed Colonel Sidorovich to delineate the new mission in exact terms and transmit it without any delay to the brigade commanders. Also, in cooperation with the corps artillery commander and the air force representative, he was to prepare a plan for artillery and air support and submit it to the corps commander for approval.

Before noon on 25 June, the commander of the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade reported that the main forces of the brigade, while passing through Senno, had come under heavy air attack. The town was burning. The brigade had suffered considerable losses in men and equipment. Many trucks were destroyed.

General Obukhov, realizing the importance of Senno as a communications center, instructed Colonel Sidorovich to transfer one or two AAA batteries there. He also directed Colonel Goryachev to speed up his advance toward Tolpino and Chereya.

The afternoon reports from the brigades indicated that all their elements were advancing faster than they had the day before. The commander of the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade reported that his brigade, after overcoming scattered resistance, was successfully advancing toward Staraya Belitsa and Bobr.

Messages from the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade showed that the brigade was constantly under heavy air attacks. The brigade commander asked for air cover. With its help the brigade continued westward and forced the Usveyka River not far from Tolpino. Toward the evening of 25 June Tolpino was taken,

but fierce air raids again caused heavy losses. It took the entire night of 25/26 June to restore the brigade's fighting efficiency.

The 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade, pursuing the retreating German troops, approached Staraya Belitsa during the night of 25/26 June and took it in the morning of 26 June.

Colonel Goryachev reported in the morning of 26 June that, after overcoming the effects of the heavy air strikes, individual units of the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade, led by the forward detachment, were continuing their advance westward. Taking advantage of the intervals between the air strikes, first to advance was the 1st Tank Company (Commander, Senior Lieutenant A.M. Zakhryapin) of the 45th Guards Tank Regiment. Close behind, the 1st Motorized Battalion under Captain Borisov was following on foot (their trucks had been destroyed the previous afternoon) in dispersed order. At 1215 General Obukhov received a radio message informing him that at 1200 Chereya was taken without a fight and the brigade was continuing to advance rapidly westward.

During the night of 26/27 June, based on a flow of encouraging reports received during 26 June from the III Guards Mechanized Corps, General Chernyakovskiy ordered General Obukhov to continue to press the attack, striking toward Lukoml, Krasnoluki, and Voloki, with the task of reaching the Berezina River, crossing it between Lipsk and Zembin, and capturing Litvichi, Panov Orlovo, and Dalkovichi, on the western bank of the river. The new mission called for cancellation of the advance toward the south and southwest. The corps would have to turn straight westward, in order to reach and cross the Berezina River on time on 28 June.

General Obukhov decided to commit the 35th Guards Tank Brigade to combat in the Chereya area, reinforced with the 129th Mortar Regiment, 334th Guards Multiple Rocket Launcher Battalion, 743d Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion, and two batteries of the 1705th AAA Regiment. The 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade, with the 1823d Self-propelled Assault Gun Regiment and one company of the 62d Guards Engineer Battalion attached, was to continue to advance from Chereya toward Rudnya, on the left of the 35th Guards Tank Brigade.

Thus, the corps commander switched the main effort of the corps from the axis of the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade to that of the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade.

To secure the right flank of the corps, General Obukhov ordered the commander of the 7th Guards Mechanized Brigade, supported by two battalions of the 326th Mortar Regiment, which had been attached to the corps for the period of the offensive, to capture the town of Lepel and hold it until the arrival of units of the 1st Baltic Army Group. The 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade was turned from the Bobr area northwest and ordered to push toward the Berezina River, which it was to cross near Brod.

While the corps commander was analyzing the situation and issuing orders to the brigades, the chief of intelligence informed him that according to the latest reports the corps was opposed by the German 299th, 95th, and 14th

Infantry Divisions, as well as small detachments of Vlasov forces.* It appeared that the Germans intended to withdraw to Lepel and Borisov, and take up defensive positions along the western bank of the Berezina River.

Earlier, at 2030 on 26 June, Colonel Kremer had reported that German tanks and infantry trying to cover the retreat of the panic-stricken 299th and 95th Infantry Divisions had counterattacked from the Bobr area. After repulsing the German attack, the forward detachment of the brigade engaged the Germans in the Staryy Bobr area. Early in the morning of 27 June the chief of staff of the 8th Brigade informed the corps staff that as of 0300 27 June Bobr was in Soviet hands. Soon afterward he reported that the brigade had cut the Minsk-Orsha highway. The Germans offered strong resistance. The brigade beat off five counterattacks, inflicting heavy losses on the Germans.

In the daily operation report to General Chernyakovskiy and General Oslikovskiy, General Obukhov, in addition to summing up the combat successes of the brigades, also emphasized that with the appearance of the corps units in the rear of the German forces the morale of the enemy troops had faltered. Large groups of Germans, demoralized by the fast moving mechanized corps, were trying at all costs to withdraw to the west by side roads. They represented no great danger to the corps, but still caused considerable inconvenience. There were also some close calls, one involving the corps commander and his staff.

Early in the morning of 26 June, while moving with the 9th Brigade not far from Chereya, the corps staff, including the corps commander with his operations group, was attacked by about two infantry regiments, some artillery, and 25-30 tanks, which were fighting their way from east to west. There were no combat troops with the staff column, except for ten light tanks of the 1st Motorcycle Battalion, which at once deployed for combat, together with the staff personnel.

In other circumstances, reported General Obukhov, the corps staff would have been totally destroyed, but in this case this did not happen. The Germans only cut the column in two and hurriedly, in an endless stream, poured through the breach. Captured prisoners testified that the group's main task had been to cross the road as quickly as possible and not to fight the Soviet troops. (After the incident the corps commander decided to keep the corps reserve with the corps staff.)

On the morning of 27 June, the main forces of the III Guards Mechanized Corps commenced a decisive drive toward the Berezina River. The corps staff had worked out detailed instructions and transmitted them to the brigades. Special emphasis was given to the organization and mission of the forward detachments, which were to push quickly forward, and at all costs capture the crossing of the Berezina River. The Chief of Intelligence was ordered to reconnoiter the river, using all possible means, including the Partisans.

* Vlasov, a former Soviet General, was captured by the Germans in 1942 and agreed to cooperate with them. He organized several units composed of conditionally released Soviet POWs who fought together with the Wehrmacht against the Soviets.

General Obukhov had ordered the corps to advance toward the Berezina River in three columns, with the 9th Guards Mechanized and the 35th Guards Tank Brigades in the center, making the main attack, the 7th Guards Mechanized Brigade on the right, and the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade on the left.

Soon after the start of the advance, Colonel Radionov, commander of the 7th Guards Mechanized Brigade, reported heavy enemy resistance to the west of Lukoml at Hill 219.0, defended by one battalion of the 210th Infantry Division, supported by artillery and mortars. At 1100 on 27 June elements of the brigade's 43d Guards Tank Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel H.K. Shalayev, and the 2d Motorized Battalion under Captain A.F. Alabushev, launched a bold attack against well-entrenched Germans and forced them to retreat. Despite heavy air strikes the brigade continued to advance toward its objective. The terrain was difficult, and the brigade had to cross many small streams on its way.

After reaching the area of the village of Utechye the forward detachment encountered strong German resistance at Hill 208.2, where a group of about 150 German troops lay in ambush. In a short but fierce battle the Germans were destroyed, and the forward detachment advanced to Kanilovka and Zabolotye, where it annihilated about one battalion of enemy troops.

The Germans offered extremely heavy resistance at the approaches to Lepel, where they had well-prepared fortifications around the bridge across the Essa River. The bridge and the western banks of the river were mined and strung with barbed wire.

During the night of 27/28 July Colonel Radionov prepared his brigade for an attack and reported to the corps that he had scheduled the assault for early in the morning.

At sunrise on 28 June the main forces of the brigade engaged the Germans at the outskirts of Lepel, attacking simultaneously from the northeast, east, and southwest. Despite a well organized defense system, the Germans were unable to offer prolonged resistance. The unexpected arrival of the brigade had so stunned the defenders that they did not even blow up the bridge. Tanks of the 43d Guards Tank Regiment which first broke into the town disorganized the German defenses, and the German troops, leaving behind equipment and heavy arms, turned in hasty flight. At 0800 Lepel was in Soviet hands.

Shortly afterward the brigade's chief of staff reported to the corps staff that during the fight for Lepel his brigade had killed 250 enemy troops and captured 107 prisoners. While waiting for the arrival of units from the 1st Baltic Army Group, the brigade took up defensive positions, remaining ready to advance to, and cross, the Berezina River east of Bogoml, and after that take Litvichi.

Meanwhile, in the morning of 27 June, the 1st Tank Battalion and a company of machine gunners of the 35th Guards Tank Brigade, had led the brigade's advance toward Brod. By the end of the day the forward detachment had taken Mostishche, and the brigade's main forces had reached Troyanovka.

At 0930 on 28 June General Aslanov reported that his forward detachment had crossed the Serguchesniy Canal and reached the Berezina River at about 0900.

There they found that the partisan brigade had commenced a covering operation along the entire west bank from Bogoml to south of Brod designed to prevent the Germans from interfering with the crossing. They were disrupting German communications and movement by blocking road junctions and defiles.

Later messages indicated that, immediately after reaching the Berezina, the forward detachment and a group of partisans who joined it during the advance started to prepare the crossing. As soon as the main forces of the brigade got to the river, some units started to cross it, using all available local materials. At the same time the brigade commander ordered the construction of a bridge.

As soon as the bridge was ready, General Aslanov crossed it first in a staff car, followed by a truck, an APC, and two towed antitank guns. However, when a tank started to cross behind them, the bridge collapsed under its weight. Submachine gunners forded the river, but all the trucks, tanks, and APCs of the brigade remained on the eastern bank.

This situation at the crossing caused General Obukhov considerable concern. He decided to investigate the situation personally, and started out at once for the crossing point. Realizing the urgency of crossing the river, and lacking standard crossing equipment, he ordered the brigade commander to sink two or three tanks in the middle of the Berezina and use them as bridge supports. This helped, but the construction still took a long time because German aircraft repeatedly attacked the crossing site.

Comment: Obukhov had lost no time in making his own examination of the problems being encountered at the river. The decision to sacrifice some tanks could not have been an easy one, since tanks were in short supply. Clearly he considered it of paramount importance to get his forces across the river and continue the pursuit of the retreating Germans. His decision and immediate action illustrate the aggressive, resourceful way General Obukhov led his corps.

While the bridge was under construction a few of the trucks of the submachine gun battalion and of the reconnaissance platoon forded the river. Then, when the bridge was finally ready, the brigade's staff, one tank platoon, and a few other units crossed. However, the remaining tanks were left on the east bank, in a wooded area two kilometers southwest of the settlement of Pristan, for the brigade had outrun its supply of fuel for them.

The 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade by 28 June had not encountered serious resistance. Toward the end of the day it concentrated near Rozhno. The forward detachment, advancing on foot, reached the Berezina River near Brod late that evening, not far from the place where the 35th Brigade was crossing.

Early in the morning of 29 June motorized units of the brigade forded the river and established a bridgehead on the western bank. German troops retreated to the dominating hills a few kilometers to the west, where they took up defensive positions and started to shell the bridge construction site near Nivka.

The corps commander ordered a speed up of bridge construction so that the main force of the corps might cross the river there and continue the advance.

Several reports from the 9th Guards Mechanized Brigade which reached the corps staff in the afternoon of 29 June were gloomy. At about 1200 engineers of the 62d Guards Engineer Battalion, assisted by motorized troops, finished the construction of the multispan bridge site. However, the crossing was hindered by German air strikes, and the brigade was repeatedly forced to disperse. About 40 bombers hit the area, destroyed the bridge, and caused many casualties. The brigade commander, Colonel Goryachev, suffered a concussion. The commander of the mortar battalion, Major A.V. Varrava, was severely wounded. A number of other officers were killed or wounded.

As soon as the bombers left, the engineers tried to repair damages, but the Luftwaffe returned a few hours later and again destroyed whatever had been repaired.

During 28 and 29 June the corps chief of engineers had reported frequently to General Obukhov about the difficulties the corps was facing trying to cross the Berezina River. In turn similar messages were sent by the corps to the army group. In his oral and written reports to General Chernyakhovskiy, General Obukhov stressed that when the corps reached the Berezina River on 28 June it did not have any crossing equipment at all. All permanent bridges in the area had been destroyed by the retreating Germans. The river itself could be reached only after crossing swamps several kilometers wide. To move the vehicles, heavy arms, and equipment across the river it had had to start building bridges from material available locally. The Luftwaffe made an all-out effort to prevent the corps from crossing. The corps lacked AAA means, and the air cover was inadequate. All the efforts of the engineers were in vain because the Luftwaffe quickly destroyed whatever they built. Forging the river with equipment and heavy arms was very difficult if not impossible, not only because of constant air strikes, but also due to the depth of the river. The most difficult situation was in the Babitsy-Uskromye sector, where the 9th Guards Mechanized and 35th Guards Tank Brigades were committed.

A more encouraging situation developed in the sector of the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade, advancing on the left flank of the Corps. The brigade reached the Berezina River in the Brod area on 28 June, and, despite Luftwaffe attacks, was able to build a bridge for trucks and tanks and cross the river with its main forces.

On 29 June Colonel Kremer reported the following to the corps commander:

1. Small groups of enemy infantry and some roaming tanks are withdrawing toward the south and southwest without offering any serious resistance. From 1400 to 2300 on 28 June the Luftwaffe bombed our crossing and combat deployment. In 45 sorties the enemy dropped 60 bombs.
2. Carrying out its mission, the brigade is crossing the Berezina River. By 1500 on 28 June it had reached Vintsevatava and captured Sumrachevo and Kamenitsa. Ten self-propelled SU-76 assault guns are in the area northwest of Brod.
3. My decision is to dismount the infantry and continue to carry out the mission.
4. Request air fighter cover of the crossing site. Badly in need of fuel, lubricants and ammunition.

Signed: Kremer*

* A.M. Samsonov, Ot Volgi do Baltiki (Moscow, 1973), p. 246.

In the morning of 29 June General Chernyakhovskiy sent the following order to General Obukov:

The forces of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group have concluded the first stage of the operation aimed at the deep breakthrough of the enemy defenses.

During the past five days five enemy infantry divisions have been annihilated and heavy losses inflicted on eight others.

In our sector, the enemy does not have any large reserves left. He tried to stop our advance with small isolated units. In view of this situation there is an opportunity to turn the initial success of the army group into an utter rout of the enemy. This task should, in the first place, be accomplished by mobile troops.

Our neighboring army groups have also won great victories. On the left the 1st Byelorussian Army Group has broken through enemy defenses and captured Osipovichi and Staryy Dorosh.

I order:

1. Commander of the III Guards Mechanized Corps: during 29 June to complete the crossing of the Berezina River and by the end of the day capture Zadorye, Zherdyazhye, and Veretey. Then, in a swift thrust, by the end of 30 June take Starinki, Ilya, Dunay, and Kraysk, and by the end of 1 July the railroad center at Molodechno and the railroad station at Vileyka.

2. Commander of the III Guards Cavalry Corps: complete the crossing of the Berezina River during 29 June, and by the end of the day capture Slagovishche, Lagaysk, and Ganevichi. Then by the end of 30 June in a swift thrust seize Radoshkovichi, Petrishki, and Ugluany, and continue to advance in the direction of Volozhkin.

3. On the right, the 1st Baltic Army Group will continue its advance. On the left, the Fifth Tank Army is crossing the Berezina River and is advancing toward Minsk.

Signed: Commander, 3d Byelorussian Army Group, General of the Army Chernyakhovskiy
Chief of Staff of the Army Group, Lieutenant General Pokrovskiy
Member of the Military Council of the Army Group, Lieutenant General Makarov.

After receiving this order, General Obukhov directed all corps units which had not yet crossed the Berezina to assemble in the Brod area, and cross the river there on the bridges already constructed. He also instructed the commander of the corps artillery to concentrate all available antiaircraft artillery in the Brod area to protect the crossing from German air strikes.

Units and sub-units which had already crossed the Berezina were ordered to advance westward without stopping, despite the increasingly severe shortage of fuel. During the previous five days of constant advance and combat the corps had advanced over 180 kilometers and used up almost all of its fuel. Now fuel would have to be brought in from the army group depots.

By the time the order was received, the 7th Guards Mechanized Brigade, which had finally been relieved at Lepel, was on its way on the road to Bogoml.

Reaching the river on 30 June it found that the 277th Rifle Division had arrived the day before and forced a crossing during the night with the aid of the local partisans, capturing a bridge at Kalnik and enveloping the German defenders.

Crossing the river on the bridge, the brigade proceeded west, and assisted the 277th Rifle Division in capturing Bogoml.

The 35th Guards Tank Brigade and the 8th Guards Mechanized Brigade on 30 June joined the 144th and 371st Rifle Divisions, which had crossed the Berezina just north and south of Lake Palik. Together these forces routed the German defenders of Mstizh, Borovlyan, Lisino, and Stypin, and cut the highway between Bogoml and Borisov. By nightfall the lead elements of the II Guards Mechanized Corps were already 25-30 kilometers beyond the Berezina River.

On 1 July, after the last elements of the corps had crossed the Berezina River, the corps commander received the following communication from Supreme Commander Stalin:

To the Commander of the III Guards Mechanized Corps Lieutenant General of Tank Troops Obukhov.

This is to express my gratitude to you and to all corps personnel for the excellent work done. I am sure that in the future the corps will carry out its combat mission with the same boldness and confidence.

Signed: Stalin

A few days later, on 6 July, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR awarded General Obukhov the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, the order of Lenin, and the Gold Star Medal for his excellent leadership in the operation.

General Comments

1. The Soviet Command placed great emphasis on secrecy while moving the III Mechanized Corps to the front. It did not want the Germans to learn either that a new tank formation was assigned to the 3d Byelorussian Army Group or where reinforcements were deployed, for this might have given the enemy a clue as to the direction of the main effort and an approximate date for the start of the offensive. (The Soviets would not move a mechanized formation to the front just to reinforce the defense.)

The redeployment of the mechanized corps from the Tula area (near Moscow) to the concentration, waiting, and jump-off areas at the front was well concealed. The concealment methods used were widely practiced in other Soviet operations, but it is doubtful that they would be as effective now as they were during the war. All movements and assembly were conducted under cover of darkness. During the planning period no operation orders or directives were issued in writing. No radio communication was permitted, and telephone communication was limited to a bare minimum. Until the last possible moment the mission of the corps was not revealed to officers below brigade commanders and their staffs. Even the corps commander, after the arrival with his troops in the army group area was told by General Chernyakhovskiy during the first visit only the general outlines of the operation. (Perhaps Chernyakhovskiy himself did not have the plans ready. It was still three weeks before the start of the offensive.)

Drastic efforts to conceal troop movements and their deployment played a great role in achieving surprise and success. It should be expected that such efforts would also be of paramount importance in contemporary Soviet military strategy.

2. The Soviet practice of organizing mixed cavalry-mechanized mobile groups did not work very well in this operation.

The Soviets believed that in terrain with forests, marshes, or rivers, where movement would be difficult for mechanized formations, it was desirable to organize groups combining cavalry and mechanized units. As a rule the cavalry commander, as the combined arms commander, was in command of the combined forces.

In accordance with this doctrine this operation appeared to call for the use of a cavalry-mechanized group. There were several rivers to cross, including the Berezina, with its swampy banks, as well as marshes, woods, and lakes scattered through the area. However, in practice the group as such was a failure. The mechanized corps was able to advance independently and rapidly. General Obukhov in his report of the operation considered that his subordination to General Oslikovskiy had hindered the operation. He had in fact reported directly to the army group commander, as well as to General Oslikovskiy, and during the battle had received his orders directly from General Chernyakovskiy. Thus the command role of the commander of the cavalry-mechanized group was not only diminished but unclear. General Obukhov reported that he had received several "unfortunate" orders from General Oslikovskiy. This reached critical proportions a few days after the Berezina crossing (and after the period considered in this study) when General Obukhov informed General Chernyakovskiy, "Operations of the corps are being shackled by the cavalry [Oslikovskiy]. I am taking the initiative. /i.e., I will take no more orders from Oslikovskiy." General Chernyakovskiy concurred and permitted him to operate independently. The cavalry-mechanized group was disbanded.

3. The role of Marshal Vasilevskiy, the representative of the Stavka of the Supreme Command, is interesting. As the coordinator of the operations of three army groups he had behind him the command authority of the supreme commander. Although in theory as well as in practice it was the commander of the army group who exercised the command and control, made final decisions and had the ultimate responsibility for the outcome of the operation, he discussed and coordinated all major decisions with the representative of the Stavka and took his advice into account. The representative of the Stavka had the power to countermand any order issued by the army group commander. This happened seldom if ever. It should be noted that while Marshal Vasilevskiy discussed the operation with General Obukhov and briefed him, all orders were issued by General Chernyakovskiy.

4. Marshal Vasilevskiy's directive (later probably issued in the form of an order by the army group commander) that in order to continue a rapid advance the mechanized corps should not engage in combat with small German units, but bypass them, was very important and is relevant to contemporary Soviet military thinking.

5. The flexibility and initiative of senior commanders was well illustrated. On 23 June, shortly after the mechanized corps started to advance close behind the infantry, it turned out that it would be more advantageous to commit it in another sector. Thus General Oslikovskiy (probably with General Obukhov's concurrence

if not advice) ordered the corps to redeploy. Obviously to move an entire corps laterally in the immediate rear of an attacking army was a difficult maneuver. But the proper commitment of the mechanized corps was so critical that it was considered necessary to shift it. Of course, it should be assumed that in a decision of this kind the commanders of the Fifth Army and of the 3d Byelorussian Army Group must have been involved or, perhaps, they even initiated it.

Some other decisions were also noteworthy. It was the 8th Mechanized Brigade on the main axis which was to take Senno. However, when it encountered heavy resistance and started to advance more slowly than the 9th Mechanized Brigade, which was on the secondary axis, it was the 9th Brigade which was ordered to take, and did take, Senno, whereas the 8th Brigade was directed to attack southwestward. During the course of the operation the main effort and the units deployed along that axis were changed. When the situation demanded, a mechanized brigade (the 7th) was ordered to take Lepel, an important road center and German resistance point, although it was in the zone of another army group.

6. Difficulties encountered in crossing the Berezina River were by no means unique in Soviet experience in World War II. Crossing (assault crossing) rivers and establishing bridgeheads on the far side was and is, in the Soviet view, a decisive factor in any successful offensive. The crossing operation of the III Mechanized Corps shows the importance the Soviet command places on getting to the river before the defenders could establish a defense line there.

While it is unlikely that in a future war the Soviets would find themselves required to resort to improvisations to cross a river, their performance here is indicative of their ability to do so. General Obukhov, who decided to sacrifice several tanks by sinking them in the river for use as bridge piers, not only showed a lot of imagination but made a correct tactical decision. Weighing which was more important--the few tanks (which were in short supply) or getting his forces across the river rapidly--he opted for the second.

7. During combat, communications between the brigades and the corps were good. The corps commander was always well briefed. Not only General Obukhov, but his brigade commanders as well, appear to have been fine combat officers, able to make the right decision on the spot, not afraid to make decisions, and showing a lot of initiative.

During the advance the corps and brigade commanders positioned themselves near the forward elements so that they could observe the battlefield better and quickly intervene personally when necessary.

8. Partisans played a substantial role in this operation. They were able to tie up substantial German forces (thus preventing their use in counterattacks), provided good intelligence, and guided the advancing Soviet troops to their objectives. However, in spite of their strength and favorable terrain, the partisans were unable by themselves to capture and hold bridgeheads, but their activities along the Berezina River helped the Soviet troops to cross it with minimal losses.

IV

BREAKTHROUGH OPERATIONS AND ADVANCE OF THE SOVIET XV RIFLE CORPS SOUTH OF BRODY IN THE UKRAINE 14-18 July 1944

General Situation and Mission of XV Rifle Corps

In the middle of April 1944, the Sixtieth Army of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group, commanded by Colonel General P.A. Kurochkin, successfully concluded offensive operations in the Ukraine west of the Dnieper River, and temporarily turned to defense. During the next three months the army's units perfected their defenses and trained strenuously for the next offensive.

At the beginning of June the Commander of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group, Marshal Ivan S. Konev, submitted to the Supreme Headquarters in Moscow a plan for the summer offensive. With some amendments the plan was approved on 24 June 1944.

The 1st Ukrainian Army Group was ordered to strike toward Rava Russka and Lvov. The Sixtieth Army was to regroup for the offensive between 29 June and 7 July into a zone 27 kilometers wide. (Map 7.)

On 29 June General Kurochkin, Commander of the Sixtieth Army, ordered Major General P.V. Tertyshnyy, Commander of the XV Rifle Corps, moving only at night between 7 and 9 July, to proceed to the new concentration area between Seretets (excl.), and Zalozhtsy Nove (excl.) and the forest east of Bashuki, arriving at the new area at 0400 on 9 July.

On 7 July, while the Sixtieth Army was regrouping, Marshal Konev summoned Kurochkin to his headquarters to discuss the forthcoming operation. The Sixtieth Army was to be committed on the main axis of the army group. Its left wing, in cooperation with the Thirty-eighth Army on its left, was to make the main attack, breaking through the enemy defense on a 10-kilometer front between the southern edge of the woods two kilometers south of Gnidava to Bzovitsa and advancing rapidly toward Zolochev and Lvov. The mobile group of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group, the Third Guards Tank Army, would be committed through the breach to exploit the breakthrough and take part in the destruction of enemy forces in the Lvov area.

General Kurochkin had decided to deploy his army in two echelons, having three corps in the first and one in the second. On the right, the XXIII Rifle Corps, composed of two divisions, would make the secondary effort in the 17 kilometer sector from Podkamen to the woods two kilometers south of Gnidava. To the left of it the main attack would be delivered by the XV and XXVIII Rifle

Corps in a ten kilometer sector between the southern edge of the woods two kilometers south of Gnidava and Bzovitsa (excl.). The XVI Rifle Corps would form the second echelon. If the main effort was successful, part of the XV and XXVIII Rifle Corps would be diverted to assist the XXIII Rifle Corps in encircling and destroying German troops around Brody.

Having been summoned the evening before by Army Chief of Staff Major General G.A. Ter-Gasparyan, at 0900 on 8 July General Tertyshnyy reported at army headquarters and, with the army commander and other corps commanders, proceeded to the front line for reconnaissance. While they were in the field General Kurochkin assigned each corps its combat mission. Detailed orders were sent to the corps the following day. General Tertyshnyy was told:

The XV Rifle Corps, composed of the 148th, 322d, and 336th Rifle Divisions, will break through the German defenses in the sector Hill 3750-Krugla Hill (frontage 5.5 kilometers), direct its main effort toward Perepelniki, Trostsyanyets Maly, and Skvarzava, and, in cooperation with the XXVIII Rifle Corps, destroy the enemy in that area (Map 8). The corps's immediate objective is to reach the line Kruguv-Perepelniki, next to continue to advance toward Skvarzava, and by the end of the day capture Sasov, Yelekhovitse, and Zolochev. Forward detachments of the divisions will reach the line Zhulitse-Khilchitse.

The army commander suggested that the corps should deploy in two echelons; with two rifle divisions in the first and one in the second. He also stressed the corps's responsibility for creating and securing a corridor through the German defense zone through which the Third Guards Tank Army would pass in order to exploit the breakthrough. He pointed out that during the battle for the German first and second defense zones, a depth of about 25 kilometers, the forward brigades of the IX Mechanized Corps of the Third Guards Tank Army would advance with the combat rifle formations of the first echelon divisions to conduct reconnaissance and to secure the routes of advance of the tank army through the breakthrough sector.

On the right, the XXIII Rifle Corps was to break through the enemy defenses in a 17 kilometer sector, and advance in the direction of Batkuv and Penyaki, pushing the enemy toward the northwest. Toward the end of the first day of the offensive the XXIII Rifle Corps was to reach the line Molechin (four kilometers north of Poboeh)-Poboeh - Bur.

On the left, the XXVIII Rifle Corps was to break through the enemy defenses on a four and a half kilometer front. The corps was to advance in the general direction of Podliptse, and by the end of the first day of combat reach the line Folvarki-Zarvanitsa-Pluguv.

General Kurochkin pointed out the boundaries between the XV and XXIII and XV and XXVIII Rifle Corps on the site and on the map.

While General Tertyshnyy was with the army commander the chiefs of his corps intelligence and operations branches were briefed by various army staff officers on such matters as German defenses and disposition, terrain, roads, and communications. Thus, when he returned to his headquarters the corps staff was ready to furnish the necessary data for his preliminary decision.

As soon as General Tertyshnyy was back at his command post he summoned his deputy for political affairs, chief of staff, chief of operations, chief of intelligence, and chiefs of arms and services, and informed them about the new mission. Then, for the benefit of all present he asked the operations officer to report on the terrain in the sector of corps advance.

On the basis of the information given him by the army staff and the corps chiefs of engineers and intelligence, the chief of operations reported that the XV Rifle Corps would be advancing over very uneven terrain. Although the hills were less than 400 meters high, there were many rivers and streams, flowing in all directions. The land on the German side of the front line was higher than that occupied by the Soviet troops. This ensured the enemy excellent observation of all Soviet activities. The German defenses could be overlooked from Soviet observation points in only a few isolated sectors.

About five to six kilometers behind the front line and back to the Sasov-Zolochov line, the operations officer indicated on a 1:250,000 map, the area was almost totally wooded. However, there were many tracks through the forests which were suitable for movement of all types of vehicles and combat equipment.

To the west of the Sasov-Zolochov line the terrain was flat and dotted with groves. There were only a few low hills. The marshy banks of the Zlochovka River represented a serious obstacle for tanks, artillery, and vehicles.

The road system in the area was poor. In the sector of advance of the XV Rifle Corps there was only one dirt road and one truck road. Most of the settlements were located in depressions. In the villages houses were of adobe covered with thatch. In towns, most of the buildings were one story, made of brick.

The ground in the entire area was rich loam. When it rained it quickly became sodden and the roads became almost impassable for vehicles.*

The chief of intelligence next reported that in the preceding three months the German Command, using its own troops and the local population, had constructed a massive defense system. In the corps sector along the line of advance toward Lvov three defense zones had been built. The main defense zone was four to six kilometers deep and had three to four lines of trenches connected by a network of communication trenches. The first trench of the main defense zone ran without a break on the slopes of the hills facing the Soviet troops along the eastern and southeastern outskirts of Gnidava, the eastern slopes of Hill 375.0, the southern outskirts of Donbrova, and eastern slopes of Hill 396.0, the eastern edge of the grove north of Oleyuv, and continued along the northern and eastern outskirts of Byalokernitsa.

The second trench, not continuous, was constructed some 200 to 300 meters to the rear of the first trench. The third was one or two kilometers behind the second.

* During the first seven days of the Soviet offensive it rained heavily. The roads and trails were very bad, and movements of all types of vehicles were extremely difficult. This hampered maneuver of rifle units as well as the effective utilization of heavy combat equipment.

There were dugouts, foxholes for men, and ammunition storage bays scattered along the first and second trenches. All the trenches had specially constructed machine gun emplacements. Some of the emplacements were protected by wooden ceilings of one or two layers of logs covered with earth. Some segments of trenches also had log covers to protect the men from shells and mine splinters.

Between 50 and 200 meters in front of the first trench were combat outposts. There were trenches and foxholes connected with the first main trench by communication trenches. Also, about 50 meters in front of their first trench the Germans had set up four lines of barbed wire reinforced in many places by concertinas. Approaches to the barbed wire were covered by antitank and antipersonnel minefields. In addition, the Germans had laid antitank minefields on probable lines of Soviet tank approach in front of the main zone as well as in the depth of their defense. At numerous points along the first trench and up to 40 meters to its rear there were earth-and-timber machine gun pillboxes.

In forest openings deep inside their defense system the Germans had built log obstacles which they later mined. Also, bridges, segments of roads, houses, and farm buildings were either mined or prepared for mining.

The second defense zone was nine to ten kilometers behind the front line. The first trench of this zone ran along the line Kruguv-Nushche-Volchkovtse. The zone was not so well organized as the first zone. The third defense zone was still under construction along the line Sasov-Zolochov. On the left bank of the Western Bug River and on the left bank of the Zlochuvka River the Germans had prepared switch positions.

Zolochov, Sasov, and other settlements in the defense zone had been turned into powerful strongpoints. Around these settlements the Germans dug trenches connected by communication trenches. An inner defense zone was organized, preferably at the settlement outskirts in solid buildings. Artillery and heavy machine guns also were deployed in and around the strongpoints. All trenches and other positions in easily approachable sectors were protected by two lines of barbed wire and concertinas. There was no information on minefields but these were to be expected.

The first trench and the outpost positions were defended by groups of submachine gunners reinforced by machine gun squads. At night, the submachine gunners in the first trench were reinforced by infantry elements from the second trench. In the second trench the Germans deployed about 2/3 of the forces of the regiments of the first echelon. In the third trench they deployed the regimental reserves.

The sector in which the Soviet XV Rifle Corps was to advance was defended by the 913th Infantry Regiment of the 349th Infantry Division. The regiment had two infantry battalions and one artillery and one mortar battery. Each battalion consisted of three infantry companies, 100 men each, and one heavy weapons company. In reserve were the 349th Field Reserve Battalion in the Kruguv area, and the 349th Reconnaissance Battalion in the Perepelniki area.

As operational reserves the Germans had three divisions in the rear: the 14th SS Galician Infantry Division in the Sasov area and to the north of it; the 8th Panzer Division (120-130 tanks) in the Byaly Kamen and Zolochov areas; and the 1st Panzer Division in the area south of Pluguv.

The 8th Panzer and 14th SS Infantry Divisions might be committed against the XV Rifle Corps during the first day of the offensive. The 1st Panzer Division, deployed 12 to 15 kilometers to the south of the corps axis, could be committed against the XV Rifle Corps only if the advance of the Soviet Thirty-eighth Army on the left failed.

On the whole, during the battle for the main defense zone the corps advance could be resisted by four to five infantry battalions, seventeen to twenty artillery batteries, and up to twenty tanks and assault guns. The commitment of German operational reserves could be expected in the second defense zone on the line Kurguv-Nushche.

Air superiority was on the side of the Soviets, whose planes significantly exceeded those of the Luftwaffe in the 1st Ukrainian Army Group zone. The corps would be supported by 121 aircraft of the 8th Guards Ground Attack Air Division.

In infantry and artillery strength the force ratio initially favored the Soviets by about 5 or 6 to 1. As shown on the order of battle (Figure 3) the XV Rifle Corps had three rifle divisions, each composed of three rifle regiments of seasoned troops and an artillery regiment. Since each regiment had three battalions, there were 27 rifle battalions. Rifle companies were in good shape, with 80 to 90 men each. The corps artillery organization and weapon strengths are shown in Figures 4 and 5, adapted from Soviet sources. There were 853 guns and mortars 76mm and larger in the corps, 55 M-13 multiple rocket launchers, and 34 tanks and self-propelled assault guns. However, when second echelons and reserves were committed, the Germans had more tanks and artillery than the Soviets. But this was only temporary. Once the breakthrough of the first and second defense zones was accomplished, the Soviet Third Guards Tank Army was to be committed in the corps sector.

Decision of the Corps Commander

Soon after this staff meeting, General Tertysnyy reached the preliminary decisions as to how the attack should be made, and issued preliminary orders to the division commanders and commanders of independent units at a meeting in his headquarters.

The corps would deliver its main effort with its left flank (the 322d Division) toward Perepelniki, Trostyanets Maly, and Skvarzava. The 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions would be in the first echelon, and the 148th Rifle Division in the second.

The initial corps objective was eight to ten kilometers behind the German front line. The final objective for the day was 25-26 kilometers behind, and included the capture of Zolochiv (Map 8).

General Tertysnyy advised the division commanders that shortly before the main attack commenced the first echelon divisions would have to send their forward battalions to carry out combat reconnaissance. The division commanders were also told that after the completion of the breakthrough of the hostile tactical defense area (first and second defense zones), the mobile group of

Figure 3

XV RIFLE CORPS

Order of Battle, 9 July 1944

148th Rifle Division
908th Rifle Regiment
914th Rifle Regiment
496th Rifle Regiment
326th Artillery Regiment

322d Rifle Division
1085th Rifle Regiment
1087th Rifle Regiment
1089th Rifle Regiment
886th Artillery Regiment

336th Rifle Division
1128th Rifle Regiment
1130th Rifle Regiment
1132d Rifle Regiment
909th Artillery Regiment

Attached:

59th Tank Regiment (22 T-34 tanks)
1827th Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment (two batteries)(eight SAU-152)
1889th Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment (one battery)(four SAU-76)
33d Gun Artillery Brigade
115th Gun Artillery Brigade
50th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
108th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade
138th Mortar Regiment
98th Multiple Rocket Launcher Regiment
7th Guards Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade
408th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment
640th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment
1178th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment
1593d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment
One assault engineer battalion

Supporting:

39th Gun Artillery Brigade (Sixtieth Army Artillery Group)
37th Light Artillery Brigade (Sixtieth Army Artillery Group)
616th Mortar Regiment (IX Mechanized Corps, Third Guards Tank Army)
108th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment (Third Guards Tank Army)
91st Multiple Rocket Launcher Regiment (Third Guards Tank Army)
441st Multiple Rocket Launcher Battalion (IX Mechanized Corps, Third Guards Tank Army)
Artillery of the 359th Rifle Division (98 guns and mortars)

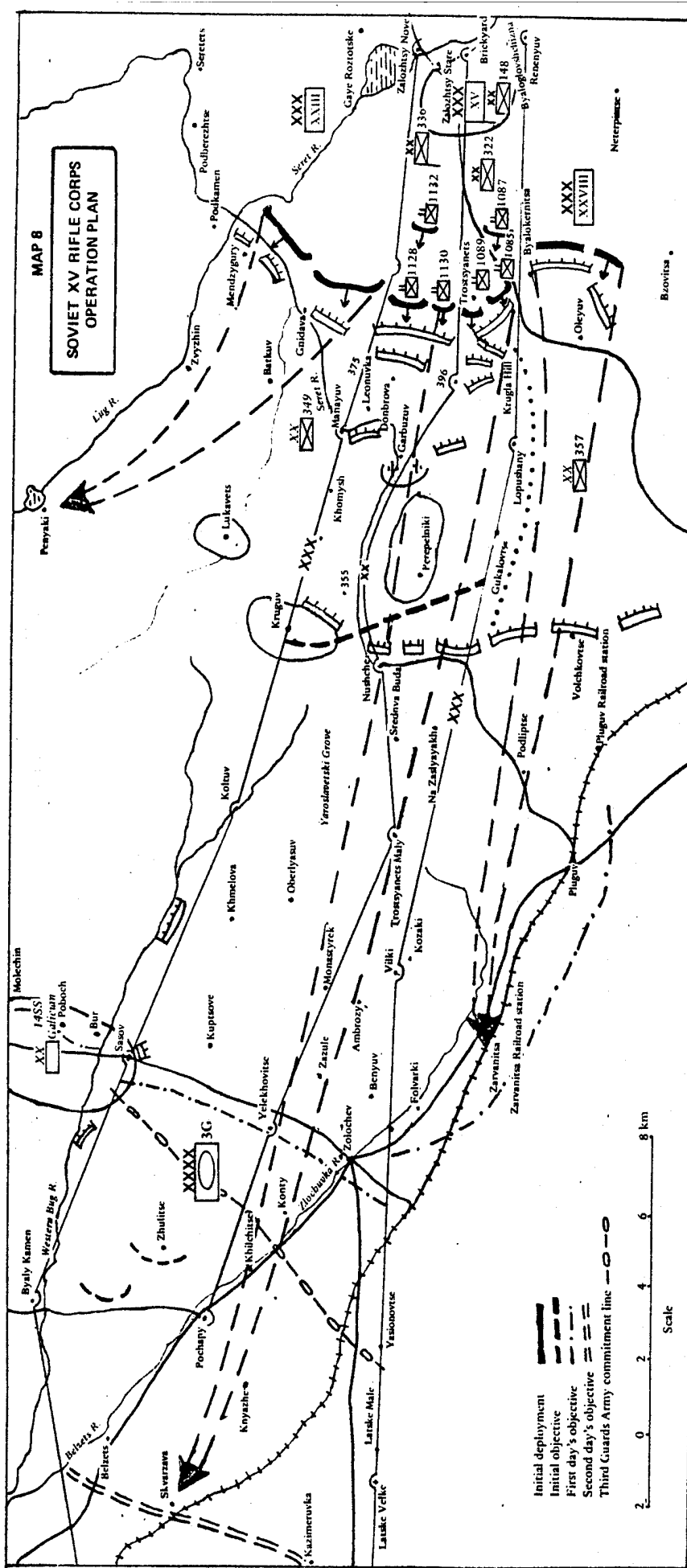
Figure 4. Soviet XV Rifle Corps Artillery Units and Strengths, July 1944

	Mortars			Guns								Total Guns and Mortars	
	82mm	120mm	45mm	57mm	76mm (Regt)	76mm (Div)	76mm (German)	105mm	122mm	152mm	203mm	Including 45 and 57mm Guns	Minus 45 and 57mm Guns
336th Rifle Div Sector													
Division Arty	46	13	29	--	7	22	4	--	12	--	--	133	104
Attached:	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	36	36
138th Mortar Regt	--	36	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	36	36
Supporting:	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	36	--	36	36
33d Arty Bde	--	--	--	--	--	40	--	--	--	--	--	60	40
7th GTD Arty Bde	--	--	20	--	--	24	--	--	--	--	--	24	24
408th TD Arty Regt	--	--	--	--	--	14	--	4	12	--	--	98	98
359th Rifle Div Arty	53	15	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	35	35
616th Mortar Regt,	--	35	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	422	373
IX Mczd Corps	99	99	29	20	7	100	4	4	24	36	--	422	373
TOTAL	99	99	29	20	7	100	4	4	24	36	--	422	373
322d Rifle Div Sector													
Division Arty	42	14	30	--	8	20	4	4	8	--	--	130	100
Attached:	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	84	--	--	84	84
50th How Arty Bde	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	36	--	36	36
Supporting:	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
155th Arty Bde	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
108th Hvy How Arty	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Bde (-1 bn)	47	15	28	1	8	20	3	3	12	--	12	12	12
148th Rifle Div Arty	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	137	108
108th TD Arty Regt,	--	--	--	--	--	24	--	--	--	--	--	24	24
IX Mczd Corps	--	--	--	--	--	24	--	--	--	--	--	24	24
640th TD Arty Regt	--	--	--	--	--	24	--	--	--	--	--	24	24
1178th TD Arty Regt	--	--	--	--	--	24	--	--	--	--	--	24	24
1593d TD Arty Regt	--	--	--	--	--	20	--	--	--	--	--	20	20
TOTAL	89	29	58	1	16	132	7	7	104	36	12	491	432
Corps Artillery Group													
98th G Mult R/L Regt	--	--	23	R/L M-13	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	23
91st G Mult R/L Regt,	--	--	24	R/L M-13	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	24
Third G Tank Army	--	--	8	R/L M-13	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	8
441st G Mult R/L Bn	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
IX Mczd Corps	--	--	--	--	--	32	--	--	--	16	--	48	48
Army Arty Gp Sub-Gp	188	128	87	21	23	264	11	11	128	88	12	961	853
CORPS ZONE TOTAL	188	128	87	21	23	264	11	11	128	88	12	961	853
Units of Fire	2.25	2.25	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.0/2.3	1.0	48	48
Rounds	270	180	294	294	294	294	168	120/138	40	40	40	853	53

Figure 5. Soviet XV Rifle Corps Weapons Strengths
18 July 1944

Armament	Divisions			Corps Total
	148th	322d	336th	
Machine Guns:				
Light	189	207	193	597
Heavy	60	65	58	183
Antiaircraft	17	17	16	50
Mortars:				
82mm	47	42	46	135
120mm	15	14	13	42
Guns and Howitzers:				
45mm	28	30	29	87
57mm	1	--	--	1
75mm*	3	4	4	11
76mm (rgt)	8	8	7	23
76mm (div)	20	20	22	62
105mm	3	4	--	7
122mm	12	8	12	32
Antitank Rifle	65	104	50	219

*Captured German weapons



the 1st Ukrainian Army Group, the Third Guards Tank Army, would be committed to combat from the Sasov-Yasionovtse line. However, in order to conduct reconnaissance and secure passage for the tank army through the breakthrough corridor, the forward brigades of the tank army would be operating in the respective sectors of the rifle division of the first echelon from the start of the operation, coordinating their movements through representatives with the division staff.

After making his preliminary plan known to those present, General Tertyshnyy issued several instructions dealing with preparation of troops for the forthcoming operation. He also informed all concerned that on 9 and 10 July he, together with division commanders, commanders of attached and reinforcing units and formations, and several staff officers, would reconnoiter the terrain in the sector of the corps advance.

During the next two days corps headquarters issued instructions defining in great detail the missions of the rifle divisions and attached and supporting units. The corps commander and his staff worked out with subordinate echelons the problems concerning cooperation among the rifle divisions, and between the rifle divisions and artillery, tank brigades, self-propelled guns, and engineers.

During the reconnaissance General Tertyshnyy assigned the first echelon divisions routes of advance from their concentration areas to the front line, and gave their commanders the exact time when they would have to relieve the units of the 246th Rifle Division of the Thirteenth Army presently deployed in defense.

Preparations for the Offensive

Guided by the corps commander's decision, between 8 and 12 July Chief of Staff Colonel G.G. Andreyuk, working with the artillery commander and his staff and the chiefs of services, prepared the operations schedule, the operation order for the offensive, order of march, table of call signals, several possible alternatives for commitment of the corps's second echelon, the timetable for artillery movements during the battle, and directives for the rear services, reconnaissance, antiaircraft defense, communication, and ammunition availability.

For the preparation phase, the corps command post was established at Byaloglovshchizna, six kilometers from the front line. During the advance, the corps commander planned to move it first to Khomysh, and later to the forest two kilometers south of Oberlyasuv. The second echelon of the corps staff was set up at the outskirts of Gaye Roztotske, two kilometers northeast of Zalozhtsy Nove. The observation point of the corps commander was set up at a hill three kilometers west of Zalozhtsy Stare, about two and a half kilometers from the front line.

In the afternoon of 10 July, the rifle divisions received from the corps staff a written operation order for attack. It directed that the 336th Rifle Division (Commander, Colonel M.A. Ignachev), on the right, with the 138th Mortar Regiment, one tank company of the 59th Tank Regiment (ten T-34 tanks), and one battery of the 1827th Self-Propelled Assault Gun Regiment (four SAU-152) attached, would deliver its main blow with its left flank toward Barbuzuv and the northern outskirts of Nushche, break through the German defenses in the sector from Hill 375.0 to Hill 396.0, and, in cooperation with the 322d Rifle Division, destroy the enemy in his main defense zone. The initial objective was the line from Krugov to

Hill 355.0. By the end of the first day the division was to capture the line Sasov-Yelekhovitse, and its forward detachment was to take the quarry two and a half kilometers northwest of Zhulitse and Hill 257.0. The assignments of units are shown on Figure 6.

Assigned to support but not attached to the 336th Rifle Division were the 33d Gun Artillery Brigade, the 408th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment, the 616th Mortar Regiment of the IX Mechanized Corps, and artillery of the 359th Rifle Division (from the army commander's reserve). In addition to its own 104 guns and mortars 76mm and larger, the division had 36 mortars attached and 233 guns and mortars supporting, making a grand total of 373 tubes. Figures 7 and 8 show the availability of ammunition for the attack.

The commander of the 336th Rifle Division was responsible for securing the junction with the XXIII Rifle Corps on his right. The 322d Rifle Division was responsible for the boundary on the left.

The division's command post was to be established in the Krutkuv Gay area, four kilometers from the front line. The dividing line between the 336th Rifle Division and the XXIII Rifle Corps would run about the line Zalozhtsy Nove-Manayuv-Kruguv-Koltuv-Sasov (excl.)-Byaly Kamen.

Between the 336th Rifle Division and 322d Rifle Division the boundary ran from the brickyard (excl.) through Hill 396.0 to Nushche, Yelekhovitse, and Pochapy.

The 322d Rifle Division (Commander, Colonel P.N. Lashchenko), with the 50th Howitzer Artillery Brigade, one tank company of the 59th Tank Regiment (12 T-34 tanks), and two batteries of self-propelled assault guns, one each from the 1827th and 1889th Self-Propelled Assault Gun Regiments (four SAU-152 and four SAU-76) attached, would make the main effort. In close cooperation with the divisions on its flanks it was to break through the enemy defenses between Hill 396.0 and Krugla Hill, continue to advance toward Perepelniki and Zolochev, and annihilate the enemy in his main defense zone. The initial objective was to be the western edge of the grove one and a half kilometers west of Perepelniki. Toward the end of the day the division would capture Zolochev, and its forward detachments should reach the railroad and highway crossing two and a half kilometers west of Zolochev.

The advance of the 322d Rifle Division would be supported by the 155th Gun Artillery Brigade, the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 108th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade, artillery of the 148th Rifle Division (corps second echelon), and the 108th, 640th, 1178th, and 1593d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiments, none of the units to be attached to the division. In addition to its own 100 guns and mortars 76mm and larger, the division had 84 attached and 248 supporting guns and mortars, for a total of 432 tubes. Thus on the 2.1 kilometer front assigned to the 322d Rifle Division there was an average of 206 tubes per kilometer of front. This was more than in the 336th Rifle Division sector, where 373 guns and mortars were concentrated in 3.4 kilometers, an average of 109 tubes per kilometer of front.

The division's command post was to be established at the ravine one and a half kilometers southwest of Trostsyanyets (two and a half kilometers from the front line).

Figure 6. SCHEMATIC PLAN OF XV RIFLE CORPS OFFENSIVE
14 JULY

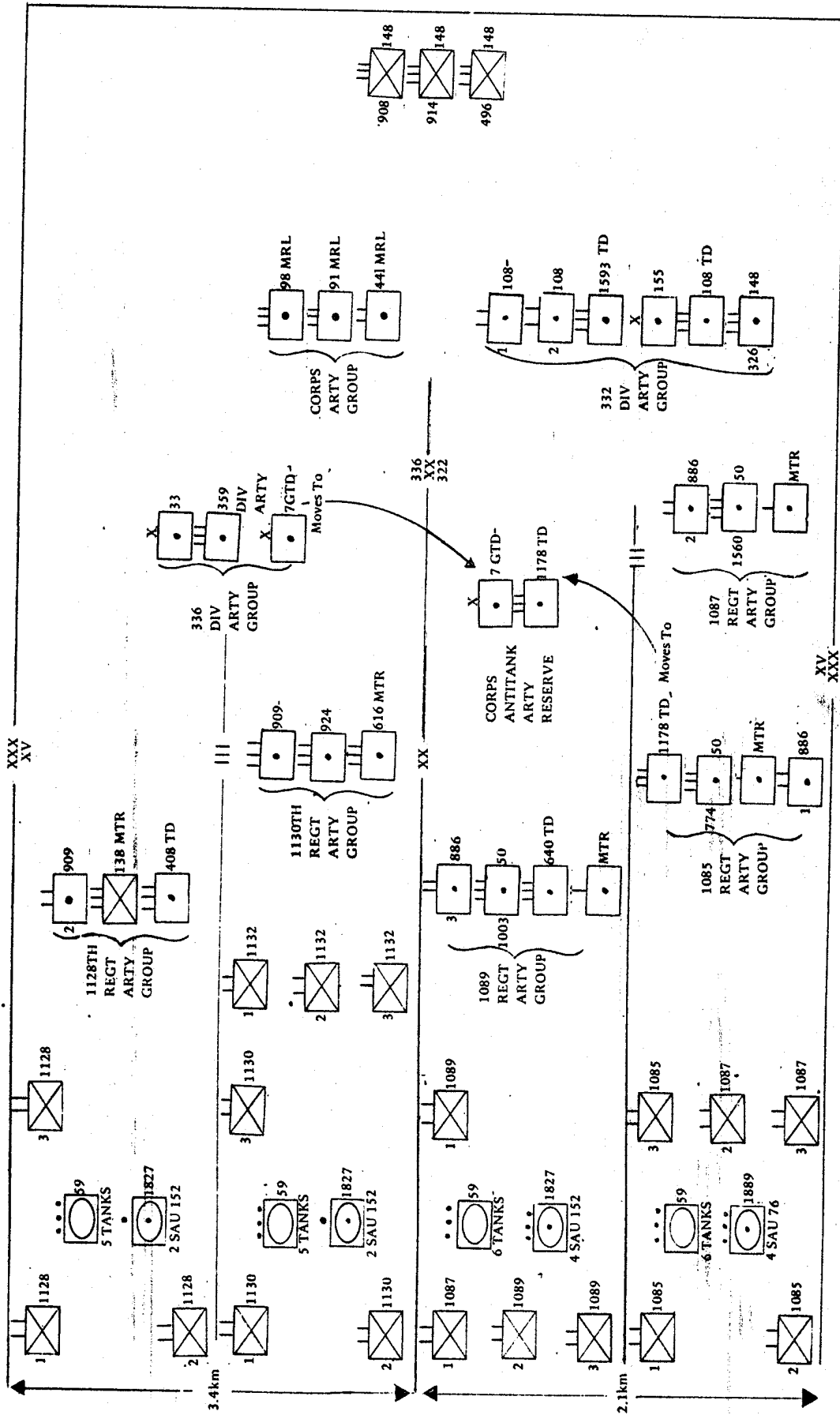


Figure 7. Soviet XV Rifle Corps Weapons Ammunition Availability

13 June 1944

Weapons	148th Rifle Division		322d Rifle Division		336th Rifle Division	
	Units of Fire	Rounds	Units of Fire	Rounds	Units of Fire	Rounds
Rifle	1.57	157	1.61	161	1.8	180
Submachine Guns	1.8	540	1.87	561	1.8	540
12.7mm	0.9	1,800	0.78	1,560	1.0	2,000
14.5mm	1.1	132	0.75	90	2.0	240
26mm	0.72		1.03		1.4	
Hand Grenades (PG-42)	1.15		1.29		1.5	
Antitank Grenades	1.3		0.74		1.5	
82mm Mortar	2.55	306	2.56	307	2.4	288
120mm Mortar	2.75	220	2.81	225	2.5	200
45mm	1.02	204	2.15	430	1.2	240
76mm (Regimental Arty)	2.55	306	2.74	329	2.5	300
76mm (Divisional Arty)	2.5	300	2.85	342	2.5	300
122mm Howitzers	2.5	200	3.23	259	2.5	200
105mm (captured German)	3.3	353	2.55	273	-	
75mm (captured German)	0.8		2.23		1.9	

Figure 8. Soviet XV Rifle Corps Ammunition Availability in Supporting Units
14 July 1944

Formations and Units	Units of Fire*
50th Howitzer Artillery Brigade	2.1
Battalions of the 108th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade	3.1
33d Gun Artillery Brigade	2.0
155th Gun Artillery Brigade	2.0
7th Guards Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade:	
57mm	1.4
75mm	3.1
108th, 408th, 640th, 1178th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiments	2.0
138th Mortar Regiment	1.5
616th Mortar Regiment	2.45
924th Artillery Regiment:	
76mm	2.5
122mm	1.5
Guards Multiple Rocket Launchers M-13	Three volleys/ each launcher

*The number of rounds in a unit of fire is not available.

The dividing line between the 322d Rifle Division and the XXVIII Rifle Corps on the left was Renenyuv (excl.)-Lopushany (excl.)-Vilki-Yasionovtse (excl.)-Latske Velke (excl.).

The 148th Rifle Division (Commander, Major General A.A. Mishchenko), would make up the corps second echelon. It was to concentrate in the area Hill 367.0-Byaloglovshchizna-Zalozhtsy-Stare (excl.), and when the offensive began it would advance behind the 322d Rifle Division toward Trostsyanets, Perepelniki, and Nushche. If progress permitted, during the first day the 148th Rifle Division would move one of its regiments to the Khmelova area, to protect the right flank of the corps, and with the remaining forces be ready to strike toward the southern outskirts of Zolochev, and capture the town in cooperation with the 322d Rifle Division. The advance of the division's main force toward the southern outskirts of Zolochev would be supported by two battalions of the 115th Gun Artillery Brigade.

The corps artillery and supporting artillery was ordered to silence and annihilate fire emplacements at the front line and in the depth of the German defense zone, neutralize enemy artillery and mortar batteries in the areas of Manayuv and Garbuzuv, and in the ravine to the north of Lopushany, demolish trenches and communication trenches at Hill 375.0, east and west of Donbrova, at Hill 396.0, and Krugla Hill, prevent the enemy from counterattacking from the areas of Manayuv, the woods north of Khomysh, Perepelniki, Gukalovtse, Lopushany and Garbuzuv, and support the attack of infantry and tanks with a rolling barrage. As soon as the corps reached the line between Sasov and Zolochev, a firm antitank defense was to be organized, to beat off counterattacks by German tanks from Zhulitse, Khilchitse, Knyazhe, and Yasionovtse.

The corps artillery group would include the 91st and 98th Guards Multiple Rocket Launcher Artillery Regiments, and the 441st Independent Guards Multiple Rocket Launcher Artillery Battalion.

Comment: The composition of the corps artillery group was later severely criticized. Since it included only multiple rocket launchers the group could not be used for counterbattery fire, which should be one of the main tasks of the corps artillery group.

The corps antitank reserve consisted of the 1178th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment, which was ordered to protect the corps left flank, displacing forward periodically in the sector of the 322d Rifle Division. Toward the end of the day the regiment was to deploy for battle in the Zazule area.

Engineer troops were ordered to secure the Seret River crossing, clear their own minefields from no-man's-land, prepare passages in German minefields, carry out engineer reconnaissance, prepare roads for the advance of the divisions into the depth of the enemy defenses, and at the end of the first day of the offensive organize and consolidate defenses along the line reached by the advancing units.

Later that night the army commander inspected the corps and discussed the corps's combat deployment with General Tertyshnyy, who pointed out that his units were deployed totally in accordance with the corps mission, and specifically with the task of delivering the main blow with the left wing. He emphasized that the

336th Rifle Division was ordered to make its main effort on the left flank, and most of its manpower and means were also deployed there; thus it would strengthen the corps main effort in the 322d Rifle Division's sector.

General Tertyshnyy directed that the observation posts of the division commanders be set up no farther than one to one and a fifth kilometers from the front line, and the regimental observation posts within 300 to 600 meters of it. The OPs of the battalion commanders were to be as close as possible to the front line. None of the division's OPs could be moved without permission of the corps commander. Such permission would be granted only after the establishment of communications from the new OP with the corps command post.

Communication with corps units, attached elements, and the army was secured by field telephone, radio, and mobile units. The corps would communicate with adjacent units by wire and radio, with the corps mobile group by wire before the attack, and by radio during the combat, and with the air force by radio and visual signals for troop recognition.

Late at night on 10 July the division commanders reported to the corps commander that they and their regimental commanders had reached their decisions. Divisions and regiments of the first echelon were deployed, as General Tertyshnyy suggested, in two echelons, each having two regiments or battalions in the first echelon and one regiment or battalion in the second.

The corps operations schedule, i.e., the graphic representation of planned operations, was ready and approved by General Tertyshnyy on 12 July, and promptly delivered to commanders of subordinate units. On the same day the commander of corps artillery submitted his plan for the employment of artillery to the corps commander for approval.

The Artillery Plan

The corps's own, attached, and supporting artillery units were organized into corps, divisional, and regimental artillery groups. Their designations and composition are shown on Figure 9. All 82mm mortar units and some of the 120mm mortars belonging to rifle regiments of the first echelon were combined into mortar groups under the artillery commanders of their respective regiments.

The 45mm and 57mm regimental antitank guns and 76mm guns of the various tank destroyer battalions were organized to concentrate direct gunfire on targets between the first and second German trenches. In the 336th Rifle Division sector there would be 72 such guns, and in the 322d 93, making a total of 165. Otherwise gunfire would be directed on targets in the German main defense area only if they were not suppressed by the 8th Guards Ground Attack Air Division planes during the artillery preparation.

The pre-assault artillery preparation was scheduled to last for one hour and forty minutes. All artillery, with the exception of the guns assigned to direct fire tasks, were to participate in a 15-minute artillery barrage directed against the front line and forward part of the German tactical defense zone. Regimental mortar groups were to suppress and destroy men and gun emplacements in the first and second trenches. Regimental artillery groups were to fire on gun emplacements,

Figure 9. Societ XV Rifle Corps Artillery Organization
July 1944

	Guns/mortars						Total
	120mm mortars	76mm	122mm how	152mm gun/how	203mm how	R/L M-13	
Corps Artillery Group (CAG-15)						55	55
98th G. Mult R/L Regt							
91st G. Mult R/L Regt							
441st G. Mult R/L Bn							
Division Artillery Group							
336th Rifle Div (DAG-336)		40		36			76
33d Arty Bde							
7th GTD Bde (-1 regt)							
332d Rifle Div (DAG-322)		59	12	36	12		119
155th Arty Bde							
108th HV How Bde (-1 bn)							
1593d TD Regt							
108th TD Regt, IX Mczd Corps							
326th Arty Regt, 148th Rifle Div							
Regimental Artillery Groups							
336th Rifle Division							
1128th Rifle Regt (RAG-1128)	36	30	4				70
2d Bn, 909th Arty Regt							
138th Mortar Regt							
408th TD Regt							
1130th Rifle Regt (RAG-1130)	35	25	20				80
909th Arty Regt (-1 bn)							
924th Arty Regt							
616th Mortar Regt							
332d Rifle Division	5	28	32				65
1089th Rifle Regt (RAG-1089)							
3d Bn, 886th Arty Regt							
1003d How Arty Regt, 50th How Arty Bde							
640th TD Regt							
Mortar Battery							
1085th Rifle Regt (RAG-1085)	5	32	32				69
1st Bn, 886th Arty Regt							
774th How Arty Regt, 50th How Arty Bde							
1178th TD Regt*							
Mortar Battery							
1087th Rifle Regt (RAG-1087)**	4	8	32				44
2d Bn, 886th Arty Regt							
1516th How Arty Regt, 50th How Arty Bde							
Mortar Battery							

* During preparation only

**Second echelon

earth-and-timber pillboxes, mortar batteries, observation points, and troops deployed back to the third trench line. Targets for the divisional artillery groups were gun emplacements, pillboxes, reserve forces, headquarters and communication centers in the main defense zone. Multiple rocket launchers were to blanket resistance centers and personnel, to a depth of four kilometers.

After the first barrage all artillery units except the rocket launchers were to fire for 60 minutes at a slower, sustained rate at gun emplacements, troops, pillboxes, and strongpoints in the main defense zone. Guns assigned for direct fire were to join during the last 30 minutes, firing at troops and gun emplacements between the first and second trenches and demolishing barbed wire obstacles in front of the first trench.

Next a ten-minute barrage was to be fired, for suppression and destruction of artillery and mortar batteries. Finally all artillery except the multiple rocket launchers was to participate in a 15-minute barrage in which divisional artillery groups were to shell gun emplacements, trenches, artillery positions, and strongpoints to a depth of six kilometers, while regimental artillery concentrated on fire emplacements and troops in the first trench and combat outposts in front of it. Numbers of artillery and mortar rounds per gun for artillery preparation is shown in Figure 10.

Artillery support of the infantry and tank assault as far as the western slopes of Hill 375.0 and Lopushany, a distance of one and a half kilometers, was to be carried out by a rolling barrage in combination with subsequent concentrated fire at previously selected targets. The rolling barrage was to be fired at three main lines, corresponding to the first three trenches of the main defense zone and five intermediate lines 100-200 meters apart between the main lines. Thereafter the advance of infantry and tanks to the line of the initial corps objective was to be supported by fire directed at resistance centers.

Artillery accompanying the advancing troops was to destroy German fire emplacements and antitank guns which delayed the progress of infantry and tanks.

Exactly 15 minutes after the infantry attack was launched, multiple rocket launcher battalions and regiments were to fire a volley at resistance centers in the second and third trenches. After that they were to be ready to fire on call at the discretion of the corps artillery commander. Figure 10-B. shows the number of rounds per gun allotted for support of the assault.

Support of infantry and tanks in the depth of the German defense was to be carried out by subsequent concentrations of fire by the artillery on call at targets identified by commanders of infantry and tank units. For this phase one half of a unit of fire was allotted.

As far as the line Pyasechna-Perepelniki, the artillery would support the infantry without changing its firing positions. Then, the artillery and mortar regiments and battalions would displace forward by echelon, following the advance of the rifle divisions.

Figure 10. Soviet XV Rifle Corps Ammunition Allotment, Rounds per Gun
July 1944

	Mortars		Guns					
	82mm	120mm	45mm	57mm	76mm	122mm	152mm	203mm
A. <u>Artillery Preparation</u>								
First Fire Barrage (15 min)	24	16	--	--	39	23	15	23
Sustained Fire (60 min)	76	48	30	25	53	24	24	26
Second Fire Barrage (10 min)	22	16	16	12	16	20	12	5
Third Fire Barrage (15 min)	28	16	30	30	39	22	12	5
TOTAL	150	96	76	67	147	89	63	59
B. <u>Assault Support</u>	60	39	--	--	61	39	27	20

Guns and mortars were to advance with their infantry units. Movements of divisional and regimental artillery groups were to be synchronized with the advance of the infantry and tanks of the first echelon. Only a part of each group would be displacing at any one time, the rest of the group remaining at the old firing position, ready to fire according to plan or on request.

In order to conceal the massing of artillery in the corps sector, divisional artillery commanders would designate registration guns, one from each divisional artillery battalion, three 82mm mortars and one 120mm mortar from each rifle regiment, six 120mm mortars from each mortar regiment, three 152mm guns from each artillery brigade, and six 76mm guns from each tank destroyer artillery regiment.

General Tertyshnyy approved the artillery plans, and they were distributed to all artillery group commanders.

Air Support

The air support of the XV Rifle Corps was planned by the staff of the 1st Ukrainian Army Group. The 8th Guards Ground Attack Air Division was to fly 215 sorties in support of the corps during the first day. Its commander, Lieutenant General V.V. Naneysvili, discussing plans with General Tertyshnyy and his chief of staff at the latter's headquarters, agreed that during the artillery preparation the air division would strike at German reserves around Kruguv, Perepelniki, and Trostyanets Maly. As the infantry and tanks attacked, the air division would support them by attacking concentrations of German troops, combat materiel, and strongpoints, to prevent German reserves from moving up from Sasov and Zolochiv and the defending forces from making an organized withdrawal to the western bank of the Zlochukva River. The air division would also be responsible for air reconnaissance and constant observation of the battlefield.

It was agreed that during the preparation phase commanders of air squadrons and flying personnel would come to the corps area to acquaint themselves with the terrain, including the general outline of the front line.

Utilization of Tanks and Self-Propelled Assault Guns

General Tertyshnyy decided to attach all of his tanks and self-propelled assault guns* to the divisions of the first echelon. On 9 July he discussed the allotment of the available tanks and self-propelled assault guns with Colonel Andreyuk and allocated most of them to the 322d Rifle Division. On 9 July the chief of staff issued an order assigning one tank company of the 59th Tank Regiment (10 tanks) and one battery (four SAU-152) of the 1827th Heavy

* 59th Independent Tank Regiment (22 T-34 tanks); two batteries of 1827th Heavy Self-Propelled Assault Gun Regiment (eight SAU-152); one battery of the 1889th Self-Propelled Assault Gun Regiment (four SAU-76).

Self-Propelled Assault Gun Regiment to the 336th Rifle Division. The rest, one tank company (12 tanks) and two batteries of self-propelled assault guns (four SAU-152 and four SAU-76) were assigned to the 322d Rifle Division. The self-propelled assault gun units were to support the assault of the infantry and tanks with their fire and were to advance some 200 to 300 meters behind the tanks.

The density of the direct infantry support (DIS) tanks and self-propelled artillery per kilometer of frontage was to be greater in the sector of the main effort of the corps. Thus in the 336th Rifle Division sector there were four combat vehicles per kilometer of frontage, while in the 322d Rifle Division sector there were ten.

Later that day (9 July) General Tertyshnyy summoned the commander of the 59th Independent Tank Regiment and informed him that, according to the directive received from the army commander, the tank regiment must also be ready to carry out another mission. He explained that, if shortly after the start of the operation the enemy should begin to withdraw to the second defense zone, he might order the tank regiment immediately to start pursuit along the main line of the corps advance and seize part of the German second defense zone.

General Tertyshnyy directed that during the preparation phase commanders of tanks and self-propelled assault gun sub-units should get in touch with commanders of rifle battalions whom they were to support in combat, and during joint reconnaissance reach an understanding with regard to cooperation, communication, and setting up general orientation points. Cooperation signals between rifle, tank, and artillery sub-units would be prepared by the corps staff and sent out to all units.

Targets located at the front line of the German main defense zone, which the tanks were to attack first, were to be well marked and memorized by the tank crews.

Commanders of tank companies were responsible for reconnoitering the routes of advance from the concentration area to the jump-off positions.

Engineer Support of the Advance

The corps commander had ordered the chief of corps engineers to submit to him a plan for the engineer support of the offensive, which he did on 10 July. The plan was based on missions assigned to engineer troops* in the corps operation order and on directives issued by General Tertyshnyy during the reconnaissance. The plan indicated what kind of engineer work would be carried out, when, and by whom.

The chief of engineers reported that the final preparation of the jump-off positions for the infantry, and in particular the task of digging trenches from

* In addition to engineer platoons in each rifle regiment, the corps had five engineer battalions, one in each rifle division, one in the corps, and one attached.

the Soviet first trench toward the enemy obstacles, was the responsibility of the rifle units of the first echelon regiments. This work was to be done only at night. The first trench of the jump-off position was to be dug 250 to 300 meters from the German front line.

In addition to the jump-off positions for the infantry, engineers were to prepare jump-off positions for the tanks, artillery firing positions for direct fire weapons, command and observation points, and supply and evacuation routes.

Passages in Soviet and German minefields and barbed wire obstacles were to be made by engineer battalions of the divisions; in Soviet minefields during the night of 11/12 July, and in the German minefields on the eve of the attack.* The barbed wire obstacles were mined so that they could be blown up during the artillery preparation.

Corps engineers were responsible for the preparation of routes across the Soviet and German trenches for artillery and various vehicles.

To assure the unimpeded advance of tanks and self-propelled artillery, General Tertyshnyy ordered each engineer battalion to detail several squads to carry out engineer reconnaissance and clear the advance routes of antitank obstacles laid by the Germans. He also directed that four mobile obstacle detachments be organized from men and equipment of the corps and division engineer battalions, one on the corps and three on the divisional levels. Each mobile obstacle detachment was to consist of an engineer company and be equipped with at least 500 antitank mines and 200 kilograms of explosives. Each was to organize several tank destroyer groups trained to battle tanks at close range.

The mobile obstacle detachments would follow the advance of the rifle divisions of the first echelon ready for action either in the respective sectors of the divisions they followed, or together on orders of the corps commander.

Antitank Defense Measures

By General Tertyshnyy's order, during the offensive operation rifle divisions and the artillery units and sub-units attached to them were to be responsible for their own antitank defense.

In addition, the following elements were assigned for defense against possible German tank counterattacks: 1178th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment (corps commander's antitank reserve); corps mobile obstacle detachment; antitank reserves of the division commanders (each consisting of one tank destroyer artillery battalion); and divisional mobile obstacle detachments.

Commanders of the antitank artillery reserves were told by the corps chief of staff where, in all probability, they would be deployed to beat off

* In Soviet and German minefields engineer troops prepared 30 passages 15 meters wide and 8 passages 100 meters wide. They removed 2,839 antitank and 4,618 antipersonnel mines.

expected German counterattacks. These deployment lines had been previously selected by the corps commander. General Tertyshnyy suggested that as soon as the infantry reached the line from the right bank of the Seret River to Lopushany, the antitank artillery reserve of the corps would deploy for combat at Hill 396.0, the antitank artillery reserve of the 336th Rifle Division on the line from the hill one kilometer southeast of Manayuv to Leonuvka, the antitank reserve of the 322d Rifle Division on the line from the hill one and a half kilometers southeast of Garbuzuv to the northern outskirts of Lopushany.

After the infantry captured Kruguv and Nushche, the antitank artillery reserve of the corps would deploy between Hill 346.0 and Garbuzuv; the antitank artillery reserve of the 336th Rifle Division on the line from the eastern outskirts of Kruguv to the northern outskirts of Nushche; the reserve of the 322d Rifle Division from the southern outskirts of Nushche to Zaluch Hill (one kilometer south of Nushche).

Finally, after the infantry reached the line between Sasov and Zolochov, the antitank artillery reserve of the corps was to secure Zazule, and the rifle divisions were to organize a firm antitank defense at the captured lines with all available guns.

Antiaircraft Defense Measures

The corps commander was informed by General Kurochkin that the AA defense of the corps in the assembly area and during the advance would be handled by the Antiaircraft Artillery Commands of the Sixtieth Army and Third Guards Tank Army, as well as by the army group's fighter aviation.

To cover the advance of the troops in the XV Rifle Corps sector, General Kurochkin assigned the 1064th AAA Regiment of the 23d AAA Division (16 85mm guns and 16 12.7mm AAA machine guns).

The density of AAA guns for the frontage of the breakthrough sector was six tubes per kilometer.

In addition, Colonel Andreyuk issued several directives designed to enhance the anti-air potentialities of the corps. Thus, the AA machine gun companies of the divisions were to protect their respective divisions' command and observation posts. Each rifle company would detail one squad, and each rifle battalion one platoon to fire (rifle and automatic fire) at low flying enemy planes. At the corps command and observation posts anti-aircraft warning stations were organized. They were connected by direct wire with the Army anti-aircraft warning station.

Measures to Ensure Secrecy

The corps commander ordered that all regrouping movements be carried out only at night, with the understanding that at daybreak all the troops would be concealed from air and ground observation. Because of the short July nights, the rifle divisions could be expected to move no more than 18-20 kilometers in one night. Troops were not permitted to billet in towns and villages. All vehicles were to travel with lights off. Control posts and commandant

service* were to be organized along the routes to ensure that the established order of the march and all the rules were strictly observed.

Concealment and camouflage of troops in the assembly area were to be checked by specially delegated staff officers, who would use planes for this purpose.

While reconnoitering at the front line, all officers were to wear soldiers' uniforms. They were to make their reconnaissances in small groups only, at times and places approved by division commanders and reported to the corps staff.

State of Supply

During the evening of 13 July, the chief of the corps rear services reported to the corps commander that as of that day the corps had three refueling units of fuel and lubricants,** and eight daily rations of food (including two days of dry rations). Ammunition on hand (in units of fire) was as shown on Figures 5 and 6. There were 1.75 ammunition fire units at the firing positions, 0.25 fire units at the supply depots of the supply units, and 0.50 fire units at artillery depots of the corps.

The 59th Independent Tank Regiment had 1.6 units of fire, and the attached self-propelled artillery sub-units had 2-2.1 units of fire. All vehicles, weapons, engineer and communications equipment had been carefully checked during the preceding several days, and when necessary repaired or replaced.

Occupation of the Jump-Off Positions

To reach the jump-off positions the corps was to advance 10 to 15 kilometers and cross the Seret River. In the corps area, moving into the Zolozhtsy Stare-Ranenyuv sector, there were only a few crossings. Because of this the plan for the advance of troops to the jump-off positions was prepared by the army staff.

Guided by the army plan, Colonel Andreyuk advised all units and formations of the corps when and where they were to cross the river. Rifle divisions of the first echelon were instructed how and when they should relieve units of the 246th Rifle Division of the Thirteenth Army, which were presently deployed in the new corps sector.

Crossing and the advance to the jump-off positions were to take place on the following schedule:

* In the Soviet Army the traffic control function of military police is assigned to traffic controllers who are a part of the commandant service. This service also secures bridges, road junctions, unit headquarters, and other key locations.

** Soviet refueling units equal the amount of fuel in tons required for a type of vehicle to move a specific distance. It differs for each type. For each unit or formation it is the amount required for all of its vehicles of each type to move that distance. At this level it is measured in tons.

- Night 10/11 July: artillery of the 322d Rifle Division, 155th Gun Artillery Brigade, 1178th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment;
- Night 11/12 July: forward rifle battalions of first echelon divisions and organic, attached, and reinforcing artillery, except for the multiple rocket launcher units and the 408th and 1593d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiments;
- Night 12/13 July: 408th and 1593d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiments, multiple rocket launcher units;
- Night 13/14 July: remaining units of rifle divisions of the first echelon, which during the same night were to replace units of the 246th Rifle Division and take up jump-off positions. At the same time artillery units designated for direct fire would take up their firing positions.

General Tertyshnyy ordered tanks and self-propelled assault guns to move to their jump-off positions 10-15 minutes before the end of the artillery preparation. Up to that time they were to remain in assembly areas on the west bank of the Seret River.

While the corps units were assembling, or advancing to the jump-off positions, the corps intelligence officer and his assistants were gathering additional data on German forces, and reporting them immediately to the chief of staff and the corps commander.

Late in the afternoon on 13 July the corps intelligence officer, at General Tertyshnyy's request, presented a summary of recent intelligence information, gathered by the 246th Rifle Division during combat intelligence missions, on 7 and 11 July. On 11 July a battalion assigned to combat reconnaissance had captured the eastern part of Gnidava and taken prisoners from the German 913th Infantry Regiment of the 349th Infantry Division. More were taken during the night of 11/12 July, when the rest of Gnidava was occupied.

While the prisoners indicated that the Germans had made no changes in deployment in the main defense zone, they reported that the German command was aware of Soviet preparations for the offensive. However, they did not know exact time nor the sector where the main attack was to be made.

The intelligence officer had learned from the staff of the Sixtieth Army that during the nights of 11/12 and 12/13 July the enemy in front of the Soviet Thirteenth Army, on the right of the XV Rifle Corps, had started to withdraw his main forces from the main defense zone to the second defense zone, about seven or eight kilometers from the front line.

To determine whether this was happening in front of the Sixtieth Army also, General Kurochkin ordered a combat intelligence operation carried out in the army zone on 13 July.

In the XV Rifle Corps sector combat intelligence was conducted by two rifle companies of the 246th Rifle Division. It showed that there were no changes in the German deployment in front of the corps, but that the enemy was very alert.

During the evening of 13 July, General Kurochkin called General Tertyshnyy and informed him that in view of the high degree of German alertness, the combat reconnaissance assault by the forward battalions which was scheduled to take place the morning of the 14th without artillery preparation would be carried out with a 30-minute artillery preparation beginning at 0445. It would already be daylight, for sunrise would come about 15 minutes before that. With sunset at about 2130, there would be a long day, and twilight would last most of the night.

Taking into consideration the fact that the German Command obviously intended to try to hold the first position, General Tertyshnyy ordered Colonel Ignatyev, Commander of the 336th Rifle Division, to assign an entire rifle regiment for the assault, instead of the forward battalion only. The 322d Rifle Division was to attack as planned with one rifle battalion.

Following the corps commander's order, at 0515 on 14 July, after a 30-minute artillery preparation, the 1128th Rifle Regiment of the 336th Rifle Division, and the 1st Battalion of the 1987th Rifle Regiment, 322d Rifle Division, launched an attack.

Early reports received from the divisions indicated that the Germans were offering fierce resistance. After an extremely intense fight, the 1128th Rifle Regiment finally captured Hill 375.0, the hill east of Manayuv, Leonuvka, and Donbrova. The 1st Battalion, 1087th Rifle Regiment, took Hill 396.0.

The corps staff reported this to the army, adding that after the assault units took segments of the enemy's first and second trenches, they halted to consolidate the seized positions.

The German Command made all-out efforts to restore the situation. Shortly after 0900 a report from the 336th Rifle Division indicated that the enemy had brought the 349th Reconnaissance Battalion and one reserve battalion to the Manayuv area, reinforced them with assault guns of the 300th Assault Gun Brigade, and at 0900 launched a counterattack against the right flank of the 1128th Rifle Regiment. A pitched battle was in progress.

Messages from the 322d Rifle Division informed the corps commander that at 1000 in the area of Hill 396.0 a German company supported by six assault guns had counterattacked toward the positions of the 1st Battalion, 1087th Rifle Regiment. The counterattack was repulsed with heavy German casualties.

Several reports received from the 336th Rifle Division during the forenoon showed that between 1000 and 1200 German troops, up to an infantry battalion strong, supported by artillery and self-propelled guns, carried out five counterattacks from the Manayuv area against the 1128th Rifle Regiment.

All these developments were promptly reported to the army staff. The corps commander also informed the Army commander that while engaged in bitter fighting with the counterattacking German troops the corps artillery was using up a considerable amount of the ammunition that had been allocated for the artillery support of the attack of the main forces scheduled for the morning of 15 July.

Taking this into consideration, and after learning that a similar situation had developed in other corps, General Kurochkin requested permission from the army group commander to commit his main forces at once, starting the artillery preparation at 1430 and the main assault at 1600. Permission was granted.

General Kurochkin ordered his commander of artillery to introduce a few changes in the plan for artillery preparation, most important of which was the cancellation of the rolling barrage which was to accompany the attack of infantry and tanks. Instead the support of the attack was to be implemented by successive concentrations of artillery fire on German strongpoints and other targets.

The Offensive

The Breakthrough of the German Main Defense Zone (Maps 9-12)

At 1430 on 14 July, General Tertyshnyy, after receiving the signal from the army commander, ordered initiation of the 90-minute artillery preparation. The infantry attack was launched at 1600. From his observation post the corps commander could observe how the divisions of the first echelon, supported by artillery, tanks, and aviation, advanced through the passages in the minefields and barbed wire prepared by the engineers during the artillery preparation. The advance seemed to be progressing smoothly.

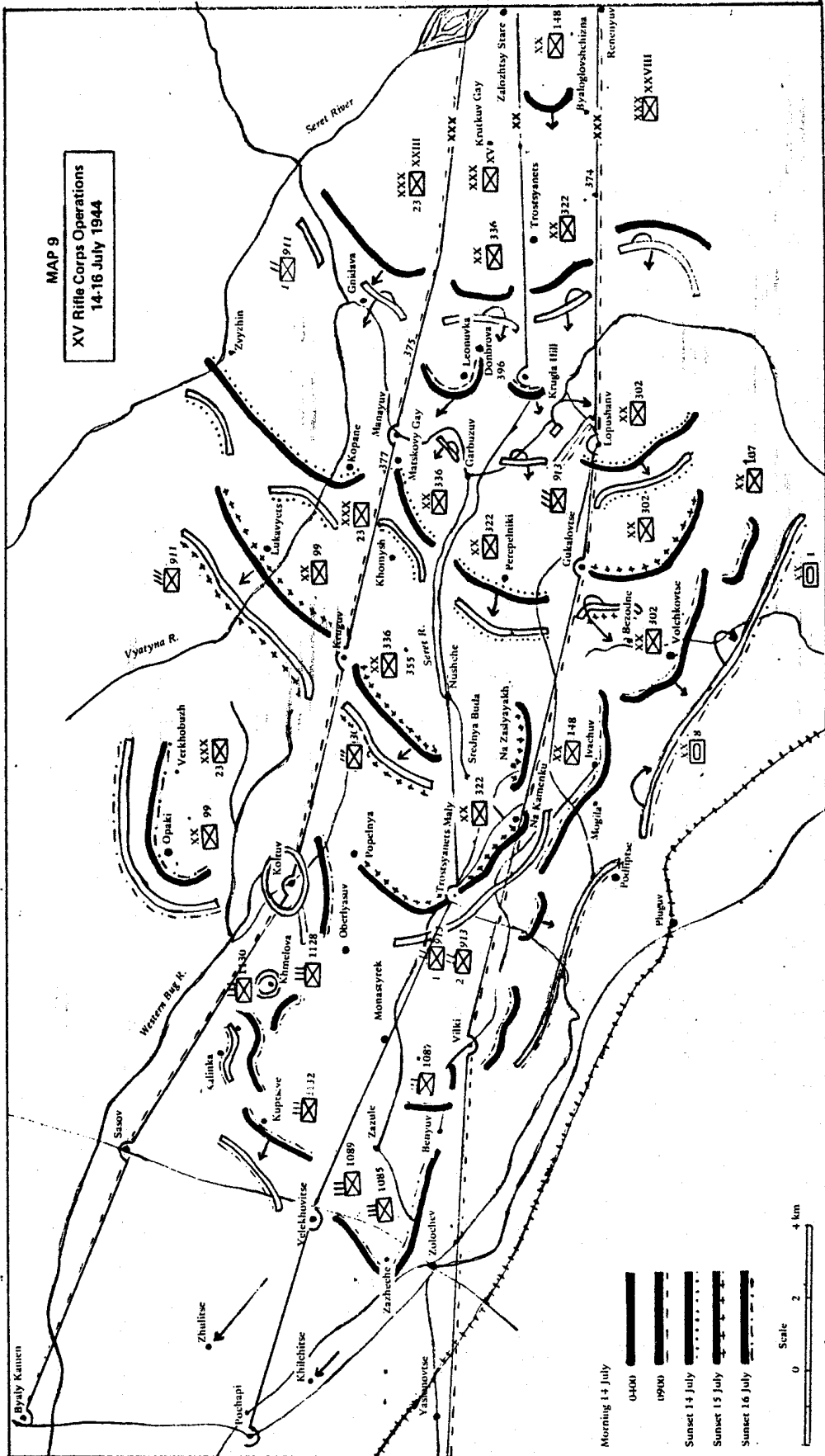
Early reports received from the field by the corps staff indicated that the troops were fighting for the first and second trenches. The self-propelled artillery and the artillery directly supporting the infantry stayed close to the infantry, shelling German fire emplacements which were hindering the advance. Rifle regiments of the 336th Rifle Division, having reached the opposite side of the loop of the Seret River, where it curved behind the German defenses, crossed it again, and engaged the Germans in combat for Manayuv and Garbuzuv. Divisional and regimental artillery groups effectively supported the advance, concentrating their fire at German centers of resistance.

Soon, however, the flow of messages from the divisions showed that the German Command was trying to stop the corps advance and restore the situation. German troops up to battalion strength, supported by tanks and assault guns, counterattacked repeatedly. Especially fierce fighting was reported by the 322d Rifle Division. There on the right wing, the 1089th Rifle Regiment found itself under heavy mortar and machine gun fire from around Garbuzuv. Two tanks supporting the regiment were hit and destroyed. Another regiment of the 322d Rifle Division, the 1085th, was forced by heavy fire from the Lopushany area and from the third trench to stop its advance.

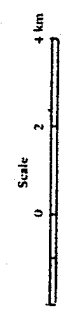
General Tertyshnyy, who was following the progress of the attack closely, directed the corps artillery commander to destroy the German resistance centers in Garbuzuv and Lopushany. The artillery commander reported that the divisional and regimental artillery groups had already opened fire on them.

Later the chief of staff of the 322d Rifle Division reported that the 3d Battalion of the 1089th Rifle Regiment, supported by four tanks, in a bold

MAP 9
XV Rifle Corps Operations
14-16 July 1944



Morning 14 July
0400
0900
Sunset 14 July
Sunset 15 July
Sunset 16 July



attack had captured a segment of the third trench, found itself in the rear of the enemy south of Garbuzov, and, in cooperation with the 1st Battalion, which was delivering a frontal attack, had forced the Germans to retreat toward Perepelniki.

Colonel Lashchenko, Commander of the 322d Rifle Division, informed General Tertyshnyy that, in view of the new situation in the Garbuzov area, he had ordered the commander of the 1085th Rifle Regiment, Colonel Timofeyev, to take advantage of the success of the 1089th Rifle Regiment, leave one battalion to protect his front, and with the two remaining battalions envelop the enemy from the northeast and destroy him.

Some time later, the division reported that Colonel Timofeyev, with two battalions, had enveloped the German forces in his sector, struck at the flank and rear of German troops defending the third trench, and, with his third battalion attacking from the front, had taken the trench and the hill one kilometer northeast of Lopushany.

During the afternoon and evening, General Tertyshnyy intermittently reported to General Kurochkin on combat developments.

The enemy, while withdrawing under heavy corps pressure, was nevertheless offering strong resistance. General Tertyshnyy believed that German counter-attacks with relatively strong infantry forces supported by tanks and assault guns indicated early commitments of new units from the reserve.

The summary report to the army for the evening of 14 July stated that, although the day's objective had not been reached, the corps's main forces, which had started the offensive at 1600, had broken through the German first defense zone and by sunset had advanced five to eight kilometers. (The 336th Rifle Division, five, the 322d Rifle Division, eight.) The advance was effectively supported by the 8th Guards Ground Attack Air Division, which flew 139 sorties in support of the corps. The Air Division's main effort was directed against the concentration of enemy troops and equipment in Perepelniki, Zolochev, and Kabarovtse (five kilometers southwest of Gukalovtse), as well as against the retreating German forces.

By sunset corps troops had captured Manayuv, Garbuzov, and Perepelniki. The 336th Rifle Division had reached Hill 377.0 and Matskovy Gay; the 322d Rifle Division was at Perepelniki.

According to reports received by the corps staff from units on its flanks and from the staff of the Sixtieth Army toward the end of the day, the 99th Rifle Division of the XXIII Rifle Corps, on the corps's right, had taken Zvyzhin and Kopane. The 302d Rifle Division of the XXVIII Rifle Corps, on the left, had captured Lopushany but was stopped by fire at the eastern edge of the woods east of Gukalovtse.

General Tertyshnyy and his staff became very much alarmed by the report that, because the 302d Rifle Division had fallen behind, there was a gap almost three kilometers wide between the XV and XXVIII Rifle Corps. The Germans had taken advantage of the gap and opened devastating flanking fire at the open flank of the corps. General Tertyshnyy reacted immediately. He called Colonel

Lashchenko and ordered him, at the expense of combat units of the first echelon, to detail part of his forces to protect the endangered left flank of the corps. General Tertyshnyy realized that while the decision withdrew some force from the forward momentum of the attack, it was essential to keep the base of the penetration open and avoid encirclement of the forces already in the penetration.

During the evening of 14 July the corps intelligence officer reported the latest data on the enemy to the corps commander and the chief of staff. According to captured documents, the Germans had suffered heavy losses. The commander of the German 1st Battalion, 913th Infantry Regiment, for example, had reported to the regimental staff that only 80 men remained in his battalion. The commander of the 349th Reconnaissance Battalion reported that of the 400 men at the start of the battle only 250 remained. During the forenoon, when only the forward battalions were engaged in combat, the Germans had already started to bring up their reserves. At 1200 on 14 July air reconnaissance spotted up to 100 tanks moving from Sasov toward Koltuv. POWs testified that the 507th Panzer Battalion had been transferred from Brody to the Koltuv area.

After reviewing all available intelligence information, gleaned from front line intelligence reports, captured German documents, and air reconnaissance reports, General Tertyshnyy concluded that the German Command would be able to transfer elements of the 14th SS Galician Infantry Division and the 8th Panzer Division to the corps sector during the night and was likely to commit them in the morning of 15 July, in an effort to stop the advance of the XV Rifle Corps.

In order to speed up the breakthrough of the entire German tactical zone, General Tertyshnyy requested, and General Kurochkin, after consultation with General Rybalko, Third Guards Tank Army commander, agreed to commit one mechanized brigade of its IX Mechanized Corps in the 322d Rifle Division sector the next morning. At 0830, after a short artillery preparation, in cooperation with the 322d Rifle Division the brigade would launch an attack toward Trostysyanets Maly. Its initial objective would be to capture the Gorodylovski Lyas grove and secure the commitment to combat of the main force of the IX Mechanized Corps.

Colonel Andreyuk informed Colonel Lashchenko of the army decision, and directed him to organize coordination with the 69th Mechanized Brigade of the IX Mechanized Corps, as well as with the units on its right and left.

Comment: Although the corps had made a significant penetration of the German defenses, they were not yet through the entire depth of the German position. Consequently, the penetration was extremely narrow. While the forward elements of the tank army were already operating with the XV Rifle Corps in accordance with the plan for future commitment of that army, full commitment of the mechanized brigade to combat before the infantry had completed the penetration shows how strong the German resistance was. The Soviet preference would have been to preserve the tank and mechanized formations for the exploitation phase. In this case, however, it was recognized that the leading infantry units did not have sufficient tank strength to accomplish their mission

rapidly enough to ensure that there would be a clean breakthrough for the tank army to exploit. The early commitment of the mechanized brigade undoubtedly was instrumental in the subsequent Soviet success.

The Advance of 15 July

During the night of 14/15 July, the corps commander and the entire corps staff had little rest. Reports from the divisions indicated that, as directed, starting at 2300 their forward battalions were very active and aggressive. Their task was to prevent the enemy from breaking contact, tire him out, and improve the jump-off positions for the corps main force for the assault on 15 July. During the night, in the sector of the 336th Rifle Division the forward battalions mopped up most of the forest north of Khomysh. In the 322d Division sector they cleared the woods southeast of Nushche and toward 0400 reached the second defense zone and engaged the enemy at the southeastern outskirts of the village.

As soon as Major F.S. Grishin, the commander of the 1089th Rifle Regiment, learned of his forward battalion's success, he immediately, on his own initiative, committed the main force of his regiment to combat, and delivered a crushing blow at the flank of enemy forces deployed at the edge of the grove south of Nushche. Breaking through heavy resistance, the regiment started to advance toward Srednya Buda, bypassing the strongpoint at Nushche on the southwest. Thus, the timely commitment of the main force of the 1089th Rifle Regiment resulted in penetration of the enemy second defense zone, with only small losses.

Comment: This is one of the numerous examples of the Soviet commander's flexibility and initiative. Despite firm centralization of command and control, there is still enough room for significant manifestation of intelligent initiative and independence by subordinates. The Soviets believe that in critical moments of the battle quick reaction to the changes in the situation and adaptation of methods which conform to the conditions on the battlefield will have a decisive influence on the success of any operation.

At daybreak the advance of the forward battalions detailed for night combat was halted by German counterattacks and heavy fire.

Early in the morning of 15 July, General Tertyshnyy, after consulting with General Kurochkin, ordered the corps to commence one hour of artillery preparation at 0730, and launch the attack of the rifle divisions of the first echelon at 0830. First reports received from the divisions after the attack began indicated that they were encountering fierce resistance. German infantry units supported by groups of six to seven tanks and assault guns counterattacked repeatedly in an effort to halt the advance. Similar reports were received from the neighboring formations.

Toward mid-day, Colonel Ignachev, the commander of the 336th Rifle Division, reported that, after advancing only 200 to 300 meters, his troops were halted by devastating fire from the first trench of the second defense zone, and despite many attempts during the previous two hours they could not advance

any more. The artillery preparation had not destroyed the German weapon emplacements, and Colonel Ignachev asked for more artillery support.

General Tertyshnyy ordered his artillery commander to provide for an additional artillery "treatment" of the second defense zone.

Meanwhile, Colonel Andreyuk reported that according to messages received from the 322d Rifle Division and the Corps liaison officer with that division, the advance in that sector was more successful. Colonel Lashchenko had deployed the 69th Mechanized Brigade* in the center of his division, and the brigade, in close cooperation with the rifle regiments, was moving forward.

At 1000 the 1085th Rifle Regiment had come under heavy fire in the area south of Zaluch Hill. Soon after that it was counterattacked from the Ivachuv area by an infantry battalion supported by 12 tanks. The advance of the regiment was halted, and a fierce engagement with the counterattacking forces began.

In the meantime, the 1089th Rifle Regiment, in cooperation with the 69th Mechanized Brigade, had captured Nushche and continued toward Trostsyanyets Maly.

Shortly before 1100 Colonel Lashchenko called the corps commander and asked his permission to commit the division's second echelon, the 1087th Rifle Regiment (Commander, Lieutenant Colonel D.P. Fomichev), to combat, to take advantage of the progress of the 1089th Rifle Regiment. It would be ordered to launch an attack with two battalions through the woods toward Na Zaslyayakh, capture it, and cooperating with the 1085th Rifle Regiment destroy the counterattacking enemy.

General Tertyshnyy assented.

Several reports received later from the 322d Rifle Division indicated that battalions of the 1087th Rifle Regiment and the attached artillery quickly crossed the forest southwest of Nushche, turned at its southwestern edge, and at about 1200 in a surprise attack captured Na Zaslyayakh. Fearing encirclement, enemy infantry and tanks had started to retreat toward Ivachuv.

Pushing persistently forward, the 322d Rifle Division broke through the German second defense zone and continued to advance toward Trostsyanyets Maly and Zolochov. Nonetheless the situation of the Soviet division was perilous. Since the 302d Rifle Division of the XXVIII Rifle Corps on its left was still engaged in combat with elements of the 8th Panzer Division at the grove west of Gukalovtse, a three to four kilometer gap had formed, and the left flank of the 322d Rifle Division was unprotected.

To protect his left flank Colonel Lashchenko ordered Lieutenant Colonel Fomichev to deploy one rifle battalion reinforced with artillery defensively

* The brigade was composed of three motorized rifle battalions, eight T-34 tanks with 85mm guns, 17 T-34 tanks with 76mm guns, and 10 SAU-76 self-propelled guns.

in the area of Na Zaslyayakh, facing south. He reported this to the corps commander.

In the afternoon, the resistance of German troops became stronger, and they launched one attack after another. The 336th Rifle Division reported that it was still on the old line in front of the second defense zone, engaged in combat with the 30th Infantry Regiment of the 14th SS Galician Infantry Division and the 8th Motorized Regiment of the 8th Panzer Division, which were counterattacking from the Kruguv area and the Oshovitsa woods.

Radio and wire messages from the 322d Rifle Division made it clear that the Germans were also attempting to restore the situation in the Nushche area. At 1230, from the woods west of Nushche, approximately one enemy infantry company with 11 tanks and assault guns counterattacked the right flank of the 1st Battalion, 1089th Regiment. The counterattack was repulsed. At 1300, an enemy company supported by three assault guns repeated the counterattack, this time from the grove north of Nushche. Again the counterattack was unsuccessful. The reports noted that the 69th Mechanized Brigade was playing an important role in beating off German counterattacks, destroying numerous German tanks and assault guns and helping the 1089th Rifle Regiment to hold the line.

Thus in midafternoon General Tertyshnyy had his right flank first echelon division making slow progress, while his left flank first echelon division was making much better progress, but at the cost of widening the already substantial gap between itself and the neighboring division from the adjacent corps on the left. He still had the 148th Rifle Division uncommitted, about four to six kilometers to the rear. And the main forces of the IX Mechanized Corps of the Third Guards Tank Army were intact in the center of his area, awaiting the signal to exploit.

Despite the strong German resistance, General Tertyshnyy decided to continue the advance as planned. He called the commanders of the 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions and ordered them to carry out the mission of the day before sunset. He also informed them that he had decided not to commit the 148th Rifle Division of the second echelon, in order to protect the open left flank against enemy attacks. He explained that, according to the latest information received from air reconnaissance, the German Command had started to assemble its infantry and tanks near Ivachuv and Volchkovtse, where they posed a threat to that flank.

Comment: General Tertyshnyy's orders to redouble the efforts of the attacking divisions showed his aggressive desire to accomplish the mission. However, he was not gambling unduly, since the 148th Rifle Division remained available for use if necessary.

During the afternoon both first echelon divisions of the corps slowly, but persistently, moved forward. General Tertyshnyy directed the commander of the 336th Rifle Division to commit his second echelon, Lieutenant Colonel Korneyev's 1132d Rifle Regiment, against the Kruguv strongpoint. Tertyshnyy suggested that the regiment be sent through the forest to envelop German positions east and south of Kruguv, and then launch an assault from the

Oshovitsa Woods toward the flank and rear of enemy troops at Kruguv, and force them to withdraw. Toward evening Colonel Ignachev reported that the maneuver and the attack were successful. The Germans, fearing encirclement, had left Kruguv. The division, taking advantage of the enemy's confusion, launched a bold attack and soon captured the second defense zone.

During the 15th the XV Rifle Corps had received considerable support from the 4th Bomber Air Corps. Air raids were concentrated on the German forces massing in the Pluguv area. To stop this German tank force from making a counterattack the Soviet air forces brought units from the northern group and from army group reserves as well. A mass attack was launched beginning at about 1400 with aircraft passing over Zalozhtse at 1500 meters at intervals of one to two minutes. This raid continued for four hours. During the 15th 3,288 sorties were flown against this one German tank force. The density of bombing reached 102 tons per square kilometer. This air force support was largely responsible for the difficulty the 8th Panzer Division had in counterattacking.

The daily summary report sent to the Sixtieth Army at 2200 stated that by sunset on 15 July the XV Rifle Corps had broken through the second defense zone in its entire sector.

The 336th Rifle Division had reached Kruguv, advancing five and a half kilometers during the day. The 322d Rifle Division had reached Popelnya, the eastern outskirts of Trostsyaneets Maly, and Na Kamenku, advancing eight and a half kilometers. The 148th Rifle Division, in the corps second echelon, was assembled in the Garbuzuv area, some four to eight kilometers to the rear of the first echelon divisions. The command post of the 336th Rifle Division had been relocated at Khomysh, and that of the 322d Rifle Division at Popelnya, and the corps CP was in the area of Hill 375.0. The main forces of the IX Mechanized Corps were near Khomysh and in the woods west of Perepelniki, and remained ready for combat in the breakthrough sector.

During 14 and 15 July the divisions of the first echelon had suffered considerable losses.* At the end of one and one half days of combat, they had not reached the line given to them in the operation order for the first day of the offensive. They were able to reach only the area of the initial objective, a task they were scheduled to fulfill in the first half day of combat.

In view of the progress made and the imminent commitment of the mobile force, part of the supporting artillery was ordered back to its formations. As of the end of 15 July the 359th Rifle Division's mortar units, the 924th Artillery Regiment, and the 221st Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion (all together 98 guns and mortars) were ordered to return to the 359th Division. To compensate the corps, General Kurochkin attached to the corps the remaining batteries of the 1827th Heavy Self-Propelled Assault Gun Regiment and one KV-I heavy tank.

* Figures not available.

Late in the evening, General Kurochkin called General Tertyshnyy and discussed the situation with him. He pointed out that although during the day the corps had advanced only a small distance, and still had not reached the first day's objectives, its advance was still greater than that in the other corps of the Army. None had advanced more than two or three kilometers. General Kurochkin confirmed information already received that Marshal Konev would commit the Third Guards Tank Army, commanded by Colonel General P.S. Rybalko, to combat the next morning.

The Third Guards Tank Army was to enter combat through the breakthrough sector, a narrow corridor some four to six kilometers wide, hacked out by the XV Corps. The corridor (later to be known as the Koltuv Corridor) had only one road fit for tank movements. It ran from Perepelniki to Srednya Buda to Trostsyanets Maly. The entire road was covered by German artillery and mortars, and some of its segments by rifle and machine gun fire as well.

There was a danger that enemy forces which were in the process of concentrating around Ivachuv and Bezodne (probably including elements of the 1st and 8th Panzer Divisions) would counterattack northward to block the corps breakthrough. Thus, the army commander directed General Tertyshnyy to deploy the 148th Rifle Division of the corps's second echelon between Na Zaslyayakh and the woods to the east, in order to launch an attack in the morning of 16 July toward Ivachuv and, in cooperation with the XXVIII Rifle Corps, destroy the enemy in that area. At the same time General Kurochkin ordered the 7th Guards Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade, the 1593d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment, the corps Mobile Antitank Reserve, and the corps Mobile Obstacle Detachment to deploy on the same line.

The army commander assigned the following mission to the XV Rifle Corps for 16 July:

During the night of 15/16 July reinforced battalions of the 322d Rifle Division Regiment, in cooperation with the forward tank and mechanized brigades of the Third Guards Tank Army, would widen the breakthrough front. In the morning, after the commitment of the Third Guards Tank Army, the divisions of the corps first echelon would exploit any success achieved by the tank army, by launching a decisive attack, with the objective of reaching the line from M. Byaly Kamen to Yasionovtse by the end of the day.

Colonel Andreyuk, returning from discussing details of cooperation with the Staff of the Third Guards Tank Army, informed General Tertyshnyy about all of the arrangements. A new element was the decision made by the commander of the Third Guards Tank Army to deploy his 16th Self-Propelled Artillery Brigade (60 SAU-57s) at the southern edges of the forest south of Perepelniki, to eliminate any potential danger to the tank army's left flank, and at the same time to support the defenses of the XV Corps. In addition, in order to secure a successful advance of the main forces of the tank army on 16 July, Rybalko had decided to commit the 56th Guards Tank and 69th Mechanized Brigades during the night of 15/16 July. They would assist the forward battalions of the 322d Rifle Division in widening the breakthrough front. (This was already known to the XV Corps commander from his conversation with the army commander.)

The Advance of 16 July

In the morning of 16 July Colonel Andreyuk reported to General Tertyshnyy that during the night reinforced rifle battalions assigned for night operations had been very active. In the 322d Rifle Division sector these battalions, in cooperation with the tank and mechanized brigades, broke the German resistance and by 0700 had reached the western edge of the forest two kilometers south of Kiltuv, Oberlyasyuv, and Monastyrek. At approximately the same time forward elements of the 56th Guards Tank Brigade reached Zazule. An hour later the 69th Mechanized Brigade reached the Yelekhovitse area and cut the road from Sasov to Zolochev.

The commander of the 148th Rifle Division, General Mishchenko, had reported to the corps staff that at about 0600 his division had deployed on the line from the southern outskirts of Na Zasluyakh to the southern edge of the grove southwest of Perepelniki and together with the 302d Rifle Division of the XXVIII Rifle Corps had launched an attack toward Ivachuv and Podliptse. The attack was halted by enemy fire and counterattacks. General Mishchenko blamed the failure on poor intelligence and insufficient artillery support. German fire emplacements were not silenced.

General Tertyshnyy summoned his artillery commander and, after a short consultation, decided to reinforce the 148th Rifle Division with two artillery regiments of the 50th Howitzer Brigade, at the expense of the 322d Rifle Division. Then he ordered General Mishchenko to carry out his mission.

Meanwhile, the 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions reported that following the commitment of the Third Guards Tank Army they had launched a vigorous attack. The Third Guards Tank Army was advancing on the only road leading from Perepelniki to Yelekhovitse through Srednya Buda, Trostsyanyets Maly, Monastyrek, and Zazule. At the front of the column was the IX Mechanized Corps, followed by the VII Guards Tank Corps, with the VI Guards Tank Corps in the rear. Along the road, the remnants of the German 349th Infantry Division offered only negligible resistance. However, the road was under artillery and mortar fire from both north and south.

Despite the successful advance of the Third Guards Tank Army the XV Corps rifle divisions were encountering heavy German resistance. On the right flank the enemy held important strongpoints at Koltuv and Khmelova and were withstanding pressure by the 1128th Rifle Regiment. Elements of the 14th SS Galician Infantry Division supported by some 50 tanks counterattacked in that area frequently. On the left flank counterattacks were delivered from Mogila and Ivachuv by the German 8th Panzer Division and part of the 1st Panzer Division.

General Tertyshnyy discussed the situation with the army chief of staff, who had arrived at the corps command post. They concluded that the German Command had assembled fresh forces on the southern and northern sides of the corridor and was doing its utmost to prevent the widening of the breach. By counterattacking from the area of Kruguv and Ivachuv in the general direction of Nushche, the enemy intended to liquidate the breakthrough and cut off the units of the XV Rifle Corps and the Third Guards Tank Army which had deeply penetrated the German defenses.

Messages from the 148th Rifle Division gave evidence of a fierce battle along the southern flanks of the breakthrough corridor. At 0800, while the division was readying itself to launch a new attack and was organizing cooperation with the newly attached artillery regiments of the 50th Howitzer Brigade, an enemy infantry regiment supported by tanks and assault guns launched a counterattack toward Perepelniki against the right flank of the 302d Rifle Division and left flank of the 148th Rifle Division. Under heavy German pressure, both divisions started to withdraw north toward the main road, and soon the Germans reached the edge of the forest southeast of Perepelniki. Thus, the only road on which the Third Guards Tank Army could advance was now under tank, assault gun, and infantry fire, which greatly impeded the movement of the army.

Upon learning about the situation, General Tertyshnyy ordered the commander of the 148th Rifle Division to counterattack immediately, and sent him the 1178th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment and part of the artillery of the 322d Rifle Division as reinforcements.

At 0845 the division attacked. After a pitched battle, the Soviet troops stopped the German advance toward the road. A paramount role in the fight was played by the 1178th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment, which destroyed many German tanks and assault guns.

Comment: This decision shows the resourceful nature of the commander and especially the flexible organization he had, which permitted him to shift part of the division artillery of a division that was itself attacking in a different direction quite a few kilometers away from the critical sector. It illustrates the Soviet concept of maneuver of artillery. However, it again reveals the technical backwardness of Soviet artillery in comparison to Western artillery, which could have accomplished the support mission without needing a command change or (probably) a physical displacement.

Intense battles on the corps south flank lasted the entire day. The 148th Rifle Division advanced very slowly. At about 2400 two regiments of the division, the 908th and 914th Rifle Regiments, captured Ivachuv and then continued toward Podliptse. During the day, the third regiment, the 496th Rifle Regiment, was ordered by the corps commander to move to the Na Kamenku area to cover the gap between the 148th and 322d Rifle Divisions. At 1900 the 496th launched an attack and a few hours later reached the line Vilki-Kozaki, where it took up defensive positions facing west and southwest.

After the commitment of the tank army on the 16th the air forces' attention was largely devoted to its support. The II Guards Bomber Corps and the V Ground Attack Corps, which was diverted from the northern sector, provided the main support. In all, about 75 percent of the Second Air Army participated in this effort. The commitment of the Third Guards Tank Army was supported by six air corps and three separate air divisions, while German units on the flanks were bombed by two more bomber corps. Targets in Sasov, Koltuv, and Byaly Kamen were especially hard hit. The IV Bomber Air Corps continued to operate against Pluguv and Zolochov. At the same time the I Guards Air Corps, the VIII Ground Attack Air Corps and the 10th Guards Ground Attack Air Division attacked German fire points on the flanks of the tank breakthrough zone. The commander of the I Guards

Ground Attack Corps, General Ryazanov, had an operational group with two radios in the narrowest part of the corridor at Nushche. He could see the tank columns and the German positions. According to prearranged plans, as each group of aircraft passed over the command point it was directed to the targets that were hindering the advance.

Early in the evening General Tertyshnyy called General Kurochkin and reported on the situation in his sector. Taking advantage of the success of the Third Guards Tank Army, which had advanced 16-18 kilometers during the day, crossed the Zlochuvka River and reached the line Zhulitse-Khilchiste (four to five kilometers west of the Sasov-Zolochev line), the main forces of the 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions had advanced westward 11 to 12 kilometers and reached the line Kalinka-Kuptsove-Zazheche-Benyuv. The 1085th Rifle Regiment of the 322d Rifle Division had crossed the Zlochuvka River and was engaged in a battle for Zolochev.

However, in spite of these accomplishments, General Tertyshnyy expressed his growing concern to General Kurochkin, because German resistance on the flanks had not weakened. Koltuv and Khmelova, two important enemy resistance centers, were still in enemy hands, and the corps flanks were being repeatedly counterattacked. To protect the corps's right flank from German counterattacks launched from these centers it was necessary to deploy the 1128th Rifle Regiment of the 336th Rifle Division defensively, decreasing the strength of the division's westward drive. On the corps left flank, the enemy stubbornly held Podliptse, endangering the flank and rear of the corps and that of the Third Guards Tank Army.

Since the front and open flanks of the XV Rifle Corps extended over 30 kilometers, General Tertyshnyy requested that the army commit fresh forces in the corps sector, either from the army reserve or, after regrouping, from neighboring corps. The corps commander also expressed his disappointment that the 1593d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment had been transferred to the XXVIII Rifle Corps, weakening the XV Rifle Corps's antitank defense capabilities considerably.

General Tertyshnyy informed General Kurochkin that since 1500 his communication with the 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions had been intermittent, and that even at the present time he had difficulties in getting in touch with them. He also asked for better air cover, because of the increased activities of the Luftwaffe, which repeatedly attacked in groups of four to eight planes, being especially bothersome in the Ivachuv and Zolochev areas.

Asked by General Kurochkin why a considerable part of the corps artillery, and especially the attached units, were lagging behind, General Tertyshnyy explained that in part this was because the roads were clogged by elements of the Third Guards Tank Army, and partly because of the constant shelling of the corridor, which made it very difficult for the batteries to move and to change their positions. It seemed also that junior commanders were not aggressive enough in keeping the artillery close to the infantry.*

*Some sources emphasize that the army commander expressed his dissatisfaction with the way General Tertyshnyy and his staff were directing the corps. He thought that the command was not firm enough. In his view, the partial disruption of communication with the divisions of the first echelon had no doubt had

Next, General Kurochkin acquainted General Tertyshnyy with the situation on his flanks. The 99th Rifle Division of the XXIII Rifle Corps had advanced only a short distance. Early in the evening it took Verkhobuzh and Opaki. Its left flank extended to the northern edge of the grove north of Koltuv. The 302d Rifle Division of the XXVIII Rifle Corps, at approximately the same time, reached the line Ivachuv (excl.)-Volchkovtse-Yaroslavitse (excl.). The supporting air force had struck concentrations of troops and equipment in the areas of Byaly Kamen, Zolochev, and Voronyaki, in front of the axis of advance of the Third Guards Tank Army.

A short time later, the army commander called General Tertyshnyy again, and informed him that in view of the slow progress of the Thirty-eighth Army on the left, Marshal Konev had decided on the afternoon of 16 July to commit the Fourth Tank Army the next morning--17 July--in the XV Rifle Corps sector and not, as previously planned, in the Thirty-eighth Army zone. The tank army, taking advantage of the success of the Third Guards Tank Army, was to strike boldly westward, destroy the German forces around Lvov, and capture the city of Lvov.

Comment: This was a very bold decision. In a matter of a little more than 12 hours, the Fourth Tank Army would have to perform a most difficult maneuver. It would have to move some 100 kilometers northward parallel to the front line, and then turn west and enter the already crowded breakthrough corridor. There were no alternative plans for such an operation made in advance.

To cover the advance of the Fourth Tank Army scheduled for 17 July, Kurochkin decided that he would commit the CVI Rifle Corps of the second echelon of the Army, from behind the left flank of the XV Rifle Corps toward Zolochev. Since the 148th Rifle Division was in that area, he ordered it transferred to the CVI Rifle Corps. The XV Rifle Corps would receive the 246th Rifle Division (Commander, Colonel M.G. Fedosenko), from the CVI Rifle Corps. The division was ordered to concentrate in the Monastyrek area by 0400 on 17 July and report to General Tertyshnyy. The XV Corps would swiftly thrust westward, and its objective for the end of 17 July was the line Krasnoye-Skniluv-Bortkuv.

Comment: The switch of the divisions carried out in the heat of the battle gives a good idea of the flexibility of the Soviet command system and confidence in subordinate commanders. By reassigning the two divisions, the army commander became assured that Tertyshnyy would concentrate his entire attention on the first echelon divisions, where his attention was most desirable, and not worry any more about the 148th Rifle Division.

General Tertyshnyy and his staff quickly reviewed the directives General Kurochkin had given and the situation of the corps troops, and prepared a

negative effects on the operation. Furthermore, the corps and division command and observation posts had dropped too far behind the forward units. This was illustrated by the fact that toward the end of the day the corps command post was 20 kilometers from the front line, and those of the 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions 12 to 16 kilometers to the rear of their forward troops.

preliminary operation order for the operation on 17 July. The order stressed that the combat elements of the corps should take advantage of the success of the Third Guards Tank Army. By the end of the day the 336th Rifle Division was to reach Krasnoye, Firleyuvka, and Skniluv; the 322d Rifle Division was to reach Bortkuv and Olshanitsa. The 246th Rifle Division would receive directives after it arrived in the Monastyrek area.

Divisions, regiments, and independent units of the corps were ordered to move their command posts closer to the combat troops, to organize stable communications, bring up artillery and rear services, and secure a smooth uninterrupted supply of ammunition, fuel, and food.

The Advance on 17 July (Map 10)

During the night of 16/17 July General Tertyshnyy and Colonel Andreyuk defined the divisions' missions and issued corresponding orders. The Chief of Engineers reported that because of the lack of centralized traffic control in the narrow (six to eight kilometers wide) breakthrough corridor traffic problems had occurred. The only road leading westward on which units of the Third Guards and Fourth Tank Armies, the corps artillery, and rear echelons of the 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions could advance was often jammed. Congested areas were frequently shelled by enemy artillery and mortars, causing considerable losses.

General Tertyshnyy complained to his artillery commander that in spite of the heavy concentration of guns in the corps sector the artillery was not responding effectively enough to silence enemy batteries deployed at the northern and southern flanks of the corridor. He ordered him to organize more effective counterbattery fire, so that the troops in the corridor could safely pass through.

During the night the reinforced forward battalions of the 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions had continued to make successful progress. According to a message received at 0530 on 17 July from the 322d Rifle Division, its 1085th Rifle Regiment had captured Zolochev at about 0400, and as ordered took up defensive positions facing southwest. At approximately the same time, forward detachments of the Fourth Tank Army passed through Zolochev and, without stopping in the town, moved westward on the road Yasionovtse-Latske Male-Olshanitsa.

Early in the morning the XV Corps Intelligence Officer informed General Tertyshnyy that, according to numerous reports received during the night from the field, the enemy in front of the corps was rapidly withdrawing westward. However, at the flanks of the breakthrough, and especially at its base, the German Command had assembled strong infantry and panzer forces and obviously intended to deliver a determined counterblow toward Perepelniki, to try to close the breakthrough gap and destroy the Soviet forces which had already penetrated deep into its defense zone. The Germans had concentrated a force approximately the size of one infantry division with some 30 to 40 tanks and assault guns (two infantry regiments, one each from the 14th and 349th Infantry Divisions, and one motorized regiment of the 8th Panzer Division) in the Koltov, Khmelova, and Sasov areas, and around Podliptse, Pluguv, and the Pluguv railroad station were assembled the 254th Infantry Division and elements of the 8th and 1st Panzer Divisions.

The chief of staff of the 246th Rifle Division, Colonel G.V. Chernykh, arrived at the corps command post during the morning and reported that because of clogged

roads the division was unable to assemble in the Monastyrek area on time. He did not expect it to arrive there until afternoon.*

Numerous reports received during the day indicated that the 322d and 336th Divisions were continuing to fight scattered, pitched battles.

The 1130th and 1128th Rifle Regiments of the 336th Rifle Division were engaged in the battle for the German stronghold at Sasov. The 1132d Rifle Regiment, after destroying enemy forces in the Belzets area, toward the end of the day became engaged in heavy fighting for Buzhek and Byaly Kamen.

In the 322d Rifle Division sector, the 1085th Rifle Regiment consolidated its positions in Zolochov. The two other regiments (1089th and 1087th) continued to advance westward. Late in the day the 1089th Rifle Regiment reached Bortkuv, which had already been captured by the VI Guards Tank Corps of the Third Guards Tank Army. (At that time the main forces of the Third Guards Tank Army were 15 to 20 kilometers northwest of the line Krasnoye-Skniluv.) The 1087th Rifle Regiment, in close cooperation with the forward brigade of the Fourth Tank Army, took Latske Velke.

Late in the afternoon the corps commander ordered his command post moved to Oberlasuv, where it arrived at about 2000.

Several times during the day, the chief of operations briefed General Tertyshnyy and Colonel Andreyuk on the combat situation on either side of the corps zone. On the corps's left, the enemy repeatedly counterattacked the 148th Rifle Division from the Pluguv area. At about 2200 the Germans pushed back the center and the left flank of the division to the line Na Kamenku-Na Zaslyayakh, thus narrowing the breakthrough corridor in that area to five to six kilometers.

This situation gravely concerned General Tertyshnyy. Not only did the rear units of the XV Rifle Corps and of the Third Guards Tank Army find themselves under fire from German troops who were getting close to the breakthrough corridor, but the enemy advance also imperilled the routes of advance of the CVI Rifle Corps and the Fourth Tank Army. Furthermore, instead of striking westward with his entire force, the commander of the Fourth Tank Army had to detail several tank brigades to beat off German counterattacks from the Ivachuv area and to protect the route of advance to Zolochov.

On the right, in the sector of the 99th Rifle Division of the XXIII Rifle Corps, the situation was stable all day. The enemy continued to hold Koltuv, Khmelova, and Kalinka. The 359th Rifle Division, committed in that general area from the army commander's reserve, achieved no success. At the end of the day, the 99th Rifle Division was engaged in combat for the Bilokha grove.

Discussing the situation with his staff officers, General Tertyshnyy expressed his disappointment with the progress of the operation. Despite the commitment of two tank armies, the introduction of the 246th Rifle Division, and the successful advance of the 336th and 322d Rifle Divisions, the widening of the breakthrough corridor toward the flanks was going very slowly. During the

*The division assembled in the Monastyrek area and the woods to the west at about 1600 on 17 July, 12 hours later than ordered.

previous four days the attacks against enemy forces deployed at the flanks of the breakthrough sector had not been strong enough. Most of the artillery which was advancing behind the XV Rifle Corps and the tank armies had been utilized in an unorganized way, usually piecemeal. General Tertyshnyy instructed Colonel Andreyuk to inform the army staff that the CVI Rifle Corps and the 359th Rifle Division had been committed in a disorderly fashion without proper artillery and air preparation and support and that their poor performance was hindering the progress of the XV Rifle Corps. He thought that the army staff did not comprehend the situation on the flanks of the breakthrough, that the enemy's strength was underestimated, and that unrealistic conclusions about the Germans' quick retreat had been drawn.

Comment: Tertyshnyy's dissatisfaction with Soviet artillery performance appears to have been valid. Had the vast amount of artillery available been properly controlled, it is hard to see how the relatively small German forces could have been so successful.

The Advance of 18 July

In the morning of 18 July the Sixtieth Army's chief of staff informed General Tertyshnyy that forward elements of the Third Guards Tank Army had just linked up with forward detachments of General Baranov's Cavalry Mechanized Group of the Thirteenth Army near Derevlyany, 20 kilometers northwest of Krasnoye. This completed the encirclement of the German forces around Brody, amounting to seven infantry divisions, one motorized division and a considerable number of independent units.

The army chief of staff requested a report on the combat situation of the corps. General Tertyshnyy replied that, according to the latest information, in the 336th Rifle Division sector the 1128th Rifle Regiment had captured Sasov, and the 1130th and 1132d Rifle Regiments, after advancing 15 to 17 kilometers westward, had consolidated their hold on the southern bank of the Western Bug River south of Byaly Kamen. The division's front stretched some 30 to 35 kilometers along the line Petryche-Krasnoy -Firleyuvka-Skniluv. There were wide gaps between the units, especially on the southern bank of the Western Bug River between Sasov and Belzets.

In the sector of the 322d Rifle Division, the 1087th Rifle Regiment, in cooperation with the forward brigade of the Fourth Tank Army, had taken Olshanitsa. The 1089th Rifle Regiment was with elements of the VI Guards Tank Corps of the Third Guards Tank Army in the Bortkuv area, and the 1085th Rifle Regiment was deployed as before in Zolochev. The 246th Rifle Division was deployed with two of its regiments on the line Benyuv-Vilki (excl.), preparing to advance toward Voronyaki. The third regiment of the division (908th Rifle Regiment) was securing the line south of Koltuv and Kalinka.

Both the artillery which was attached to the divisions and the divisions' organic artillery were attached to infantry regiments. Communication between rifle regiments and supporting artillery was smooth. In several sectors, tank and artillery units of the Third Guards and Fourth Tank Armies were advancing with the infantry. The commanders of rifle regiments were in constant radio contact with them and cooperated closely during counterattacks.

Despite the commitment of the fresh troops of the 359th Rifle Division between Koltuv and Khmelova, and the CVI Rifle Corps in the Vilki-Kozaki-Na Kamenku sectors,

the situation there remained substantially unchanged. In the morning of 18 July the enemy counterattacked several times around Sasov, Khmelova, Podliptse, and Pluguv in attempts to liquidate the breakthrough. The most serious counterattack took place at about 0830, when approximately two German infantry battalions, supported by 16 tanks and assault guns, counterattacked toward Sasov. The 1128th Rifle Regiment of the 336th Rifle Division was in the area, with supporting artillery. A fierce battle developed, with heavy losses on both sides. After the Germans succeeded in moving up to the northern outskirts of Sasov, General Tertyshnyy asked General Rybalko to send his 91st Tank Brigade there. Shortly thereafter the 93d Tank Brigade of the Fourth Tank Army was sent to the area as well. With the help of the two tank brigades the 1128th Rifle Regiment was able to halt the enemy before he entered the town.

At 1000 General Kurochkin ordered General Tertyshnyy to halt the attack and turn to the defense on the line Sasov-southern bank of the Western Bug River-Petryche-Krasnoye, with the front toward the north, and Olshanitsa-Latske Velke-Yasionovtse-Zolochev-Benyuv, with the front toward the south. He was to concentrate his main forces and means on the Sasov-Krasnoye line, and especially along the Sasov-Zolochev road.

General Tertyshnyy discussed the army order with Colonel Andreyuk and several other staff officers, requested and received the latest situation reports from the divisions, and at 1200 issued an order to turn to a defense.

In part, the order provided:

The 336th Rifle Division was to take up defense positions on the line Sasov-southern bank of the Western Bug River-Petryche-Krasnoye, and prevent an enemy breakthrough toward Zolochev via Sasov, Byaly Kamen, or Krasnoye. The division was directed to defend the Sasov-Byaly Kamen sector with two regiments.

The 322d Rifle Division would defend the line Bortkuv-Olshanitsa-Khmele-hill 500 meters north of Gologury with two regiments. One rifle regiment was to stay in the second echelon in the area of Knyazhe, Latske Velke, and Latske Male. The division was directed to give special attention to the approaches to Slovita (seven and a half kilometers southwest of Olshanitsa), Olshanitsa, and Zolochev.

The 246th Rifle Division, minus the 908th Rifle Regiment, was to advance from the line Benyuv-Vilki (excl.) toward Voronyaki and Shpiklosy, and by the end of 18 July reach the line Kondratuv-Shpiklosy-southern outskirts of the Shurevo grove, where it was to take up defensive positions to prevent an enemy breakthrough to Zolochev. The division's reserve, one rifle battalion, was ordered to Zolochev.

The 59th Tank Regiment and the 1827th Heavy Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment were assigned to the corps reserve. The 59th Tank Regiment was to concentrate in the Knyazhe area, and the 1827th Heavy Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment in the Benyuv area. The corps command post would move to Ovsisko.

As soon as the divisions received the corps order they started to implement it. Following standing procedures and practice, division commanders first determined the probable lanes of German tank approaches, moved the antitank artillery there, and mined the most critical sectors. The chief of corps engineers reported that regimental and divisional engineers had laid 850 antitank mines in two sectors alone--Sasov-Zolochev, and Byaly Kamen-Zolochev. The rifle divisions of the corps organized 17 mobile tank destroyer detachments.

At 1930, the commander of the 246th Rifle Division reported that his division had taken up defense positions on the assigned line.

In the evening report to the army commander, General Tertyshnyy stated that despite the wide defense frontage (about 70 kilometers), and the relatively low density of infantry and tanks per kilometer of frontage (the density of artillery including the artillery of two tank armies committed in the corps sector was no more than 12 guns and mortars per kilometer), the corps had successfully carried out its mission. During the day the Germans trying to break the ring of encirclement counterattacked, but the corps units, after turning to the defense in the assigned sectors, beat them off and inflicted heavy losses on the Germans.

The army staff reported that the XXIII Rifle Corps, on the right, was fighting on the line Molechin-Maydan-Opaki. The 359th Rifle Division and the 237th Tank Brigade were engaged in fierce battles for Koltuv and Khmelova. The CVI Rifle Corps and the VI Mechanized Corps of the Fourth Tank Army on the left, were locked in heavy battle with the Germans between Zarvanitsa and Ivachuv.

The ring closed by the Thirteenth Army and the Third Guards Tank Army in the Brody area was wider in the north and northwest than in the south, where the Sixtieth Army was holding the front. In that area the German forces inside the ring were separated from those outside to the south by no more than 12 to 15 kilometers. Large infantry and tank formations were concentrated there to render assistance to trapped units trying to break out of the ring. Between 18 and 22 July the encircled German troops made many attempts to break out toward Zolochev, while German troops outside counterattacked boldly in an effort to break in. All of these attacks were repelled by the XV Rifle Corps.

In the forenoon of 19 July the 99th Rifle Division from the northeast, the 359th Rifle Division from the east and the south, and the 908th Rifle Regiment of the 246th Rifle Division (XV Rifle Corps) from the southwest, launched a coordinated attack against two German infantry regiments reinforced with artillery and tanks in the Koltuv, Khmelova, and Kalinka areas. The Germans were destroyed, easing the situation considerably on the right flank of the 336th Rifle Division.

At the same time, however, in the entire corps supplies of ammunition, fuel, and food, and conditions for the evacuation of wounded had gravely deteriorated, because the only road which ran through the area had become almost impassable after days of heavy rain. It took a great effort on the part of the engineer troops to repair the 28-kilometer stretch of road and keep it in reasonable shape, so that combat elements could be assured of at least the minimum of ammunition and other supplies.

In the afternoon of 19 July, General Tertyshnyy learned from air and ground reconnaissance that the Germans were moving infantry, artillery, and tanks to the line Ushnya-Byaly Kamen-Buzhek. At nightfall, at several places, they started to build bridges across the Western Bug. At the same time, to the south, in front of the 246th Rifle Division the enemy increased reconnaissance efforts toward Voronyaki and Zolochev.

Shortly after this two German infantry regiments launched an attack from around Snovich against the left wing of the 246th Rifle Division. They were able, despite heavy losses, to push back the 914th Rifle Regiment of that division and reach the railroad line near Zarvanitsa.

All this led General Tertyshnyy to conclude that the enemy would try to break through the division's defense in the area of Ushnya, Zolochev and Shpiklosy to bring out the remnants of his troops from the pocket. He instructed the commanders of the 336th and 246th Rifle Divisions to tighten their defenses and be ready to beat off imminent enemy attacks.

In accordance with the corps commander's order the 640th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment, while remaining in the corps antitank reserve, was moved from the Olshanitsa area to the Zolochev area. The 1827th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment and 59th Tank Regiment were reinforced with engineer elements and assembled in the woods east of Yelekhovitse, with the mission, depending on the situation, of operating with the general and antitank reserve of the corps. The 1085th Rifle Regiment was concentrated in Zolochev and designated as the corps general reserve.

The 107th Rifle Division of the XXVIII Rifle Corps and the 12th Tank Brigade of the Fourth Tank Army, which during the night of 19/20 July had assembled in the Zolochev area, were attached to the XV Rifle Corps.

In view of the successful advance of Soviet forces toward Lvov, enemy resistance on the right flank of the 246th Rifle Division decreased considerably. The forward detachments of the division which were sent out during the night of 19/20 July met only limited opposition and captured Gologury, Zhukuv, and Remizovtse.

At 0630 on 20 July, after an artillery preparation, two enemy divisions of the encircled Brody Group, supported by tanks and assault guns, launched an attack toward Zolochev. One of the divisions jumped off from Byaly Kamen and Buzhek, the other from the Sasov area and Ushnya. The 336th Rifle Division, which was defensively deployed in that area, stubbornly defended its positions. At about 1400, the Germans, who had a three to one advantage in infantry and total supremacy in tanks, pushed back the right flank of the Soviet division and captured the southeastern part of Belzets, and Pochapy, Khilchitse, and Zhulitse. Several small infantry groups, about 600 men, most of them officers, broke through to the grove north of Knyazhe, where they were stopped.

The corps's general and antitank reserves were already committed to combat. Since the 107th Rifle Division had not yet reported to the corps commander (the division had been assigned to the XV Rifle Corps by the army commander), the situation in the corps sector became exceptionally difficult. Subsequently, the commander of the Fourth Tank Army, taking into consideration the fact that further advance of the German force might endanger the army's lines of communication, directed the 93d Tank Brigade, reinforced with one battalion of the 22d Self Propelled Artillery Regiment, to take up defensive positions in the Knyaze, Latske Male, and Latske Velke areas, and prevent the advance of enemy troops southward. The 51st Motorcycle Regiment of the Fourth Tank Army was engaged in combat in the Khilchitse area, where elements of the 336th Rifle Division also were fighting.

After regrouping and coordinating its activities with the artillery, the right wing of the 336th Rifle Division struck back, and at about 1800 drove the Germans out of Khilchitse and Pochapy. Until the morning of 21 July the situation in the 336th Rifle Division sector remained unchanged.

On 20 July the enemy had repeatedly counterattacked positions of the 246th Rifle Division in an effort to link up with his troops advancing from the north. All the attacks were repelled. However, around 2000, when the battle in the 336th Division sector subsided, after a heavy artillery barrage the enemy threw his 254th Infantry Division, supported by 20 tanks, into the battle against the 246th Rifle Division. The Germans captured Zhukuv and Shpiklosy; one battalion and some tanks reached the Voronyaki area. To destroy the enemy troops who had broken through to Voronyaki, and to restore the situation, General Kurochkin committed the 100th Rifle Division of the CVI Rifle Corps in the 246th Rifle Division sector. With this reinforcement the Soviets were able to halt the German advance.

Thus, despite strenuous counterattacks from north and south the Germans were unable to break through the XV Corps defenses, and their attempts to rescue their encircled troops failed.

Comment: An important reason the Germans could not break through the thinly spread corps defensive lines was the forceful action of the Thirteenth Army from the north and the successful advance of the Fourth Tank Army toward Lvov. These Soviet operations dispersed and pinned down substantial enemy forces so that they could not be used for the breakthrough effort in the XV Rifle Corps sector. Also, German counterattacks in the north from the Sasov-Byaly Kamen line were not coordinated with the one in the south from the Zhukuv-Snovich line. Thus the corps could maneuver with part of its forces, especially artillery, using them effectively against the two enemy groups in turn.

During 21 and 22 July the Germans made several more efforts to break out of the pocket, but they were unsuccessful. By 22 July the surrounded enemy forces were squeezed into a small area, shelled by artillery from all directions.

In view of the hopelessness of the situation, the German Command ordered these troops to cease resistance as of 1400 22 July and surrender.

In the period 14-22 July the XV Rifle Corps had inflicted considerable casualties on the enemy. According to Soviet estimates the Germans lost over 12,000 men and officers killed; 40 tanks and assault guns were destroyed, as were 267 guns and mortars, 2,340 vehicles, and a large number of light infantry weapons. The corps took 7,825 prisoners, including one general. It also captured 21 tanks, 37 armored vehicles, 130 guns and mortars, 540 vehicles, 102 tractors, a great many machine guns, submachine guns, and rifles, and a huge amount of ammunition.

There are no figures on Soviet casualties.

General Comments

1. General Tertyshnyy responded promptly and well to the emergency that confronted him at the end of the first day of the offensive. With German forces exploiting the gap between his 322d Division and the 302d Division of the corps on his left by opening flanking fire on his troops, he changed the orders to the 322d Rifle Division and ordered units detailed to cover the exposed flank. Time was critical. While this change of plan withdrew some strength from the forward

momentum of the attack, he recognized and responded to the necessity to keep the base of the corps penetration open and avoid encirclement.

Similar flexibility on the part of General Tertysnyy was shown in several other situations. During the first night, when it became apparent to him that the Germans were moving reserves toward his front lines, he asked the army commander to commit at least the forward brigade of the tank army ahead of schedule, since he did not himself have enough tanks to complete the breakthrough of the entire depth of the German position. Although the Soviets would have preferred to preserve the tank formations for the exploitation phase, his request was granted. Again, General Tertysnyy committed the second echelon of the 322d Rifle Division from reserve on 15 July sooner than planned and so accomplished a surprise envelopment of the enemy strongpoints that were holding up the advance.

By midafternoon on the 15th General Tertysnyy was faced with the decision whether or not to continue his advance, whether to commit his second echelon division, and what to do about his exposed left flank. He decided to press on as rapidly as possible, withhold the second echelon division, and order the lagging right flank 336th Rifle Division to commit its own second echelon regiment in an enveloping maneuver to speed its advance. Thus he kept the second echelon division available either to cover the exposed left flank or to support the first echelon units. He resisted the temptation to call for more tanks from the Third Tank Army.

General Tertysnyy's resourcefulness was shown in the morning of 16 July when he ordered the 148th Rifle Division to counterattack and to support it he quickly transferred part of the 322d Rifle Division's artillery and the 1178th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment from corps reserve to the endangered sector. This concept of a rapid artillery shift, in this case of a unit that was attacking in a different direction some distance away, is basic to Soviet tactical doctrine.

OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS OF THE XCI RIFLE CORPS WEST OF LUBLIN (POLAND)
INCLUDING ASSAULT CROSSING OF THE VISTULA RIVER NEAR PULAVY
July-August 1944

General Situation

At the end of June and during the first part of July 1944, the Soviet armed forces defeated the Germans in Byelorussia. Pursuing the fleeing enemy, Soviet troops then liberated a considerable part of Poland.

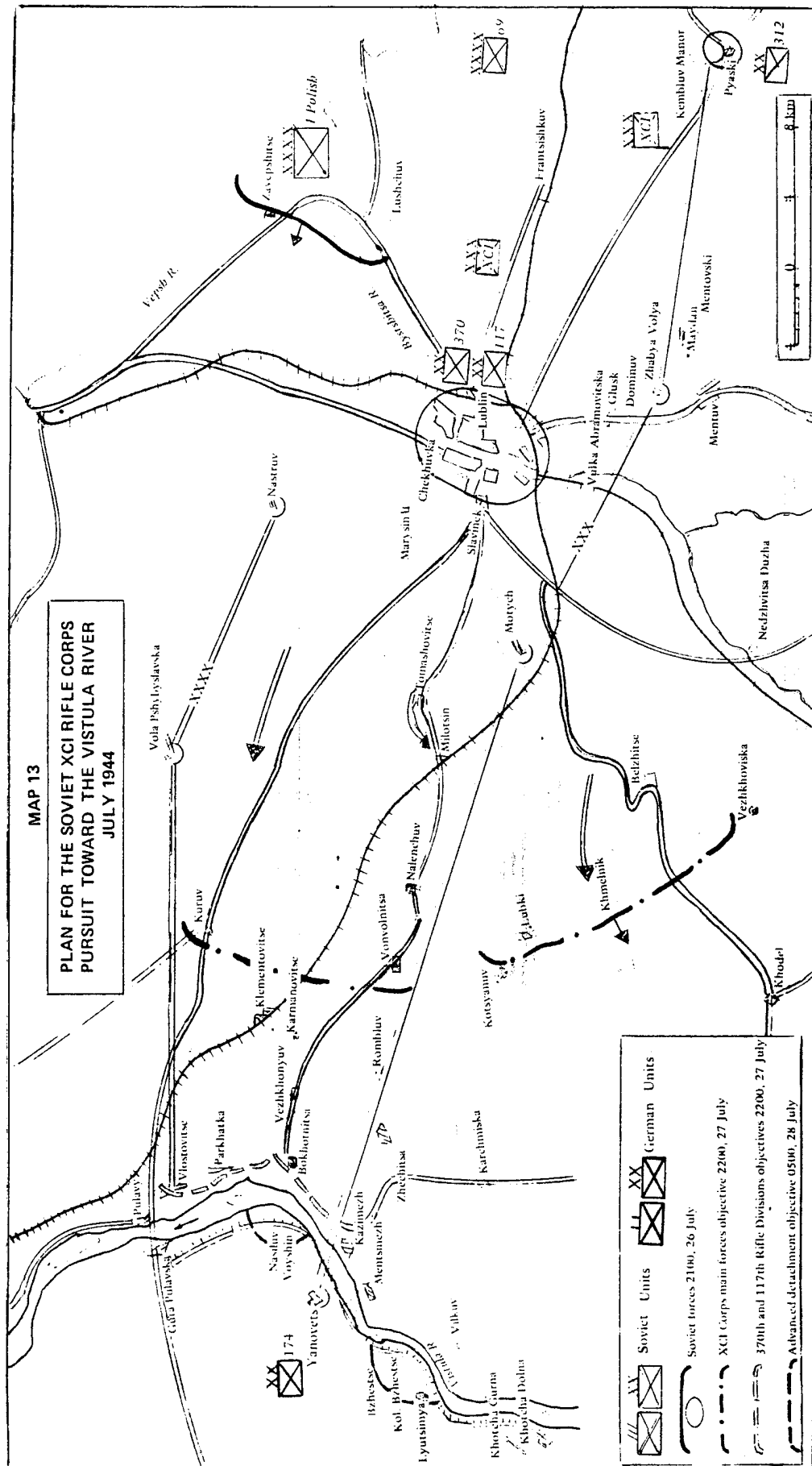
The Sixty-ninth Army (XCI, LXI, and XXV Rifle Corps), which was advancing on the left flank of the 1st Byelorussian Army Group, was ordered to advance to the Vistula River in the sector between Pulavy and Yuzefuv and to capture two bridgeheads on the west bank of the Vistula, one in the Gura-Pulavska area, and the other in the Khotcha-Dolna area.

The XCI Rifle Corps (the 370th, 117th, and 312th Rifle Divisions, and the 1206th Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment; Figure 11), pursuing the remnants of the routed divisions of the German LVI Panzer Corps, had by 26 July reached the following areas: the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions were at Lublin and its vicinity (Lublin had been liberated a day earlier by elements of the Soviet Second Guards Tank Army and Eighth Guards Army); and the 312th Rifle Division (corps second echelon) was at Pyaski (Map 13).

At 1400 on 26 July, Lieutenant General V. Ya. Kolpachki, commander of the Sixty-ninth Army, arrived at the XCI Rifle Corps headquarters at the Kembluv manor, where he gave the corps commander, Major General F.A. Volkov, a new mission. Also present at the meeting were the corps chief of staff, operations officer, and several other senior corps officers.

The corps (less the 312th Rifle Division, to be left at Lublin) on the morning of 27 July would advance swiftly toward Klementovitse and Bokhotnitsa. By the end of the day it was to reach a line between Kuruv and Volvolnitsa. In addition, General Volkov was to organize a mobile task force by morning and send it to the Kazimezh area as a forward detachment of the corps to make an assault crossing of the Vistula River. It was expected to reach the river at 1400 and cross it during the night of 27/28 July between Kazimezh and Bokhotnitsa, to capture a bridgehead between Nasiluv and Voyshin. The army commander directed that the forward detachment be made up of one rifle battalion, reinforced with artillery and combat engineers. The entire forward detachment was to be motorized.

General Kolpachki explained that, by moving a strong forward detachment to the river, he expected that the corps would be able to outrace the Germans to the Vistula and prevent them from deploying their retreating forces and



MAP 13
PLAN FOR THE SOVIET XCI RIFLE CORPS
PURSUIT TOWARD THE VISTULA RIVER
JULY 1944

XX ⊠ German Units
 XX ⊠ Soviet Units
 XX ⊠ Soviet forces 2100, 26 July
 XX ⊠ XCI Corps main forces objective 2200, 27 July
 XX ⊠ 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions objectives 2200, 27 July
 XX ⊠ Advanced detachment objective 0500, 28 July

Figure 11

XCI RIFLE CORPS

Order of Battle

Sixty-ninth Army, Commander: Lieutenant General V.Ya. Kolpachki

XCI Rifle Corps, Commander: Major General F.A. Volkov

370th Rifle Division, Commander: Colonel P.S. Gavilevskiy

1230th Rifle Regiment

1234th Rifle Regiment

1232d Rifle Regiment

940th Artillery Regiment

400th Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion

117th Rifle Division, Commander: Major General E.G. Koberidze

240th Rifle Regiment, Commander: Colonel Rusakov

820th Rifle Regiment

275th Rifle Regiment (one battalion only)

322d Artillery Regiment

222d Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion

312th Rifle Division, Commander: Major General A.G. Moyseyevskiy

1079th Rifle Regiment

1081st Rifle Regiment

1083d Rifle Regiment, Commander: Major Kraynov

375th Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion

859th Artillery Regiment

41st Rifle Division, Commander: Major General Chernyak*

102d Rifle Regiment

139th Rifle Regiment

244th Rifle Regiment

132d Artillery Regiment

117th Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion

1206th Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment (14 guns)

Attached: 256th Mortar Regiment

Additional attachments, as of 8 August:

12th Artillery Division (less 46th Light Artillery Brigade)

35th Guards Multiple Rocket Launcher Brigade

115th Guards Independent Multiple Rocket Launcher Mortar Regiment

257th Combat Engineer Battalion

68th Tank Brigade

*From 8 August

reserves in their previously prepared positions on the west bank.* Consequently he demanded that the corps troops, and especially the forward detachment, not get involved in combat with isolated German elements and/or rearguards, but bypass them, move rapidly forward, cross the river without halting, and capture a bridgehead on the west bank.

To expedite the arrival of the corps's main forces at the Vistula, General Kolpachki directed that all trucks and horse-drawn vehicles belonging to the corps should be used for troop transportation. In addition, horses and wagons also should be procured locally for the same purpose.

The army's chief of operations, who was accompanying the army commander, informed General Volkov that the First Polish Army, on the corps right, was advancing from the Bystshitsa River toward Pulawy. On the corps left, the LXI Rifle Corps, making the army's main effort, was advancing toward Maydan Mentovski, Karchmiska, and Vilkuv. By the end of the day it was to reach the line Lubki-Vezhkoviska (excl.). During the night of 27/28 July its forward detachment was to capture a bridgehead on the west bank of the Vistula River in the Kol. Bzhestse-Lyutsimya area.

The XCI Rifle Corps had gained considerable experience in river crossing since the war began. Most recently, since 18 July 1944 the corps had advanced about 180 kilometers and assault crossed the Tutiya, Western Bug, and Vepsh Rivers.

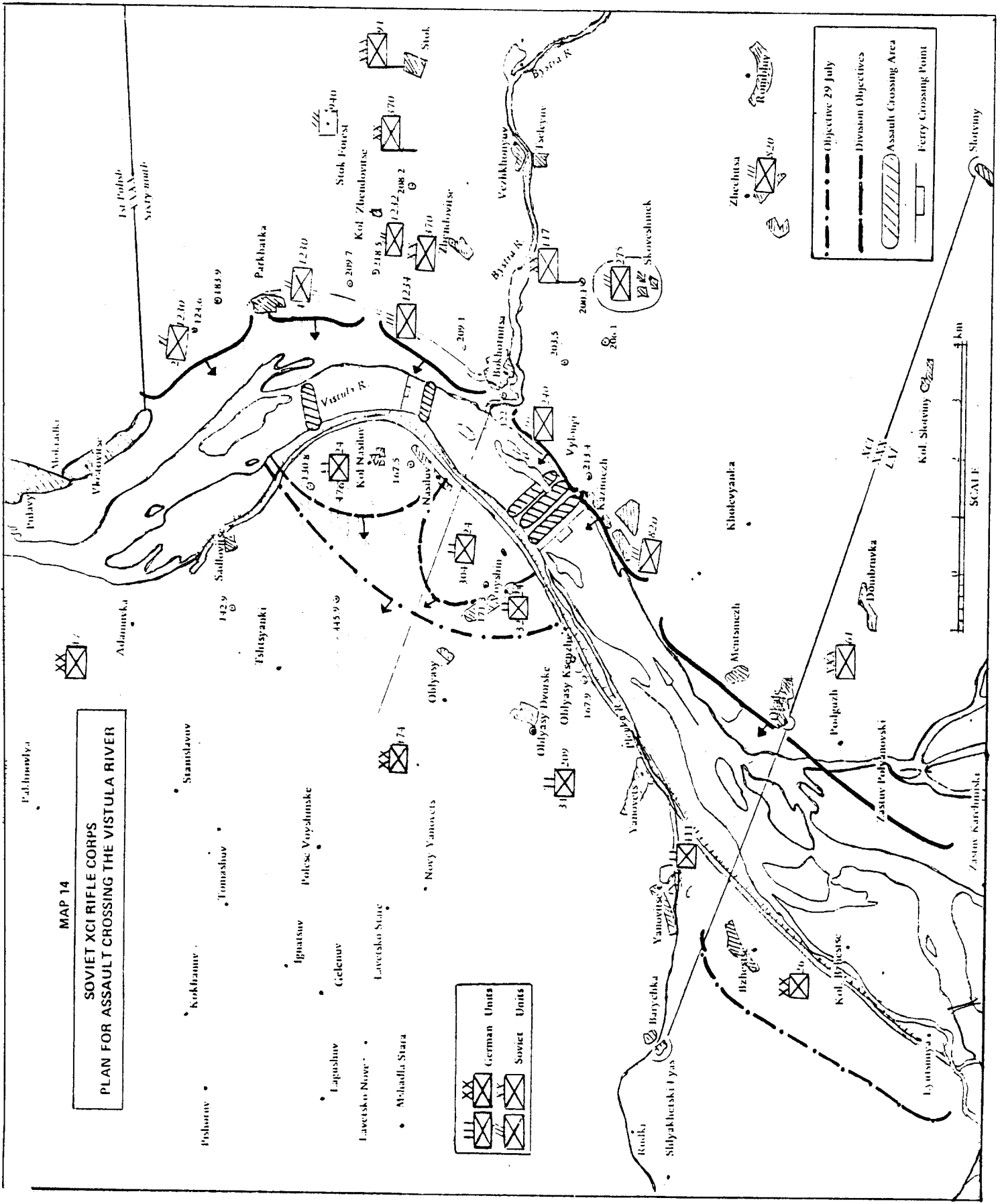
General Kolpachki and his staff were at corps headquarters less than half an hour. Upon their departure General Volkov asked his chief of staff to summon the division commanders for a meeting at 1600. Then, with the chief of staff and the corps staff officers he reviewed the situation in the light of the new army order, and, in consultation with them, he made plans for the advance.

When the division commanders had assembled, General Volkov informed them of the mission received from the army and announced his decision (Map 14). The forward detachment would be composed of the 2d Battalion of the 240th Rifle Regiment, one artillery battalion of the 322d Artillery Regiment, the 222d Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion, and a combat engineer company, all from the 117th Rifle Division, which was to be responsible for supplying transportation. Attached to the detachment was to be the corps's 1206th Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment. To support the crossing General Volkov ordered the division commanders to transfer to the forward detachment all their available organic divisional crossing equipment, principally boats.

The commander of the forward detachment would be Colonel Rusakov, Commander of the 240th Rifle Regiment. Colonel Rusakov was summoned immediately to corps headquarters, where he received his orders from the corps commander.

The forward detachment would move out from its concentration area at 0600 on 27 July, and without engaging in combat with the retreating German forces

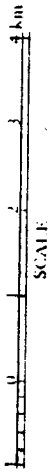
*The Army commander's assumption that the Germans would not be able to take up defensive positions on the left bank of the Vistula River was wrong. Actually, before the Soviets reached the river, the German command had deployed its reserves in a well prepared defensive position on the west bank.



MAP 14
SOVIET XXI RIFLE CORPS
PLAN FOR ASSAULT CROSSING THE VISTULA RIVER

XX	German Units
III	Soviet Units

---●---	Objective 29 July
---	Division Objectives
▨	Assault Crossing Area
—○—	Ferry Crossing Point



would advance toward Tomashovitse, Volvolnitsa, Vezhkhonyuv, and Kazimezh, reaching the right bank of the Vistula River in the Kazimezh area by 1400 on 27 July. The forward detachment would make an assault crossing of the Vistula River from the march, capture a bridgehead in the Voyshin area, and hold it until the arrival of the main forces of the corps.

Comment: Note that the army commander had ordered the crossing for the night of 27/28, whereas the corps commander decided to cross from the march, that is in the afternoon of 27 July. Perhaps there were changes in the army commander's decision not mentioned in the available sources. Or perhaps the corps commander felt that he had sufficient latitude to make this modification in the army commander's concept.

The forward detachment would receive from the divisions the following crossing equipment: 6 A-3 boats, 23 wooden engineer boats, 7 small inflatable boats, 67 life jackets, and a set of pontons.

General Volkov directed the commanders of the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions to make use of all of their available motor vehicles, horse transport, and locally mobilized horses and wagons, and advance toward the Vistula on the 27th along the following routes:

370th Rifle Division: (commander: Colonel P.A. Gavilevskiy)
Route No. 1 - Marysin-Klementovitse-Parkhatka;
Route No. 2 - Slavinek-Karmanovitse-Bokhotnitsa.

Toward the end of the day the division was to reach the Vistula River between Parkhatka and Bokhotnitsa.

117th Rifle Division: (commander: Major General E.G. Koberidze)
Route No. 3 - southern outskirts of Lublin-Milotsin-Volvolnitsa-Vezhkhonyuv;
Route No. 4 - southern outskirts of Lublin-Motych-Volvolnitsa-Kazimezh.

Toward the end of the day the division would reach the Vistula between Bokhotnitsa and Kazimezh. Then, taking advantage of the success of the forward detachment, it would make an assault crossing of the river from the march and widen and consolidate the bridgehead in the Voyshin area already in the hands of the forward detachment.

312th Rifle Division: (commander: Major General M.G. Moyseyevskiy)
was to assemble in the Lublin area and wait for further orders.

General Volkov advised the division commanders to collect boats and other items which could be used during the crossing (wooden boards, ropes, steel drums, etc.) from the Lublin area and along the way as they advanced. He also instructed his chief of staff to send a reconnaissance group organized from the reconnaissance companies and from the combat engineer battalions of the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions with the forward detachment. The mission of the scouts from the reconnaissance companies was to capture prisoners from the west bank of the Vistula and to determine the status of the German defense system and the deployment of German troops. The mission of the reconnaissance engineers was to collect data on the Vistula River in the sector between Parkhatka and Kazimezh.

The chief of the rear services of the corps, who was delayed and arrived at the meeting late, reported that the gasoline situation was critical. When

the corps reached the Lublin area, in each of the combat vehicles, trucks, and special vehicles there remained no more than three to five kilograms of fuel. Vehicles which were sent to the army depots for POL had not yet returned. He explained that the army POL depots were still in the old area (Kivertse, north of Lutsk), some 200 kilometers from the current corps concentration.

In order to prevent postponement of the start of the advance of the forward detachment, General Volkov ordered the commanders of the 312th and 370th Rifle Divisions to drain the fuel from their vehicles and turn it over to the 117th Rifle Division, which was organizing the forward detachment and was responsible for its transport.

Operations of the Forward Detachment of the Corps

Various reports compiled by the corps intelligence officer informed General Volkov in the early hours of 27 July that during the night the remnants of the German LVI Panzer Corps had continued to retreat westward.*

At 0605 on 27 July, Colonel Rusakov reported by radio to the corps chief of staff that at 0600 his detachment, with 50 vehicles and 14 self-propelled assault guns, had commenced to move along the assigned route. The next report received by the corps staff at 0830 indicated that the forward detachment was advancing swiftly without encountering enemy resistance.

At 1000 Colonel Rusakov reported by radio directly to the corps commander that he had reached the Vezhkhonyuv area, where he learned from the local population that the western bank of the Vistula was occupied by entrenched German forces. General Volkov ordered Rusakov to proceed cautiously and discreetly to the river and try to concentrate his force in the Kazimezh area by 1100.

Shortly after 1100 Colonel Rusakov advised General Volkov that the forward detachment had just arrived in Kazimezh. He reported also that three of his trucks loaded with unsinkable crossing equipment had fallen behind. Later, as they tried to catch up, they were lax about observing the camouflage rules and as they reached the east bank of the Vistula River in the Bokhotnitsa area, the Germans spotted them and opened heavy mortar and machine gun fire. The vehicles and most of the crossing equipment were burned.

At 1150 Colonel Rusakov reported that near the northern outskirts of Kazimezh the forward detachment had tried to cross the Vistula River in boats. The enemy immediately discovered the crossing and opened heavy small-arms, artillery, and mortar fire, from the west bank. The crossing attempt failed.

*Later, from captured documents of the German Fourth Panzer Army it was learned that by 26 July in the zone of advance of the Soviet Sixty-ninth Army the defensive positions on the left bank of the Vistula River were already occupied by fresh German troops. The mission of the German LVI Panzer Corps was to retreat toward Annopol (45 kilometers southwest of Kazimezh) where it was to organize a forward bridgehead position and prevent the Soviet forces from reaching and crossing the Vistula in that area.

Comment: Obviously the problems of crossing the river had been underestimated. Intelligence about the enemy was inadequate and crossing equipment insufficient.

In the early afternoon of 27 July, General Volkov and General Koberidze went to the forward detachment's command post in Kazimezh, to see for themselves what was going on. After receiving Colonel Rusakov's detailed report on the unsuccessful crossing attempt they reviewed the general situation with him and his staff. General Volkov ordered Rusakov to take advantage of the remaining daylight hours to find out as much as possible about the enemy, through observation and interrogation of the local population, and to be ready for an assault crossing during the night. General Volkov emphasized that it was of great importance to find out from local Poles where the most convenient crossing points were, and what was known to them about the German defense system on the west bank of the river, as well as to collect from the nearby villages all fishing boats and timber that could be used for construction of crossing equipment in the surrounding villages.

From the forward detachment's command post General Volkov got in touch with his chief of staff and ordered him to take all the necessary measures to accelerate the advance of the corps's main forces to the river so that they would start crossing the Vistula during the night. He directed them to capture bridgeheads in the following areas: the 370th Rifle Division near Nasiluv and the woods to the north; and the 117th Rifle Division around Voyshin.

At 1430, following General Volkov's directives, General Koberidze, Colonel Rusakov, and the commander of the 2d Battalion of the 240th Rifle Regiment reconnoitered the terrain at the northern outskirts of Kazimezh, questioned local inhabitants, and considered the available places to make the assault crossing. Then General Koberidze set the following mission for the forward detachment of his 117th Rifle Division:

During the night of 27/28 July the detachment would cross the Vistula River near the sawmill north of Kazimezh and capture a bridgehead near Voyshin. The division commander envisaged that, if the forward detachment were successful, the remaining battalions of the 240th Rifle Regiment, whose arrival at Kazimezh was expected before sunset, would also cross the river during the same night.

For the support of the forward detachment, General Koberidze detailed 38 guns and mortars: five 82mm mortars, three 120mm mortars, six 45mm guns, four 76mm guns (regiment artillery), sixteen 76mm guns (division artillery), and four 122mm howitzers (division artillery). His plans were reported to the corps staff and approved by General Volkov, who in turn reported them to the army commander.

During the afternoon and early evening General Volkov, back at his CP, was in constant touch with General Koberidze and Colonel Rusakov. The reports received by him or the chief of staff indicated that Colonel Rusakov and the commanders of the 2d Battalion, the rifle companies of the 240th Rifle Regiment, and the supporting sub-units, had thoroughly reconnoitered the area on the west bank of the river as well as German defenses on the west bank, set up the order in which the rifle companies would cross the river, and organized cooperation among infantry, artillery, and mortar units.

Colonel Rusakov had deployed the 45mm and 76mm guns of the regiment artillery and the 222d Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion at the northern outskirts of Kazimezh near the sawmill, in order to carry out direct fire on the German fire emplacements on the left bank, which were expected to start shelling the moment the forward detachment began the assault crossing.

In the evening, the chief of the corps political branch, who shortly before had returned from the forward detachment, reported to General Volkov on the political and party work done by political officers. The troops had been informed about the importance of their mission. In all companies party meetings had been organized, during which the leading role of Communists in setting examples of heroic deeds were discussed. In turn, Communists and Komsomol members had talked with men in squads and platoons, making an all-out effort to lift their fighting spirit.

Soon after darkness fell, Colonel Rusakov reported that the Germans were illuminating the surface of the river between Bokhotnitsa and Kazimezh with flares, and that heavy small-arms, artillery and mortar fire was being directed at the Kazimezh area. He also pointed out that the crossing equipment was not yet ready and that the crossing would start later than planned.

At 0415 the corps operations officer, who was at the forward detachment's command post at Kazimezh, reported that the 4th and 6th Companies had started to cross the river near the sawmill shortly after 0300 without artillery preparation. The crossing was made in two A-3 engineer boats, ten fishing boats, and ten rafts (each carrying three or four men). At about 0400 both companies, unobserved by the enemy, reached a small island some 300 meters southwest of Voyshin.

An hour later, Colonel Rusakov called the corps commander and informed him that at 0430 one platoon (19 men) of the 4th Rifle Company, under the command of Corporal Mityaguk, had crossed the river from the island to the west bank, and, proceeding cautiously, dug in some 400 meters northeast of Voyshin, still unspotted by the Germans.

At sunrise, approximately 0400, the Germans discovered the Soviet troops who had landed on the island and opened heavy artillery and mortar fire at them. At 1000 some 50 German planes strafed the Soviet concentration on the island. However, thanks to the fact that the units deployed there had dug in immediately after landing, they suffered only minor casualties from the artillery and air attacks. The crossing was obviously bogged down. When General Volkov asked Colonel Rusakov for a report later in the morning, he was told that in view of the well organized defense of a superior enemy force, the forward detachment was unable to carry out its mission and secure a bridgehead. The corps commander ordered him to tell the troops to dig in where they were and wait for further orders.

Meanwhile, at 0530 on 28 July, the chief of staff had reported that units of the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions had advanced to the Vistula River quickly the day before without any serious enemy resistance. During the night they had assembled in the following areas (Map 15):

370th Rifle Division: The 1230th Rifle Regiment near Parkhatka and the woods east of Zbendovitse; 1234th Rifle Regiment between Parkhatka and Bokhotnitsa; 1232d Rifle Regiment in the area of 218.0 and Kol. Zbendovitse (excl.);

940th Artillery Regiment in the woods east of Kol. Zbendovitse; the 400th Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment had taken up firing positions near Zbendovitse.

117th Rifle Division: The 240th Rifle Regiment in the sawmill area at the northern outskirts of Kazimezh; the 820th Rifle Regiment at Zhechitsa, and Kol. Zhechitsa; the 257th Rifle Regiment near Rombluv.

The chief of staff said that both divisions reported that they had not made any attempt to cross the river. General Volkov immediately called Major General Koberidze and Colonel Gavilevskiy to find out the reasons. Both division commanders explained that their standard organic crossing equipment was very limited, and that there had been no time to collect makeshift materials. They also pointed out that he (Volkov) had issued an order banning the destruction of buildings to obtain materials for crossing. Fishing boats and timber collected in various settlements some distance from the river were being brought up to the Vistula very slowly by horse transport, because the divisions did not have fuel for motor vehicles.

From the information received by the corps headquarters during the night General Volkov had concluded that the enemy had a well organized defense on the west bank of the Vistula River. In such a situation further attempts to cross the river without considerable preparation would not succeed. Thus he decided that in order to cross the river and capture a bridgehead a meticulously planned and executed river crossing operation would be necessary. In addition the crossing units would have to be supplied with sufficient crossing equipment.

After the chief of staff completed his situation report, General Volkov directed him to summon the senior staff officers, commander of corps artillery, chief of corps engineers, chief of corps rear service, and commanders of the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions. The corps commander briefly informed the officers of the situation and asked the assistant operations officer to report on the terrain on the west bank of the river, and the intelligence officer to report on the deployment of enemy forces.

Describing the terrain, the assistant operations officer said that in the zone of advance of the corps to the west of the Vistula River the terrain is fairly rugged. Large tracts of forest and numerous hamlets and villages had helped the enemy to organize an effective defense system and permitted him to conceal the maneuver of his reserves behind the front.

From the areas of bench mark 167.5, Voyshin, and especially from Hill 167.9 and the ruins of the Yanovets castle, the Germans could easily observe the river, and in several sectors could observe the deployment of the XCI Corps troops on the east bank.

The ground was higher on the east bank of the Vistula where the units of the XCI Rifle Corps were concentrated than that the enemy occupied on the west bank, and numerous hills made it possible to observe open sectors on the German side. Also, ravines and low areas close to the river concealed the concentration of Soviet men, equipment, and crossing materials.

The river in the corps zone was between 400 and 1,000 meters wide, and between two and four meters deep, with a current too swift for rafts. The

bottom was sandy. There were no fords. The most convenient points for crossing were near Bokhotnitsa and at the sawmill on the outskirts of Kazimezh. A number of coves in the area, concealed from enemy observation, would permit secure loading of troops and weapons.

The assistant operations officer pointed out that his data was very sketchy, for there was little information available. He assured General Volkov that additional information would be disseminated as soon as it became available.

Next, the corps intelligence officer reported to the group. He stated that since the XCI Rifle Corps was just reaching the Vistula River the corps staff did not have exact data either on the German defense system or on German troop deployment. Based on the information received from the staff of the Sixty-ninth Army, however, the corps assumed that as of 23 July the German command had deployed the 174th Reserve Infantry Division in the sector Gura-Pulavska-Yanovets-Khotcha Dolna (13 kilometers southwest of Yanovets). Its mission was to defend the river there. Each of the infantry companies of the German division had 120 to 150 men, 6 to 11 light machine guns, and 12 panzerfausts (German bazooka-type weapon). Each of the heavy weapon companies had six to eight heavy machine guns, and six 81.4mm mortars.*

Artillery reconnaissance indicated that the Germans had three battalions of 105mm guns near Tomashuv and Gelenuv, northwest of Obyasy, and near Polese Voyshinske, and Lavetsko Stare; three batteries of 75mm guns at Gura Pulavska, Adamuvka, and Voyshin; eight mortar batteries at Sadloyitse, Kol. Nasiluv, west of Voyshin, and at Obyasy Dvorske; four AA automatic guns (20mm) at Voyshin and Obyasy Dvorske; ten guns directly on the western river bank between the forest north of Nasiluv and Obyasy Ksenzhe (for direct fire).

The German defense system consisted of individual trenches for three to five men each. In some sectors these trenches were connected by communications trenches along the front and to the rear. Estimated strength of the German forces on the west bank in a ten kilometer sector facing the XCI Rifle Corps is shown on Figure 12.

Figure 12. ESTIMATED STRENGTH OF GERMAN FORCES IN FRONT OF XCI RIFLE CORPS AS OF 27 JULY 1944

	Number	Density/Kilometer of Frontage
Infantry Battalions	5	0.5
Machine Guns (light and heavy)	c. 130	13
Panzerfausts	c. 140	14
Guns (75mm and up)	40	4
Mortars (81.4mm and up)	38	3.8
Tanks and Assault Guns	12	1.2

*After the crossing, prisoner interrogation revealed that in front of the XCI Rifle Corps on the west bank of the Vistula, as of the end of 27 July the Germans had the 24th Reserve Infantry Regiment composed of three battalions, and one battalion of the 209th Reserve Regiment, both of the 174th Reserve Infantry Division. In addition, one reinforced infantry battalion of the 26th Infantry Division was attached to the 174th Reserve Infantry Division, and was used by the division commander as his reserve.

As soon as the intelligence officer ended his presentation, the chief of staff, at the corps commander's request, reviewed the numerical strength, weapons, and equipment of the XCI Rifle Corps.

Rifle regiments of the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions consisted of two battalions each, with the exception of the 275th Rifle Regiment of the 117th Rifle Division, which had only one battalion. Rifle companies numbered no more than 30 to 40 men each. Weapons, equipment, and personnel strength of the XCI Rifle Corps, excluding the 312th Rifle Division, and attached elements are shown in Figure 13.

Soon after the meeting, General Volkov reconnoitered the terrain, accompanied by the commanders of the rifle divisions, a group of staff officers, and commanders of attached units. While still in the field, he announced his plan for the assault crossing. He had decided that the corps should cross the river on a 7.5 kilometer front during the night of 28/29 July, and secure a bridgehead extending to bench mark 130.8, Hill 171.3, and Oblyasy Ksenzhe. He would concentrate his main forces in the center of the corps zone, where the crossing would be made by two rifle regiments and one rifle battalion.

The commander of the 370th Rifle Division, Colonel Gavilevskiy, was ordered to deploy his division in two echelons. Covering the attack with a battalion deployed between Vlostovitse (excl.), and Parkhatka (excl.) the main forces were to cross the river between Parkhatka and Bokhotnitsa and capture bridgeheads near bench mark 130.8 and Nasiluv. There would be two crossings, one west of Parkhatka, and the other 1.5 kilometers northwest of Bokhotnitsa. In addition one six-ton ferry would be operated 1.5 kilometers southwest of Parkhatka. For these crossings the division had only two A-3 engineer boats, six wooden boats, and ten fishing boats.

The division command post was to be established in the grove southeast of bench mark 208.2, and its observation post at Hill 209.1.

The 117th Rifle Division, with the 256th Mortar Regiment attached, was to deploy in two echelons, assault cross the Vistula River between Bokhotnitsa and Kazimezh, and capture a bridgehead southwest of Nasiluv and Voyshin. The division would organize one six-ton ferry crossing and three assault crossings in the sawmill area, near Kazimezh. The crossing equipment on hand consisted of three captured German metallic ponton sections, twelve wooden engineer boats, eighteen fishing boats, and four standard A-3 engineer boats.

General Volkov instructed General Koberidze to establish the division command post in the ravine two kilometers southwest of Tseleyuv, and his observation post at Hill 213.4.

The assault crossing of the river and the engagement on the west bank would be supported by the 859th Artillery Regiment of the 312th Rifle Division. However, the regiment had not yet arrived at the corps concentration area. It was still on the road between Lublin and the Vistula.

The starting time of the crossing for all corps units was set for 2300 on 28 July. The division commanders were told to move their crossing equipment close to the river, and to continue the search for more local fishing boats and timber with which to build the ferries.

Figure 13. Strength of the Soviet XCI Rifle Corps at the Vistula River
25 July 1944*

Divisions & Units	Men	Rifles	Sub-machine Guns	Machine Gun		Mortars			Guns			Anti-tank Rifles	Motor Vehicles	Horses	SU-76 SP Assault Guns	
				Light	Heavy	120mm	82mm	50mm	122mm	76mm Guns (Div)	76mm Guns (Regt)					45mm
117th Rifle Division	4,819	2,944	1,189	159	49	15	34	27	12	28	12	12	62	113	584	-
370th Rifle Division	4,905	3,243	1,340	186	60	14	37	36	12	28	12	30	171	144	691	-
1206th SP Assault Gun Regt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
859th Arty Regt (312th Rifle Div)**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	20	-	-	-	-	-	-
Attached: 256th Mortar Regt	-	-	-	-	-	26	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	49	-	-
Total	9,724	6,237	2,529	345	109	55	71	63	36	76	24	92	339	306	1,275	14

*Excluding the 312th Rifle Division

**From 27 July

The regimental artillery and the independent tank destroyer artillery battalions of the divisions were ordered to take up direct firing positions on the east bank to support the crossing with direct fire on the German fire emplacements across the river.

General Volkov directed his chief of staff to issue all the necessary orders to carry out this plan. At the same time he discussed the cooperation between artillery and infantry, and precisely defined all the details related to the crossing and to the combat operations at the bridgehead.

The corps command post was to be set up at Stok, 6.5 kilometers east of the Vistula, and the observation post on Hill 213.4, north of Kazimezh.

Immediately after General Volkov returned to his headquarters he called the army commander and reported his decision. General Kolpachki approved it without changes, but he requested assurance that the 859th Artillery Regiment, of the 312th Rifle Division, would arrive on time to support the crossing effort of the 117th Rifle Division.

The commanders of the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions and their regiment commanders and commanders of supporting units reconnoitered the terrain in their respective sectors, organized cooperation, and then issued preliminary operations orders to their units. They submitted their plans to the corps commander for approval, and with General Volkov's acquiescence issued detailed operations orders for the crossing and subsequent advance.

Colonel Gavilevskiy had decided to deploy the 1230th and 1234th Rifle Regiments in the first echelon, and the 1232d Rifle Regiment in the second. The 1230th Rifle Regiment, with the 3d Battalion of the 940th Artillery Regiment, and one combat engineer platoon from the combat engineer battalion of the division, was to cross the Vistula west of Parkhatka and capture a bridgehead between bench mark 130.8 and Nasiluv. For the crossing, the division commander allotted to the regiment two wooden engineer and four fishing boats. The 1234th Rifle Regiment, with the 904th Artillery Regiment (minus the 3d Battalion), and the 400th Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion, was to cross the Vistula 1.5 kilometers southwest of Parkhatka and capture a bridgehead in the Nasiluv area. To make the crossing and construct a ferry the division allotted to the regiment two A-3 engineer boats, four wooden engineer boats, and six fishing boats. The 1232d Rifle Regiment, deployed in the second echelon, was to be ready to cross the river behind the 1234th Rifle Regiment.

Colonel Gavilevskiy directed the regiment commanders to send two platoons, one from each of the first echelon regiments, across, before the crossing of the main force, to capture a foothold on the left bank and facilitate the crossing of the main forces.

The commander of the 117th Rifle Division, General Koberidze, anticipated that during the night of 28/29 July the 240th Rifle Regiment would cross to the small area on the west bank 400 meters northeast of Voyshin, where a platoon of the regiment's 2d Battalion had dug in the night before, and capture Voyshin. Under the cover of the 240th Regiment the rest of the division would commence the crossing.

The 820th Rifle Regiment was to take up jump-off positions in the Kazimezh area, ready to cross the river behind the 240th Rifle Regiment, and would support

that unit's crossing with small arms and direct artillery fire from the east bank. The 275th Rifle Regiment, deployed in the division's second echelon, was to concentrate in the Skoveshinek area.

In the afternoon of 28 July, while the division commanders were engaged in reconnaissance and in preparation for the assault crossing, General Volkov and his chief of artillery discussed the artillery support of the crossing and the advance on the west bank. With the attached 256th Mortar Regiment and the 859th Artillery Regiment of the 312th Rifle Division (20 76mm guns and 12 122mm howitzers), the first echelon of the corps had 262 guns and mortars of 76mm and larger. This constituted an average density of 35 guns and mortars per kilometer on the 7.5 kilometer front.

General Volkov decided to attach the 256th Mortar and 859th Artillery Regiments to the 117th Rifle Division and immediately informed General Koberidze. This increased the average artillery density in the 117th Division zone to 40 guns and mortars per kilometer on the division's four kilometer crossing front.

The corps artillery commander suggested and General Volkov agreed that no centralized artillery preparation on the corps level should be planned.

During the assault crossing, the artillery was to suppress German guns, mortars, machine gun emplacements, and troops, as well as cover the flanks of the crossing forces. General Volkov also directed that the support of the infantry attack on the west bank was to be achieved by consecutive concentrations of fire on enemy strongpoints. To secure close cooperation between infantry and artillery during the battle on the bridgehead, the organic artillery of battalions and regiments would cross the river with the infantry.

The corps chief of engineers reported that as soon as the corps received the order for crossing the Vistula he had issued specific instructions to the division commanders dealing with preparation for the crossing. He emphasized that special attention should be paid to the collection of materials which would be useful in the crossing.

As of the morning of 28 July, the corps had six A-3 engineer boats, 20 wooden engineer boats, 28 fishing boats, and three captured ponton sections. In addition, the divisions had prepared 180 small rafts, each of them able to carry two or three men. The available means could transport up to ten companies (each 30 to 40 men) and two guns of the battalion or regimental artillery in one crossing. However, the rafts proved to be unusable, because the current swept them down the river. Thus, the crossing had to be carried out in boats and ferries, with a capacity of five companies and two 76mm guns per crossing.

The chief of the rear services reported to the corps commander that the divisions were very short of ammunition and POL. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the army POL depots were over 200 kilometers to the rear. The ammunition, POL and food available as of the evening of 27 July is shown on Figure 14.

As soon as General Volkov received the army's order to advance toward the Vistula and capture a bridgehead on its west bank, political officers in the units started to build up the men's morale to prepare them for the river crossing operation. In their work they depended heavily on party and komsomol members.

Figure 14. Soviet XCI Rifle Corps Ammunition, POL, and Food for Crossing the Vistula River
27 July 1944

Divisions	Ammunition (Units of Fire)						Fuel and Lubrication			Food (Daily Rations)	
	Artillery Shells			Mortar Shells		Small Arms	Hand Grenades	Refuelings			
	45mm	76mm (Regt)	76mm (Div)	122mm	82mm			120mm	Gasoline		Lubricant
117th Rifle	0.5	0.3	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.05	-	0.8	2
3706h Rifle	2.0	1.0	0.9	0.2	1.2	1.2	0.9	0.2	0.2	-	2

Note: Number of shells in units of fire: 45mm 200 shells
76mm 120 shells
122mm 80 shells
82mm 120 shells
120mm 80 shells

On the eve of the operation the number of party members in rifle divisions was as follows:

117th Rifle Division	
240th Rifle Regiment	116
275th Rifle Regiment	136
820th Rifle Regiment	142
Total	394

370th Rifle Division	
1230th Rifle Regiment	134
1232d Rifle Regiment	139
1234th Rifle Regiment	118
Total	391

321st Rifle Division	
1079th Rifle Regiment	291
1081st Rifle Regiment	258
1083d Rifle Regiment	143
Total	620

In addition, about 10% of the personnel in other units (artillery, combat engineers, rear services, etc.) belonged to the party.

Political officers organized group discussions during which they explained the importance of the Vistula crossing operation and the capture of the bridgehead. Veterans talked about their former combat experience and especially of their participation in river crossings.

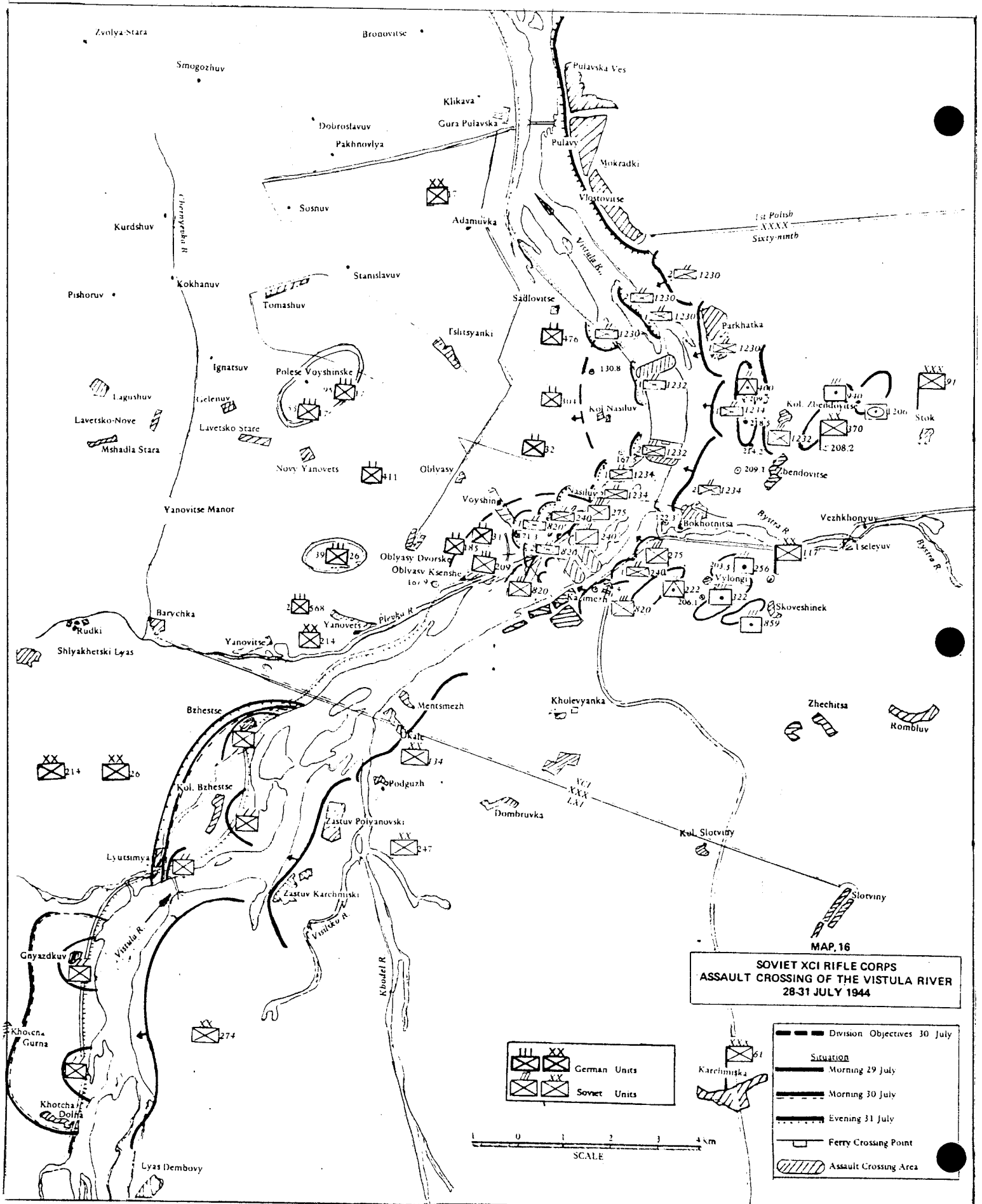
On 28 July, the political branch of the corps issued special leaflets calling on soldiers to fulfill their duties to the fatherland.

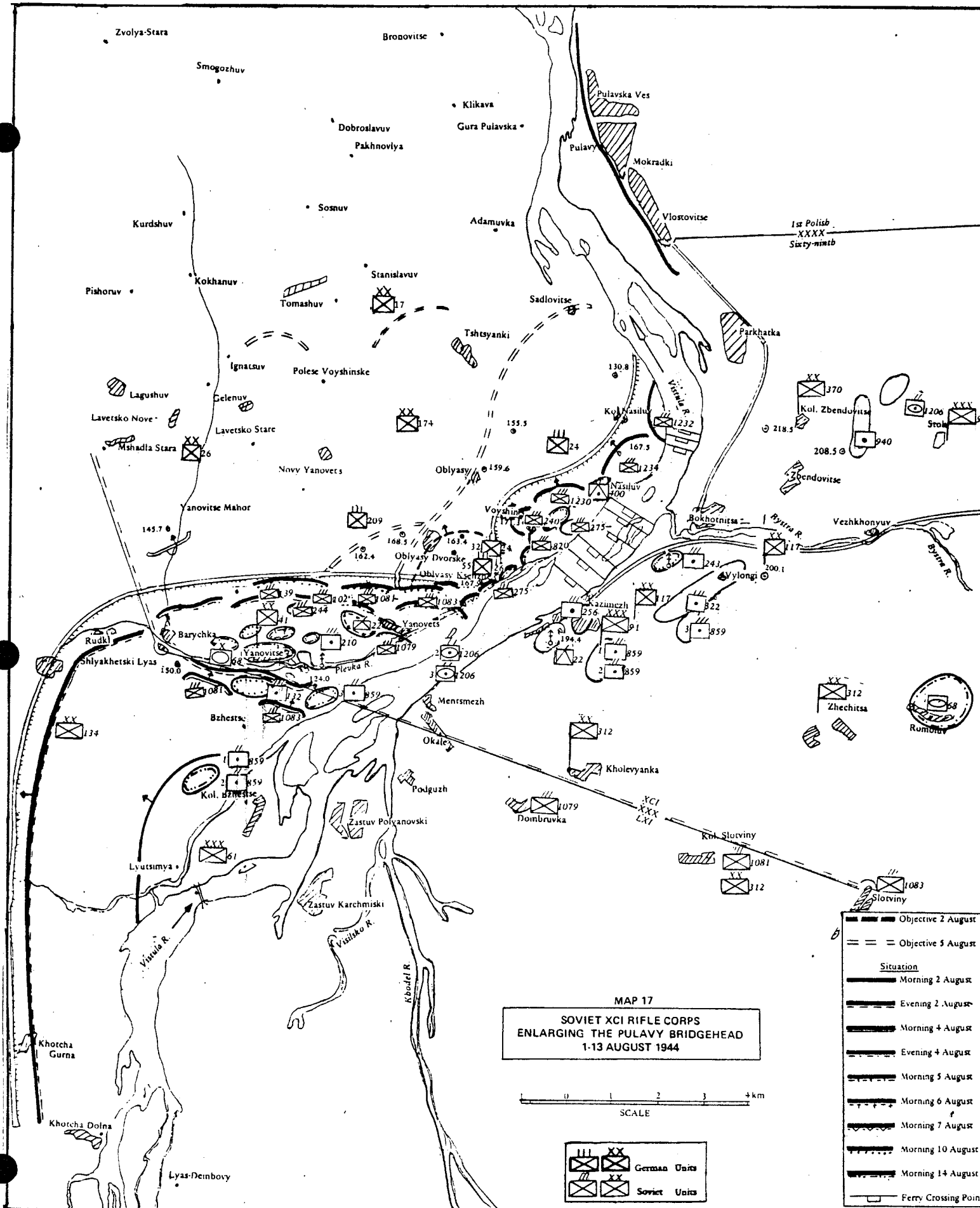
Combat Operations (Maps 16-18)

Late in the afternoon of 28 July the corps intelligence officer from the field reported to General Volkov that various reports received during the day indicated that the Germans had significantly consolidated their defenses on the west bank and improved their observation of the corps's preparation activities for the advance.

The reinforced rifle platoon of the 117th Rifle Division which was maintaining a foothold on the west bank, supported by artillery fire from the east bank of the river, had beaten off numerous German counterattacks, and the enemy was unable to push it back into the river. At the same time, the Germans hammered units of the 117th Rifle Division which were deployed on the small island east of Voyshin with artillery fire and air strikes. Up to 2,500 artillery and mortar rounds and more than 700 bombs fell on the island.

At 2350 on 28 July the commander of the 370th Rifle Division reported that at 2130, in the Parkhatka area, a ten-man reconnaissance party had crossed the river by boat and taken an unoccupied trench some 1.2 kilometers northeast of bench mark 130.8. The Germans soon discovered the reconnaissance group and





opened heavy artillery and mortar fire on them. In the ensuing firefight the reconnaissance party attracted a considerable part of the German firepower. Taking advantage of this situation, at 2300 elements of the 1230th and 1234th Rifle Regiments (one rifle company from each of the two regiments) started to cross the river in boats and rafts. However, the raft crossing had to be abandoned because the strong river current pulled them downstream.

Shortly before 0100 on 29 July Colonel Gavilevskiy reported by phone to General Volkov that the enemy, continuously illuminating the river with flares, had discovered the crossing of the two companies and opened heavy artillery and mortar fire that drove them back to the east bank. The corps commander ordered Gavilevskiy to try again.

Only one platoon, 17 men, of the 1st Battalion of the 1230th Rifle Regiment crossed the river during the night and joined the reconnaissance group which was still holding the trench northeast of bench mark 130.8. However, these troops used up their ammunition supply, and, lacking the support of the artillery deployed on the right bank, were forced to withdraw. They recrossed the Vistula in the night of 29/30 July (sunset was at about 2115).

Whereas the 370th Rifle Division had been unsuccessful in its efforts to cross the Vistula, the 117th Rifle Division was more fortunate. The division commander and staff kept in constant touch with corps headquarters. During the night of 28/29 July the 5th Rifle Company and the antitank rifle company of the 240th Rifle Regiment reached the island near Voyshin. A submachine gun company (35 men) and a reconnaissance platoon, both from the 240th Rifle Regiment, reached the west bank in the area occupied by the reinforced platoon of the 2d Battalion. After prolonged, fierce, and often hand to hand combat, these units were able to infiltrate the enemy defenses to a depth of almost 300 meters and consolidate their positions in the area between Nasiluv and Voyshin.

At the same time the 3d Battalion of the 322d Artillery Regiment established telephone communication with the units on the west bank.

The Germans did not give up. Toward the end of the night German troops counterattacked elements of the 240th Rifle Regiment from the southwestern outskirts of Voyshin three times, with a force of about two companies, supported by heavy artillery and mortar fire. The counterattacks were repulsed by rifle, machine gun, and artillery fire.

During the night the division delivered food, ammunition, and entrenching tools to its units on the west bank.

Early in the morning of 29 July, General Volkov arrived at 370th Rifle Division headquarters. After receiving the situation report from Colonel Gavilevskiy, he expressed his deep disappointment. He pointed out that the division had acted too timidly. The division and regimental commanders had not shown enough urgency and persistence to move the rifle companies and artillery across the river. Moreover, no communication had been established with the units fighting on the west bank, and artillery support from the right bank had been lacking.

In the morning report to the army, the chief of staff stated that only the 117th Rifle Division of the XCI Rifle Corps had been able to cross the Vistula.

By that time one submachine gun company, one rifle company, and one reconnaissance platoon, altogether about 80 men, were on the west bank. This force held a bridgehead one kilometer wide and 400 meters deep.

The unsuccessful operations of the corps during 27-29 July were blamed by the corps commander on well-organized enemy defense, lack of organic crossing equipment, and the poor leadership of the division commanders, who he felt had not made strong enough efforts to strengthen their forces on the west bank.

In the morning of 29 July the chief of operations learned that the Polish First Army, on the corps right, had turned to defense on the east bank of the Vistula River at Vlostovitse, Pulavy, and further to the north.

On the left the LXI Rifle Corps had crossed the Vistula with six rifle battalions and captured two bridgeheads--one in the Bzhestse-Lyutsimya-Kol. Bzhestse area, and the second in the area of Gnyazdkuv and Khotcha Dolna.

General Volkov, at 1800 on 29 July, after analyzing the situation, ordered the commanders of the 117th and 370th Rifle Divisions to carry out their original missions which they had been unable to accomplish the night before, during the night of 29/30 July. They were to cross the river and capture a bridgehead on the west bank.

At 1915 the corps commander arrived at the command post of the 370th Rifle Division, where Colonel Gavilevskiy informed him that he planned to proceed according to his plans for the preceding night, sending one company each of the 1230th and 1234th Rifle Regiments across the river to capture bridgeheads and cover the crossing of the main force. The division's engineer would prepare an assault crossing point for the 1230th Rifle Regiment equipped with two wooden engineer boats and four fishing boats. For the 1234th Rifle Regiment the engineers were making two A-3 engineer boats into a ferry and they would provide four wooden engineer boats and six fishing boats besides.

General Volkov approved Colonel Gavilevskiy's plans and proceeded to the command post of the 117th Rifle Division. There he found that General Koberidze had decided that the 240th Rifle Regiment would start crossing immediately after nightfall, with the 820th Rifle Regiment close behind it. The combat engineers had set up a six-ton ferry at the northern edge of Kazimezh and prepared three crossing points, each with four wooden engineer boats, six fishing boats, and one A-3 engineer boat.

At 2200 reinforced rifle companies of the 1230th and 1234th Rifle Regiments again began crossing in the 370th Rifle Division sector. The Germans, detecting the crossing, opened heavy fire. Machine gun fire from the area of two houses east of Kol. Nasiluv was especially deadly. Several boats were destroyed. The assault force had to turn back.

The 117th Rifle Division was again more successful. At 2230, the 1st, 4th, and 5th Rifle Companies of the 820th Rifle Regiment, totalling 146 men with three heavy machine guns, began to cross the river in the Kazimezh area. The Germans, using flares to illuminate the surface of the Vistula, detected the assault force and opened heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire on it. One company landed on the island near the west bank, and the two remaining companies managed to get to the peninsula southeast of Voyshin.

Toward morning, despite heavy resistance the 4th and 6th Rifle Companies and the mortar company of the 2d Battalion of the 240th Rifle Regiment crossed from the island to the west bank of the river, and consolidated their position in the area already taken by the submachine gunners. At the same time, the 1st Battalion of the 240th Rifle Regiment crossed from the east bank to the island.

Thus, in the morning of 30 July the division had the 2d Battalion and the submachine gun company of the 240th Rifle Regiment in the bridgehead southwest of Nasiluv. The 1st Battalion of that regiment and one rifle company of the 820th Rifle Regiment were deployed on the island. Two other rifle companies of the 820th Rifle Regiment were concentrated in the northern part of the peninsula southeast of Voyshin.

During the night of 29/30 July and through the next day, the division reported that the Germans were mounting repeated fierce counterattacks against the elements of the 117th Rifle Division entrenched on the bridgehead north-east of Voyshin. All counterattacks were beaten off.

In the morning of 30 July the army operations officer reported that General Kolpachki had ordered 22 wooden boats from the army's engineer depot delivered to the corps immediately. He also informed the corps chief of staff of the situation in the neighboring zones. On the right, units of the Polish First Army continued to defend the east bank of the Vistula. On the left, the LXI Rifle Corps had moved two entire rifle divisions, the battalion and regimental artillery, and the division's tank destroyer battalions to the west bank. On learning of the assignment of new boats, General Volkov assigned ten to the 370th Rifle Division and twelve to the 117th Rifle Division.

At 0845 General Volkov arrived at the 370th Division command post. After receiving a detailed report from Colonel Gavilevskiy he reviewed the division's mission with him and decided not to change it. Then the two officers inspected the regiments, talked with regiment commanders, checked on their understanding of their missions, and advised them on many practical aspects of cooperation between infantry and artillery in a river crossing operation.

Having decided to reinforce the 370th Rifle Division with additional artillery, General Volkov ordered the mission of the 859th Artillery Regiment of the 312th Rifle Division changed. As of 30 July, the regiment would support the 370th Rifle Division. This increased the total number of guns and mortars (76mm and up) in the division from 91 to 123. Consequently, the density of artillery was increased from 26 to 35 guns and mortars per kilometer of frontage. At the same time the 370th Rifle Division received much needed ammunition from the army ammunition depot.

Around noon (30 July) General Volkov summoned the chief of the corps political branch and directed him to increase political and propaganda efforts in the units, to prepare the troops better for the forthcoming battle.

During the night of 30/31 July and the next day, fierce fighting developed along the entire corps front on the west bank of the Vistula. The division commanders reported often to the corps commander and the chief of staff on the situation, and General Volkov visited the command posts of his first echelon divisions in the morning hours of 31 July.

In the 370th Rifle Division zone, at 2230 the 4th Rifle Company of the 1230th Rifle Regiment crossed the river in the Parkhatka area in eight boats, and entrenched on the west bank about one kilometer northeast of bench mark 130.8. Then, under cover of fire from that company, the 2d Company and several platoons of the 1st and 5th Rifle Companies of the 1230th Rifle Regiment also crossed.

All during the night, the enemy covered the crossing points with heavy artillery and machine gun fire, and used flares to illuminate the surface of the river. Repeated attempts by the remaining elements of the 1230th Rifle Regiment to cross the river were unsuccessful.

At 2200 a reconnaissance group crossed the river in the 1234th Rifle Regiment sector in two boats and landed on the west bank, north of Nasiluv. The group was followed by a rifle platoon from the 1st Company, under Lieutenant Veselov. At once the platoon struck its objectives, two houses near the shore from which machine gun fire had been concentrated on the crossing troops. By destroying them the platoon eased the crossing for the main forces of the regiment.

Following Veselov's platoon, the 1st Battalion started across, supported by artillery batteries deployed on the east bank, engaging the Germans in a heavy exchange of fire. Behind the 1st came the 2d Battalion. Battalion commanders and commanders of supporting artillery units crossed with the first wave and played a major role in organizing the battle of the forward elements and in assuring solid artillery support. The battalion chiefs of staff were given the responsibility for directing and controlling the crossing. Communications between battalion commanders and their chiefs of staff, as well as between the battalions and the regiment, were carried out by radio and telephone.

At 0300 on 31 July, the two battalions were concentrated in the bridgehead, and their commanders ordered an attack. The 1st Battalion soon captured the area around bench mark 167.5, and the 2d Battalion, in cooperation with units of the 117th Rifle Division, took Nasiluv.

At about 1300 on 31 July, east of the Kol. Nasiluv area, the 1232d Rifle Regiment completed the crossing of the river, then attacked and captured the area between a point one kilometer east of bench mark 130.8 and bench mark 167.5.

Meanwhile, during the same nights, under cover of artillery, rifle, and machine gun fire from the 240th Rifle Regiment, entrenched northeast of Voyshin, and supported by artillery on the east bank, three rifle companies and a mortar company of the 820th Rifle Regiment, 117th Rifle Division, succeeded in crossing the river, although under direct fire from four anti-aircraft guns, several artillery and mortar batteries, and eight machine guns. Several counterattacks were driven off in fierce fighting. After all of the German counterattacks were beaten off, the Soviet artillery carried out a 20 minute barrage directed against enemy defenses. Then, under the cover of artillery fire, units of the 820th Rifle Regiment attacked and captured the eastern part of Voyshin, and the Hill 171.3, where they consolidated. By morning the rest of the 820th Rifle Regiment and the entire 275th Rifle Regiment had successfully crossed the river. The entire bridgehead area, however, was under heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire.

At 1030 on 31 July, approximately a battalion and a half of the German 11th SS Police Regiment, which had been transferred from Chenstokhova, supported by ten assault guns and air strikes, counterattacked elements of the 820th Rifle Regiment in the area of Hill 171.3. The first counterattack was beaten off. It was followed by three more, of which the last one, which in some sectors turned into hand to hand combat, was the fiercest.

Finally the last enemy counterattack was repulsed, and the corps retained its positions. German losses were more than 110 men, 10 machine guns, 80 rifles, a 37mm gun, and an 81.4mm mortar. No information is available on Soviet losses.

In the evening of 31 July General Koberidze reported that during the previous 24 hours the Germans had fired over 4,000 artillery and mortar shells at 117th Rifle Division units deployed in the bridgehead and had made eight air strikes, in which some 80 planes took part.

At 2000 the corps chief of staff reported to General Volkov that after a day long battle the divisions had most of their troops across the river. All but three rifle companies of the 1230th Rifle Regiment were still on the island two kilometers northwest of Parkhatka or on the east bank near Parkhatka. The three rifle companies were consolidating their positions one kilometer north of bench mark 130.8. The other two regiments of the 370th Rifle Division were deployed between a footpath 700 meters east of bench mark 130.8 and Nasiluv and in an area 300 meters east of Voyshin. The Polish First Army, on the right, was continuing to defend its zone on the east bank of the river. On the left the LXI Rifle Corps was engaged in fierce combat in its bridgehead in the Bzhestse and Lyutsimya areas.

The corps intelligence officer then reported that from interrogation of POWs it was apparent that the German forces facing the corps included: five infantry battalions of the 174th Reserve Infantry Division, one from its 209th and four from its 24th Reserve Infantry Regiment, a battalion of the 568th Infantry Regiment of the 214th Infantry Division, a combat task force of unknown size from the 26th Infantry Division, and elements of the 11th SS Police Regiment. In reserve in the woods north of Novy Yanovets were the 55th and 95th Infantry Regiments of the 17th Infantry Division.

The intelligence officer concluded that in the zone of the corps advance the Germans had up to 15 infantry battalions and a strong artillery group.

The Battle to Expand the Bridgehead

In view of the continuing strong enemy resistance and the slow advance of the corps units in the bridgehead, General Volkov decided to regroup part of his forces and concentrate his main effort on the widening of the bridgehead in the Nasiluv area. He ordered the commander of the 370th Rifle Division to withdraw the 1230th Rifle Regiment from its bridgehead back across the river during the night of 1 August. The next night, the regiment would re-cross the river, at the 1234th Rifle Regiment's crossing points, and, after lagging in the bridgehead, relieve units of the 240th Rifle Regiment of the 117th Rifle Division deployed near Voyshin.

The corps commander also directed that the 400th and the 22d Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalions be moved to the bridgehead during the same night.

All of these moves were made with the approval of the army commander.

Shortly after midday on 1 August General Kolpachki arrived at the corps command post. General Volkov gave him a report on the situation and elaborated on his plans for advance. He informed him that enemy resistance was stiffening, and that the corps was repulsing numerous German counterattacks. The units in the bridgehead were being resupplied with ammunition and food rations. Evacuation of wounded was proceeding smoothly.

General Kolpachki told Volkov that he was immediately attaching to the corps the 9th Ponton Battalion with an N2P bridge train and the 22d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment. The 312th Rifle Division was to return to the corps, and toward morning of 2 August assemble in the area of Zhechitsa, Kol. Slotviny, and Slotviny.

In explaining his plans for the offensive for 2 August, the army commander said that he intended to link up the bridgeheads of the XCI and LXI Rifle Corps and expand them in depth and width. He assigned the following mission to the XCI Rifle Corps:

While part of the troops covered the line from bench mark 167.5 to Hill 171.3, the main forces were to attack toward bench mark 163.4 and Yanovets, and capture that line before the end of the day. After that, part of the forces would advance toward the southwest and join the elements of the LXI Rifle Corps in the Yanovitse area.

The LXI Rifle Corps, continuing to make the main effort, was to reach the east bank of the Plevka River at Yanovitse and Rudki, and join the XCI Rifle Corps in the Yanovitse area. The boundary line between the XCI and LXI Rifle Corps would run from Slotviny (excl.) to Barychka to Mshadla-Stara.

As soon as the army commander left, General Volkov reviewed the order with his chief of staff and high ranking staff officers. During the discussion he developed his plan. At 1500 on 1 August he issued the following order:

The 370th Rifle Division, while covering the right flank of the corps, would relieve elements of the 117th Rifle Division as far as Hill 171.3, and prepare its left wing to attack with that division.

The 117th Rifle Division, with the 22d Tank Destroyer Artillery and 256th Mortar Regiments attached, would deploy in two echelons. One of its regiments would advance from the line Hill 171.3 (excl.)-ravine southwest of Voyshin toward Oblyasy Ksenzhe and Yanovets. Then, in the Yanovitse area the division would join the units of the LXI Rifle Corps. The attack of the 117th Rifle Division would be supported by the 859th Artillery Regiment and the 375th Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion of the 312th Rifle Division.

The regrouping of the units in the divisions was to be completed no later than 0100 on 2 August. The start of the attack was set for 0955. Artillery preparation of the attack would last 20 minutes (from 0940 to 1000). In addition,

in accordance with the army plan, ground attack air squadrons would strike the Yanovets and Oblyasy Dvorske areas at 0950 and 1000.

Regrouping proceeded more slowly than had been planned, and when it became apparent that the units would not be ready in time to move out at 0955, General Volkov concluded that the attack should be delayed. Consequently he requested permission from General Kolpachki to postpone it. The army commander agreed and set a new time. Artillery preparation would start at 1240, and the troops would move out fifteen minutes later.

At 1255, five minutes before the end of the artillery preparation, regiments of the first echelon of the 117th Rifle Division launched the attack. The Germans met the attacking forces with heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire. After making little progress, the attackers were halted, and dug in. Multiple efforts by the 117th Rifle Division to break the enemy resistance were unsuccessful.

The corps liaison officer with the LXI Rifle Corps reported that its attack was successful. By the end of the day the corps formations had reached the line bench mark 124.0-Barychka-Rudki-points east of the Shlyakhetski Lyas-eastern part of Andzheyuv-Khotcha Gurna.

In view of the stubborn German resistance in the corps zone, and the success of the LXI Rifle Corps on the left, General Volkov ordered the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions to consolidate their positions where they were. It seemed to him more profitable to attempt an attack toward Yanovets, from the LXI Rifle Corps bridgehead; and he decided that the 312th Rifle Division, supported by the 1206th Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment should make it. Consequently he requested permission from General Kolpachki for such an attack. Upon receiving permission from the army commander he ordered the 312th Rifle Division to cross the river at Zastuv Polyanovski during the night of 2/3 August, and concentrate near Bzhestse and in the forest to the west. The following night the division would relieve units of the LXI Rifle Corps in the areas of bench marks 124.0 and 150.0, and in the morning of 4 August the division would be ready to advance toward Yanovitse and Yanovets; capture the line Yanovets-Hill 168.5, and join the 117th Rifle Division in the area of Oblyasy Ksenzhe and Oblyasy Dvorske.

The crossing by the 312th Rifle Division was delayed because of lack of crossing equipment and heavy enemy fire. By dusk on 3 August, only two rifle regiments (the 1081st and 1083d) had crossed the Vistula River. During the night these regiments relieved units of the LXI Rifle Corps as planned.

The 1079th Rifle Regiment assembled at about 1000 on 3 August near Dombruvka on the east bank, where it remained until 2200 the next day.

During 4 August, the corps staff received numerous reports from the divisions indicating that in the area of Nasiluv and Voyshin the enemy was putting up strong resistance and launching many counterattacks. At 1030 on orders of the commander of the 1083d Rifle Regiment one of the regiment's rifle companies carried out a reconnaissance operation toward Yanovitse, without artillery support. Not encountering serious enemy resistance, the company in a bold attack took Yanovitse, where it captured two prisoners from the 185th Replacement Regiment. The commander of the 1083d Rifle Regiment immediately moved his 1st Battalion to Yanovitse, and ordered it to advance toward Yanovets.

After a prolonged battle, the battalion broke the enemy resistance and at about 1200 took Yanovets. There the 2d Battalion joined the 1st. However, the Germans continued to hold the ruins of the Yanovets castle, located on a dominating hill north of the village. From the castle's 50 meter high tower, the enemy could observe the river in the entire army zone, and direct artillery fire on all the corps crossing points.

The commander of the 1st Battalion, Major Nekhay, decided to storm the castle. He caught the Germans by surprise and drove them out. The enemy launched several counterattacks with infantry and tanks in attempts to retake the castle, but all the attacks were repulsed, with heavy losses.

The 1081st Rifle Regiment, supported by two artillery battalions, attacked toward Hill 149.1 and the small village 700 meters north of it. Around 1200, after taking both objectives, the regiment encountered heavy resistance, stopped, and started to consolidate its positions. At 1600, approximately two German infantry battalions counterattacked the regiment three times from the area of Hill 145.7 and from the woods northeast of the hill, trying to restore the situation. All counterattacks were beaten off.

Attempts of the 117th Rifle Division and of the two battalions of the 1083d Rifle Regiment, 312th Rifle Division, to launch an attack toward Oblyasy Dvorske in order to unite with the 112th Rifle Division were unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the LXI Rifle Corps was engaged in fierce combat, repelling enemy counterattacks.

During the night of 4/5 August, the 1079th Rifle Regiment, 312th Rifle Division, crossed the river to the LXI Rifle Corps bridgehead. Toward morning the regiment concentrated about 500 meters north of Yanovitse. At the same time, the 375th Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion of the 312th Rifle Division and several batteries of the 22d Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment crossed to the bridgehead.

In the Zastuv Karchminski area the 1206th Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment started during the night to cross the Vistula on ferries belonging to the LXI Rifle Corps. The crossing was very difficult because the Germans lighted the crossing points with flares and covered them with artillery and mortar fire, and the Luftwaffe strafed the crossing troops. Hence, the corps was able to move only two batteries (seven self-propelled assault guns) across the river during the night. The batteries assembled in the Yanovets area.

In the evening of 4 August, General Volkov discussed the situation with his chief of staff and the division commanders and decided that on 5 August he would concentrate his main effort on the right wing of the 312th Rifle Division. The division would attack from the Yanovets area toward Oblyasy Dvorske, destroy the enemy around Oblyasy Dvorske and Oblyasy Ksenzhe, and join the 117th Rifle Division near Voyshin.

The next day the corps was engaged in heavy fighting in the Voyshin and Yanovets area. The Germans launched several fierce counterattacks, each in battalion strength, supported by three to five tanks and/or assault guns. General Volkov, after talking to the division commanders and after reconnoitering the battlefield, decided to halt the attack and consolidate the bridgehead. At the same time, he would transfer more artillery, mortars, and self-propelled guns to the west bank in order to give better support to the infantry.

During the night of 5/6 August, the 1206th Self Propelled Assault Gun Regiment and the remaining batteries of the 22d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment finished crossing the river. Following the corps commander's instructions, these regiments took up firing positions in the 312th Rifle Division zone. The 275th Rifle Regiment of the 117th Rifle Division moved from the second to the first echelon during the night and took up defensive positions southwest of the 820th Rifle Regiment.

For the next two days the corps, while getting ready to resume the attack repulsed many strong German counterattacks. On 6 August, General Koberidze, with General Volkov's approval, decided to send the division's reconnaissance company to reconnoiter the German positions during the night. The company crossed the Vistula near Kazimezh, attacked and penetrated the German positions some 500 meters northeast of Hill 167.9, where it consolidated. In the battle up to 20 enemy men and officers were killed, and three prisoners from the 5th Battery of the 34th AAA Motorized Regiment were taken. The Germans counterattacked several times, trying to restore the situation and push the reconnaissance company back to the river, but their assaults were repulsed with heavy casualties.

Reports from the LXI Rifle Corps showed strong enemy resistance in that zone also. At the end of 7 August the LXI Rifle Corps was fighting on the line Barychka-Rudki-the western rim of the grove southeast of Shlyakhetski Lyas-Andzheyuv-Khotcha Gurna.

Regrouping of Army Forces into the Zone of the XCI Rifle Corps

In view of the fierce enemy resistance in the entire Sixty-ninth Army zone, General Kolpachki ordered all army formations to cease the attack as of 7 August, and consolidate their positions. The Army commander realized that the terrain on the west bank of the Vistula in the XCI Rifle Corps zone was advantageous to the enemy. As long as the Germans could hold that area they could observe the crossing points in the entire army zone. To deprive the enemy of this advantage, General Kolpachki decided to make an all out effort to force the Germans out of that area. He would reinforce the XCI Rifle Corps with artillery and crossing equipment and then carry out a decisive attack to widen and deepen the corps bridgehead.

To strengthen the XCI Rifle Corps, General Kolpachki as of 7 August withdrew the 41st Rifle Division (102d, 139th, and 244th Rifle Regiments) from the XXV Rifle Corps, deployed on the left flank of the army, and attached it to the XCI Rifle Corps. In the morning of 8 August this division was to relieve the 1081st Rifle Regiment of the 312th Rifle Division between the cemetery 500 meters northwest of Yanovets and the Yanovitse castle.

In addition, General Kolpachki attached to the corps the 12th Artillery Division (less the 46th Light Artillery Brigade), the 35th Guards Multiple Rocket Launcher Mortar Brigade, the 68th Tank Brigade, the 243d Mortar Regiment, the 115th Guards Independent Multiple Rocket Launcher Mortar Regiment, and the 257th Combat Engineer Battalion.

The XCI Rifle Corps was ordered to hold the enemy from the cemetery 500 meters northwest of Yanovets to the Yanovitse manor, with part of its force

while the 117th and 312th Rifle Divisions made the main attack from the line Hill 171.3 - Yanovets toward Obyasy and Tshtsyanki, to encircle and destroy the Germans in the Obyasy Dvorske, Obyasy Ksenzhe area. The first day's objective was a line from the western edge of the forest southwest of Sadlovitse to bench marks 155.5 and 159.6 and to the western outskirts of Yanovets. If the situation was favorable, advance elements of the corps were to proceed to the line Tshtsyanki-Polese Voyshinske.

The 370th Rifle Division was to secure the corps right flank and send its main forces toward bench mark 155.5. Its objective for the first day was the northern edge of the forest southwest of Sadlovitse.

The date for this new attack was originally scheduled to be 9 August, but when it became apparent that an adequate supply of artillery ammunition could not be brought up General Kolpachki postponed the date to 15 August.

Major General Chernyak, commander of the 41st Rifle Division, set up his command post in Yanovitse on 8 August. Late in the afternoon of 8 August, General Volkov summoned General Chernyak and directed him to relieve the 1081st Rifle Regiment of the 312th Rifle Division during the night of 9/10 August.

General Volkov and General Chernyak decided to deploy the 102d and 139th Rifle Regiments of the 41st Rifle Division between the cemetery and the castle; the 244th Rifle Regiment (second echelon) in the forest 1.5 kilometers north of Yanovitse; the 132d Artillery Regiment in firing positions south of Yanovitse; and the 117th Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion on the road one kilometer north of Yanovitse.

The corps commander decided that if the main attack was successful the division would launch a strong assault to take bench marks 168.5 and 162.4.

On 10 August the corps command post was moved to the southern outskirts of Kazimezh.

Both from the divisions and from the chief of the corps rear services reports had come that the flow of ammunition and food to corps units in the bridgehead had improved considerably, and that wounded were being evacuated from the bridgehead without interruption.

In preparation for moving artillery and mortar units and the corps rear elements to the bridgehead General Volkov checked with his chief of engineers on the status of crossing equipment in the divisions. As of 10 August, the chief of engineers reported, the 370th Rifle Division had five A-3 engineer boats, six wooden engineer boats, three small inflatable boats, three ponton sections, and ten fishing boats. A kilometer and a half north of Bokhotnitsa three ferries were in service, one of six-ton capacity, made of two A-3 boats, and two of nine-ton capacity, each built of ponton sections and three A-3 boats. The 117th Rifle Division had five A-3 engineer boats, three wooden engineer boats, three small inflatable boats, and three fishing boats. Near the sawmill there were two ferries, one of six tons and the other nine. From the captured German ponton sections a sixteen-ton ferry had been built. In addition to these the 257th Independent Combat Engineer Battalion had completed three ferries, of nine-, ten-, and sixteen-ton capacity, which were in operation between Bokhotnitsa and the sawmill.

General Volkov had been informed that army engineers had built a bridge near Lyutsimya. He knew also that the LXI Rifle Corps had a ferry near Zastuv Polyanovski. Since his divisions' boats and ferries were being used to capacity, and could not take the T-34 tanks and self-propelled guns, he asked General Kolpachki for permission to use the bridge and the LXI Rifle Corps ferries to take the tank brigade and other elements that had been assigned to reinforce his corps across the river. General Kolpachki approved the request.

By 12 August the corps still held two bridgeheads, separated by a narrow strip of land. In preparation for the major attack on the 15th, General Volkov decided that he should improve his position by joining the bridgeheads of the 117th and 312th Rifle Divisions. Consequently he called in the commanders of those two divisions and gave them new orders. General Koberidze's 117th Rifle Division was to capture the hill east of Yanovitse and Hill 167.9, which the Germans were using for observation and where German weapons were sited to fire at the division's crossing points. General Moyseyevskiy, commander of the 312th Rifle Division, was ordered to capture the hill east of Yanovets and proceed to join up with elements of the 117th Rifle Division on 13 August.

Returning to his command post, General Koberidze assigned the task of taking the two hills to the 3d Company of the 275th Rifle Regiment, a company of 38 men. General Moyseyevskiy assigned his division's task, seizure of the hill east of Yanovets, to the penalty company attached to his divisions.*

The 3d Company took up positions 200 meters east of Hill 167.9, and at 1500 on 13 August, following a 30-minute artillery preparation, launched an attack. After one and a half hours of fierce combat the company captured the hill. Meanwhile, the penalty company of the 312th Rifle Division had launched its attack and captured the hill east of Yanovets.

The division commanders reported to the corps that as the result of these attacks the bridgeheads were united by a narrow strip of land along the river. The Germans had lost their observation posts and could no longer fire directly from the river bank on the 117th Rifle Division.

The corps intelligence officer reported to the corps commander that the interrogation of prisoners captured during the engagement revealed that Hill 167.9 had been defended by the 1st and 2d Companies of the 24th Reserve Regiment, and by one company of the 55th Infantry Regiment, a total of about 130 officers and men.

At 0830 on 14 August, the corps artillery commander reported to General Volkov that as of that morning the following artillery units had crossed the river to the bridgehead: 256th Independent Mortar Regiment; 210th, 114th, 115th, and 131st Multiple Rocket Launcher Regiments of the 35th Guards Multiple Rocket Launcher Mortar Brigade from General Headquarters Reserve; and the 859th Artillery Regiment of the 312th Rifle Division. Artillery regiments of the 370th and 117th Rifle Divisions remained on the east bank of the river.

*Penalty companies were composed of men who during service in regular units had committed a crime. They were sentenced to serve in a penalty company for a prescribed period. Such companies were assigned the most dangerous and difficult missions.

A little later, the commander of the 68th Tank Brigade reported that after crossing the bridge near Lutsimya the brigade, with its 21 tanks, had assembled in the forest northwest of Yanovitse.

As the XCI Rifle Corps prepared to move out on 15 August, the opposing forces showed an advantage, but not an overwhelming one, for the Soviets.

	<u>XCI Rifle Corps</u>	<u>German Forces</u>	<u>Ratio*</u>
Battalions	23	15	1.5:1
Guns & Mortars (76mm & larger)	308	156	5.2:1
Tanks & Self-propelled Guns	34	24	1.4:1

Operations of the XCI Rifle Corps Aimed at Widening the Bridgehead (15-17 August)

A 30-minute artillery preparation began at 0800 on 15 August, directed primarily against enemy troops and guns. At the same time, the Soviet air force struck German artillery positions and tactical reserves around Tshtsyanki, Tomashuv, Polese Voyshinske, and Gelenuv.

At 0830 commanders of the 370th, 117th, and 312th Rifle Divisions reported to the corps commander that their divisions had launched the attack, with the main corps effort being made by the 117th and 312th Rifle Divisions. Soon afterward, reports from the field made it clear that the Germans were putting up strong resistance, and in some sectors they had launched counterattacks in infantry battalion strength supported by six to eight tanks and assault guns.

In the evening of 15 August, the commander of the 370th Rifle Division reported that late in the day the 1232d Rifle Regiment had taken Kol. Nasiluv; the 1234th Rifle Regiment was at the southern edge of the forest about two kilometers northwest of Nasiluv; and the 1230th Rifle Regiment, taking advantage of the successful operation of the 117th Rifle Division, had helped destroy the enemy in the northwestern part of Voyshin, the hamlet one kilometer north of Voyshin, and near bench mark 155.5.

The division was facing approximately one infantry regiment, supported by heavy artillery and mortar fire from the Sadlovitse-Tomashuv area. The enemy offered especially strong resistance in individual fortified hamlets, and at the edge of the forest northwest of Nasiluv.

The commander of the 117th Rifle Division reported that his division had attacked in two echelons. The first echelon (240th and 275th Rifle Regiments) quickly routed the enemy from his defense positions and speedily advanced to the northwest. Then, in cooperation with the 1230th Rifle Regiment of the 370th Rifle Division the 117th destroyed approximately two infantry battalions in the northwestern part of Voyshin and in the hamlets to the north of it.

*No figures for personnel strength are available. The Soviets assumed that the manpower strength of German infantry companies was three or four times that of their own rifle companies. However, since no figures for Soviet company strength are available, 1.5:1 ratio in battalions in the Soviet's favor has little meaning. It is assumed that the ratio in manpower favored the Germans.

The left flank regiment of the 117th Rifle Division was under heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire from Oblyasy Ksenzhe, which hampered the advance. To destroy the enemy there, General Koberidze detailed one rifle company from the 275th Rifle Regiment and the division's reconnaissance company. These units, in cooperation with elements of the 1083d Rifle Regiment, 312th Rifle Division, were successful.

At sunset, General Koberidze reported to the corps staff that his division was between bench marks 155.5 and 158.3.

The commander of the 312th Rifle Division informed General Volkov that his attack had met little enemy resistance as it started off. The division was supported by the 1206th Self Propelled Artillery Regiment with 14 self propelled guns. Later reports indicated that the division's right wing regiment (1083d), had taken Oblyasy Dvorske quickly. In the woods west of Oblyasy Ksenzhe, the regiment, in cooperation with the 3d Company of the 275th Rifle Regiment and with the reconnaissance company of the 117th Rifle Division, killed or wounded 80 enemy officers and men, and captured 23. Five tanks in running condition were taken.

Toward the end of the day the 312th Rifle Division reached the line bench mark 158.3 (excl.)-Hill 168.5 (excl.).

The 102d Rifle Regiment of the 41st Rifle Division, supported by the 68th Tank Brigade, taking advantage of the success of the 312th Rifle Division, took the line Hill 168.5-bench mark 162.4 (excl.).

In the afternoon of 15 August, General Volkov approved the requests of the division commanders to move their command posts to the bridgehead. The 370th Rifle Division established its CP at Nasiluv, the 117th Rifle Division at Voyshin, and the 312th Rifle Division around Hill 167.9. At the same time the corps commander ordered his command post to shift from Kazimezh to the west bank near Voyshin.

In a preliminary report on enemy casualties submitted to the army in the evening of 15 August, it was stated that during the day the corps had destroyed several hundred enemy troops and one artillery and six mortar batteries, and captured a considerable number of machine guns and small arms. Six destroyed German tanks remained on the battlefield. Ninety-six men from the 17th Infantry and 174th Reserve Infantry Divisions were taken prisoner.

During the night fierce fighting continued in the entire corps zone. In order to restore the situation, the Germans brought in their tactical reserves, which, together with units of the 17th Infantry and 174th Reserve Infantry Divisions already engaged in combat, launched five counterattacks supported by tanks and assault guns. All were beaten off. The tense situation at the front permitted General Volkov and his staff only limited rest.

In the morning of 16 August the 370th Rifle Division reported that after repulsing night counterattacks it had advanced and by daybreak had reached the line Sadlovitse-bench mark 142.9.

During the day all corps units worked at consolidating and improving their positions. In the evening, reports from the divisions indicated that they were in contact with the enemy along the following lines:

370th Rifle Division: Sadlovitse-bench mark 142.9-two isolated houses 1.2 kilometers southwest of bench mark 142.9;

117th Rifle Division: northern edge of the grove 1.2 kilometers northwest of Hill 155.5-pond 500 meters northwest of bench mark 158.3;

312th Rifle Division: from the pond to Hill 168.5;

41st Rifle Division: from Hill 168.5 to bench mark 162.4 (Yanovitse).

For the next three days (17, 18, 19 August) the corps consolidated its position, moved additional artillery units, mortars, and other combat equipment into the bridgehead, replenished ammunition, and prepared to resume the offensive on 20 August (Map 6).

The corps attacked twice more, once on 20 August and the second time on 26 August, and made some gains. As of 27 August it turned to defense along the line Adamuvka Povisle-Dobroslavuv-Sosnuc-Kokhanuv-Lavetsko Stare. There it stayed until January 1945, when the 1st Byelorussian Army Group launched the Vistula-Oder Offensive.

General Comments

In a month of fierce fighting the XCI Rifle Corps had made an assault crossing of the Vistula River, and in cooperation with the LXI Rifle Corps captured a bridgehead 12 kilometers wide and from 3 to 12 kilometers deep. This difficult operation, with its numerous complications and unanticipated stubborn defense, is an excellent example of why since World War II the Soviet Army has concentrated a great deal of attention on studying and planning for crossing rivers.

The XCI Rifle Corps was poorly prepared to cross this major river. There was little equipment provided, and what could be scrounged from the countryside was inadequate for the transfer of large numbers of men and equipment in a short period of time. Obviously there had been little study of the river, for the first attempts relied heavily on rafts, which would never have been used had there been adequate understanding of the swift current of the river. Artillery support was also inadequate, with only one mortar regiment assigned as reinforcement when the operation started. Even the corps's organic artillery and mortars were short of ammunition.

At the start of the operation the army commander decided to concentrate the main effort of the army in the LXI Rifle Corps zone. But when the XCI Rifle Corps found itself facing stubborn opposition, and it was apparent that the Germans had observation points from which they could observe the crossings of the army, he moved a considerable part of the LXI Rifle Corps's forces and equipment into the zone of the XCI Rifle Corps so that the bridgeheads in that area might be widened and the Germans driven from their points of advantage.

The corps commander was very active, personally supervising front line activities and observing results. He called for aggressive offensive conduct

by his subordinates, yet did not seem overly critical when units failed to achieve objectives in the face of overwhelming resistance. He called for initiative and creativity in demanding that field expedients be found to help in crossing the river. While he took risks in sending units across the river with little support and insufficient crossing equipment to make a large scale assault, he did not sacrifice troops blindly by demanding suicidal attacks. With flexibility and imagination he changed the plan several times, most notably when he withdrew one regiment which had already crossed, in order to insert it farther up the river where he thought it could be more effective.

The initial plan to cross the river from the march was bold and typical of Soviet practice. The events after this failure show that a river crossing in the face of a prepared enemy involves great delay and a very extensive effort. This crossing is one of many that Soviet analysts have studied in great detail. From its lessons they have profited at least to the extent of providing their army with more effective engineer equipment and with vehicles capable of fording rivers. They are well aware that had they been able to move the major portion of their force directly onto the river the Germans would have been denied the time and opportunity to spot targets and put up such a strong defense.

VI

THE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS OF THE 90TH RIFLE DIVISION TOWARD TSEKHANUV 14-16 January 1945

The Soviet strategic design for operations in East Prussia planned for January 1945 called for the destruction of a large force of German Army Group Center (over 40 divisions and numerous special formations) concentrated there, thus liquidating the threat to Soviet forces deployed to the south. The mission was assigned to the 2d and 3d Byelorussian Army Groups.

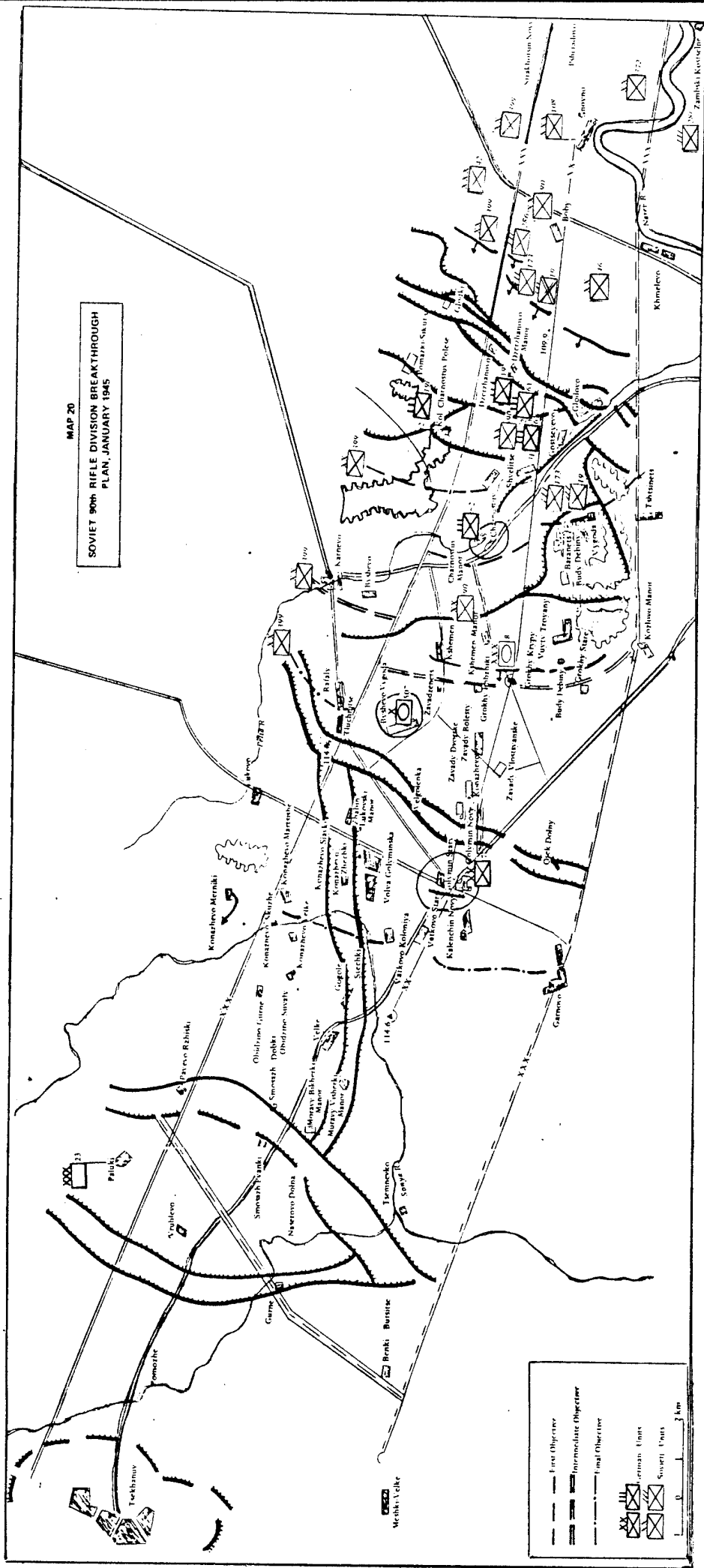
The 2d Byelorussian Army Group (Front) under Marshal K.K. Rokossovskiy, composed of the Second Shock, Third, Forty-eighth, Fiftieth, Sixty-fifth, and Seventieth Armies, and the Fifth Guards Tank Army, was ordered to destroy the Soviet forces in the Mlava area, advance toward Marienburg and Elbin, and reach the Baltic Sea, cutting off the Germans in East Prussia from the main German forces in the west (Map 19).

The Soviet Second Shock Army, deployed in the reserve of the 2d Byelorussian Army Group near Ostruv Mazovetskiy, 55 to 60 kilometers east of Pultusk, was ordered on 23 December 1944 to concentrate in the bridgehead at Rozhansk by 8 January 1945, relieve part of the forces of the Forty-eighth and Sixty-fifth Armies which were committed there, and prepare to advance toward Tsekhanuv, Shrensk, and Zelyun.

The CVIII Rifle Corps (46th, 90th, and 372d Rifle Divisions) of the Second Shock Army, advancing on the axis of the main army effort, was ordered to break through the German defenses on a four-kilometer front between Dzerzhanovo and Glodovo, destroy the defenders, and, while securing its own right flank, proceed to a line from Kshemen to the woods south of Vuyty Troyany, a distance of ten kilometers (Map 20). Next, developing its advance toward Golymin Stary, the corps, by the end of the first day of the offensive, was expected to reach the line Zhabin Lukovski Manor-Kalenchin Novy-Garnovo, 16 kilometers from its starting point.

On 25 December 1944, the commander of the CVIII Rifle Corps, Lieutenant General V.S. Polenov, and the commanders of the 46th, 90th, and 372d Rifle Divisions, went to the bridgehead to reconnoiter their zones of advance. During this reconnaissance General Polenov gave the combat missions for the offensive orally to each of the division commanders. The written operational order for the attack was issued by the corps staff on 12 January and sent out to the troops on the same day.

The corps would attack on a two division front, the 90th Rifle Division on the right, the 46th Rifle Division on the left, and the 372d Rifle Division in the second echelon. The 90th Rifle Division, under Major General N.G. Lyashchenko (19th, 173d, 286th Rifle Regiments and 96th Artillery Regiment),



MAP 20
SOVIET 90th RIFLE DIVISION BREAKTHROUGH
PLAN, JANUARY 1945

Legend:

- First Objective
- Intermediate Objective
- Final Objective
- German Units
- Soviet Units

Scale: 2 km

was to make the corps main effort, breaking through the German defenses in a two-kilometer sector from Dzerzhanovo to a point 700 meters west of bench mark 109.9, destroying the German strongpoint at Dzerzhanovo, proceeding for 5.5 kilometers, and occupying the Charnostuv manor and the grove south of it. Then, continuing its advance toward Golymin Stary, by the end of the day it was to reach the line Konazhevo Martsishe-Vatkovo Koloniya, a distance of 15 kilometers from its starting point.

General Polenov attached the following elements to the 90th Division:

- 46th Guards Independent Heavy Tank Regiment
- 93d Guards Tank Regiment
- 95th Guards Tank Regiment
- 255th Mortar Regiment of the 28th Mortar Brigade
- 258th Mortar Regiment of the 28th Mortar Brigade
- 941st Artillery Regiment of the 372d Rifle Division (second echelon of the corps, whose commitment to combat was scheduled for the second day of the offensive)
- 248th Artillery Regiment of the 86th Rifle Division (from the second echelon of the Army)
- two companies of the 14th Combat Engineer Assault Battalion

The division's attack was to be supported by:

- 96th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade
- 81st Gun Artillery Brigade
- 2d and 3d Battalions of the 21st Heavy (203mm) Howitzer Artillery Brigade
- 7th Multiple Rocket Launcher Mortar Brigade
- two battalions of the 43d Multiple Rocket Launcher Mortar Regiment

In addition, for the period of artillery preparation and the support of the infantry assault the 760th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment (the Corps antitank artillery reserve), and mortar units of the 372d Rifle Division (second echelon of the corps), and of the 86th Rifle Division (second echelon of the army) were to be assigned to support the 90th Rifle Division. For the period of artillery preparation only, the division would be supported by regimental artillery and the tank destroyer battalions of the 372d and 86th Rifle Divisions.

The 46th Rifle Division, attacking to the left of the 90th Division, was to break through enemy defenses in the sector from 700 meters west of bench mark 109.9 to Glodovo, and capture the eastern edge of the woods 1.6 kilometers south-east of Gostseyevo. The commander of the 90th Rifle Division was to be responsible for the boundary with the 46th Rifle Division, which would run: Gnoyno-bench mark 109.9-Grokhy Krupy.

General Polenov informed the division commanders that the 399th Rifle Division of the Forty-eighth Army would advance on the corps's right flank. The boundary between the 90th and 399th Rifle Division was to run from Strakhotsin Novy (excl.) to Charnostuv Manor, Konazhevo Martsishe, and Tsekhanuv.

The corps commander advised the division commanders that in order to complete the breakthrough of the German main defense zone successfully, and to exploit the initial success, the commander of the Second Shock Army had

decided to commit the VIII Tank Corps in the CVIII Rifle Corps zone as soon as the rifle divisions had reached their initial objectives.

The 90th Rifle Division had been in combat since the first day of the war and had accumulated considerable combat experience. When the war began it was deployed in the Baltic States. It participated in the defense of Leningrad and in 1944 was involved in the breakthrough operations of the Leningrad Army Group. The troops and staffs were veterans, well selected for this attack.

While General Lyashchenko and the other division commanders were reconnoitering the terrain with the corps commander, Lyashchenko's operation and intelligence officers, the commander of the division's artillery, and the chiefs of engineers and communications were obtaining all available data on the German defenses and forces, as well as on their own support troops and supplies, from the corps chief of staff and other staff officers. Thus, when General Lyashchenko returned to his headquarters on 25 December and assembled senior staff officers to inform them about the mission and outline a preliminary plan for the organization and preparation for the offensive, he received from his staff short briefings which enabled him to start work immediately.

The intelligence officer reported first. He reported that in the sector of the forthcoming attack of the CVIII Rifle Corps the enemy had prepared three defense zones. The main (first) zone was seven and a half to eight kilometers deep. It consisted of three positions. The forward edge of the zone ran from a cluster of houses one kilometer east and southeast of Glodki, through Dzerzhanovo, to the southern outskirts of Glodovo. The first position of the main zone was one to one and a half kilometers deep and had two, and in some places three, lines of deep trenches, some 250 to 300 meters apart. The trenches had built-in machine gun emplacements and prepared positions for riflemen.

Behind the first and second trenches were dugout shelters for the troops, firing positions for antitank guns, and emplacements for heavy machine guns. Some of the heavy machine guns were deployed in reinforced concrete pillboxes. In front of the first trench the Germans had laid antipersonnel and antitank minefields, and had built two to four lines of barbed wire entanglement. In several areas concertinas were used. Between the second and third trenches of the first position and on the line from Charnostuv to Glodovo the Germans had prepared switch positions facing northeast.

Some two and a half to three kilometers behind the forward edge of the main defense zone, along a line from the southwestern edge of the forest a kilometer east of Charnostuv Polese Manor, through the southern part of Shvelitse to Vygoda, the Germans constructed their second position, in which they deployed the regimental reserves. This position, which had only one deep trench, also protected the area of the main artillery positions.

Six and a half to seven kilometers to the rear of the forward edge of the first defense zone the enemy had prepared a third position, consisting of one continuous trench running from one kilometer west of Byshevo, through Kshemen Manor, to Budy Debiny. In this position the divisional reserves were deployed.

In response to General Lyashchenko's question about the density of engineer obstacles, the intelligence officer said that on each kilometer of front there were approximately seven kilometers of trenches, 32 machine gun emplacements,

four reinforced concrete pillboxes for machine guns, one and a half earth and timber pillboxes, and 32 dugout shelters.

The German second defense zone was built some 12 to 13 kilometers to the rear of the forward edge of the main defense zone and ran along a line from Rafaly through bench mark 114.8, then one kilometer east of Golymin Stary, through Golymin Novy, to Osek Dolny. The zone consisted of two deep trenches about 400 to 600 meters apart, protected by barbed wire obstacles.

The third defense zone was located some 23 to 25 kilometers from the forward edge of the main defense zone, along a line from Payevo Rzhiski, through Smosazh Dobki and the Moravy Bikherki manor to Tsemnevko. It had four deep trenches.

Between the second and third defense zones, from the Muravy Visherki manor to the Zhabin Lukovski manor, the enemy had constructed a switch position consisting of two trenches facing south, while on the line from Payevo Shvelitse through Gurne to Genki Butsitse there was an antitank ditch three meters deep and five meters wide.

Large settlements such as Shvelitse, Kshemen, Velgolenka, Golymin Stary, and Tsekhanuv were included in the defense system and adapted for all-around defense. Around the town of Tsekhanuv the Germans had constructed a segmented deep trench with built-in machine gun emplacements.

The intelligence officer pointed out that the enemy used dummy positions widely. General Lyashchenko interrupted the report and ordered that the intelligence officer and the commander of artillery make an all-out effort to establish the exact location of all dummy positions. After the breakthrough, the army staff established that about 40% of the artillery firing positions were dummies. Roving guns would fire from them periodically.

Next, the intelligence officer turned to the German troop deployment. Defending the area in the zone of advance of the CVIII Rifle Corps was the German 7th Infantry Division of the XXIII Army Corps. The division was composed of the 19th, 61st, and 62d Infantry Regiments, the 7th Artillery Regiment, the 7th Combat Engineer Battalion, and replacement battalions. The division was reinforced with the 80th Construction Battalion, the 63d Artillery Regiment, and one battalion of the 57th Heavy Mortar Regiment from the General Headquarters Reserve.

According to the latest intelligence data, the 7th Infantry Division was 7,580 men strong. Each of the three infantry regiments had only two infantry battalions. Infantry companies each had 70 to 90 effectives.

Defending the sector in front of the assigned zone of advance of the 90th Rifle Division in the Dzerzhanovo area was the 1st Battalion of the 19th Infantry Regiment, and in Glodovo and to the north was the 1st Battalion of the 61st Infantry Regiment.

German reserves were deployed as follows:

Regimental: 2d Battalion of the 61st Infantry Regiment in the Shvelitse area;

Divisional: 62d Infantry Regiment, 80th Construction Battalion, and the 7th Combat Engineer Battalion in the Charnostuv area; 507th Panzer Brigade in the Byshevo Vygoda area; replacement battalion of the 7th Infantry Division in the Golymin Stary area;

Operational Reserves: 25th Panzer Regiment of the 7th Panzer Division, plus one unidentified infantry regiment in the Tsekhanuv area.

The main concentration of enemy artillery was in the Charnostuv and Shvelitse areas.

Next, the operations officer discussed the terrain facing the 90th Rifle Division. It was open, lightly rolling, and rising toward the enemy positions. A great number of patches of woods and settlements in the enemy territory made it possible for the Germans to elude Soviet observation and to conceal movement of men and weapons. In the area where the 90th Rifle Division was to assemble for the attack, on the other hand, there was not enough natural concealment to cover the Soviet troops' movements. The Soviet deployments could be observed by the Germans to a depth of two to four kilometers. This circumstance called for extraordinary camouflage efforts and considerable engineering work in preparing the jump-off positions.

In the sector where the division was to be deployed, most of the enemy defenses could be observed up to the line from Charnostuv Polese manor, through Charnostuv to the eastern edge of the woods south of Charnostuv, that is to a depth of three to four kilometers.

The Pelta and Sonya Rivers were reported to have sloping banks and hard bottoms, and to be only eight to twenty meters wide and two-tenths to two meters deep. This would make crossing not too difficult. The roads in the area were sufficiently developed to accommodate the needs of the division. By and large, the terrain favored the employment of all arms and provided good conditions for maneuver and coordination during the course of the battle.

According to the long-range meteorological forecast, only minimal snowfall was expected. The temperature might fluctuate between -10° C and -50° C. The thickness of the ice on the river might be no more than 15 to 20 centimeters. In general, the weather pattern might vary, with mist and periods of short precipitation.

Next, General Lyashchenko and his chief of staff reviewed the combat readiness of the division. Colonel Lukyanov reported that the division had 7,057 effectives. On the average each rifle company had about 90 men. Morale was high. There were 257 light machine guns, 84 heavy machine guns, 162 antitank rifles, and 18 anti-aircraft guns. As for artillery (organic, attached, and supporting), its 528 guns and mortars, according to preliminary calculations made by the division's artillery commander (Figure 15), would permit a density of 264 guns and mortars per kilometer of frontage (excluding 45mm guns). However, in spite of the large number of artillery pieces, the effectiveness of the division's fire on the second and third positions of the main defense zone was expected to be less than against the first position, because 70% of the entire artillery force was composed of guns no larger than 76mm and mortars up to 82mm.

The 93d and 95th Tank Regiments, which were attached to the division, had a total of 42 IS-122 tanks. The 46th Independent Heavy Tank Regiment had 31 KV

Figure 15. SOVIET 90th RIFLE DIVISION
Weapon Strengths
January 1945

Units	Mortars			Guns						Total	
	82mm	120mm	120mm	76mm (regt)	76mm (div)	122mm	152mm	203mm	Multiple Rocket Launcher		45mm AT Cannon
Division Weapons	54	18		12	32	12	--	--	--	36	128
Attached:											
255th & 258th Mortar Regts											
28th Mortar Bde		72									72
248th Arty Regt, 86th Rifle Div (Army 2d ech)					20	12					32
941st Arty Regt, 372d Rifle Div (corps 2d ech)					20	12					32
Supporting:											
96th Hv How Arty Bde											
794th How Arty Regt, 38th How Arty Bde							32				32
81st Gun Arty Bde						26					26
760th TD Arty Regt						12	24				36
3d & 4th Bns, 21st Hv Arty Bde					24						24
372d Rifle Div arty & mortar units								18			18
86th Rifle Div arty & mortar units	54	18		10	12						94
7th R/L Mortar Bde		12		10	12						34
2d & 3d Bns, 43d R/L Mortar Regt									156 (M-31) 24 (M-13)		--
TOTAL	108	120		32	120	74	56	18	--	36	528

tanks, making a total of 73 tanks to be deployed in the division's sector. Since the Germans were known to have very few tanks, the 90th Rifle Division would have an overwhelming superiority. It also had a 2.7:1 advantage in infantry.

After evaluating the short reports presented by the chief of staff and the operations and intelligence officers, General Lyashchenko outlined his battle concept in general terms. He gave Colonel Lukyanov instructions about the organization of reconnaissance and the commander of the division's artillery instructions about the distribution of artillery. The next day, on 26 December 1944, General Lyashchenko and the unit commanders (including attached and supporting units), reconnoitered the terrain and enemy deployment. While still in the field, he announced to the subordinate commanders that he had confirmed the decision to deliver the main blow on his right, toward the Dzerzhanovo manor and Charnostuv, and that he would deploy the division in two echelons. In the first would be the 173d and 19th Rifle Regiments, and in the second the 286th Rifle Regiment.

The 173d Rifle Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel I.F. Ryabko, on the right, with the 167th Independent Rifle Company attached from the Army, was ordered to attack on an 800-meter front, break through the enemy defenses from Dzerzhanovo to the Dzerzhanovo manor, destroy the enemy in the Dzerzhanovo area, and capture a line from 400 meters south of the Charnostuv Polese manor to the northern part of Shvelitse. Subsequently the regiment was to capture the Charnostuv manor 500 meters north of Charnostuv, and secure the deployment and commitment to combat of the 286th Rifle Division from the western bank of the Pelta River. The 173d Rifle Regiment was to be responsible for securing the boundary with the 399th Rifle Division on its right.

The 19th Rifle Regiment, commanded by Colonel M.A. Karpenko, on the left of the 173d, was ordered to break through enemy defenses from the Dzerzhanovo manor to a house 700 meters west of bench mark 109.9, on a front of 1,200 meters. It was to destroy the opposing forces in the southern part of Shvelitse and advance to the Pelta River. Subsequently it would capture the line from the road junction west of Charnostuv to the grove 500 meters south of Charnostuv, and advancing toward Golymin Stary proceed to the line from Grokhy Imbzhiki to Grokhy Krupy (excl.). The 19th Rifle Regiment was to be responsible for securing the boundary with the 173d Rifle Regiment on its right, and with the 46th Rifle Division on its left.

The 286th Rifle Regiment (Commander, Colonel P.G. Fomenko) as the second echelon of the division was ordered to advance behind the 173d Rifle Regiment, at a distance of no more than one kilometer. As soon as the regiments of the first echelon reached the line from the Charnostuv manor 500 meters north of Charnostuv to the western edge of the woods 500 meters south of Charnostuv, the 286th Rifle Regiment would deploy for combat on the right bank of the Pelta River, advance toward Byshnevo Vygoda, and capture Kshemen.

In order to avoid artillery preparation against abandoned or lightly held positions the commanders of the two first echelon regiments were ordered to prepare one forward battalion each to carry out combat reconnaissance. These battalions were to attack and capture the first and second enemy trenches during the first artillery barrage of the artillery preparation. If the forward

battalions were successful, the remainder of the artillery preparation was to be cancelled, and the assault of the main forces of the division would be supported by successive concentrations of fire. If the attack of the forward battalions was unsuccessful, the assault by the main forces of the division would start after the artillery preparation was complete.

To support the VIII Tank Corps as it was committed to combat in the division's sector after the division reached its initial objective, the division artillery commander was to prepare concentrated artillery fire on Byshevo Vygoda, Konazhevo, and Zavady Vlostsyanske. The commanders of the 19th and 173d Rifle Regiments were to send out forward detachments to protect the flanks of the VIII Tanks Corps, and capture and hold the second defense zone from Lukovo (excl.) to Golymin Stary.

Allocation of artillery and mortar units corresponding to these plans would be prepared by the division artillery commander, approved by the division commander, and distributed.

After assigning missions to the regimental commanders, General Lyashchenko returned to his headquarters where he issued several directives with regard to other preparations for the offensive training. He instructed Colonel Lukyanov to draw up the operation order and prepare all the necessary data for the coordination of combat activities of the various arms.

The regimental commanders were told when and in what order they should carry out the reconnaissance of the terrain and the enemy deployment. The reconnaissance by the regimental commanders was to be under the direct supervision of the division commander during 3 and 4 January 1945. Reconnaissance by the battalion commanders was to be conducted on 6 and 7 January under the supervision of regimental commanders. In an explanatory note, the chief of staff pointed out that reconnaissance activities were to be conducted under the supervision of a senior commander in order to insure that all the problems related to the operation were recognized and solved.

During the next several days General Lyashchenko and his staff, together with the division artillery commander, engineer officer, and commanders and staffs of attached units, worked on preparation of a plan for the coordinated utilization of all arms and services during the coming operation.

Also, during the remaining days of December and early in January the division commander and selected staff officers made several trips to the bridgehead in order to get better acquainted with the terrain and with enemy positions and deployment.

Utilization of Tanks

On 27 December General Lyashchenko summoned the commanders of the 46th Heavy, 93d, and 95th Tank Regiments, and, after reviewing in detail the combat readiness of the tank force, he informed them that the tanks reinforcing the division would be utilized for direct infantry support and only on the axis of the main effort of the division. The 46th Heavy and 93d Tank Regiments were to be attached to the 173d Rifle Regiment in the first echelon, and the 95th

Tank Regiment to the 286th Rifle Regiment in the second. This resulted in a density of 65 direct infantry support tanks per kilometer on the axis of the main effort. The tanks of the first echelon were to attack in two lines, the 31 of the 46th Heavy Tank Regiment in the first, and the 21 tanks of the 93d Tank Regiment in the second. The tanks attached to the 286th Rifle Regiment would follow one kilometer behind the first echelon.

Comment: This deployment was later criticized, for the 19th Rifle Regiment in the first echelon was given no tanks, and the 95th Tank Regiment, attached to the second echelon rifle regiment, did not participate in the battle on the first day. Soviet analysts emphasize that World War II experience suggests that tanks in direct infantry support should be attached to second echelon rifle divisions only when first echelon rifle regiments are sufficiently supplied with tanks. Thus the decision of the commander of the 90th Rifle Division has been deemed faulty by the Soviets, and this study supports their criticism.

Artillery Support (Figures 16-18)

The artillery units of the division were given detailed missions and instructions for carrying them out. In accordance with usual Soviet procedure General Lyashchenko himself carefully reviewed the allocation and placement of each artillery unit. An 85 minute pre-assault preparation was planned. Of this for the first 15 minutes there was to be general artillery fire by all units on major enemy positions. Then would follow 60 minutes of concentrations fired to destroy or neutralize identified defenses. For the final ten minutes of the preparation there would be general artillery fire again on all major targets. It was intended that during the artillery preparation weapons and trenches should be destroyed and troops annihilated to a depth of five kilometers.

Corps artillery would participate in the preparation, starting the firing of the barrage with a volley by multiple rocket launchers (M-31) aimed at the Dzerzhanovo area. The corps artillery group as well as the regimental artillery was assigned targets. It was also to carry out counterbattery fire and suppress movement of German reserves when required.

Battalion and regimental artillery of the 90th Rifle Division, regimental artillery of the 372d and 86th Rifle Divisions, and tank destroyer battalions of the 90th, 372d, and 86th Rifle Divisions, a total of 104 guns, were assigned for direct fire missions. Each rifle battalion would be accompanied by six guns, advancing no more than 400-500 meters behind the infantry.

The 372d Rifle Division of the corps second echelon would provide 82mm and 120mm mortar support, and the 86th Rifle Division of the army's second echelon would participate in the artillery preparation, concentrating on the enemy's first line of trenches.

Artillery support of the infantry assault was to be carried out by a method called a double rolling barrage, covering an area 2,100 meters wide and 1,600 meters in depth. Six main phase lines were established, with a distance of 400 meters between the first and second lines and 300 meters between subsequent

Figure 16. SOVIET 90th RIFLE DIVISION
 Artillery Organization
 January 1945

Divisional Artillery Group

255th & 258th Mortar Regiments, 28th Mortar Brigade	
248th Artillery Regiment 86th Rifle Division	128 guns and mortars
760th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment (corps reserve)	

Corps Artillery Group

96th Heavy Howitzer Brigade	
794th Howitzer Regiment, 38th Howitzer Brigade	112 guns
81st Gun Artillery Brigade	156 frames for M-31
3d and 4th Battalions, 21st Heavy Artillery Briagde	rocket launchers
7th Rocket Launcher Artillery Brigade	24 M-13 rocket launchers
2d and 3d Battalions, 43d Rocket Launcher Artillery Regt	

Antitank Artillery Reserve

66th Independent Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion	12 guns
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	<u>173d Rifle Regiment</u>	<u>19th Rifle Regiment</u>
Organic Artillery	12 45mm guns	12 45mm guns
	4 76mm guns	4 76mm guns
	18 82mm mortars	18 82mm mortars
	6 120mm mortars	6 120mm mortars
(total)	40	40
372d 7 86th Rifle Division units assigned for direct fire	10 76mm regt guns	10 76mm regt guns
(total)	12 76mm div guns 22	12 76mm div guns 22
96th Artillery Regiment, 372d & 86th Rifle Div mortar units		116 guns and mortars
941st Artillery Regiment, 372d Rifle Division, 286th Rifle Regiment mortar units		56 guns and mortars

The 286th Rifle Regiment in the second echelon received no additional artillery until committed to combat.

Figure 17. Soviet 90th Rifle Division
 Projected Ammunition Consumption for the First Day of Combat
 14 January 1945

Weapons	Preparation		Support Attack		Exploitation		Total	
	Units of Fire	Rounds	Units of Fire	Rounds	Units of Fire	Rounds	Units of Fire	Rounds
82mm Mortars	0.78	94	0.52	62	0.43	52	1.73	208
120mm Mortars	0.7	56	0.47	38	0.39	31	1.56	125
76mm Guns (Regimental Arty)	0.76	107	0.51	71	0.43	60	1.7	238
76mm Guns (Divisional Arty)	0.9	126	0.6	84	0.4	56	1.9	266
122mm Howitzers	0.9	72	0.6	48	0.4	32	1.9	152
152mm Howitzers	0.9	54	0.7	42	0.4	24	2.0	120
203mm Howitzers	0.7	28	0.5	20	0.3	12	1.5	60

Figure 18. SOVIET 90th RIFLE DIVISION OPERATIONS, JANUARY 1945
 Organization of the Participating Artillery

	<u>173d Rifle Regiment</u>	<u>19th Rifle Regiment</u>
<u>Organic artillery</u>	12 45mm guns	12 45mm guns
	4 76mm guns	4 76mm guns
	18 82mm mortars	18 82mm mortars
	<u>6 120mm mortars</u>	<u>6 120mm mortars</u>
	40	40
 372d & 86th Rifle Division units assigned direct fire	10 76mm regt guns	10 76mm regt guns
	<u>12 76mm div guns</u>	<u>12 76mm div guns</u>
	22	22
 <u>Regimental Artillery Groups</u>		
96th Artillery Regiment	} 116 guns and mortars	
372d & 86th Rifle Division mortar units		
941st Artillery Regiment, 372d Rifle Div	} 56 guns and mortars	
286th Rifle Regiment mortar units		
 <u>Divisional Artillery Groups</u>		
255th & 258th Mortar Regiments, 28th Mortar Brigade	} 128 guns and mortars	
248th Artillery Regiment, 86th Rifle Division		
760th TD Artillery Regiment (corps reserve)		
 <u>Antitank Artillery Reserve</u>		
66th Independent TD Artillery Battalion		12 guns
 <u>Corps Artillery Groups</u>		
96th Heavy Howitzer Brigade	} 112 guns	
794th Howitzer Regiment, 38th Howitzer Brigade		
81st Gun Artillery Brigade		
3d & 4th Battalions, 21st Heavy Artillery Bdg		156 frames for M-31 rocket launchers
7th Rocket Launcher Artillery Brigade		24 M-13 rocket launchers
2d & 3d Battalions, 43d Rocket Launcher Artillery Regiment		

The 286th Rifle Regiment in the second echelon received no additional artillery until committed to combat.

lines. Six intermediate phase lines, two between the first and second main phase lines, and one between each pair of the subsequent main phase lines, were also established. While the units carrying out the main rolling barrage were sequentially shelling the main phase lines, those assigned to the secondary barrage would shell the intermediate ones, with firing schedules so timed that each leapfrogged the other as the barrage proceeded.

The planned speed of advance of infantry and tanks was to be two kilometers per hour. Considering this rate of advance the rolling barrage was allotted 48 minutes to cover the 1,600 meter depth.

Pre-planned artillery support would continue as far as the line Zhabin Lukovski manor-Golymin Stary, to a depth of 12 kilometers. Subsequent infantry combat was to be supported by concentrated fire at newly discovered targets of opportunity and by the fire of the accompanying guns.

Artillery would start to displace forward by echelon to new firing positions as soon as the rolling barrage was completed, according to a schedule prepared by the divisional artillery staff. Displacement would in all cases be made by battalions, so that two-thirds of each artillery regiment would always be in position.

To counter a possible German artillery counterpreparation, the plan anticipated the possibility of using the entire artillery force supporting the division for the suppression of German artillery and mortars. But such artillery suppression fire could be opened only on order of the army commander. It would be scheduled as follows: artillery barrage on all previously identified artillery positions, three minutes; concentrations on selected targets, seventeen minutes; artillery barrage (as before) five minutes.

Engineer Support

General Lyashchenko decided that, during the preparation period for the offensive, combat engineers would be put under centralized control of the division's engineer offices. When the infantry assault commenced, an engineer company was to be attached to each rifle regiment. The two engineer companies of the 14th Independent Assault Combat Engineer Battalion attached to the 90th Rifle Division, with the division's own engineer battalion, would provide a density of two and a half engineer companies per kilometer of frontage.

General Lyashchenko ordered his engineer officer to carry out a thorough engineer reconnaissance, to determine the system and character of enemy fortifications, and the location of the various obstacles. By and large this was to be carried out through observation from four observation posts organized in the divisional zone. During the penetration these OPs would displace with the forward elements of the first echelon regiments, and continue to reconnoiter German defenses.

The engineers would widen and deepen trenches and communication trenches, and construct footholds and ramps to facilitate a fast exit from them at the start of the assault. They would also construct observation posts, firing positions for the artillery and mortars, and attack positions for the tanks.

It was estimated that only for the artillery units 35 observation posts, 104 direct fire artillery positions, 102 artillery battery positions, 1,056 excavated niches for ammunition in the trenches, 362 slit trenches, and 264 dugout shelters would be built.

Removal of the mines in the jump-off area was to start on 10 January. Assigned for this task were the division's engineer battalion and the 1st Company of the 14th Independent Assault Combat Engineer Battalion. (By the start of the offensive the engineers had removed 19,370 mines.)

Clearing passages in the enemy minefield and barbed wire obstacles would start during the night of 14 January. The engineers were to prepare 16 passages eight to ten meters wide, and at least one engineer squad protected by four to six submachine gunners was to be assigned for clearing of each passage. As soon as the passages were prepared, their protection would become the responsibility of the rifle regiments. Traffic control at the passages would be handled by elements of the 14th Independent Assault Combat Engineer Battalion.

Regimental engineers and division engineers attached to the regiments would support the rifle units during the assault. In addition, in each of the rifle companies one rifle squad was to be organized to remove obstacles.

To assist the infantry in destroying reinforced concrete pillboxes, the engineer battalion of the division and the elements of the 14th Independent Assault Combat Engineer Battalion would detail several platoons which would advance with infantry. The advance of the tanks would be supported by the 2d Company of the 14th Independent Assault Combat Engineer Battalion.

Roads in the division's zone would be repaired by the division's engineer battalion and by the 1st Company of the 14th Independent Assault Combat Engineer Battalion. The road repair plan envisaged that behind the advancing infantry the Dzerzhanovo-Shvelitse-Kshemen-Golymin Stary road would be repaired immediately and 60 ton bridges would be built across the Pelta River near Shvelitse and the Charnostuv manor 500 meters north of Charnostuv. Spans for three bridges, 20 to 25 meters long, would be ready well in advance of the offensive.

To oppose enemy counterattacks and to consolidate the captured territory, the chief of engineers would organize a Mobile Obstacle Detachment composed of a company from the divisional engineer battalion armed with 1,000 anti-personnel mines, over 950 antitank mines, and 500 kilograms of explosives.

Air Force Support

Air force units controlled by a higher headquarters were to support the division's effort by attacking the areas around the Charnostuv manor, the woods 1.5 kilometers south of Charnostuv, Kshemen, Kshemen manor, Veloglenka, Konazhevo, Zavady Dvorske, the Zhabin Lukovski manor, and Golymin Stary.

Close cooperation between the artillery and the air force was carefully organized, and radio communication between ground and air units would be direct. As soon as aircraft appeared over the battlefield, the artillery was to silence enemy AA batteries and, using air registration points and smoke shells, indicate

enemy targets. An air force liaison officer with a radio was to be stationed at the corps commander's OP. Special radio nets were to be added to the division and division artillery radio nets to operate on the same frequencies as the ground attack aircraft.

Arrangements for Coordination

Before issuing final instructions for cooperation, General Lyashchenko approved the plans of the regiment commanders and, when necessary, clarified the mission of the division and the regiments.

Cooperation between the division's own and attached units was organized in phases related to the immediate, intermediate, and daily objectives. General Lyashchenko issued specific instructions with regard to the missions of various units and services, the order in which they were to be carried out, and the character of the activities. He determined in great detail who should cooperate with whom and when, and established the sequence of artillery resubordination. Landmarks were pointed out to the troop commanders during the field reconnaissance, and unified coordination signals for infantry, artillery, and tanks were specified.

The 173d and 19th Rifle Regiments were ordered to proceed without stopping until the regiments' immediate objectives were reached. The Shvelitse area was to be taken from the march. General Lyashchenko ordered the second echelon of the regiments to advance 500 to 1,000 meters behind the first, and to be committed to combat after the fall of Shvelitse. As soon as the immediate objectives were taken, the positions would be consolidated before the attack proceeded.

As soon as the 286th Rifle Regiment entered the battle, on the western bank of the Pelta River, the 173d Rifle Regiment would be withdrawn to the second echelon and advance behind the 286th Rifle Regiment. Artillery and tanks attached to the 173d Rifle Regiment during its deployment in the first echelon would be detached and assigned to the 286th Rifle Regiment as soon as it moved to the first echelon. The 286th and 19th Rifle Regiments, with the attached tanks and artillery, were to break through the enemy divisional reserve positions, capture the line Zavadzenets-Grokhy Krupy (excl.), and in cooperation with the VII Tank Corps exploit the success in the depth of enemy defenses.

General Lyashchenko informed his subordinate commanders that, according to the decision made by the corps commander, the 46th, 93d Heavy, and 95th Tank Regiments would support the effort of the 90th Rifle Division only as far as the Zavadzenets-Grokhy Krupy (excl.) line, and then would come under the 372d Rifle Division.

The main forces of the 90th Rifle Division, following the VIII Tank Corps, were to break through the enemy second defense zone from the march, and by the end of the first day of the offensive reach the line Konazhevo Martsishe-Vatkovo Koloniya.

On 28 December 1944 this battle plan was rehearsed during a staff field exercise attended by commanders of rifle, tank, and artillery regiments.

The division commander ordered the commanders to conduct field exercises with the purpose of coordinating operations within rifle regiments on 5 January and within rifle battalions on 8 January.

Organization of Combat Reconnaissance

During the preparation period reconnaissance of the enemy in the 90th Division zone would be carried out by the 137th Rifle Division, which was defending the area. The 90th Rifle Division was to take over reconnaissance responsibility with the start of the artillery preparation for the attack. During the deep penetration phase, rifle regiments would conduct necessary reconnaissance. General Lyashchenko emphasized the importance of taking prisoners in order to learn as much as possible about the enemy. In addition, he ordered that two reconnaissance groups be organized from the elements of the divisional reconnaissance company. These groups were to operate with the forward units of the first echelon rifle regiments.

After consulting with his chief of staff and intelligence officer, the division commander decided that the first group would reconnoiter toward Dzerzhanov and the Charnostuv Polese manor, and the second group toward the southern part of Shvelitse and the grove 500 meters to the south of Charnostuv. In addition, a six-man reconnaissance team from the reconnaissance company was to operate behind enemy lines in the Golymin Stary area. As soon as the division captured the first position, this team, equipped with a radio, was to penetrate secretly into the depth of the enemy defenses and determine the whereabouts of infantry reserves, concentrations of tanks and artillery, and the strength of German forces deployed in the second defense zone, and report on any signs of the start and direction of enemy withdrawal.

Each rifle regiment of the first echelon was to detail a three to five man team to search for and collect enemy documents and weapons.

After units reached the jump-off position for the attack, observation of the enemy was to be conducted around the clock by officers and specially trained observers. The established targets were to be plotted on charts, and assigned to specific artillery and mortar units by the division's artillery commander.

By the time the attack started five infantry, thirty-five artillery, and four combat engineer observation points had been set up. According to the division after-action report, the division had identified 107 targets before the attack. These included eleven artillery batteries, two mortar batteries, twenty-nine earth-and-timber pillboxes, seven machine guns, three separate guns, ten observation posts, one entrenched self-propelled assault gun, and three dugout shelters.

For antitank defense of the rifle battalions, General Lyashchenko established special artillery groups from the regimental artillery units that were to accompany the rifle battalions in combat and planned also to use the mobile obstacle detachment and tanks and other units in an antitank role as required. He formed a divisional antitank artillery reserve from the 66th Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion, ordering it to organize antitank strongpoints in the Shvelitse, Kshemen manor, and Byshevo Vygoda areas, once they had been taken. The mobile

obstacle detachment was to be deployed on the axis of possible tank approaches as part of this defense. Plans for artillery and mortar fire against enemy counterattacks completed the antitank preparations.

Antiaircraft Defense

The corps chief of staff informed General Lyashchenko that the division's antiaircraft defense would be the responsibility of the army's AAA group, composed of the 47th AAA Division and 803d Army AAA Regiment. Small caliber AAA batteries were to be deployed about one to one and a half kilometers from the front line, and medium caliber AAA three to four kilometers back.

The division commander decided that his own division AA company would cover the area of the field artillery positions with four of its platoons (12 AA machine guns) and the division's command post with two platoons (6 AA machine guns).

To combat low flying enemy aircraft each rifle company was to detail one rifle platoon, and each machine gun company one machine gun platoon.

Command, Control and Communication

Stressing the importance of secrecy, General Lyashchenko ordered that all directives and instructions related to preparations for the offensive were to be oral only. Written operational documents were to be prepared in longhand and in only one copy.

All division activities were based on the division commander's operation order. Two days before the start of the offensive unit commanders received the written order, a table of radio signals (radio code), coded communications tables, excerpts from the cooperation table, and a supply directive.

General Lyashchenko decided to establish his command post in the Boby area, three kilometers from the front line, and the division's observation post at the northern edge of the grove one kilometer southwest of the Dzerzhanovo manor, one kilometer from the enemy's front line. Construction work on the division and regimental command posts started on 5 January 1945.

The division commander ordered that division and regimental command and observation posts were to be relocated after each of the three objectives (immediate, intermediate, and objective of the day) was achieved, but only after securing the permission of the immediate superior. Before making the displacement, the new post's communications center must be operative.

Comment: Note the close control exercised over the operations of subordinate units.

Command communication was to be carried out by radio, telephone, courier, and liaison officers. The chief of communications was to organize radio

communication in four channels: division and regimental commanders' channel, staff channel, artillery commander's channel, and a channel to communicate with adjacent units.

The tank unit commanders' radios were included in the division and division artillery commanders' channels. In addition, special receivers in the artillery and rifle unit staffs were to listen in on the radio network of tank units. Also, artillery observers were assigned to tanks equipped with radios. (It appears that not all tanks were equipped with radios.) In the division staff one radio was to keep in touch with the air force. Through this station the division would also receive signals from the planes and the latest intelligence data. Request for air support was to be arranged through the air force liaison officer stationed at the corps command post.

General Lyashchenko forbade the use of both radio and telephone during the preparation period, again emphasizing the importance of secrecy. Communication between the division's headquarters and subordinate units was to be carried out by liaison officers and couriers.

On 12 and 13 January, pursuant to the division commander's directives, the division staff inspected the level of preparedness of all units of the division for the offensive, and found the troops well prepared and ready.

Political Preparedness

Shortly after receiving the directive for the offensive from the corps commander, General Lyashchenko summoned his deputy for political affairs and discussed with him the political indoctrination of the troops. He emphasized that the main objective of the political work during the preparatory period was to insure timely execution of the division's mission, heighten the ideological and political awareness of the troops, and raise the offensive spirit of officers, NCOs and men. An important element of the political work was to be the dissemination of up to date bulletins received from the Soviet News Agency.

Discussions of the country's external and internal affairs were to be conducted regularly in the sub-units. In addition, political officers would give short talks about the situation at the front, conduct group reading of papers, and issue the division's combat bulletins.

Before the unit's deployment at the jump-off positions, the political branch of the division was to organize discussions in all sub-units and at party-komsomol meetings, during which the problems of military security, vigilance, and discipline would be considered.

General Lyashchenko pointed out the importance of political work with replacements, and of acquainting them with the combat traditions of their units. Insofar as possible, they were to have talks with old-time soldiers with great combat experience. He also instructed his deputy to make sure that political officers would once more explain to all the troops the rules of proper behavior on the territory of allied Poland.

The importance of a high degree of cooperation and friendly relations among the various branches of forces at all levels participating in the forthcoming offensive was emphasized. To acquaint the troops in various arms with one another General Lyashchenko called for joint meetings of rifle, tank, artillery, and engineer troops.

The State of Supplies

During the preparation period the division's chief of rear services reported daily to the division commander on the state of supplies and on other matters related to the operation of the rear services.

The division received its supplies by army transport from the army supply depot at Daleke, 32 kilometers southeast of Dzerzhanovo. Division transport and half the regimental transport would be used to distribute them to regimental depots.

On the eve of the offensive the division's rear service headquarters, divisional depots, motor transport company, medical battalion, and field bakery were in the woods one kilometer east of Zambski Kostelne. The artillery ammunition depot was in the woods two kilometers to the east.

General Lyashchenko directed the chief of rear services to move the rear elements of the division to the forest 500 meters east of Konazhevo Merniki as soon as the division reached the objective of the day.

At the start of the offensive the division had the following amount of ammunition, food, and POL on hand:

<u>Ammunition:</u>	<u>Units of Fire</u>	<u>Rounds</u>
82mm mortar	2.5	120
120mm mortar	2.5	80
45mm gun	1.5	300
76mm gun (regt)	2.0	240
76mm gun (div)	2.75	330
122mm howitzer	2.5	200

<u>Food:</u>	<u>Daily Rations</u>
Flour and bread	4.8
Meat	1.7
Fats	2.6
Sugar	5.2
Tobacco	2.0

<u>POL:</u>	<u>Refuelings</u>
Gasoline	2.6
Lubricants	2.5

Combat Training

Based on corps instructions, the division commander directed his chief of staff to prepare a detailed schedule of combat training with great emphasis on night offensive operations. One battalion from each regiment was designated for night combat training. All the training was to be conducted in terrain prepared for defense in the German method.

The division staff was to conduct staff command war games with the regimental and battalion staff. General Lyashchenko requested that all officers and NCOs be tested on the organization and conduct of offensive operations.

Deployment in the Assault Area

In accordance with the division commander's decision, during the night of 11/12 January 1945 the 173d and 19th Rifle Regiments each deployed one rifle battalion in the first trench to relieve the units of the 137th Rifle Division which had been defending the sector. The next night all of the remaining units of the division took up assault positions in three trenches. The first trench was about 400 to 600 meters from the German defense line. The second trench was 250 to 300 meters behind the first, and the third trench 1,000 to 1,500 meters from the first.

On 13 January, commanders of rifle platoons were given their missions and the attack order. During the night of 13/14 January, the regimental commanders and the division staff carried out a final inspection check on readiness of the troops for the attack. Three hours before the attack was to commence, NCOs and men were informed of the division's mission. An address by the military council of the army group, exhorting all the forces to fulfill their duties to the fatherland honorably, was read in all companies and batteries. It was reported to the division commander that officers and men responded to the address with enthusiasm and promised to carry out their missions on time. Many men, NCOs, and officers applied for admission to the Communist Party or the Komsomol because they wanted to meet the enemy as full-fledged Communists.

At 0600 on 14 January 1945, General Lyashchenko reported to the corps commander that his division was ready for battle.

Combat Operations

Advance of 14 January (Map 21)

Wet snow was falling on the morning of 14 January. Visibility was 500 to 1,000 meters. The snow, and a cloud ceiling of 200 to 300 meters, made air support impossible.

As planned, the artillery preparation started at 1000 with a volley of multiple rocket launchers and the preliminary barrage by the entire corps and

MAP 21
 COMBAT ACTIVITIES OF THE 90th RIFLE DIVISION
 14 TO 16 JANUARY 1945



division artillery. During the artillery barrage combat engineers opened passages in enemy obstacles in front of the forward edge of the German positions.

At 1015 General Lyashchenko ordered the forward battalions of the 173d and 19th Rifle Regiments and the 46th Heavy Tank Regiment to assault enemy positions. The battalions took the first trench with little trouble and continued to advance toward the second. Soon, however, the commanders of the rifle regiments reported to General Lyashchenko that because of heavy enemy fire the forward battalions were unable to capture the second position (from the march) and were halted.

General Lyashchenko reported the situation to General Polenov and directed his artillery commander to go on with the artillery preparation according to schedule. Thus the artillery continued its fire at the surviving and newly discovered hostile fire emplacements throughout the entire depth of the main defense zone, behind the first line of German trenches. At the same time, the regimental commanders reported that the remaining rifle battalions of the first echelon rifle regiments were approaching the line already reached by the two forward battalions.

At 1100 General Lyashchenko signaled the support tanks to advance. As soon as they reached the line of the rifle battalions of the 173d and 19th Rifle Regiments, these battalions also resumed the attack.

The division artillery commander reported that his forward observers had reported that the precise artillery fire during the period of artillery preparation had destroyed or suppressed German fire emplacements in the first position area.

At 1230 the commander of the 73d Rifle Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Ryabko, reported that with the help of the attached tanks the regiment had overcome the enemy resistance, and, advancing steadily, had reached the second position occupied by German regimental reserves. The commander of the 19th Rifle Regiment, Colonel Karpenko, also reported success. His troops too had reached the second German position.

The intelligence officer reported to the chief of staff and the division commander that the enemy, under cover of heavy artillery and mortar fire from the depth of the defense, had withdrawn the remnants of the 19th and 61st Infantry Regiments from his first position to his second position. It was also reported that at the same time he moved the second echelon battalion of the 61st Infantry Regiment to the second position.

Reports from the battlefield indicated that when the Soviet troops approached Shvelitse they were met with heavy machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire from the German defenders. Especially heavy fire was coming from the Kshemen and Charnostuv areas. In view of this situation, the division commander's order to take Shvelitse from the march had not been carried out; the assault had been beaten off.

Analyzing the failure, General Lyashchenko concluded that there were several considerations: the supporting tanks had acted indecisively, the accompanying guns and 82mm mortars fell behind the rifle battalions, and the division artillery --which at the time of the assault was in the process of changing its firing position--had supported the attack with only a few battalions. However, the main

reason for the failure was, in General Lyashchenko's view, the fact that neither the German artillery nor German troops deployed in the second position were destroyed or suppressed during the artillery preparation.

After estimating the situation, General Lyashchenko decided to commit to combat the second echelons of the 173d and 19th Rifle Regiments, in order to increase the pressure on the enemy and strengthen the attack. He reported his decision to General Polenov and requested that the corps artillery destroy German batteries in the Kshemen manor and Charnostuv areas.

At 1255 the division commander ordered the commanders of the 173d and 19th Rifle Regiments to commit their second echelons, capture Shvelitse and continue toward Charnostuv. To support them he ordered the division artillery commander to suppress enemy troops deployed at the second position and above all at Shvelitse, and to speed up relocation of positions of the regimental artillery groups.

The division staff was to oversee the timely execution of these orders.

After receiving the division commander's order, the rifle regiments of the first echelon moved their guns nearer to the forward elements and prepared to recommence the attack. At the same time combat engineers cleared the terrain in front of the second German position of newly discovered minefields.

At the time set by the division commander, apparently about 1400 hours, the artillery began a barrage, under cover of which the rifle regiments supported by tanks attacked.

Reports which reached the division headquarters from various units in the field disclosed that in the battle for Shvelitse units of the division showed exceptional courage and decisiveness. Companies and platoons assaulting enemy strongpoints had had to beat off fierce German counterattacks.

At 1510 General Lyashchenko was informed by Colonel Lukyanov that Shvelitse was taken and the troops were continuing to advance. The 19th Rifle Regiment in a bold assault crushed the retreating elements of the German 61st Infantry Regiment and proceeded across the Pelta River. Then, overcoming only minor German resistance, the Soviet troops broke into the southern part of Charnostuv.

At the same time reports arriving from the 173d Rifle Regiments indicated that north of Shvelitse that regiment and the 46th Heavy Tank Regiment were under heavy counterattack by German infantry and tanks from the Kol. Charnostuv Polese area.

Comment: The decisive action of the 19th Rifle Regiment, breaking through the enemy regimental reserve positions, had created conditions favorable for the exploitation of the breakthrough into the depth of the enemy defenses. With the 19th Rifle Regiment in the southern part of Charnostuv, it would be possible to deliver a blow at the flank and rear of the enemy forces defending the strongpoint at the Charnostuv manor. But General Lyashchenko hesitated and did not take advantage of this opportunity.

At 1520 Lieutenant Colonel Ryabko reported that his 173d Rifle Regiment had turned back a German counterattack from the area of Kol. Charnostuv Polese and

was advancing slowly. At 1650 he reported that the advance was very slow because of strong enemy resistance. At about 2000, Colonel Lukyanov, who was at the 173d Rifle Regiment OP, discussed the situation in that regiment's sector with General Lyashchenko. By that time the regiment was engaged in a battle for the northern part of Charnostuv.

General Lyashchenko, meanwhile, had arrived at the OP of the 19th Rifle Regiment shortly before 1600 and found its right flank troops engaged in a heavy battle for Charnostuv. The left flank units, according to Colonel Karpenko, were slowly advancing, despite heavy artillery and mortar fire from the grove 500 meters south of Charnostuv, the Kshemen manor and Baranets. General Lyashchenko ordered Karpenko to increase pressure on the enemy and speed up the advance. At 1615, shortly before the division commander left the regimental OP, the regiment's left flank came under counterattack by a German infantry company from the 61st Infantry Regiment with about ten tanks which had come from the grove 500 meters south of Charnostuv. The engagement was fierce. At 2000 the regiment commander reported that as of that hour he was still fighting for the grove.

During the day, Colonel Fomenko reported to the division commander frequently about the whereabouts of his 286th Rifle Regiment. Toward the end of the day, two of the regiment's battalions reached Dzerzhanovo and the third arrived at the eastern outskirts of Shvelitse. At that time, the divisional antitank artillery reserve moved to the Shvelitse area.

In the evening, the engineer officer reported that as of 1900 combat engineers had cleared the mines and repaired the road between Dzerzhanovo and Shvelitse, and started to build a 60-ton bridge across the Pelta River at Shvelitse. From the old bridge across the Pelta which had been prepared for demolition by the Germans, the engineers removed 32 explosive packages. They had managed to repair it to carry light traffic.

Toward the end of the day due to range limitation the divisional artillery group (255th and 258th Mortar Regiments) changed its firing positions. The 255th Mortar Regiment deployed 200 meters east of the northern part of Shvelitse, and the 258th Mortar Regiment deployed 250 meters east of the southern part of the town. The 248th Artillery Regiment remained in its initial positions.

The regimental artillery group of the 19th Rifle Regiment (941st Artillery Regiment of the 372d Rifle Division), with the exception of one battalion which moved to a new firing position one kilometer east of the southern part of Shvelitse, remained in its old positions. The regimental artillery group of the 173d Rifle Regiment (86th Artillery Regiment) had not changed its positions. The 760th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment took its firing positions near the Dzerzhanovo manor, and, following the corps commanders' directive, became the corps antitank artillery reserve. Artillery and mortars of the 86th Rifle Division (second echelon of the army), and the tank destroyer artillery battalion of the 372d Rifle Division, had reverted to the command of their division commanders.

During the first day of combat the divisional artillery had used the following amount of ammunition:

82mm and 120mm mortar shells	1.2 units of fire (90 rounds)
76mm regimental artillery	1.1 units of fire (132 rounds)
76mm divisional artillery	1.2 units of fire (144 rounds)
122mm artillery	0.8 units of fire (64 rounds)

Early in the evening General Lyashchenko received permission from the corps commander to move his command post to the woods one kilometer west of Boby, and the division observation post to the Dzerzhanovo area, 1.5 kilometers from the front line.

At approximately the same time the operations officer reported that the 399th Rifle Division of the XLVI Rifle Corps (Forty-eighth Army), on the right of the 90th Division, had reached a line from the grove 250 meters west of Pomazki Sikuty to the eastern edge of the woods near Kol. Charnostuv and had taken up defensive positions. On the 90th Division's left, some units of the 46th Rifle Division were engaged in a fierce battle for Gladovo. The rest of the division had captured Gostseyevo and advanced 300 to 500 meters west from the village.

Late in the evening General Lyashchenko, in the presence of the chief of staff, deputy for political affairs, artillery commander, engineer officer, and several high ranking staff officers, summed up the disappointing results of the first combat day. He pointed out that the advance of the 90th Rifle Division had been insignificant. The division had penetrated into the enemy defenses for only four to four and one half kilometers, at an average rate of advance of about 500 meters per hour.

General Lyashchenko emphasized that the unsatisfactory advance of the division was mainly due to the fact that the enemy's forces and guns deployed in his second position had not been destroyed during the artillery preparation. Thus the division was unable to take the second position without halting, and consequently its rate of advance had decreased considerably. There were other reasons: cooperation among the services as well as troop leadership after the capture of the first position were below acceptable standards; reconnaissance of the enemy was poorly carried out; supporting tanks had fallen behind the infantry, did not disperse widely enough, and acted indecisively; guns accompanying the infantry lagged behind rifle companies and battalions; their effectiveness was low due to poor visibility. Finally, the infantry had used its own weapons, and especially mortars, inefficiently.

Comment: During the battle the division OP was left almost six kilometers behind the advancing troops, and consequently the division commander was often unaware of the real situation on the battle field. The CP was too far behind--some eight and one half kilometers. Thus the commander was unable to secure timely collection of combat data. Because of their remoteness from the front units, the division and regimental commanders were tardy in their reaction to combat changes in the field.

General Lyashchenko, after reviewing the latest reports from the regiments, decided to consolidate his position. Then he would order the second echelon rifle battalion of the 173d Rifle Regiment to make a night attack and capture the Charnostuv manor. The rest of the divisional units were to prepare themselves to resume the attack in the morning of 15 January.

This decision was reported to the corps commander, who, while approving it, demanded that all shortcomings shown during the first day of combat be eliminated.

After receiving General Polenov's consent, General Lyashchenko issued the following directives:

The 173d Rifle Regiment, with the same supporting elements, would attack toward Byshevo Vygoda, destroy the enemy near the Charnostuv manor, and reach the line from the cluster of houses one kilometer east of Byshevo Vygoda to Zavadzenets. Then the regiment would proceed to the line from Konazhevo Martsishe (excl.) to the Konazhevo Slavki manor.

The 286th Rifle Regiment (minus the 2d Battalion), with the 95th Tank and 941st Artillery Regiments, would capture the Kshemen manor and proceed to the line from the Konazhevo Slavki manor (excl.) to Vatkovo Koloniya.

The 19th Rifle Regiment was to advance toward Konazhevo Zavady Vlostsyanske, and capture the line from Grokhy Imbzhiki (excl.) to Grokhy-Krupy (excl.). After that, as the second echelon of the division, the regiment would advance behind the 286th Rifle Regiment.

The boundary between the 173d and 286th Rifle Regiments was to be Zavadzenets (excl.)-Konazhevo Zhechki-Konazhevo Slavki.

The boundaries with the 399th Rifle Division on the right and the 46th Rifle Division on the left remained the same as in the operation order for the offensive.

The division artillery commander was ordered to carry out a ten minute artillery barrage with all the divisional artillery before the start of the attack, to suppress the enemy in the Charnostuv manor-Kshemen-Kshemen manor area, and in the grove 500 meters south of Charnostuv. Then the artillery was to support the advance of the infantry and prevent enemy counterattacks from Byshevo Vygoda, the Kshemen manor, and Baranets.

The 2d Battalion of the 286th Rifle Regiment (divisional reserve) was ordered to concentrate at Shvelitse and advance behind the rest of the regiment.

The 66th Independent Tank Destroyer Battalion (the antitank reserve) was to deploy north of Shvelitse and advance behind the 173d Rifle Regiment.

Advance on 15 January (Map 21)

During the night of 14/15 January, there were exchanges of fire between the 90th Rifle Division and the Germans facing it. The division conducted reconnaissance, regrouped, replenished its ammunition supply, and readied itself for the morning attack. The second echelon of the 173d Rifle Regiment was ordered to make a night attack to capture the Charnostuv manor. The attack was hastily and carelessly organized. The troops came under heavy enemy fire, and failed.

At 0915 the commander of the 173d Rifle Division reported that the enemy in battalion strength, supported by ten tanks, was counterattacking some of his units from the Charnostuv manor area. Soon afterward he reported that the attack had been beaten off and that the enemy had suffered heavy losses.

At the same time (0915) a report from the 19th Rifle Regiment indicated that a German force about the size of an infantry battalion, with ten tanks, was counterattacking the regiment from the Baranets area. The regimental commander requested artillery support. The attack was repelled by heavy artillery fire.

After repulsing the enemy counterattacks, General Lyashchenko received permission from the corps to start the ten minute artillery barrage against German defense positions at 1000. At 1010, after the firing ended, the division commander signaled the start of the infantry attack. At the same time the divisions on the right and left also resumed the offensive. Overcoming fierce enemy resistance from previously prepared defense positions, the division persistently moved forward and drove the German forces from the Charnostuv manor.

Colonel Ryabko reported that, supported by heavy artillery fire and the 46th Heavy Tank Regiment, which was deployed on the east bank of the Pelta River, his 173d Rifle Regiment had crossed the river and consolidated its position on the west bank. In the Charnostuv manor area, the regiment captured two 60-ton bridges which the enemy had not had time to blow up, despite the fact that they were mined. Combat engineers quickly removed explosives, thus securing unimpeded movement for all weapons, equipment, and supplies to the west bank.

At 1615 General Lyashchenko talked on the phone with Colonel Ryabko, who informed him that as of 1600 the regiment had reached the depression one kilometer west of the Charnostuv manor, where it became engaged in combat with the divisional reserves for the third position.

The 286th Rifle Regiment, committed from behind the right flank of the 19th Rifle Regiment, attacked toward the Kshemen manor. Late in the afternoon Colonel Tomenko reported to the division that at about 1600 the regiment was between bench mark 115.6 and a point 500 meters northeast of the Kshemen manor. The regiment was attacking without tank support, because the 95th Tank Regiment attached to the 286th Rifle Regiment had not arrived in time to take part in the assault.

The 19th Rifle Regiment meanwhile had destroyed the enemy in Charnostuv and in the grove to the south, and were in the area south of bench mark 115.6.

Shortly after 1500, General Polenov informed General Lyashchenko that at 1600 the VIII Tank Corps would be committed to combat from the line Charnostuv-Budy Debiny. The right column of the tank corps (the 58th and 60th Tank Brigades and their supporting elements) would advance in the 90th Rifle Division zone along the route Charnostuv-Golymin Stary-Tsekhanuv.

The division staff directed the rifle regiments to take advantage of the commitment of the tank force and increase their efforts.

With the advantage of the VIII Tank Corps thrust, units of the division broke into the positions of the German divisional reserves. Reports from the field indicated fierce fighting. At 1830 the replacement battalion of the German 7th Infantry Regiment, supported by over ten tanks, counterattacked from the Kshemen area. The attack was beaten off, and the 173d Rifle Regiment continued to advance. By the end of the day on 15 January the 173d Rifle Regiment had reached Kshemen, the 286th Rifle Regiment was at Grokhy Imbzhiki, and the 19th Rifle Regiment was at Grokhy Krupy.

The division antitank artillery reserve consolidated its position near the road junction 0.8 kilometers northwest of the Charnostuv manor. The division's artillery took up firing positions in the Kshemen and Charnostuv areas. The division command post moved to the Shvelitse area.

Early in the evening Colonel Lukyanov reported to General Lyashchenko that the right column of the VIII Tank Corps had advanced six kilometers and was engaged in combat for Konazhevo Zavady Dvorske.

Reports received from the neighboring divisions indicated that at about 2000 the 399th Rifle Division on the right, after beating off several enemy counterattacks, crossed the Pelta River, and took Karnevo and Byshevo. The 46th Rifle Division, on the left, had captured Vuyty Troyany and Grokhy Stare and continued to advance.

In the evening General Lyashchenko summoned his staff and reviewed the results of the day's combat. The results were again disappointing, as had already been noted by General Polenov during his visit to the division's command post an hour earlier. The division had advanced only three and a half to four kilometers. The reason for the slow advance, as General Polenov pointed out, in addition to the increased enemy resistance was the fact that the shortcomings which were observed and pointed out on 14 January had not been eliminated.

Reconnaissance had been inadequate and had not helped the commander and the staff to evaluate the situation correctly and influence the course of the battle. As a result enemy counterattacks came unexpectedly and held up the advance. The support tanks had been used indecisively and without proper artillery support. The division's units had not attempted to maneuver to envelop enemy troops. Cooperation with the tank brigades which were committed in the breakthrough sector of the division had been carelessly organized. The division did not attack simultaneously with the thrust of the tank brigades. As a result, units of the division when encountering enemy resistance did not have a strong enough push, and lagged a considerable distance behind the VIII Tank Corps.

At about 2400 on 15 January, the forward units of the division discovered that the enemy was withdrawing.* General Lyashchenko ordered an immediate pursuit to capture Tsekhanuv by the end of the next day.

The commanders of the 173d and 386th Rifle Regiments were ordered to pursue the enemy with forward detachments supported by tanks. The main forces of the regiments were to form marching columns and advance behind the forward detachments, ready at any time to enter combat with the retreating German forces. The 19th Rifle Regiment was assigned to the division's second echelon.

Advance on 16 January

In accordance with the division commander's decision, Colonel Ryabko detailed the 1st Battalion of the 173d Rifle Regiment for the pursuit, and mounted most of its men on the tanks of the 46th Heavy Tank Regiment. At 0500 on 16 January, the forward detachment took Byshevo Vygoda, then, without encountering enemy resistance, continued across the second defense zone and at about

*In fact, the Germans had already started to withdraw the remnants of the 19th and 61st Infantry Regiments and that of the 7th Infantry Division's replacement battalion to the second defense zone earlier in the evening.

1230 captured Konazhevo Martsishe. Continuing to advance, the forward detachment reached the Sonya River, where it was stopped by the German 62d Infantry Regiment, rear guard of the 7th Infantry Division, which had taken up defensive positions on the previously prepared line Konazhevo Skuzhe-Gogole Velke.

General Lyashchenko, after learning of this, instructed Colonel Ryabko to deploy his main force for attack and assault the enemy positions not later than 1700. The artillery commander would assist with artillery fire.

At 1830, Colonel Ryabko reported to the division that at 1700, after a short artillery barrage, the 173d Rifle Regiment, with the 46th and 93d Tank Regiments, had assaulted the enemy position, taken it, and moved forward. The division commander ordered him to deploy his main forces in a column and proceed.

Subsequently the regiment reported that at about 2200 it had reached the Pomozhe area, where it encountered heavy enemy fire and minefields. The regiment had to stop its advance. Elements of the VIII Tank Corps had reached the same area, and the two units had started to prepare for the attack toward Tsekhanuv.

Reports from the 286th Rifle Regiment in the morning of 16 January indicated that the regiment was continuing to advance successfully. Colonel Fomenko sent out his 3d Battalion mounted on tanks of the 95th Tank Regiment as the forward detachment. The main forces of the regiment, deployed in a column, were advancing behind the forward detachment.

Comment: Even at present, with their highly motorized forces the Soviets continue to mount their infantry on tanks during an advance, at least while on maneuvers. Krasnaya Zvezda of 16 March 1977 had a picture on page one showing riflemen of the Byelorussian Military District mounted on tanks.

At 1245 Colonel Fomenko called the division commander and informed him that at 1230 his forward detachment had reached the eastern bank of the Sonya River and had started an assault crossing. However, at the same time it was counterattacked from the Konazhevo Velke area by a battalion of the German 62d Infantry Regiment, supported by ten tanks and twelve assault guns. To help out the forward detachment, Colonel Fomenko had already committed his 1st Battalion. General Lyashchenko approved this commitment, and he decided to commit his antitank reserve (the 66th Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion) also, to beat off the German counterattack. He informed Colonel Fomenko, and issued the necessary orders to the division artillery commander. The 66th Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion quickly took up defense positions near the Konazhevo Slavki manor and engaged the counterattacking enemy tanks and assault guns. The counterattack was repulsed. In this battle, the 66th Tank Destroyer Artillery Battalion and tanks of the 95th Tank Regiment destroyed two German tanks (including one Tiger tank), one Ferdinand assault gun, and two antitank guns.

After repulsing the counterattack, the 286th Rifle Regiment continued to advance and soon afterward took Gogole Stechki and Gogole Velke. After that, in accordance with the division commander's decision, it deployed in column and started to advance behind the 173d Rifle Regiment. At about 2200 the regiment reached the Vrublevo area, where, together with other elements of the division, it began preparation for the attack on Tsekhanuv.

At about 2200 the forward echelon of the 19th Rifle Regiment, deployed in the division's second echelon, approached the Smosazh Pyanki manor.

During the day (16 January) the division artillery commander had kept General Lyashchenko informed about the whereabouts of the artillery. At 1750 he reported in part that at about 1700 the artillery was deployed at the following firing positions: the artillery group of the 173d Rifle Regiment in the Konazhevo Slavki manor; the artillery group of the 286th Rifle Regiment at the western outskirts of Volya Golyminska; the divisional artillery group one kilometer west of Volya Golyminska and Vatkovo Koloniya; the 66th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment (the division antitank artillery reserve) had reached the Smosazh Velki manor.

General Lyashchenko pointed out to the artillery commander that, during the pursuit, some artillery units had fallen so far behind the infantry that their firing range did not permit them to support the combat. For example, during the division's battle at the Sonya River, the 258th Mortar Regiment fell behind more than six kilometers. The staffs of artillery units often lost contact with infantry and with their own elements. These shortcomings, according to General Lyashchenko, resulted primarily from the failure of the division artillery commander to exercise sufficient control.

During the day the command post of the division changed its location twice. The first time, at about 1700, it moved to the Volya Golyminska area, and at about 2200 to the Smozah Pyanki manor.

Soon after the 90th Division reached the Pomezhe area, at about 2200, General Polenov assigned it to the corps second echelon. The division was to transfer to the second echelon immediately after the 372d Rifle Division (currently the second echelon of the corps) crossed its combat deployment line and was committed to the battle. The 90th Rifle Division was ordered to be ready to consolidate Tsekhanuv.

According to the information available to the division commander, the 399th Rifle Division's forward detachment reached Paluki toward the end of the day. The 46th Rifle Division, on the division's left, at the same time reached the line Vrublevo (excl.)-Naserovo Dolna.

At 0300 on 17 January 1945, the CVIII Rifle Corps and the VIII Tank Corps resumed the offensive. Tsekhanuv was captured at about 1130, and a swift pursuit of the retreating enemy began. The 90th Rifle Division, now deployed in the second echelon, consolidated Tsekhanuv, where it organized an all-around perimeter defense.

In its report to the VIII Rifle Corps the commander of the 90th Rifle Division stated that during the three days of combat (14-16 January), the division had routed the main forces of the German 7th Infantry Division, killed about 1,600 officers and men, and captured 116 prisoners. The division took 6 tanks, 48 guns, 58 mortars, 330 rifles and submachine guns, 72 machine guns, and a great amount of ammunition and equipment.

General Comments

1. General Lyashchenko's decision concerning combat employment of the division and attached units was based on the order he had received from the corps commander. However, within the framework of the order there was plenty of leeway for his tactical options.

Before making the decision as to how the order would be implemented the division's staff provided Lyashchenko with a detailed assessment of the friendly and enemy situations, and he himself reconnoitered the terrain. It should be noted that the Soviets, having been on the defensive for a prolonged time, had good data on the German defensive structure and troop deployment.

General Lyashchenko's decision to deploy his division in two echelons was a correct one in the given situation. Also proper was his directive to the first echelon regiments to conduct a reconnaissance in force with one battalion each prior to the opening of the artillery preparation, in order to discover whether the Germans were actually occupying their first position in force.

2. All phases of the artillery support were prepared in great detail, for Lyashchenko, like every Soviet combined arms commander, considered artillery a major resource in fulfilling his mission. Each enemy target was analyzed and assigned to a particular artillery unit. Artillery units were assigned on the basis of the number of targets identified in particular areas. Ammunition was allocated on the basis of target requirements. The planned timing of displacement of each battery was carefully calculated, and locations to which units would move were clearly identified. However, this did not prevent the artillery from lagging behind the infantry and tanks in this operation. As a result, the performance of artillery was below the usual Soviet standards.

3. The Soviets emphasize that in a breakthrough operation the role of engineer units is very important. In this operation, the engineer troops were required to conduct reconnaissance, prepare the attack positions, remove minefields, and clear paths through the obstacles prior to the attack. They began to remove the mines four days prior to the offensive and started working on making paths through the obstacles the night before the attack. During the offensive they provided mobile obstacle detachments, continued to remove enemy obstacles, repaired roads, and built several bridges.

4. Soviet commanders lay great stress on thorough reconnaissance. In this example, in addition to the usual reconnaissance carried out by all units as a part of their responsibilities, two special reconnaissance groups were formed from the division's reconnaissance company, to operate forward of the division. Also, a special team was formed which was to operate behind enemy lines.

5. Strong antitank measures were always extremely important to Soviet commanders. Here, General Lyashchenko created special antitank artillery groups to accompany the rifle battalions, and another group to act as the division antitank reserve. These groups worked closely with the mobile obstacle detachments. Lyashchenko and his staff selected the locations for future antitank reserve strongpoints, and indicated to the subordinate unit commanders the likely avenues of enemy tank attacks.

6. Soviet commanders were expected to keep as close to the action as possible in order to be able to exercise close personal control and command. Thus, as a rule, Soviet commanders selected locations for their observation and command posts as close as possible to the enemy lines. In this operation General Lyashchenko was criticized for failing to relocate the observation and command posts forward aggressively enough during the course of the battle, thus reducing his ability to control the troops.

7. Despite meticulous planning the division did not fulfill its mission on the first day. This is quite characteristic, because in four of the five examples researched in this study, the first day's mission was not accomplished.

VII

POSTWAR FACTORS INFLUENCING SOVIET COMMAND DECISIONS (Observations on the relevance of the study to present-day Soviet views)

Since the end of World War II, the scientific-technical revolution in the Soviet economy has contributed enormously to raising the combat capabilities of the Soviet armed forces, and, consequently, this scientific-technical-military revolution has significantly influenced the decision-making process of Soviet commanders.

A thorough review of modern Soviet military books, magazines, and the daily press strongly suggests that the effectiveness of the contemporary Soviet armed forces far exceeds that of Russian forces at the end of World War II. Modern Soviet forces are better organized, better trained, and better led. They are outfitted with a wide variety of the newest weapons and equipment, perhaps not so sophisticated as those in the West (and especially in the United States), but still more than adequate for satisfactory performance of any complex combat mission.

Following combat experience against many modern Soviet weapons and systems, in the October War of 1973, and subsequent analysis of materiel captured in that war, the then Chief of Defense Research and Development of the Israel Defense Forces, Brigadier General Uzi Eilam, made the following observations in 1975:

Clearly Eastern /Soviet/ equipment lags behind Western /essentially American/ technologies by at least one generation. Generally speaking, the Eastern equipment is less sophisticated. . . . /But/ though the Eastern equipment still uses old technologies, its operational characteristics are in many cases parallel to those of the Western equipment. Being less sophisticated in design, it is quite reliable in operation.

. . . .
In summary, we have seen a good, simple but far-sighted approach to the systems on the Russian side—an approach which balances their lack of sophistication. . . . We have noticed an Eastern lead as far as system philosophy and design is concerned. We have found crude, robust and not-so-sophisticated, but highly reliable sub-systems in the East.

Technologies are more advanced in the West, yet it takes less effort to be second in a new technological area.*

*Louis Williams, ed., Military Aspects of the Israeli-Arab Conflict: Proceedings: International Symposium, Jerusalem, October 12-17, 1975 (Tel Aviv, 1975), pp. 24-27.

The postwar rise in the education level of the population has also caused significant changes in the quality of the personnel drafted to the armed forces. In his pamphlet "Sovetskiye Vooruzhennye Sily-- Vernyy strazh sotsialisticheskikh zavoyevaniy" ("The Soviet Armed Forces-- Trusted Guard of Socialist Achievements," Moscow, 1971), the late Soviet Minister of Defense, Marshal A.A. Grechko, wrote that whereas in 1939 only 12% of the military had had high school and college education, 27.5% had not completed high school, and 65.6% had attended elementary school only, at present the number of troops having completed high school and college is more than 47%, about 52% have an incomplete high school education, and less than 1% have completed only elementary school.

According to available press reports, the number of officers with higher military and special education is very high. Although exact figures are unavailable, it appears that most--if not all--officers from the regiment commander and regimental staff level up have graduated from one of the Soviet service academies.* Of nearly 1,000,000 in the Soviet officer corps, about 45% have engineering and technical degrees, a testimony to the technological progress made during the past two or three decades. This compares favorably with the very limited number of well educated officers serving in the Soviet forces during World War II. Except for a small group of high ranking generals and officers whose military education was reasonably good, the majority of junior and medium grade officers during the war had attended only short three- to five-month officer courses or abbreviated courses in military schools.

Taking all of this into consideration, one must assume that the professional competence of Soviet commanders at all levels has improved greatly in comparison with the performance of the Soviet officer corps during World War II. However, it should be remembered that except for certain command and air involvement in the Korean War, Soviet officers have not been engaged in any combat activities since 1945. Thus, how the Soviet officer corps would perform in practice in future war remains to be seen.

Possibly relevant is the only known instance of combat experience of Soviet Air Force officers who were with the Arab armies in the Middle East. In July 1970, a flight of five Soviet-piloted MiG-23s was encountered over the Suez Canal by approximately five Israeli aircraft, probably Super-Mystères. In two or three minutes four of the five Soviet aircraft had been shot down, and the fifth seriously damaged, without loss to the Israelis.

However, that experience must be discounted to some extent and caution be exercised in trying to draw conclusions from it, for a number of reasons, of which the superiority of the Israeli armament is only one. It should not be forgotten that in 1914 the German Army went into combat for the first time since 1871, yet immediately demonstrated an enormous combat effective superiority over its opponents on both fronts--allof whom had been in combat in the previous 15 years. There are many similarities between the Soviet preparation for combat since 1945 and that of the Germans after 1871.

At present, the Soviet military leadership exhorts its officers to study the experience of World War II--especially the offensive operations of the Red

*In Soviet parlance, academies are the equivalent of American service schools and staff colleges.

Army--and to apply the lessons learned therefrom in combat training and eventual future war.* The Soviet Command emphasizes that, while conditions of war have changed, it is only from the study of military history that one can recognize the changes and derive new principles which govern combat action. However, the crux of the matter is to apply the lessons of history "creatively." Thus, the combat training of the forces and planning for future operations, although built around the experience of World War II, have to take into consideration new weapons (including nuclear), equipment, and organization.

Since many of the major factors that influence a commander's decisions, including his personality, the terrain over which the battle is fought, and the weather, remain substantially the same as they were during the war, the differences will not be radical, and the fundamentals of command and control would not be greatly changed. However, there can be no doubt that if the World War II operations on the eastern front were to be fought again in the 1970s and with the 1970s' means, many decisions, even if the same officers were in command, would be different, and altered tactics would be used, because of the different capabilities and resources of the forces involved. These changes in availabilities include:

- the advent of potential employment of nuclear weapons,
- the growth of firepower of conventional weapons including tactical missiles,
- motorization and mechanization of forces,
- the advent of antitank guided missiles (ATGM),
- technological developments in communication and electronics,
- appearance of the strategic missile forces,
- increased power of the air force.

Increased firepower and mobility in modern ground forces has increased the dispersion of combat forces on the battlefield, in a trend that has been followed throughout the history of modern warfare, since the introduction of gunpowder. Soviet writers point out that this greater dispersion will have a substantial influence on command and control in combat. Since Soviet combat formations and units will be separated, with large intervals between them at times, their commanders will be leading combat operations along individual, isolated axes. Their command posts will be farther from one another and can be expected to be moved more often than they were in World War II. Enemy interference may well disrupt radio communication, and it may become necessary to use other means. Forces may be habitually commanded from mobile command and observation posts, a practice that was only occasionally followed in World War II by the commanders of tank units and mobile groups. Most important, however, with highly maneuverable forces, the situation may be expected to change rapidly, and as a result commanders will have very limited time for estimating a changed situation, making a decision, assigning combat missions, and organizing cooperation among his units. In doing this his much better training will stand him in good stead. There will be a demand for flexibility, and the examples discussed

*See "The Role of Military History in Current Military Policy: A Soviet View," History, Numbers, and War, Spring 1977, p. 68.

in these case studies give clear evidence that many Soviet commanders did possess flexibility and initiative in World War II. There can be no doubt that this quality is being stressed in contemporary training.

The broadening scope of considerations facing the contemporary Soviet commander calls for a sharp increase in data necessary for decision making. Colonel Y.M. Bondarenko, a noted Soviet military author, asserts (Kommunist Vooruzhonnykh Sil, No. 10, May 1973) that, during combat operations where nuclear weapons are used, the division headquarters will receive three times as much information as a division in World War II. No less important, this information very quickly becomes outdated. The matter is further complicated by the incompleteness of data on the enemy, and often on one's own forces. At the same time, in order to make a sound decision a commander needs immediately relevant data that truly reflects the actual situation. However, decisions must be made quickly, almost immediately.

To deal with the need for quick decisions, the Soviets soon after World War II increased the number of officers assigned to various staffs, and reorganized their work assignments. However, Soviet writers point out that the quantitative growth of staffs cannot be endless. Furthermore, they cite examples of staff enlargement during the war, where staffs often became awkward and unwieldy. Thus the Soviets now foresee that electronic computer technology will lead to substantial automation of command and control, and free commanders from routine decisions and needless expenditure of energy. Nevertheless, in the Soviet view, the commander can never be excluded from the process of troop command and control. His responsibilities will inevitably become more complex. He will have to orient himself quickly in any situation, make expedient decisions, disseminate these promptly to the subordinate units, assign combat missions confidently and opportunely, organize cooperation, and above all make sure that his decisions are put into effect firmly and resolutely. Successful performance will therefore require the kind of imaginative flexibility that was demonstrated by many commanders in World War II.

The present day Soviet commander, as is clear from Soviet military publications, is constantly reminded that time has become one of the most important elements of success. To gain time, schedules for carrying out such tasks as concentrating or regrouping units and formations, rapid advance of the jump-off lines, the immediate use of available weapons, and timely supply of subordinate troops, must be compressed to a minimum, and all activities related to the preparation and conduct of operations must be accelerated. Whether or not the modern Soviet commander will show the ability to employ the element of time properly in a battle so as to gain advantage over the enemy remains to be seen. The Soviets often mention that in future war time must be used more efficiently than it was in World War II. General Suvorov's saying that "one minute decides the success of a battle, one hour the success of the campaign, and one day the fate of the war" is a favorite slogan of the Soviet military. However, dilatoriness has been a major Russian failing in the past.

The modern Soviet commander will have to carry out his mission with much greater intensity, rapidity and dynamism than his World War II counterpart, and show a great deal more purposefulness, flexibility, and recognition of reality. The mobility, maneuverability and striking potential of his motorized and mechanized formations have increased manyfold. The opportunities for using airborne troops for tactical as well as strategic purposes have multiplied. The

combination of great firepower (in a motorized rifle division it has increased 25-fold since the end of World War II) and total motorization of the forces have inevitably enlarged the scope and depth of operations.

The introduction of tanks to the T/O&E of motorized rifle divisions and the development of a doctrine for their massed use has a profound effect on a Soviet commander's thinking. Whereas in World War II Soviet rifle divisions did not have their own tanks, and only few of them were generally attached to the divisions as direct infantry support (DIS) tanks, today's motorized rifle division commander has about 265 tanks of his own, of which some 120 are integral parts of motorized rifle regiments (40 tanks in each), and the rest are organized in the divisional tank regiment. Thus, a modern commander of a motorized rifle division, or even of a motorized rifle regiment, has become a bona fide combined arms commander, whose decisions are complicated, as well as facilitated, by tremendous combat power. Consequently a modern war places much higher demands on the entire officer corps than the wars in the past.

While in the past the basic yardstick of a Soviet commander for accomplishing an offensive mission was the destruction of immediately opposing enemy forces and capturing their defensive positions, today the offensive mission includes these former objectives but must also take into consideration the capture or destruction of the enemy's tactical nuclear weapons. Routine solutions will not do; the modern commander must demonstrate diversity and imagination.

While on the offensive, the Soviet commander must decide how to mass his troops on the battlefield for a decisive strike. He knows that the massing of troops and means on the main axis remains no less significant than it was during the war. Yet he is also aware that as long as the enemy has a nuclear potentiality, he cannot achieve concentration the same way that he could in the past. The forces on the main axis must be dispersed widely enough to avoid complete destruction by an enemy nuclear strike. The size of the area for troop deployment will depend on the radius of potential nuclear impact, the degree of protection available to the troops, and the ability to use the protective properties of the terrain, among other things. However, the concentration must be dense and strong enough to be able to break through the enemy defenses, and destroy the hostile forces. Thus, the Soviet commander must be able to concentrate the necessary forces and means quickly and covertly, and only for the short time necessary for the assault. After the successful attack, the troops must immediately disperse again.

All this calls for almost perfect timing and planning on the part of the commander and his staff, much greater precision than was required in the operations of World War II. Whether or not the Soviets will be able to carry out such a difficult maneuver under fire is difficult to predict. Their literature implies that their officer corps and troops are well trained and ready for any task. However, the available information on Soviet maneuvers does not mention this particular facet of their tactics.

The achievement of surprise, always an important factor in an attack, was accomplished by the Soviets in several of the case study operations by extreme efforts to maintain secrecy, by moving under cover of darkness and following strict regulations regarding movement and the show of lights. The greater mobility of post-World War II forces and the development of more powerful conventional and nuclear weapons have increased the importance--and possibly the value

--of surprise in the opening attack. Soviet officers and analysts have concentrated considerable attention on studying surprise attacks carried out by Soviet and German forces in World War II, and many articles in Soviet military journals and the military newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star) emphasize that surprise often is the key to victory. A great amount of time in training of Soviet officers and men is devoted to surprise, and--judging from Soviet military literature--it may be expected that its importance is considered even greater than in past wars.

However, to achieve surprise the modern Soviet commander has to overcome numerous problems which World War II officers did not have to face. In future warfare, for example, any regrouping of forces, or introduction of new units or weapons, could not long remain secret as was the case during World War II, because of the development of sophisticated detection devices which, in many cases, would discover the introduction, and void the surprise.

The major point made by the Soviets is that it is almost impossible to accomplish ad hoc surprise. Surprise is assured only by detailed planning and purposeful, creative, and timely implementation. It must be prepared on a basis of thorough intelligence of the enemy, including his strengths and weaknesses as well as the deployment of his troops.

No matter how deeply the experience of the Soviet-German war influences the thinking of present Soviet officers, their current planning and modus operandi are not a mere reflection of the past war, but take into account the considerably changed characteristics of contemporary NATO defenses from those encountered by Soviet forces during World War II. Among the most important points frequently made in Soviet literature are:

-- German defenses were continuous, well fortified and deep, and Soviet operations, as exemplified in these case studies, were designed to break through this fortified defense with infantry troops and some direct support tanks, then exploit the breakthrough with tank forces. But NATO has no such fortified positions, and in case of an attack--especially a surprise attack--intends to conduct a mobile defense, using widely dispersed mobile units. Moreover, in peacetime NATO troops are not occupying defensive positions along the border, but would move toward the border after the attack becomes imminent or actually begins. Thus a Soviet surprise attack would take the form of a meeting engagement instead of a breakthrough.

-- The firepower of weapons and the units that employ them has increased many-fold, making it more costly to remain in combat over an extended period of time or to carry out formal assaults.

-- The existence of nuclear weapons and their potential employment on the battlefield will influence tactics, reducing the advisability of massing forces and impelling commanders to seek different means for delivering concentrated thrusts against the enemy defenses. In addition commitment of nuclear weapons could dramatically change the tactical situation on the battlefield, turning a potential victory into defeat in a matter of hours.

-- The levels of mobility and maneuverability of all units and formations have increased considerably and make possible much more rapid changes in tactical situations.

In summary, one may say that the new breed of Soviet commanders' concept of waging modern operations is deeply rooted in the World War II experience of the Soviet armed forces. The Soviets believe that by analyzing the operations of past wars, including the decision making process of the Soviet commanders, their officer corps will get better understanding of the essence of tactics and strategy and that this understanding will play an important role in shaping military views. Thus, a comprehensive analysis of the past wars is a must for all Soviet officers.

However, the close attention paid by Soviet officers to military history does not mean that the Soviets are not aware of technological progress and its impact on tactics and operations. What they want to do is to apply past experience creatively to modern warfare. The unanswered question is how much of the new changes in military tactics will be translated into practice on the battlefield, and to what degree the present stage in the development of science and technology has been absorbed by the average Soviet officer.

There is little doubt that, whereas the basic principles of command and control and of the decision making process remain the same, and the experience of World War II in this area is still valid, future wars will make a greater demand on Soviet commanders than the past.

Problems of troop command and control will have to be solved by them in a more imaginative, and also more scientific, way than before. The volume of data on the situation which a commander must have in order to make a decision has changed quantitatively. The time that can be spent on making decisions and assigning combat missions to subordinate formations and units has been considerably reduced. In view of this the wide introduction of computers has become of great importance in the decision making process of the Soviet commander. Computers can be expected to assume such functions as computation, systematization, analysis of the necessary data, calculation of the ratio of forces, variants of the distribution of forces and means, strategic concentration, and tactical deployment, thereby greatly reducing the work load of the commander and his staff.

However, the Soviets emphasize that no new technical development would or could replace the commander. They say that the main strength in combat in World War II was, and it still is, in their view, the man. Thus, the Soviet military and political leadership are doing what is in their power to prepare their officer corps in the best possible way. Schools, special courses, and on the job training take up a considerable time in an officer's life. Some Soviet specialists estimate that a Soviet officer in the rank of colonel retiring after over 30 years in service has spent about 38% of his service years in various schools, learning and improving his professional skill.

One of the most important observations to be made from these case studies is that they sharply contradict the prevalent notions in western military circles about the inflexibility and lack of initiative of Soviet commanders in combat. Not only were the commanders in these case studies flexible in their decisions, when it became apparent that original plans needed to be changed, but their superiors encouraged them in the exercise of flexibility and initiative, as long as changes did not alter the basic plan of the higher commander and helped to fulfill the mission. These operations of course are among those to which the

attention of modern Soviet officers is directed as examples to follow. But even if they are exceptions to what was general practice, that fact in itself is important. As was the case in the old Prussian and German armies, officers are being encouraged by example to exercise initiative and imagination.

Under the more relaxed political atmosphere of the 1970s Soviet commanders may be expected to be more flexible than they were under the rigid Stalin regime of World War II. Writings of Soviet analysts clearly show the emphasis being put on flexibility and initiative, both in training and during maneuvers and field and staff exercises. It would be a mistake to put confidence in the probability of Soviet commanders blindly following prescribed patterns without using imagination and their own initiative.

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**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
1155 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1155**

June 9, 2016
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[REDACTED]

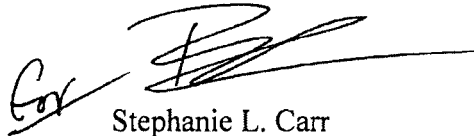
Dear [REDACTED]:

This is in response to your enclosed November 19, 2015, Freedom of Information (FOIA) request to the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC) for "Studies on Soviet Combat Performance... Accession Number ADB201482." DTIC forwarded one record, totaling 214 pages to our office for review and direct response to you. Your request and responsive information were received in this office on December 7, 2015, and assigned FOIA case number 16-F-0292. We ask that you use that number when referring to your request.

The Office of Net Assessment (ONA), a component of the Office of the Secretary of Defense reviewed the responsive record and determined that it is appropriate for release without excision.

This constitutes a full grant of your request, and I am closing your file in this office. There are no fees associated with this response in this instance.

Sincerely,


Stephanie L. Carr
Chief

Enclosure:
As stated

Cc: DTIC