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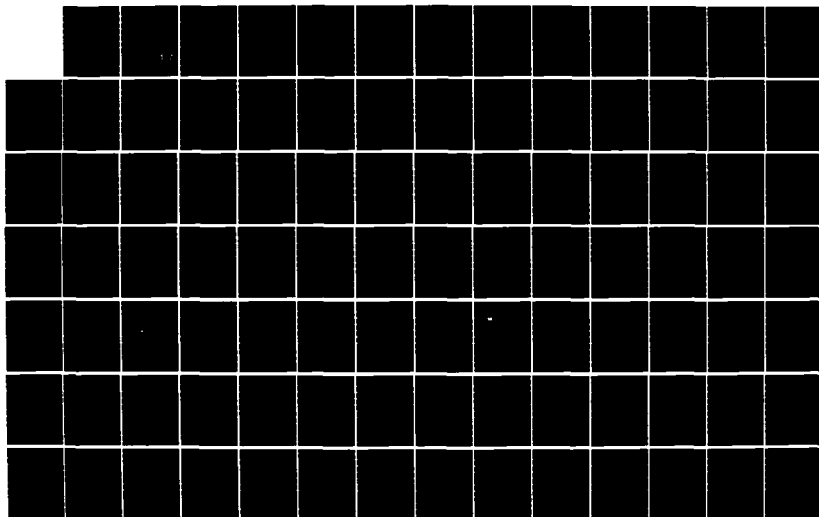
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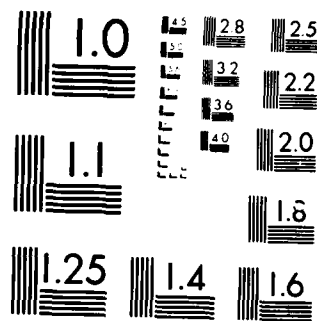
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ENCIRCLED FORCES: THE NEGLECTED PHENOMENON OF WARFARE

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U. S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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PAUL TIBERI, LTC, U. S. ARMY  
B. A., Pepperdine University, 1982  
B. S., Pepperdine University, 1982

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
1985

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Throughout history, a common phenomenon of warfare has been the encirclement of the forces of one or both warring factions. The nature of future war -- taking place in a battlefield that will be characterized by fluid activities, greater confusion, and indistinct battle lines -- suggests an increasing		

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likelihood that one's force, or a part thereof, will become encircled at some stage of the conflict.

This study reviews the nature of encirclements and tests the hypothesis that there exists a set of historically-justifiable principles that are common to the successful employment of encircled forces at the operational level of war. Three case studies are analyzed from an operational perspective. The substance of these assessments provides some tentative principles which are then tested against other historical examples, reflecting different environmental factors, different antagonists, and different outcomes.

The author concludes that the hypothesis is substantiated by nine principles which are considered common to the successful employment of encircled forces at the operational level of war. Not surprisingly, these principles were conspicuously absent among unsuccessful operations involving encircled forces.

The author suggests that these principles should be examined further and considered during future reviews of U.S. Army doctrine. He also proposes that the subject be included in the main curriculum of each of the staff colleges. Moreover, he maintains that "encircled forces" should be included in field training, command post exercises, and battle simulations in order to test the applicability of the derived operational principles and, hence, complete the doctrinal cycle.

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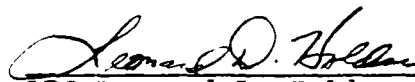
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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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Approved by:

 , Thesis Committee Chairman  
LTC Leonard D. Holder, M.A.

 , Member, Graduate Faculty  
LTC Henry L. Thompson, Ph.D.

 , Member, Graduate Faculty  
MAJ Roger Cirillo, M. A.

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

ENCIRCLED FORCES: THE NEGLECTED PHENOMENON OF WARFARE, by Lieutenant Colonel Paul Tiberi, U. S. Army, 232 pages.

Throughout history, a common phenomenon of warfare has been the encirclement of the forces of one or both warring factions. The nature of future war--taking place in a battlefield that will be characterized by fluid activities, greater confusion, and indistinct battle lines--suggests an increasing likelihood that one's force, or a part thereof, will become encircled at some stage of the conflict.

This study reviews the nature of encirclements and tests the hypothesis that there exists a set of historically-justifiable principles that are common to the successful employment of encircled forces at the operational level of war. Three case studies are analyzed from an operational perspective. The substance of these assessments provides some tentative principles which are then tested against other historical examples, reflecting different environmental factors, different antagonists, and different outcomes.

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The author suggests that these principles should be examined further and considered during future reviews of U. S. Army doctrine. He also proposes that the subject be included in the main curriculum of each of the staff colleges. Moreover, he maintains that "encircled forces" should be included in field training, command post exercises, and battle simulations in order to test the applicability of the derived operational principles and, hence, complete the doctrinal cycle.

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## INTRODUCTION

The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night.

- Longfellow

In 1800, Napoleon directed General Massena to defend Genoa, Italy against the Austrians. By a sudden attack, the Austrians cut Massena's army in two, and forced him to withdraw into the city. Massena, although besieged, attracted a sizable Austrian force in the area, by executing several threatening maneuvers thus permitting Napoleon to triumph at Marengo.

In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, French Marshal Bazaine withdrew a large force into the Fortress of Metz, France. The Prussian force entrenched its outposts and main line of resistance around Bazaine's fortress. With the main body of its troops divided into three sections and held in reserve, the Prussians were ready to counter any attempt of Marshal Bazaine's forces to break-out of Metz. Consequently, sorties by Marshal Bazaine to join Marshal MacMahon's forces, advancing to his relief, were unsuccessful. After 69 days of this siege, Marshal Bazaine surrendered over 170,000 men.

The two foregoing illustrations represent the focus of this thesis. The first example connotes an operation by an encircled force with a favorable conclusion; the second example demonstrates one whose outcome was catastrophic. But what factors made the former operation successful? In fact, what factors have historically characterized successful operations by encircled forces? Moreover, does a common correlation of factors exist among successful operations by encircled forces?

The purpose of this study is to conduct a critical analysis of the U. S. Army operational doctrine as it pertains to encircled forces. The thrust is twofold. First, the study attempts to derive, through analysis and synthesis of historical research, a set of principles which have distinguished successful operational commanders whose force, or a part thereof, became encircled. Then, the derived principles are used as criteria against which to discern the feasibility of current U. S. Army doctrine on encircled forces.

The principal question that this thesis aims to answer is "Are contemporary AirLand Battle operational principles of encircled forces consistent with those principles derived from historical examples?" Two subsidiary questions suggest themselves: "What are the principles common to successful operations by encircled forces?" and "Is current doctrine consistent with those principles?"

It is clearly not within the scope of this study to propose a new doctrine for encircled forces. As a student of modern warfare, the author seeks a dual objective: to stimulate reflective thought on the subject, and to suggest a set of principles for consideration during subsequent doctrinal reviews.

At this point the reader may be pondering three issues which must be addressed before we launch into the study. Specifically, "What is doctrine?"; "What is the author's interpretation of a 'principle'?"; and "What results are necessary for operational commanders whose force, or a part thereof, was encircled to be considered successful?" These three questions must be addressed before proceeding to the central issue of this study. The answers to these questions establish the parameters for subsequent discussion and proffer the author's perspective to the reader.

Doctrine, for the purpose of this paper, is viewed as a concept, guide, or outline for the prosecution of war. "It (doctrine) is," according to Major General Cushman, "an enlightened exposition of what has usually worked best."<sup>1</sup> Significantly, this view recognizes doctrine as having a transient quality, subject to

---

<sup>1</sup>Maj. Gen. John H. Cushman, "The CGSC Approach to Writing Doctrinal Literature," Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth Pamphlet Number 1, 18 September 1973, p. 3.

constant review and refinement. It is seen as neither a checklist of rules and recipes nor a shared grasp of techniques. Doctrine is not what to think, but how to think.<sup>2</sup>

An example will clarify the point. In the German Wehrmacht during the Second World War, a commander, confident that his seniors and subordinates understood what he was doing and why, sought every opportunity to seize the initiative and act boldly. He knew that leaders at every level of command around him would act to exploit the vulnerabilities of the enemy that he might create or to protect him if he encountered unforeseen difficulties. Doctrine understood this way establishes both a common cultural bias and the trust that must characterize today's corps of U. S. Army officers.

The second issue deals with my interpretation of the word "principle." In this study the term "principle," unless otherwise specified, does not refer to a set of laws, axioms, or self-evident truths. Principles herein do

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<sup>2</sup>The following are representative of this point of view: U. S. Department of the Army, Operations, Field Manual 100-5 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1982), p. 1-1, hereafter cited as FM 100-5; Asa A. Clark IV et al., The Defense Reform Debate (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 85-6; Col. Huba Wass de Czege, "Army Doctrinal Reform," in The Defense Reform Debate, pp. 101-18; Col. Clyde J. Tate and LTC L. D. Holder, "New Doctrine for the Defense," Military Review 29, no. 3 (March 1981), 2-9; Col. Wayne Downing, "U. S. Army Operations Doctrine," Military Review 61, no. 1 (January 1981), pp. 64-73; and Maj. Richard H. Sinnreich, "Tactical Doctrine or Dogma," Army 29, no. 9 (September 1979), p. 16-9.

not set forth cause and effect, but rather they represent the underlying patterns to which warfare tends to conform over the long run. They are the result of generalizations of combat experience, historical research, and combat training. Principles constitute practical recommendations on procedures for preparing, organizing, and conducting an operation or battle.

The last issue pertains to "successful" operational commanders whose force, or a part thereof, become encircled. Successful operations by an encircled force appear to fall into one of four categories. First, the encircled force that is able to effect a breakout through the enemy's encirclement. In the second category are encircled forces that conduct a coherent defense which allow a link-up operation with the parent unit to be accomplished. The third category is comprised of cases where the enemy abandons the encirclement of the force due to his inability to annihilate it. The last category is the encircled force that is destroyed by the enemy when its annihilation was the only means available to the operational commander to accomplish a vital mission.

The structure of this thesis should facilitate the reader's efforts to grasp and judge the author's findings. Chapter 1 defines the problem concerning encircled forces, reviews both threat and U. S. Army doctrine relating to operations by encircled forces, details the significance

of the study, and discloses the thesis hypothesis. Chapter 2 explains the investigative plan and operative methodology. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 illustrate three historical case studies of successful operations by encircled forces during the Second World War. Chapter 6 reviews the "lessons learned" from the case studies and synthesizes these into a coherent set of principles. Following this synthesis, some implications of these principles for the future may be worth sketching out.

The value of historical research to the military profession has been widely accepted. Should this study help to refine our operational doctrine, that utility will have been reinforced. But even if this study serves only as another stimulant to provoke military thought, the intrinsic worth of historical research will be realized.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM

It is the task of military science  
in an age of peace to prevent the  
doctrine from being too badly wrong.

Michael Howard<sup>1</sup>

### THE BATTLEFIELD

The U. S. Army of the 1980s and 1990s must be prepared to meet a number of varying contingencies. It may be forced to fight on a relatively primitive environment or on a highly sophisticated battlefield against the Warsaw Pact or Soviet surrogates. The latter scenario features Central Europe as the most dangerous threat to the U. S. Army. It is also the scenario with which this study is primarily concerned.

In this area of greatest strategic concern, the U. S. Army can expect battles of greater scope and

---

<sup>1</sup>Howard, "Military Science in an Age of Peace," Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies 119 (March 1974), p. 10.



intensity than ever fought before. Confronted by an enemy who expects to sustain rapid advance through deep maneuver and by using every weapon at his disposal, the U. S. Army can anticipate campaigns<sup>2</sup> whose battles will be intense, deadly, and costly. The manifestation of complex surveillance, target acquisition, and communications systems throughout his ground forces can provide our potential adversary the intelligence with which to bring his potent combat power to bear upon us.

The willingness of our potential enemy to employ his ever increasing arsenal of nuclear and chemical weapons forewarns us of the need to be ready from the outset to fight in that environment. The devastating effects of such weapons cannot be allowed to determine the outcome of future conflict due to our lack of preparedness. When complemented with highly mobile forces poised and equipped to exploit tactical and operational opportunities, however, nuclear and chemical weapons may invariably increase the tempo of combat operations.

An army that is either unprepared or inadequately equipped to fight under these conditions will be liable to

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<sup>2</sup>A campaign is the orderly execution of strategic objectives within a theater of operations wherein the theater commander is allowed sufficient time to procure and provide the means to secure the desired objectives. See Col. W. D. Johnson, "Concept Statement for Theater Operations," in The Art of War Quarterly, Department of the Army (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: United States Army War College, 1 February 1984), III, p. 60.

paralysis and piecemeal destruction. Moreover, at the very time when uncertainty in battle demands better command and control, enemy radio electronic combat can be expected to make that task more difficult than ever before. Threat electronic countermeasures will be targeted to confuse, deceive, and disorient our field commanders; and electronic warfare will test our ability to maintain cohesion of effort while simultaneously displacing our command and control facilities. Furthermore, the geographical and economic conditions of this scenario compel the U. S. Army not only to fight battles that are more devastating but also to do so at the end of long, vulnerable lines of logistic support.<sup>3</sup>

Fighting outnumbered against a smart opponent with greater means and shorter supply lines places a premium not only on maneuver and firepower but also on decentralized, independent operations. Nevertheless, in order to achieve decisive results, formations and fires will have to be massed. The lethality of such concentration of combat power suggests that some penetrations by both antagonists will be inevitable. As a result, distinct battle lines may become a rarity.

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<sup>3</sup>This is a synopsis of the view proffered in FM 100-5 and by one of the manual's principal authors, Col. H. Wass De Czege, "Toward a New American Approach to Warfare," (unpublished paper presented at USMA Senior Conference XX, the "Military Reform Debate," 3-5 June 1982).

Having considered some general characteristics of the future battlefield, we can turn our attention to the doctrine espoused by our potential adversaries to achieve their political or ideological goal.

#### SOVIET OFFENSIVE DOCTRINE

(Today) not even the wealthiest country can afford to keep the whole of its armed forces deployed in peacetime. The only solution is to keep deployed in peacetime sufficient armed forces to reach at least the nearest strategic objectives before successive echelons are mobilised and sent into action . . . it would seem advisable to possess in peacetime armed forces of the right size and type, so that the main aims of the war can be attained in the initial period without additional mobilization. . . He who, right from the start, can get his troops the deepest into enemy territory will be best able to exploit the results of his own nuclear strikes and to prevent the enemy from mobilising. This will be of great importance in Europe because the distances are so small (my emphasis).<sup>4</sup>

The preceding section highlighted the Soviet threat to NATO as our nation's most dangerous military challenge. It is important to note that the U. S. Army faces the likelihood of military confrontation against other foes and in other regions of strategic interest to the United States. But for the purpose of this paper, a

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<sup>4</sup>Marshall V. S. Sokolovsky, Voennaya Strategiya, translated and quoted by P. H. Vigor, in Soviet Blitzkrieg Theory (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 206-7.

review of Soviet offensive doctrine will suffice. After all, if the U. S. Army operational doctrine for encircled forces can adequately address the threat posed by Soviet forces, it seems logical to assert that the same doctrine can withstand other, different but less dangerous, challenges as well.

Two factors determine the shape of the Soviet military system: the unifying and integrating effect of communist party control and the existence of a military doctrine.<sup>5</sup> The latter of these factors--that is, the existence of a military doctrine--is the subject of our immediate focus.

The Soviets clearly adhere to Clausewitz's dictum that war is an extension of policy. Thus, Soviet military doctrine is not just applicable to the battlefield. It encompasses the entire spectrum of the nation's preparation for war. It follows, therefore, that the shape of the Soviet armed forces must reflect whatever tasks they have been set by the Soviet Communist Party, for which they, the military branches, constitute merely an instrument of policy.

The function of Soviet military doctrine, then, is to produce a military machine capable of implementing Soviet policy by means of war. Toward this end, doctrine

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<sup>5</sup>C. N. Donnelly, "The Development of Soviet Military Doctrine," Military Review No. 8 (August 1982), p. 39.

serves to enable Soviet armed forces to wage the type of war demanded by the Communist Party. Hence, doctrine is not just a set of regulations. "It is," states C. N. Donnelly, a senior analyst at the Soviet Studies Center, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, "an all-embracing military philosophy which is applied to the whole military system as the military element of Marxist-Leninist doctrine."<sup>6</sup>

Recently, a United States intelligence agency confirmed that, among the broad strategic goals of the Soviet leadership, one of them is to "continue to modernize conventional forces to enable them to conduct high speed, mobile, deep operations . . . (the intent) is to knock Western Europe out of the war quickly without resort to nuclear weapons."<sup>7</sup> This is not to imply that the Soviets want a war against NATO at the present time. In my opinion, they would far prefer to achieve their declared long-term aim of a Soviet-style communist world by peaceful means rather than through methods which entail the risk of a catastrophic war. However, if a war is used to achieve this policy in Europe, it will be the aim of the Soviets to win it quickly before it escalates into an

---

<sup>6</sup>Donnelly, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>7</sup>Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, The Soviet Battlefield Development Plan (Washington, D. C.: <np>, 1982), p. 56.

all-out exchange of strategic nuclear weapons.<sup>8</sup>

We can assert, then, that an offensive against the NATO theater of military operations (Russian: TVD) has the strategic mission of rapidly defeating and destroying NATO forces, capturing vital territory, and causing the disintegration of the NATO alliance. Understandably, this will only be possible given favorable political circumstances. In order to accomplish this rapid destruction, it is essential, the Soviets insist, to achieve surprise. These characteristics are intended to preempt NATO's deployment, shatter NATO's defense by a high-speed offensive in depth, destroy NATO's armed forces, and neutralize the Western economy. If this goal can be realized without the use of even tactical nuclear weapons, clearly the risk of escalation to strategic nuclear confrontation is reduced.

If speed and surprise are essential for a Soviet victory, it follows that the Soviet armed forces must be capable of achieving both. The principles of operational art and tactics, as outlined in 1972 by V. Ye. Savkin, (see Table 1-1) a Soviet military theorist, appear to be a logical development of this line of thinking.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Donnelly, op. cit., p. 42, Vigor, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Savkin, The Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics (A Soviet View), translated and published under the auspices of the U. S. Air Force (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1974).

TABLE 1-1. THE SOVIET PRINCIPLES OF WARFARE AT  
THE OPERATIONAL AND TACTICAL LEVEL

1. Speed: The achievement of mobility and the tempo of combat operations.
2. Mass: The concentration of the main effort and the creation of superiority in men and equipment over the enemy at the decisive place and time.
3. Surprise.
4. Aggressiveness in battle - no letup in the attack, breakthrough, and pursuit.
5. Preservation of combat effectiveness among one's own troops by:
  - \* being properly prepared and efficiently organized
  - \* maintaining at all times efficient command control over one's force.
  - \* maintaining troop morale and their will to fight
6. Realistic planning: Ensuring the aim and plan of any operation conforms to the realities of the situation.
7. Depth: Attempting simultaneous action upon the enemy to the entire depth of his deployment and on objectives deep in his rear, including action to weaken his morale.
8. Combined Arms: Ensuring cooperation of all arms of the service and ensuring the coordination of effect toward achieving the main objective.

Source: Derived from V. Ye. Savkin

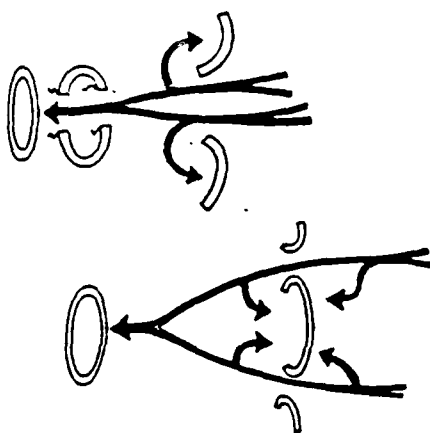
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There can be no time to train soldiers just before a preemptive campaign; to try to do so would jeopardize surprise. Hence, the divisions in the most sensitive strategic locations must be fully combat ready. Theoretically, this precludes NATO's mobilization and permits the Soviets to win the war in the initial period--that is, before NATO has the chance to mobilize and deploy its forces. The pattern of maintaining a high state of readiness in the groups of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe seems to support this logic.

The offensive against NATO can be expected to include several Warsaw Pact fronts whose principal objectives would include the seizure of key NATO political and economic centers.<sup>10</sup> In such a scenario, the simultaneous annihilation of NATO's military forces would likely assume a secondary, albeit a formidable, role.

Front objectives are to be attained by employing high speed operations along either multiple or converging axes of advance, exploiting the results of the integrated fire plan. The defenders are to be split into separate or isolated groups to be destroyed concurrently while the offensive is continued toward NATO's rear area.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 1-1: SOVIET OFFENSIVE MANEUVER



Attack along one or more axes to split the defenders into separate groups. These are to be destroyed in detail, with concurrent further attacks toward the enemy's rear.

Attacks along converging axes to envelop sizable enemy forces. Surrounded forces are to be destroyed as concurrent attacks continue to the enemy's depths.

Source: FM 100-2-1, p. 4-3.5.

<sup>10</sup>A front is a Soviet wartime formation comprised of several armies, each having three to six divisions.

<sup>11</sup>U. S. Department of the Army, Soviet Army Operations and Tactics, Field Manual 100-2-1 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: <np>, 1982), p. 4-3. Hereafter cited as FM 100-2-1.



The dynamic combination of the characteristics of the future battlefield and the Soviet offensive doctrine suggests that, in the future, the encirclement of one's forces may become the norm rather than the exception.

#### ENCIRCLED FORCES

Encirclements are formed as the result of operations in which the attacker entirely surrounds elements (or all) of the opposing force. In the days when linear warfare was the standard method of disposing troops in battle, a unit encircled and cut off by the enemy was considered lost; its surrender due to lack of ammunition, starvation, or sickness was a foregone conclusion. Accordingly, the classical concept for a successful military operation was to outflank the enemy, roll up his line, encircle his force, and destroy it either by close combat or by waiting for supplies to dwindle and disease to spread.

By a strange paradox, the mobility enjoyed during the Second World War appears to have negated the theory that the encirclement of the enemy force made its destruction a fait accompli. While motorization allowed on one hand the attacker to execute a more rapid envelopment of the enemy's force, on the other hand, it may have provided to that surrounded enemy the means with which to resist

annihilation efforts: improved mobility of the encircled force itself; the airplane with which to resupply troops beleaguered miles behind enemy lines; and the increased potential for higher headquarters to extract, reinforce, or otherwise support a subordinate's encircled force. Forces that assimilated these means and capabilities into their warfighting infrastructure--that is, doctrinal, organizational, personnel, technological, and societal assimilation--during the Second World War seem to have fared much better than those forces which had not.<sup>12</sup>

At this point, Michael Howard's quote at the beginning of this chapter acquires increasing significance. He opines that military science during peacetime labors under several disadvantages, not the least of which is the impossibility of verifying whether doctrine is right or not.<sup>13</sup> If one accepts this proposal, it then follows that our doctrine must undergo a continuous process of refinement so that improvisations thereto, at the outbreak of hostilities, are made more easily and less painfully. With this spirit we will now review U. S. Army doctrine pertaining to operations by encircled forces.

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<sup>12</sup>J. S. Lucas, War on the Eastern Front (New York: Stein and Day, 1980).

<sup>13</sup>Howard, op. cit., p. 3.

## U. S. ARMY DOCTRINE ON ENCIRCLED FORCES

The new FM 100-5 represents an evolutionary change in U. S. Army doctrine. Colonel Huba Wass de Czege, one of its principal authors, provides an excellent summary of the doctrinal changes:

AirLand Battle doctrine has a number of distinctive features. It takes a nonlinear view of battle and enlarges the geographical area of conflict, stressing unified air and ground operations throughout a theater. It distinguishes the operational level of war--the conduct of campaigns at the corps and higher levels--from the tactical level. It recognizes the nonquantifiable elements of combat power, especially that of maneuver, which is now accorded the same importance as firepower. It acknowledges the importance of nuclear and chemical weapons and of electronic warfare and details their effects on operations. And, most importantly, it keeps the human element prominently in the foreground.<sup>14</sup>

As Colonel Wass de Czege points out, one of the important features of the revised manual is its recognition of the "operational level of war." Since the intent of this study is to address U. S. Army doctrine on encirclements as it pertains to the operational commander, we must elaborate on the definition given above. FM 100-5 defines this level as follows:

The operational level of war uses available military resources to attain strategic goals within a theater of war. Most simply,

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<sup>14</sup>Wass de Czege, "Army Doctrinal Reform," p. 109.

it is the theory of larger unit operations. It also involves planning and conducting campaigns . . . The disposition of forces, selection of objectives, and actions taken to weaken or to outmaneuver the enemy all set the terms of the next battle and exploit tactical gains. They are all part of the operational level of war. In AirLand Battle doctrine, this level includes the marshalling of forces and logistical support, providing direction to ground and air maneuver, applying conventional and nuclear fires in depth, and employing unconventional and psychological warfare.<sup>15</sup>

FM 100-5 is recognized as the Army's keystone operational manual.<sup>16</sup> The manual does devote a short chapter to the subject of encircled forces. Unfortunately, the three and one-half pages (less sketches) do not address encirclements at the operational level of war. Instead, that portion of the manual is oriented almost exclusively to the tactical battle.<sup>17</sup> Without question the tactical commander should receive guidance on this critical subject. But what guidance is offered to our key "war-fighters?"

The Corps<sup>18</sup> is the focal point for fighting the

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<sup>15</sup>FM 100-5, p. 2-3.

<sup>16</sup>FM 100-5, Foreword.

<sup>17</sup>FM 100-5, pp. 13-1 through 13-6.

<sup>18</sup>The corps is the U. S. Army's largest maneuver unit. Refer to U. S. Department of the Army, Corps Operations, Field Circular 100-15 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1984).

AirLand Battle<sup>19</sup> and the corps commander is the U. S. Army's key war-fighter at the operational level.<sup>20</sup> It is suprising, therefore, that the manual which provides doctrine for corps operations (FC 100-15) does not address operational considerations for encircled forces. Likewise, FM 100-16, Theater and Field Army Operations (DRAFT), completed on 25 September 1984, contains no guidance whatsoever for the operational commander regarding encircled forces.

#### SHORTCOMINGS

The lack of operational guidance concerning encircled forces suggests several questions. Are there any generalizations, or "tips for success," that can be provided to the operational commander? Can he intentionally allow all or part of his force to become encircled? If so, under what conditions? What risk is he accepting in doing so? What, if anything, can he do to minimize this risk? If part of his force becomes encircled, when, how, and under what conditions does he commit assets to extricate the encircled force?

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<sup>19</sup>U. S. Department of the Army, Corps Operations, Field Circular 100-15 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1984), p. 4-1. Hereafter cited as FC 100-15.

<sup>20</sup>FC 100-15, p. 3-8.

Given the anticipated battlefield environment and the nature of our potential enemy's offensive doctrine, the answers to these and other related questions appear to be absolutely vital. Surely the Army's doctrinal manuals can provide this much to our key war-fighters--not to mention the ancillary benefits to their staffs!

#### HYPOTHESIS

There exists a set of historically justifiable principles for the successful employment of encircled forces at the operational level of war and these principles can provide insights to the operational commander in the planning and conduct of related combat operations.

The method for testing the validity of this hypothesis is described in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE METHOD

History is a catalog of mistakes.  
It is our duty to profit by them.

- Liddell Hart<sup>1</sup>

### THE HISTORICAL METHOD

The nature of this study requires an historical approach to research and development of the thesis. The study of history of any kind, however, is always difficult. Because the human factor is so pronounced, the validity of accounts must be carefully considered; and recreating the atmosphere of the historical event further complicates the historical approach. Hence, "the reliability of evidence and the reality of conditions in which an event described took place are," according to J.F.C. Fuller, "two of the primary requisites to the proper study of history."<sup>2</sup> These difficulties are further accentuated by the fact that evidence is based largely on reports of eye witnesses or other interested observers. But the atmosphere of the battlefield is so tremulous with

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<sup>1</sup>B. H. Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p 138.

<sup>2</sup>J. F. C. Fuller, The Foundations of the Science of War (London: Hutchinson, 1926), p. 327.

excitement and confusion that those who have breathed it are frequently at a loss to reproduce it. And as time elapses, the images of the battle become skewed and the intangibles are rapidly forgotten.

The intent here is not to excogitate the value of history to the profession of arms. Differences of opinion as to its relevance and significance notwithstanding,<sup>3</sup> military history serves utilitarian purposes. As Liddell Hart points out, " . . . the study of military history is a form of vicarious experiences of others. In the process, we only need to avoid the associated pitfalls."<sup>4</sup> The pitfalls are intelligibly addressed in The Modern Researcher by Barzun and Graff.<sup>5</sup>

Presumably, if we can collect enough reliable data from military history we should be able to determine patterns of conduct, performance, and outcomes that provide basic insights into the nature of armed conflict. The intelligent synthesis of this data should then indicate trends to assist military planning for the future. It is both vain and dangerous to seek immutable

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<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of the controversy on the value of the historical approach see Robert J. Shafer, A Guide to Historical Method (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1980), pp. 4-11.

<sup>4</sup>Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup>Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, The Modern Researcher (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), pp. 44-6, 118, 141-44.



lessons from the records of the past; the facts are too contradictory, too specialized, too subject to misinterpretation, to support unequivocal conclusions. Certain generalized principles, however, can be substantiated. "Historical examples," stated Clausewitz, "clarify everything and also provide the best kind of proof in the empirical sciences. This is particularly true of the art of war."<sup>6</sup>

#### INVESTIGATIVE PLAN

The strategy I have developed to accomplish the historical approach is comprised of four parts: selection, analysis, synthesis, and extrapolation.

##### Selection of Historical Examples

The focus of this study is on the operational level of war. Accordingly, the historical examples of encircled forces used in this study should represent a significant part or all of an operational commander's force--only then can his actions be scrutinized. Generally, then, the encircled force should be of division size or larger.

Among other prerequisites for selection is the availability of sufficient sources, primary and secondary,

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<sup>6</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p 170.

(preferably from the perspective of both antagonists), to provide validity to the analysis. Moreover, the cases should be selected from recent conflicts since, as Clausewitz opined, "The further back (in time) one goes, the less useful military history becomes, growing poorer and barer at the same time."<sup>7</sup> And in order for the analysis to be pertinent to the modern period, the examples should reflect forces that possessed the capability to employ combined arms in battle.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the preponderance of the cases should represent successful outcomes from encirclement so as to derive insights from subsequent analysis and synthesis which are pertinent to modern warfare.

The combination of these prerequisites--operational level of war, availability of source material, contemporary style of war, application of combined arms, and successful execution--suggests that most of the cases be selected from the Second World War. During World War II, most of the encirclements affecting operational commanders took place on the Eastern Front.<sup>9</sup> Since the

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<sup>7</sup>Clausewitz, On War, p. 173.

<sup>8</sup>Combined arms in this study refers to the combined application of various branches and to the complementary use of such arms in such a way the enemy's reaction to one branch of this forces increases his vulnerability to one or more of the other branches.

<sup>9</sup>Lucas, War on the Eastern Front, p. 177.

Soviet Union, potentially the most dangerous enemy to the United States, was one of the principal antagonists on the Eastern Front, the selection of cases from this theater of operations also provides a lucrative opportunity to take a close look at our potential foe.

Care must be taken, however, to insure that the derived principles are not situationally dependent. That is, if, in fact, operational principles for the successful employment of encircled forces do exist then their applicability must not be restricted to a single set of operational and environmental factors--mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time-space (MEET-T/S). Instead, the derived principles should be characterized by a general applicability. Accordingly, the set of principles deduced from the Eastern Front will be tested for applicability in different theaters of operation, involving different antagonists and reflecting varying results--hence, the selection of historical and contemporary examples in Chapter 6.

#### Analysis of the Historical Examples

There exists a number of models against which to analyze the historical examples. Among them, I wish to highlight the following:

\* J.F.C. Fuller's system of using his trilogy of spheres of the military instrument--mental, moral, and physical.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Fuller, The Foundations of the Science of War, pp. 324-35.

- \* T.N. Dupuy's Quantified Judgment Method of Analysis (QJMA) utilizing, as the title implies, a quantitative methods approach.<sup>11</sup>
- \* The U. S. Army's Center of Military History's Campaign Analysis using the narrative technique.<sup>12</sup>
- \* H. Wass de Czege's Combat Power Model employing an analytical framework for considering the relative effects of battle's variables.<sup>13</sup>

I have selected the last of these for conducting the analysis of the historical examples. Most important in the selection was the fact that operations research techniques cannot capture adequately the unquantifiable aspects of battle. Thus they have a tendency toward biasing results in favor of the mechanical aspects of warfare. Wass de Czege's model addresses not only the unquantifiable variables but also their interdependent character. Particularly noteworthy is that the model features the moral domain of battle.

Wass de Czege's analytical model uses four principle terms, each of which represents a complex function of many variables: firepower, maneuver, protection, and leadership. Certain aspects of each term

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<sup>11</sup>Dupuy, Numbers, Predictions, and War (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979).

<sup>12</sup>Robert W. Coakley and John E. Jessup Jr., A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1979), pp. 52-5.

<sup>13</sup>Wass de Czege, "Understanding and Developing Combat Power (unpublished paper available at the School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas).

Figure 2-1: THE RELATIVE COMBAT POWER MODEL

$$L_f (F_f + M_f + P_f - D_e) - L_e (F_e + M_e + P_e - D_f) =$$

The Outcome of Battle

L = leadership effects

F = firepower effects

M = maneuver effects

P = protection effects

D = effects of opponent's efforts to degrade firepower, maneuver, and protection

f = friendly

e = enemy

Source: Huba Wass de Czege, "Understanding and Developing Combat Power."

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are quantifiable, but many are not. In its most simplistic form, the model posits that the relative combat power of a unit is the result of what leaders do with the unit's firepower, maneuver, and protection capabilities. It also recognizes that relative combat power is affected by the efforts of each antagonist to degrade the combat power of the other. Ultimately, the actions taken by the leaders either increase or decrease the unit's relative combat power.<sup>14</sup>

Each of the four principal variables constitute the model's first level of abstraction. As seen in Figure

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<sup>14</sup>As I summarize the contents of Wass de Czege's paper, the reader should recognize that I am extracting liberally therefrom in order to provide as accurate a synopsis as possible with minimal interpretations.

2-2, they are calculated by 18 more specific variables which constitute the model's second level of abstraction. Those 18 are determined by 64 even more specific variables which constitute the model's third level of abstraction. Given the time, staff officers and commanders could go to a fourth, fifth, or even sixth level of abstraction in order to examine in depth a situation and courses of action. For the purposes of this study, however, the third level will suffice.

Some amplification of the four principal terms, or variables, of the model will give the reader an appreciation for how the cases will be analyzed and synthesized into a set of coherent principles for the operational commander.

#### Firepower Effects

The model represents firepower as a complex function of five variables: volume of fire, lethality of munitions, accuracy of delivery means, capability of target acquisition systems, and flexibility of employment of these means. Each of these variables is itself a function of a number of other variables. For example, "volume of fire" is a function of the number of delivery means employed (tanks, artillery pieces, mortars, antitank guns, machine guns, rifles, etc.); of the rate of fire of the weapons systems (its sustained rate of fire, crew

proficiency, displacement time, etc.); of the effectiveness of the supply system (basic load, fire discipline, available and controlled supply rates, production rates, stockage, resupply capability, etc.); and of the degradation effects on all of these variables by enemy action or other "frictions" of the battlefield. Wass de Czege emphatically points out that "... it is the effect of firepower which contributes to the combat power and not its unapplied or misapplied potential."<sup>15</sup>

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Figure 2-2: COMBAT POWER VARIABLES

FIREPOWER	PROTECTION
Volume of fire	Concealment
Lethality of munitions	Exposure limitation
Accuracy of fire	Damage limitation
Target acquisition	
Flexibility of employment	
MANEUVER	LEADERSHIP
Unit mobility	Technical proficiency
Operational analysis	Understanding of unit capabilities
Management of resources	Analytical skills
Command, control, and coordination	Communication skills
	Dedication, commitment, and moral force
	Understanding of battlefield effects

Source: Huba Wass de Czege, "Understanding and Developing Power."

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<sup>15</sup>Wass de Czege, "Understanding and Developing Combat Power," p. 9.

### Maneuver Effects

Maneuver consists of the ability to engage the enemy or to avoid engagement in such a way as to maximize the effects of friendly firepower and minimize the effects of enemy firepower. It is truly the dynamic element of combat which seeks to position a sufficient force so as to gain a decisive relative advantage vis-a-vis the enemy on the battlefield. Again, it is the effects thus created which contribute to combat power. Maneuver is a function of four variables: unit mobility, tactical and rational analysis, management of resources, and command, control, and coordination.

### Protection Effects

This element of the model is inexorably linked to the previous two, firepower and maneuver. Clearly, the ability to survive on the battlefield has a direct relationship to the effectiveness of firepower and maneuver. The reduction of one's own attrition will result in bringing greater combat power to bear on the enemy. The variables by which protection is calculated are: concealment (to avoid being detected), exposure limitation (to limit vulnerability after detection), and damage limitation (to minimize the effects of enemy hits).



### Leadership Effects

As leadership is the sine qua non in the exercise of command<sup>16</sup> so too is it the quintessential element of Wass de Czege's model. Whereas the interrelationships of the other elements may have a profound effect on the relative combat power, the effect of leadership is exponential. That is so because the leader's ability to create the optimum opportunity for the employment of his unit's firepower, maneuver, and protection capabilities will determine, to a large degree, the battlefield results.

In order for that impact to be decisive, the leader, in Wass de Czege's view, must possess certain abilities and qualities. Included among these are: technical proficiency, a thorough understanding of unit capabilities, the analytical skills necessary for reasoned judgment, an effective methodology for obtaining and analyzing the information needed for making sound decisions, the ability to communicate clearly, dedication to his profession and to his men, and the commitment to the accomplishment of his assigned tasks. Two qualities, in particular, stand out as the manifestation of the successful leader: The ability to exert the moral force

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<sup>16</sup>See, for example, the discussion of Patton with regards to the role that leadership assumes in exercising command in Edgar F. Puryear Jr., Nineteen Stars (Washington: Coiner Publications, 1971), pp. 259-61.

that is paramount to the proper execution of his mission, and a "feeling" for the effects of combat on himself, on his soldiers, and on the execution of his assigned mission.

In reading Wass de Czege's paper, its elaboration on leadership in particular, one cannot help but sense the presence of Clausewitz and his perception of "military genius".

Like Clausewitz, Wass de Czege clearly points to those gifts of mind and temperament that, in combination, bear on military activity. "These taken together," according to Clausewitz, "constitute the essence of military genius."<sup>17</sup> Also like Clausewitz, Wass de Czege recognizes that the military genius possesses these qualities in varying degrees. But while one or the other may predominate, none may be in conflict with the rest. Hence, the harmonious combination of his "gifts" constitutes the primary criterion for a leader's combat effectiveness. Moreover, if his mind is to emerge unscathed from its relentless struggle with uncertainty, two qualities are indispensable to the military commander.

First, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead. The first of

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<sup>17</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 100.

these qualities is described by the French term, coup d'oeil; the second is determination.<sup>18</sup>

Given this general overview of Wass de Czege's model, how will we use it to analyze the selected historical examples? The model will serve as the analytical framework to examine shortcomings and successes of the historical examples. That is, it focuses the collection of data required to conduct a valid examination of the historical examples.

The correlation of the analyses from the various case studies should enable us to discern certain "patterns" that were common among successful operations involving encircled forces.

#### Synthesis of Data

Once these "patterns" have been deduced for each of the four principal elements of the combat power model, they can be synthesized into a coherent set of generalized principles. Recognizing the dangers of this analysis (misinterpretation, contradiction, etc.), there will be no attempt to draw unequivocal conclusions. As was stated earlier in this chapter, immutable conclusions cannot be based on historical "evidence." But, certain generalized principles can be substantiated. This will be done by

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<sup>18</sup>Op. cit., p. 102. I highly recommend Clausewitz's Chapter 3, Book One (pp. 100-12) to the reader.

comparing and contrasting the "patterns" among successful and unsuccessful operations. We thus should be able to observe "patterns" common among successful operations but conspicuously absent among unsuccessful operations. Once this has been accomplished, these observations only need to be developed into a general but meaningful principle. The sum total of these principles will represent our final product--a coherent set of principles for the successful operation of encircled forces.

Again, these principles cannot be considered a set of laws, axioms, or self-evident truths. They do not set forth cause and effect. They only represent the underlying patterns to which successful operations by encircled forces tend to conform over the long run at the operational level of war. As such, they do not provide a cookie-cutter solution to the operational commander. But they offer him some insights on what has historically worked best.

#### Extrapolation

Included in the last chapter will be a very rudimentary sketch of the implications of this study. This will be attempted in order to provide a point of departure for further study on the subject of encircled forces. These studies eventually might lead to the development of a coherent doctrine for encircled forces at the operational level of war.

## SUMMARY

The principal question of this thesis--Are contemporary AirLand Battle principles of encircled forces at the operational level of war consistent with those derived from historical examples?--was answered in the first chapter. Simply put, the current U. S. Army doctrine does not address the phenomenon of encircled forces at the operational level of war. In the process of reviewing current doctrinal literature (in Chapter 1), it was also determined that a void exists in providing pertinent guidance to commanders and their staffs. An hypothesis was formed with the intent of directing research so as to begin to fill this void: There exists a set of historically justifiable principles for the successful employment of encircled forces at the operational level of war.

The historical method of research was chosen for this study because it is conducive to the harvesting of proof with which to substantiate or refute the hypothesis. The Wass de Czege "Combat Power Model" serves as the tool to gather and analyze the data for subsequent synthesis. A subsidiary attempt is also made to sketch out the implications of this study on the preparation for, and conduct of, battles and campaigns on the future battlefield.

Michael Howard appropriately describes the ultimate goal of such a process:

All scientific thought is a sustained attempt to separate out the constants in any situation from the variables, to explain what is of continuing validity and to discard what is ephemeral, to establish certain abiding principles and to reduce them to their briefest, most elegant formulation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Howard, "Military Science in an Age of Peace,"  
p. 3.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DEMYANSK POCKET

We regard a voluntary withdrawal to the interior of the country as a special form of indirect pressure--a form that destroys the enemy not so much by the sword as by his own exertions. Either no major battle is planned, or else it will be assumed to take place so late that the enemy's strength has already been sapped considerably.

Among the favorable circumstances (for a withdrawal to the interior of the country) are: a sparsely cultivated area, a loyal and warlike people, and severe weather conditions.

In Russia...the tide turned...at the point of culmination.

--Clausewitz<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

A brief study of the war on the Eastern Front reveals that, in its early stages, rapid and virile thrusts by German armor units created pockets within which the Soviet forces were contained and then annihilated. The great battles at Minsk, Kiev, and Uman in 1941 are some of the encirclements with which many students of military history are familiar.<sup>2</sup> In the first year of the Russo-German War,

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<sup>1</sup>Clausewitz, On War, pp. 469, 472, 478.

<sup>2</sup>John Erickson, The Road to Stalingrad (London: Harper and Row, 1975), especially pp. 150 to 155 and 163 to 179. Also noteworthy is Bryan I. Fugate, Operation Barbarossa (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1984).

the German Wehrmacht<sup>3</sup> with its blitzkrieg style of warfare produced encirclements which resulted in Soviet losses totalling more than 2 1/2 million men, over 10,500 tanks, and nearly 20,000 guns.<sup>4</sup>

Table 3-1: 1941 SOVIET LOSSES DUE TO GERMAN ENCIRCLEMENTS

	Men	Tanks	Guns
Dnepropetrovsk	14,000	45	69
Gomel	84,000	144	848
Kiev	665,000	884	3,178
Korosten	18,000	142	123
Lake Ilmen	53,000	320	695
Mariupol	107,000	212	672
Minsk	324,000	3,332	1,809
Nilolaiev	60,000	84	1,100
Nikopol-Krivoi Rog	84,000	199	465
Perekop	12,000	34	179
Reval	12,000	91	293
Roslavl	38,000	250	359
Smolensk	310,000	3,205	3,120
Ulman	103,000	317	1,100
Valday Hills	30,000	see note 5	400
Vyazma	<u>663,000</u>	<u>1,242</u>	<u>5,452</u>
TOTAL	2,577,000	10,501	19,862

Source: Derived from Lucas, War on the Eastern Front

<sup>3</sup>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW), High Command of the Armed Forces.

<sup>4</sup>Lucas, War on the Eastern Front, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup>Numbers are not verifiable; few armored units, however, were involved in the Valday Hills region during 1941.

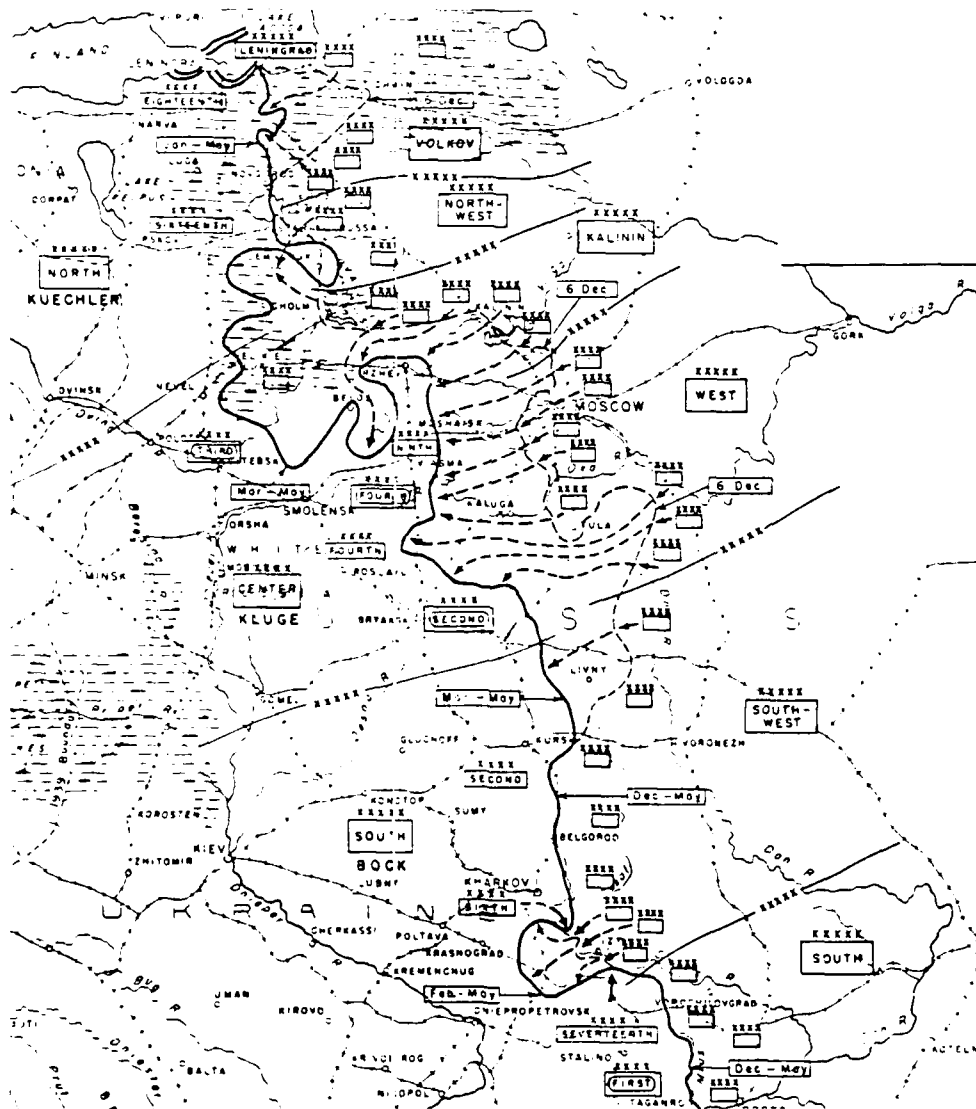


Quick to adapt and able to apply the bitter lessons it had had to learn, the Soviet High Command was eventually to use, with consummate skill, operations and tactics similar to those which had given the Wehrmacht such remarkable success in the envelopment battles of 1941 and 1942. Thus, by the middle years of the war and with increasing success thereafter, the German army was bled to death in the East as Soviet forces relentlessly drove westward and, in the process, cut off, surrounded, and attempted to destroy whole German armies. The encirclement and subsequent annihilation of Paulus' Sixth Army at Stalingrad certainly must have boosted the confidence of Soviet commanders to prosecute such a style of war--a style of war whose characteristics were more clearly manifested in later envelopment efforts. One such effort is the subject of this chapter--the Demyansk Pocket.

#### OPERATIONAL SETTING

By 2 December 1941, the German lightning offensive into Russia had ground to a halt and, almost immediately, the Soviet sources went over to a counter-offensive (see Map 3-1). As the inadequately-clothed German soldiers fought an overwhelming Russian force that was determined to drive its enemy away from the approaches to Moscow, major German groupings were forced to withdraw. These withdrawals, in many cases, turned into retreats and

Map 3-1: THE RUSSIAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE  
(Winter 1941-1942)



Source: Vincent J Esposito, The West Point Atlas of American Wars, vol. II (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959).

threatened to degenerate into routs as losses increased at alarming rates.<sup>6</sup>

Concerned with the potential chaos from disorderly retreats, the Fuehrer ordered his commanders to form "hedgehogs" around towns and regions of strategic importance.<sup>7</sup>

One of the largest of these "hedgehogs" was that of Demyansk. As a result of the 1941 offensive, Count Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt's II Corps had reached the Valday Hills, thereby cutting the railway link between Moscow and Leningrad. Throughout the winter, this hedgehog around the town of Demyansk was defended against numerous Soviet counterattacks--the bastion would have to be held if Hitler's offensive was to be resumed. These hedgehogs were to slow and eventually halt the Soviet drive in such a way as to make the Soviet units which had infiltrated German lines vulnerable to counterattacks. The Soviet General Staff, conscious of the operational significance of the Demyansk salient, mounted a strong offensive that finally encircled the II German Corps on 8 February 1942.<sup>8</sup> The severe winter conditions that had plagued the German

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<sup>6</sup>At this point of the war, Germany had nearly a million soldiers killed, wounded, or missing in the Eastern Front alone. Lucas, War on the Eastern Front, p. 196.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Paul Carell, Scorched Earth (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), p. 283.

forces during their eastward drive now helped the surrounded II Corps withstand Soviet annihilation attempts until an aggressive link-up effort reestablished friendly contact on 21 April 1942.<sup>9</sup>

The resulting "mushroom" projected forces of Army Group North's 16th Army nearly 70 miles beyond the Staraya Russa-Kholm line into the Soviet Northwest Front (see Map 3-2). This corridor, however, was dangerously narrow. Consequently, throughout 1942, there existed an ever increasing danger that the Soviets would cut off the Demyansk mushroom at its stalk--merely six miles across at its narrowest point.<sup>10</sup> The pocket initially contained six German divisions totalling approximately 100,000 men.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, a total of 12 divisions would be deployed inside the pocket.<sup>12</sup> With these forces constantly at the brink of disaster, the Demyansk pocket provides one of the most suspenseful stories of the Eastern Front.

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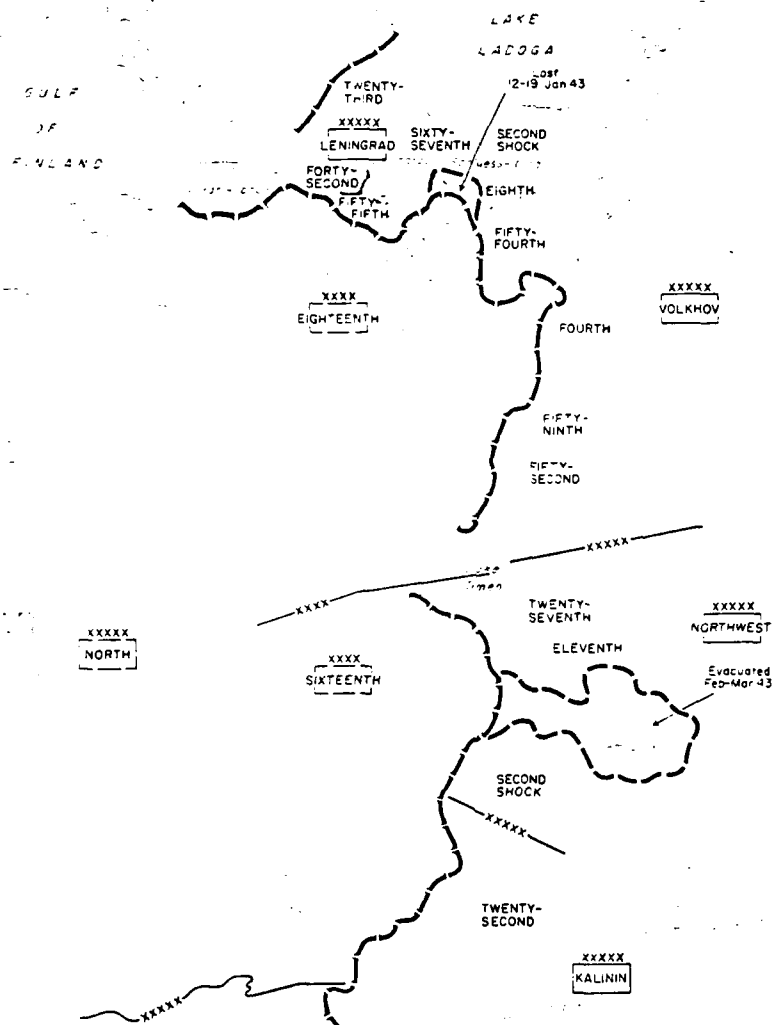
<sup>9</sup>For a good account of the link-up operation see Gen. Der Infanterie Gustav Hoehne, "In Snow and Mud: 31 Days of Attack under Seydlitz during Spring 1942 (Russia)," translated and published by the Historical Division, European Command (MS# C-034), 16 October 1948. This document is available at the Archives Section, Combined Arms Research Library, Ft. Leavenworth, KS N-16235.2). A vivid account is given also by Paul Carell, Hitler Moves East (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), pp. 426-34.

<sup>10</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 285.

<sup>11</sup>Carell, Hitler Moves East, p. 426.

<sup>12</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 304.

Map 3-2: ARMY GROUP NORTH AND THE DEMYANSK "MUSHROOM"  
(Winter 1942-1943)



Source: Earl F. Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, p. 110.

## OPERATIONAL PLANS

Demyansk was an important factor in both Hitler's and Stalin's calculations. Hitler wanted to retain possession of the salient so as to launch a renewed offensive against Moscow at an opportune time.<sup>13</sup> As for Stalin, just as Stalingrad was to be the center of gravity for the eventual defeat of the German southern front, so too did the bulge around Demyansk represent an opportune launching pad through which to roll up the front of Army Group North.<sup>14</sup>

The Stavka<sup>15</sup> envisaged using the Northwest Front, commanded by Marshal Timoshenko, for this operation. The 27th Army and the First Shock Army were to cut the corridor and then the 11th, 34th, and 53d Armies would reduce the encircled force. First Tank Army and elements of the 68th Army comprised the newly formed front mobile group, under the command of Lt. Gen. Khozin, that was to conduct the breakthrough and exploitation. Concentrated in the vicinity of Ostashkov, south of Lake Seliger, this

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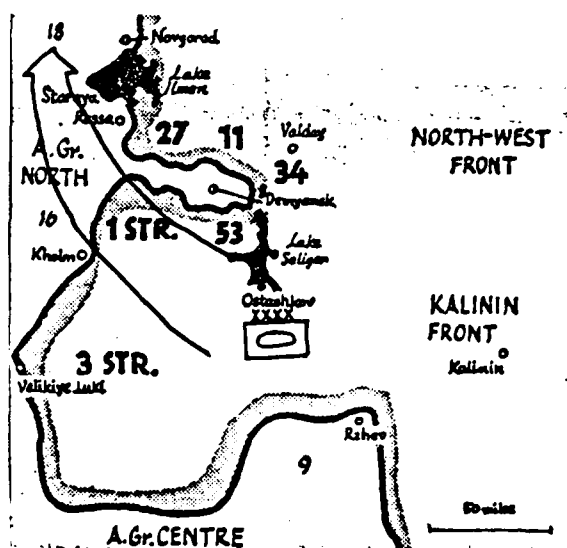
<sup>13</sup>John Erickson, The Road to Stalingrad, pp. 303-04, and Earl F. Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Campaign in Russia, 1942-1945 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 101.

<sup>14</sup>Paul Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 285.

<sup>15</sup>Stavka Verkhovnova, Glavonkommandovania (the Soviet Supreme Command). See Otto Preston Chaney Jr., Zhukov (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 441.

mobile group was to blow through the gap created by the First Shock Army and drive towards Luga into the flank and rear of the 18th German Army at Leningrad.<sup>16</sup>

Map 3-3: STAVKA PLAN



Source: Adapted from Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 284.

<sup>16</sup> John Erickson, The Road to Berlin (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), p. 61.

Timoshenko's northern group comprised 13 rifle divisions, nine rifle brigades, and miscellaneous armored units with about 400 tanks. Opposing this force were three German divisions--the 8th Jager Division,<sup>17</sup> and the 81st and 290th Infantry Divisions. The Soviet southern group consisted of seven rifle divisions, four rifle brigades, and armored formations totalling 150 tanks. Facing this force was the German 126th Infantry Division. Having detached its 8th Panzer Division earlier to Army Group Center to be used to blunt the Soviet penetration at Vitebsk, the 16th Army was left without any major armored formations.<sup>18</sup>

"Group Saur" comprised 16th Army's lone operational reserve. This reserve consisted of assault guns and a few tank companies belonging to the 203d Panzer Regiment that had been raised in France in 1941. The Regiment, dispersed in the vicinity of Starya Russa, was commanded by Lt. Col. Freiherr von Massenbach.<sup>19</sup>

Field Marshal von Kuechler, the Commanding General of Army Group North, recognized the seriousness of the situation. He attempted to forewarn OKH<sup>20</sup> that, given the

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<sup>17</sup>"Light" infantry.

<sup>18</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 285.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Oberkommando des Herres (The German Army High Command).



condition of II German Corps and the general superiority of the opposing Russian forces, serious developments were likely to develop in the coming months.<sup>21</sup>

#### EXECUTION OF PLANS

The Soviet attack began on 28 November 1942 with a massive artillery concentration. The Soviets, having complete air superiority at this point of the battle, then massed their air assets to conduct carpet bombing immediately following the artillery bombardment. Later, low-flying aircraft continued to drop ordnance over German positions as the Soviet infantry divisions, with T-34 tanks interspersed well forward, launched the ground attack. Slowly, the Soviet attack was beginning to compress the narrowing corridor.

Lt. Gen. Hohne was in command of the German forces in the corridor while Lt. Gen. Laux, because of Count Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt's illness, commanded the German forces in the Demyansk area proper. In order to halt the Soviet advance, Hohne used all the soldiers at his disposal--to include engineers, drivers, and signal operators to prevent the walls of the corridor from crumbling. Likewise, Laux emptied offices, workshops, and depots to bolster his defenses. Mashenback's 203d Panzer Regiment

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<sup>21</sup>Army Group North's official files as translated and quoted by Earl F. Ziemke, op. cit., p. 101.

was committed piecemeal at the most critical points.

Faced with this worsening situation, Field Marshal von Kuechler (CG, Army Group North) decided to take a gamble. Convinced that the 12 divisions were about to be destroyed, he withdrew four divisions from his 18th Army.<sup>22</sup> He retained the 28th Jager Division in reserve (later sent to join the German 20th Mountain Army in Finland) and committed the 58th, 225th, and 254th Infantry Divisions to the Demyansk battle.<sup>23</sup>

On the dangerous southern flank, the Soviets were about to break through the 126th Infantry Division. Maj. Gen. Hoppe, the Division Commander, pulled back his battalions to a shortened line. When Soviet tanks began to penetrate on 4 December, they ran into the front of the reinforcements--209th Grenadier Regiment of the 58th Infantry Division. On the northern part of the corridor, the 8th Jager and the 81st Infantry Divisions were at the focal point of the Russian attack. On several occasions elements of these two divisions were encircled and had immediately broken out. But, by the middle of December, the 81st Division totalled only 310 men. The 8th Jager

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<sup>22</sup>These units had been holding the Russian forces further north in the vicinity of Lake Ladoga-Volkhov. While they played a vital role in the Demyansk pocket, their absence weakened the bottleneck between Leningrad and Volkhov. As a result, when the Soviets opened the second battle of Lake Ladoga five weeks later, the German forces were too weak to stop the Russians from breaking the blockade of Leningrad.

<sup>23</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 287.

Division was not faring much better. It appeared that the Soviets were about to break through. But the tenacious defense of the divisions' remnants held on until the 17th of December when the 225th Infantry Division relieved them.

Although Timoshenko continued to press the Germans until 12 January 1943, the II German Corps, with reinforcements, had survived the critical period.<sup>24</sup> But the German forces inside the pocket were understrength and understandably fatigued. Moreover, the Russians were bound to renew their attack. Would Demyansk become another Stalingrad?

The real question was whether or not the risk associated with the retention of the Demyansk pocket was still justified and prudent given the change in the disposition of forces. Kuechler thought not. After a discussion with Col. Gen. Zeitzler, Chief of the Army General Staff, the OKH Chief agreed. Zeitzler told Kuechler that he intended to take the matter of evacuating the Demyansk pocket up with Hitler. Hitler resisted until 31 January, the day following the devastating news from the Volga--that Stalingrad was about to fall. On 1 February 1943, the II German Corps received the green

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<sup>24</sup>During the 46 days (28 November 1942 to 12 January 1943), the Soviets had 10,000 men killed and 423 tanks destroyed. German casualties totalled 17,767 men killed, wounded, or missing as a result of this action. Carell, Scorched Earth, pp. 289-93.

light. The evacuation was to be executed within 70 days without leaving behind any material.<sup>25</sup>

The evacuation would not take anything near 70 days. In tacit agreement with 16th Army, Laux had given orders to make the necessary preparations in the middle of January. He organized a planning staff under Major von Rosenthal, previously the chief of operations for 225th Infantry Division. Hence, by the time that the official order to evacuate had arrived, important actions had already been accomplished. For example, "operation rubbish clearing" had resulted in the evacuation of some 8,000 tons of equipment, 5,000 horse-drawn and 1,500 motor vehicles, and nearly all of the rear supply depots. Perhaps more importantly, a system of routes had been developed from the head of the mushroom through the corridor to accommodate several columns simultaneously.<sup>26</sup>

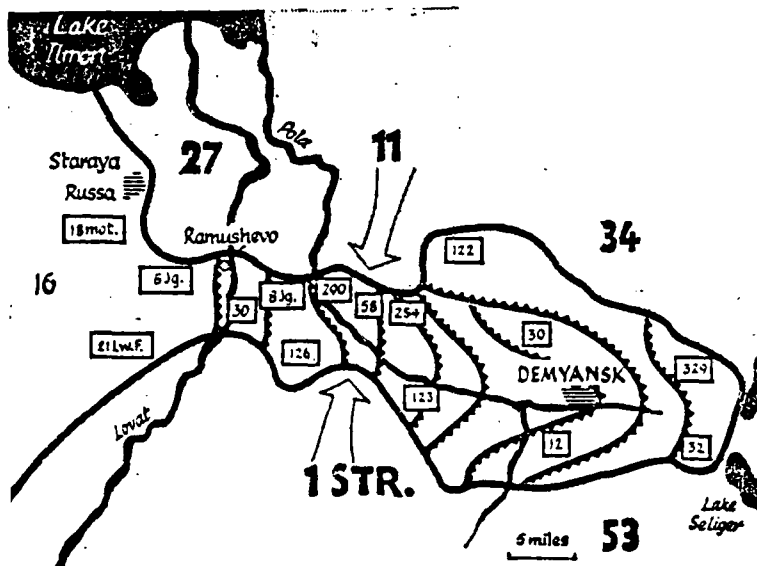
The evacuation plan called for nine "interception lines." (See map 3-4). These coordination graphics were intended to facilitate the orderly withdrawal of the forces--first from the Demyansk area proper, then from the corridor--from east to west. Forces along these interception lines were to help those further east in conducting a passage of lines by providing liaison teams,

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<sup>25</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, pp. 112-13.

<sup>26</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, pp. 293-96.

Map 3-4: EVACUATION OF DEMYANSK



Source: Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 300.

fire support, and rear protection. Significantly, deceptive measures were taken to prevent Soviet agents or partisans from discerning the concept. These measures included the commitment of units to represent various "reinforcing or replacement" headquarters, dummy radio traffic, false orders depicting associated construction requests, and so on.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 296-97.

The deceptive measures notwithstanding, Stavka decided to renew its offensive against the Demyansk pocket. Recognizing that Army Group North as well as 16th Army lacked an operational reserve, Marshal Timoshenko was receiving increasing pressure from the Soviet High Command to bring the Demyansk battle to its desired conclusion.<sup>28</sup> His effort, however, was not coordinated properly. Although 11th and 53d Armies opened the attack on 15 February, 27th Army did not attack until the 23d of February, and the First Shock Army finally attacked three days later.<sup>29</sup>

While the Soviets were experiencing a myriad of problems in coordinating their efforts, the German evacuation plan was proceeding quite well. Realizing the increasing danger of the Soviet Attack, Laux requested that he be allowed to initiate "Plan Ziethen" forthwith. Approval was received on 17 February. Although dangerous penetrations existed throughout, the evacuation was effected rather comfortably--in part due to Soviet ineptness. Artillery played a key role in the operation.

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<sup>28</sup> Zhukov, who had been the political commissar sent by Stalin to supervise the activity of Northwest Front (among others) would later be severely criticized for his sophomoric leadership. See, for example, Otto P. Chaney Jr., Zhukov (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 416.

<sup>29</sup> Erickson, The Road to Berlin, p. 62.

There was inadequate transportation to carry out all of the stockpiled ammunition. There was no need, therefore, to save it. As a result, the German forces enjoyed lavish indirect fire support for the first time in many months.

By the 27th of February, the entire pocket had been evacuated. Although understrength and exhausted from 14 months of savage fighting, the 12 divisions would soon make the difference in thwarting further Soviet thrusts across the Lovat into the rear of Army Group North.

#### OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

Let us take an analytical look at the battle using the four key variables of Wass de Czege's combat power model.

##### Firepower

Soviet military theorists consider the winter offensive of 1942 and the summer offensive in 1943 as the turning point for Soviet operational art.<sup>30</sup> The first notable feature of this turning point was the availability and application of firepower. Certainly, it distinguishes

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<sup>30</sup>See, for example, Maj. Gen. E. Boltin, "The Soviet Art of War at the Turning-point," Soviet Military Review No. 2 (February 1967), pp. 46-48 and No. 6 (June 1967), pp. 52-45.

the Soviet method from that of the German. The huge increase in the production of arms in 1942-43 allowed the Soviets to enjoy and employ an overwhelming concentration of firepower. Starting with about 40,000 guns in mid-1941, the Russians lost most of this during the following 12 months. But by mid-1943, they had their gun strength back up to nearly 60,000.<sup>31</sup>

In other major categories of weapons the changes were equally dramatic. The Russians had over 15,000 tanks in mid-1941, but most of these were obsolete. After their catastrophic defeats of that year, the Soviets concluded that their T-26s, T-28s, and BT-7s were no match for their German opponents. In later 1941, they introduced the T-34/76 with a 76.2mm gun capable of dealing with any German armored vehicle. When the Germans retaliated with their Panther tank, the Soviet T-34 was modified to include an 85mm gun. While not the Panther's equal, it was reliable, highly maneuverable over the worst terrain, and cheaply reproducible.<sup>32</sup>

The Soviet air force began the war in similar shape. As in the case of Russia's tanks, the air force was virtually destroyed during the first year of the war.

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<sup>31</sup>Stephen B. Patrick, "The Russo-German Conflict," in War in the East (New York: Simulations Publications, 1977), pp. 16-7.

<sup>32</sup>S. B. Patrick, "The Russo-German Conflict," p.17.



Both, however, were reconstituted and by mid-1943 the Soviets had a total of 8,000 tanks and 5,000 modern aircraft.<sup>33</sup> The weapons factories in the Urals (which produced 78 percent of Soviet tanks, 42 percent of the artillery, 35 percent of the munitions, and nine percent of the aircraft by 1943)<sup>34</sup> had recovered from the great "factory removal" once the German drive toward Moscow was halted; and Germany could neither match nor stop the Soviet production. Moreover, while Germany had no ally who could share this burden, the Western Allies supplied the Soviets 22,206 aircraft, 12,755 armored vehicles, and 436,087 motor vehicles as well as considerable amounts of ammunition, clothing, and food.<sup>35</sup> While the aircraft and armored vehicle supplies accounted for only 15 and 11 percent of Soviet production respectively, the number of motor vehicles not only equaled that produced by Germany but also allowed the Soviet Union to concentrate its production efforts on aircraft, weapons, and armored vehicles. But perhaps more significantly, Germany's two-front war prevented her from allocating sufficient resources with which to favorably prosecute the campaign on the Eastern Front.

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<sup>33</sup>Richard DiNardo, "The Armored Fist," Strategy and Tactics (September, 1984), p. 24.

<sup>34</sup>James F. Dunnigan, "Organization of Soviet Ground Forces," in War in the East, p. 108.

<sup>35</sup>Op. cit., p. 106.

In the Demyansk area, the Soviets enjoyed a 3.8:1 superiority in men, a 7.8:1 advantage in armored vehicles, and an overwhelming superiority of airpower.<sup>36</sup> Yet, they were unable to annihilate the German force. This was partly due to the ability of the Luftwaffe to keep the forces in the pocket supplied by air.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, given the overwhelming forces at the disposal of Timoshenko, it appears that there must have been either a significant failure on the part of the Soviet leadership or an incredible accomplishment on the part of the Germans. This topic will be explored in the following sections.

#### Maneuver

Contrary to the popular myth of the time, the German army of World War II was far from being fully mobile. At the initiation of Unternehm Barbarossa most artillery was towed by horses, not trucks or tracked vehicles. And of the 139 divisions poised from the Arctic Circle to the Black Sea, there were 15 panzer divisions and 10 motorized divisions (including the two SS motorized infantry divisions). The balance was on foot. Hence, only 14 percent of

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<sup>36</sup>Derived from John Erickson, The Road to Berlin, pp. 61-4.

<sup>37</sup>The German Luftwaffe had detailed 500 aircraft for this purpose and averaged 100-150 sorties daily. Edward C. McCarthy, "The Course of the Battle," in War in the East, pp. 31-2.

the German divisions were fully motorized. By 1943, the Germans were able to increase this to 18 percent which, although far from being considered completely mobile, represented for the German army a marked advantage over that of the Soviet army whose mobile forces during this same period accounted for only eight percent of its ground combat forces.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the Germans did not possess this advantage at Demyansk.

The increased production of war materials made it possible for the Soviet Union to carry out a series of organizational measures which had a great impact not only on the relative firepower of its ground forces but on their mobility as well. Of particular importance was the formation of tank armies, the creation of tank corps using new equipment, and the recreation of the mechanized corps.<sup>39</sup> But during the battle for the Demyansk pocket, the Soviets were caught in a transition period. While they had begun to organize properly for a more maneuver oriented style of warfare, the officer corps, inexperienced and unimaginative as a result of the 1937 purge, had not yet assimilated the operational art commensurate with the advancement in weapons and organization. Thus, a doctrinal

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<sup>38</sup>Derived from S. B. Patrick, "The Russo-German Conflict" and James F. Dunnigan, "Organization of Soviet Ground Forces" and "Organization of German Ground Forces," in War in the Eastern Front, pp.1-17,105-125, and 126-153.

<sup>39</sup>J. F. Dunnigan, "Organization of Soviet Ground Forces," in War in the Eastern Front, pp. 105-25.

bias towards maneuver at the operational and tactical levels of war was lacking. This accounts for Timoshenko's failure to maneuver his forces properly. He failed to mass adequate combat power at the decisive point--that is, at the stalk of the Demyansk "mushroom." Moreover, his main effort was directed against German strength instead of seeking soft spots through which to irrupt with his superior force. Lastly, his maneuver sought a tactical victory by destroying the German divisions directly instead of thrusting his mobile forces to the operational depth with the aim of severing command and logistical lines of communication between the encircled divisions and Army Group North.

But it is not with the Soviet failure that we are primarily interested. What part did maneuver play in the German operational plan and execution? Three maneuvers contributed to the successful outcome of this operation. First, the immediate counterattack in February 1942 broke through the encircling force and reestablished contact between the Demyansk forces, 16th Army, and Army Group North. The timeliness of the decision to counterattack into the enveloping Soviet force prevented the encircling force from fortifying its ring around the surrounded German divisions and thus contributed to the success of the counterattack. The resulting corridor, albeit dangerously narrow at the stalk, facilitated the planning and execution of subsequent operations.

The second maneuver on the part of the Germans that contributed to the successful outcome of this battle was the shifting of the three divisions (58th, 225th, and 254th Infantry Divisions) from the 18th Army to the Demyansk battle. Had Marshal von Kuechler, the Commanding General of Army Group North, elected not to do so, the German divisions at Demyansk would certainly have been annihilated in December 1942. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze the theater strategy that Hitler espoused which resulted in the Demyansk pocket (as well as the encirclement and destruction of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad). Nevertheless, the reader should note an apparent incongruity between the theater strategy and the operational objectives directed by Hitler to achieve the strategic goals. My purpose in highlighting this issue is that the operational commanders were denied the freedom to choose the operational method for the attainment of their assigned strategic and operational objective. Indeed, Hitler's passion for centralized control inhibited his operational commanders from achieving harmony between their tactical battles and designated operational objectives. It is thus that, after he succeeded in establishing a corridor to the Demyansk area proper, Kuechler was unable to influence subsequent operations with which to contribute to German strategic goals.

The last maneuver that enabled the trapped divisions to escape annihilation was the withdrawal operation.

Although worthwhile in themselves, the tactical issues of this operation are outside the scope of this study. But there are operational implications as well. Perhaps key to the success of this phase of the Demyansk battle was the vision on the part of the commanders from II Corps, 16th Army, and Army Group North to secretly plan for the possible evacuation of the pocket, although in doing so, it violated Hitler's orders.<sup>40</sup> It seems likely that, had they waited for Hitler's "decision," this phase of the operation would have been unsuccessful. Also noteworthy were the measures implemented to deceive the Soviets--that is, dummy radio traffic, false orders, the commitment of "reinforcing or replacing" units, and so on. It must be concluded that the Germans expertly considered the effects that these maneuvers would create and their contribution to the accomplishment of the operational mission.

#### Protection

Theoretically, at different stages of the conflict and to various degrees, both antagonists espoused similar philosophies for protecting their force. A close look at the implementation of this theory, however, reveals that neither adversary adequately protected his force during the battle for the Demyansk salient.

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<sup>40</sup>For a thorough appreciation for the extent of Hitler's control of such matters, most revealing are the secret records of his conferences by Felix Gilbert, Hitler Directs His War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950).

One of the primary features of protecting the force is the integration of various arms into a combined team. This action not only maximizes the unit's combat power, but, more importantly, it arrays the various elements of the team in a complementary fashion so that the enemy's reaction to one arm of the team simultaneously increases his vulnerability to the other arms. One can conclude that the side which is able to transfer this philosophy from theory into practice will incur a decisive advantage over the opposing side. In the process, the survivability of its own force will be enhanced.

During the battle for the Demyansk salient, neither the Germans nor the Soviets adequately implemented the combined arms philosophy. The Germans failed to do so for two reasons. First, Hitler was mesmerized by numbers. He opted for maintaining a constant number of divisions even if doing so reduced their overall effectiveness. With this decision he decreased the staying power and the protective qualities of the units.<sup>41</sup> The second factor which adversely affected Germany's ability to use the combined arms philosophy was the loss of aircraft and armor fighting vehicles. As these were either attrited or shifted to other sectors (or theaters) of operations, the losing unit experienced a corresponding loss of protection

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<sup>41</sup>See Liddell Hart, History of the Second World War, pp. 242-44.

for its force. At Demyansk, the Germans had neither the fighter aircraft nor the armored fighting vehicles with which to employ the principles of the combined arms concept. The operational consequences were inevitable.

The Soviet Union failed to use the combined arms approach because the need to do so had not been imbued in its officer corps. While the officers were beginning to master the conduct of both defensive and offensive operations, they had not attained the level of sophistication necessary to synchronize fully the combat power of the various arms. Consequently, they were unable, for the time being, to exploit their superiority in quantity, if not in quality, of power-producing resources.

Reconnaissance is another feature that enhances the survivability of an organization. Closely associated with this feature is a unit's communications capability. Aggressive reconnaissance adds depth to the battlefield and provides security for the main force. Moreover, it may disclose the enemy's scheme of maneuver. Among other uses, communications allows for the rapid exchange of battlefield information and provides greater agility in the execution of combat plans. At Demyansk, the Germans had a marked advantage in communications means. They also conducted more aggressive reconnaissance and patrolling than did their adversary. Soviet ski battalions acquired useful intelligence on the enemy. But their lack of organic communications prevented the timely exchange of



this data to an agent in a position to turn it into operational advantages.

The climate had played a key role in the war; and it would continue to do so. The Soviet Union, west of the Volga and south of the latitude of Leningrad, is far from uniform in its climate. But some general rules do apply. Winters generally begin in earnest in November. They tend to be cold. The wind can sweep across the steppe lands, as they would in central and western Europe, thus adding a significant wind chill factor to the normal cold temperatures. In March, the spring thaws start and mud turns the country into a quagmire, making it difficult, if not impossible, to move heavy vehicles over unimproved roads. This lasts until mid-May. Through mid-September, the weather is warm and the rain is not a major factor. Then rasputitza (autumn mud) sets in until the cycle begins anew in November.

The relative effects of the climate during the Demyansk battle are problematical. While the severe snow storms affected negatively the German aerial resupply and means of fire support, one can easily argue that, given the Soviet's mobility and firepower advantage in this sector during the period, the climate favored the German cause by attenuating the Soviet superiority.

One of the greatest German mistakes once the war on the Eastern Front had been initiated was its failure to exploit Russian sentiments. When Germany invaded Russia, a

large proportion of Russia's people detested Stalin's cruel Communist regime. The purges of the 1920s and early 1930s, followed by the sweeping purge of the Army's leadership in 1937, had left millions of survivors of those disasters who feared and welcomed the opportunity to bring down Stalin's regime. There were also strong separatist movements in White Russia and the Ukraine. Had Hitler sought to exploit these sentiments, the Germans may have had the active support of much of the population of the areas they overran, and may have been able to attract a far greater number of deserters from the Red Army.

Hitler, however, rigidly held to his policy which considered Russians, like the Poles, untermensch, inferior people--to be treated as slaves by German right of conquest. Instead of liberators, Hitler's Nazi occupation administrators soon established themselves as oppressors as bad as those of Stalin. Stalin, astute to the potential power of strong public support, stepped up the propaganda theme of patriotism to "Mother Russia," playing down the issue of loyalty to Communism. By summer of 1942, the partisan movement was solidly established.<sup>42</sup> Akin to the

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<sup>42</sup>Excellent accounts of the partisan movement include Fernand de Brinon's Memoirs (Paris: University Press, 1948) and John A. Armstrong (ed.) Soviet Partisans in World War II (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964). For a concise treatise, see Alexander Werth's Russia at War 1941-1945 (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1964), pp. 710-26.

resistance efforts in Europe, partizanskies, like the maquis in France, inhibited German operational objectives by attracting considerable forces which might otherwise have been employed at the front. At the same time, by striking at the logistical and communication centers in the rear of the invading army, they had a significant psychological impact on the German soldiers. At Demyansk, the partizanskies did not represent an overwhelming threat. Nevertheless, infantry units had to be diverted from the front lines to protect the vulnerable supply depots and critical lines of communication.

#### Leadership

In Chapter 2 the enormous effect that leadership has on relative combat power was attributed to its inexorable link to the other three variables in Wass de Czege's model. This intricate relationship should be evident as we consider the substance of the preceding analysis of firepower, maneuver, and protection effects.

The success of the operation can be attributed, in part, to Timoshenko's failure to maneuver his forces against the relatively weak German flanks to operational depths. This action would have massed his already superior force and attained an overwhelming firepower advantage while simultaneously protecting that force from the attrition inherent with his direct assaults.

We also noted three significant decisions on the part of German operational commanders which, to a large extent, resulted in the successful extrication of nearly 100,000 men from the Demyansk pocket: the immediate counterattack to establish a friendly corridor, the reallocation of three divisions to hold the shoulders, and the preparatory plans for an orderly withdrawal. The three operations were characterized by the maneuver of forces so as to bring about the desired effects from their firepower while simultaneously maximizing their protective capacity. There can be no doubt that leadership--cautious and unimaginative on the part of the Soviets, bold and decisive from the Germans--was the greatest multiplier of relative combat power in the battle for the Demyansk salient.

#### SUMMARY

Are there principles which, if properly adhered to, can provide the operational commander with insight for the successful operation of his encircled force? While the hypothesis has yet to be substantiated by empirical evidence from a representative sample, the extrication of the divisions from the Demyansk pocket can serve to formulate three tentative generalizations.

- \* An early counterattack against the encircling force may be advantageous to the encircled force

in that it provides an opportunity to reestablish friendly contact before the enemy strengthens his encircling ring.

- \* The operational commander may have to shift or reallocate resources to prevent the annihilation of the encircled force. As with any combat maneuver, this decision appears to depend on a thorough appreciation of associated risk and on the boldness and timeliness of the decision.
- \* The vision to anticipate future operational requirements even under extreme conditions might be an essential ingredient of the operational commander's character.

We can seek to confirm or confute these tentative generalizations as other case studies are analyzed. But the relative success of this operation notwithstanding, the effects of Hitler's strategic policy on the operational commander should not be underscored. Two of these are of particular significance. The first, centralized command and control of theater operations, attenuated his greatest advantage--the resourcefulness and leadership of his operational commanders. A distinguishing characteristic of the blitzkrieg had been its agility. This was due to the rapid decision-making of German operational commanders and to the speed with which these decisions had been executed. By his decree, Hitler denied his operational commanders their greatest asset.

Hitler's other questionable policy, to secure "hedgehogs," also reduced the relative combat power of his force. Dynamic, fluid battles favored the German Wehrmacht because such battles provide the greatest dividends to the side that possesses a relative superiority in speed and initiative. Quickly massing, striking enemy weakness, exploiting along diverging axes, and concentrating again only when necessary had been a key feature of the blitzkrieg. "Hedgehogs," although arguably instrumental in preventing massive and disorderly withdrawals earlier, diametrically contradicted these blitzkrieg standards. As the German Wehrmacht espoused the more static style of warfare, it became more vulnerable to Soviet superiority of numbers. Hence, as the Wehrmacht's combat power dwindled, that of the Soviets increased geometrically.

## CHAPTER 4

### KORSUN-SHEVCHENKOVSKIY

We have had tremendous military successes, but we still have no constructive plan for Russia. We come as conquerors where we should come as liberators.

--Joseph Goebbels<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In the Demyansk operation, the Soviets failed to exploit their advantage in relative combat power vis-a-vis their German invaders. As a result, the Germans successfully extricated nearly 100,000 men. Recognizing the operational shortcomings of its leaders and of its operational art, the Stavka decided to disseminate rapidly to field commanders periodic doctrinal and tactical revisions learned from combat operations. One of these revisions addressed the phenomenon of encircled forces. The destruction of encircled forces was determined to comprise two separate operations: (1) the prevention of link-up efforts by the enemy, and (2) the annihilation of the surrounded force. This revision was subsequently

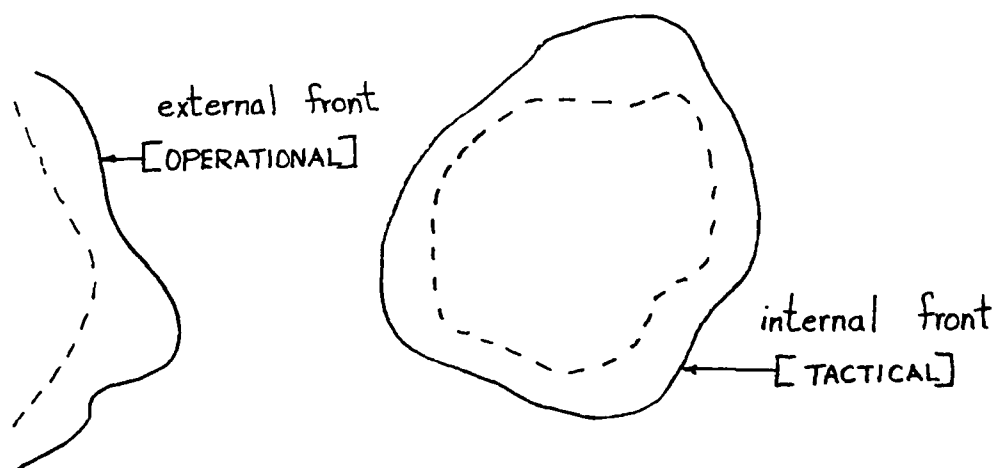
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<sup>1</sup>Goebbels was the master-mind of Nazi propaganda during the war. The quote was taken from Alexander Dallin, German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), p. 511.

published in Voyennaya Mysl (Military Thought).<sup>2</sup> A review of the two primary features of the promulgated methodology will enhance our future efforts toward analysis and synthesis.

It is noteworthy that the revision distinguished operational from tactical encirclement. The condition for operational encirclement was determined to be the joining of mobile arms deep behind the enemy's rear which resulted in severing his lines of communication. That of tactical encirclement consisted of a solid ring all around, and in close proximity to, the enemy force.<sup>3</sup> This definition was

Figure 4-1: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FRONTS



Source: Belyayev, "Liquidation of a Large Encircled Grouping," p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Maj. Gen. N. Belyayev, "Liquidation of a Large Encircled Grouping," Soviet Military Thought No. 7 (August 1946).

<sup>3</sup>Belyayev, "Liquidation of a Large Encircled Grouping," p. 7.



correlated with the need to execute the two aforementioned operations. Accordinging, the operational element was tasked to accomplish the first task--that is, prevent the enemy from linking his relief and encircled forces. The tactical arm was relegated the mission of annihilating the encircled grouping. These were subsequently referred to as the "internal" and "external" fronts or as the "inner" and "outer" rings.

That the responsibility of preventing an enemy link-up was given to the external force appears to be the embodiment of the maturation that was taking place in Soviet operational art. Specifically, the Soviets, as substantiated earlier, had begun to espouse a more maneuver-oriented style of prosecuting war. One of the prerequisites of this style was the rapid thrust of armored formations into the depths of the enemy's rear.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Germans were expected to employ their own armored formations to effect the link-up of their relief and encircled forces. Hence, the use of Soviet armored and mechanized units in the "external" force would position

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<sup>4</sup>A representative sample of this view includes Marshal of the Soviet Union R. Ya. Malinovskiy and Marshal of Armored Troops O. Losik, "Wartime Operations: Maneuver of Armored and Mechanized Troops," Soviet Military History Journal, No. 9 (September 1980), 18-25; Col. N. Korbrin, "Encirclement Operations," Soviet Military Review, No. 8 (August 1981), 36-9; and Army Gen. P. Kurochkin, "Operations of Tank Armies in Operational Depth," Soviet Military Thought, No. 11 (November 1965), 97-126.

powerful and mobile forces so as to repel the anticipated enemy armored relief columns.

The task of annihilating the encircled force was to be performed either by methodically compressing the tactical ring of encirclement or by a "splitting blow." The first method consisted of sequentially cutting and slicing off small portions of the encircled force; the latter, and preferred, method sought to counter the synergistic effects of the encircled force by splitting it into two or more smaller groups--the "divide and conquer" philosophy.

It was also concluded that the most opportune time for delivering the enemy such a blow was at the moment that the ring of encirclement was being closed.<sup>5</sup> Theoretically, the early start of the attack would find the encircled force in a state of chaos and, therefore, maximize the relative combat power of the attacking force.<sup>6</sup> In addition, aggressive reconnaissance would be conducted to discern enemy breakout plans. Strong mobile reserves, meanwhile, would be positioned so as to counter any attempt to carry out such plans.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Belyayev, "Liquidation of a Large Encircled Grouping," pp. 15-8.

<sup>6</sup>Op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>7</sup>Op. cit., p. 23.

In the following case study, it will be possible to determine to what extent the Soviets succeeded in executing this operational scheme. At the same time, there will be ample opportunity to ascertain German accomplishments and failures in overcoming Soviet efforts to annihilate the encircled force.

#### OPERATIONAL SETTING

Within 12 months of the Soviet counter-offensive which removed the Demyansk salient and destroyed Paulus's Sixth Army at Stalingrad, the situation on the Eastern Front had taken a profound turn in favor of the Russians. Stalingrad itself brought premonitions of disaster to the Germans. But after the frenzied mechanized jousting on the battlefields in the salient at Kursk (July 1943), the mangled German Wehrmacht began to wither. The last offensive and the last victories of the German Army in Russia had come and gone forever.

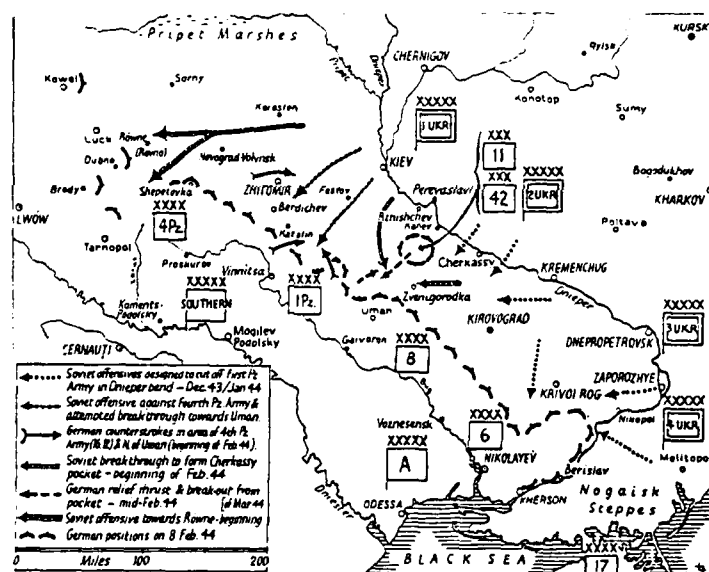
At the end of October 1943, what Manstein calls "the decisive struggle" for the Dnieper line was already well advanced, as the Red Army piled on the pressure in four sectors: the Zaporozhe bridgehead, the two Dnieper sectors, and the bridgehead to the north of Kiev.<sup>8</sup> To hold

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<sup>8</sup>Manstein, Lost Victories, pp. 505-14.

this Dnieper Front, all 750 kilometers of it, Manstein mustered 37 infantry and 17 panzer and panzergrenadier divisions, the bulk of them badly mauled.<sup>9</sup> Directed by Hitler not to give up any ground, the Germans' "Maginot Line" on the high western bank of the Dnieper was to prove both a temporary and an illusory haven for safety.<sup>10</sup>

Map 4-1: ARMY GROUP SOUTH (Winter 1943-44)



Source: Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 514.

<sup>9</sup>Erickson, The Road to Berlin, p. 137.

<sup>10</sup>Gilbert, Hitler Directs His War, pp. 87-98.

Northwest, southwest, and south of Kiev, where Marshal Zhukov acted as Stavka "coordinator" for the 1st and 2d Ukrainian Fronts, operations of mounting strategic significance were building up by the end of January 1944.<sup>11</sup> At this juncture, Field Marshal Manstein's Army Group South, unable to stop the Soviet offensive in the Ukraine, was forced to withdraw westward. The situation of the army group had rapidly deteriorated, and there was the increasing danger that Manstein's forces would become separated from those of Army Group Center to the north.

On January 14, General Vatutin's 1st Ukrainian Front (formerly the Voronezh Front), after an advance of nearly 200 kilometers in three weeks, halted its offensive southwest of Kiev. The Front's left wing had enveloped German forces which were still entrenched on the western bank of the Dnieper River in the vicinity of Kanev. To the South, General Konev's 2d Ukrainian Front (formerly the Steppe Front), which had been on the offensive since January 5, captured Kirovograd and enveloped the south flank of the same German force, subsequently known as the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy group.<sup>12</sup> These two envelopments

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<sup>11</sup>Col. A. Grylev, "Korsun-Shevchenkovskii Operation," Soviet Military Thought No. 2 (March 1954), p. 40.

<sup>12</sup>German authors normally refer to it as the "Cherkassy pocket" or, more specifically, "the pocket near Cherkassy." The Soviet designation as "The Battle of Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy" is probably more accurate since that was the primary locality of the actual encirclement.

left a large salient bulging into the Russian line, with the 1st Ukrainian Front on its north and the 2d Ukrainian Front on its south.

To the Soviets, this salient acted as a cork to the Soviet offensive and, concomitantly, presented an opportunity for encircling and liquidating nearly 56,000 German troops.<sup>13</sup> To Hitler, the jutting salient fed his imagination on thoughts of reconquest--a springboard for restoring a defensive line of the Dnieper.<sup>14</sup>

#### OPERATIONAL PLANS

Taking advantage of the favorable enveloping position and the quantitative superiority of its forces, Stavka assigned the following mission: "An attack of the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front from the region of Belaya Tserkov, in the direction of Zvenigorodka, Shpola, and by an attack of the troops of the 2d Ukrainian Front from the area north of Kirovograd, also in the direction of Shpola, Zvenigorodka, to surround and destroy the enemy troops in the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy salient."<sup>15</sup>

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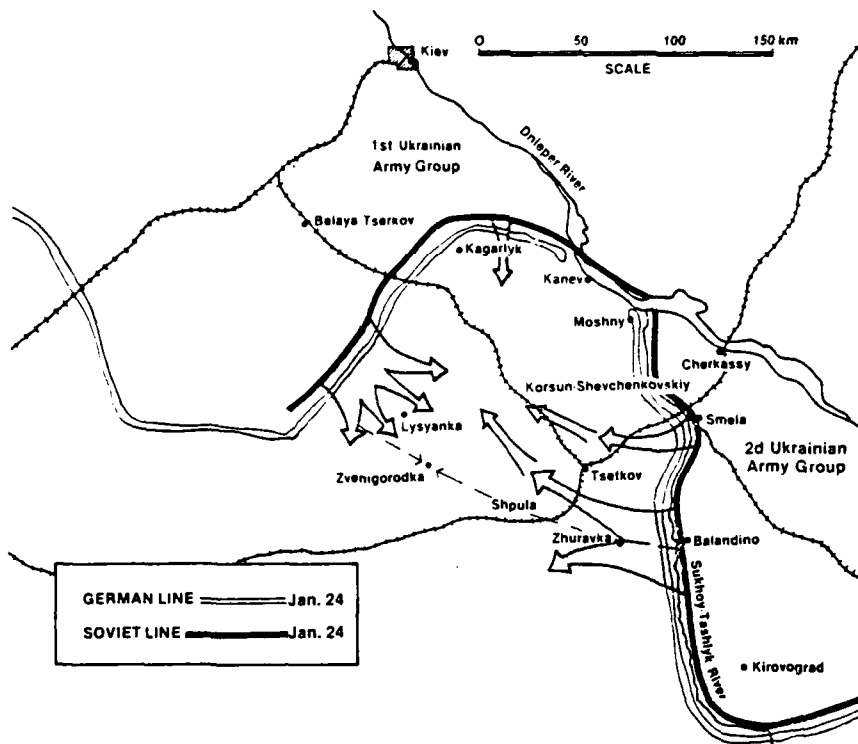
<sup>13</sup>T. N. Dupuy, Great Battles of the Eastern Front, p. 129.

<sup>14</sup>Erickson, The Road to Berlin, p. 167.

<sup>15</sup>Grylev, "Korsun-Shevchenkovskii Operation," p. 41.

For the operation, the Soviets committed five combined arms armies comprising 27 rifle and one cavalry divisions, two tank armies consisting of four tank corps and one mechanized corps, and one cavalry corps. It is worthy to note how these forces were arrayed.<sup>16</sup>

Map 4-2: STAVKA PLAN (January 1944)



Source: Dupuy, Great Battles of the Eastern Front, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup>Dupuy, Op. cit., p. 135.

1st Ukrainian Front:<sup>17</sup>

27th Army--one echelon; its four rifle divisions in two echelons.

40th Army--one echelon; its four rifle divisions in two echelons.

6th Tank Army--two echelons; one mechanized corps in the first echelon, one tank corps in the echelon.

2d Ukrainian Front:

52d Army--one echelon; its three rifle divisions in two echelons.

4th Guards Army--one echelon; its four rifle and one airborne divisions in two echelons; one additional rifle division in reserve.

53d Army--one echelon; its eight rifle and one airborne divisions in two echelons; one additional rifle division in reserve.

5th Guards Tank Army--in two echelons; two tank corps in the first, one in the second; one tank brigade in reserve.

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<sup>17</sup>On 5 February 1944, the 2d Tank Army, consisting of two tank corps (six tank brigades), was committed in the sector of the 1st Ukrainian Front.



Air Support for each of the two Fronts was as follows:<sup>18</sup>

	1st Uk <u>Front</u>	2d Uk <u>Front</u>	TOTAL
Air Corps	1	4	5
Bomber	-	1	1
Ground Attack	-	1	1
Fighter	1	2	3
Air Divisions	4	10	14
Bomber	1	3	4
Ground Attack	1	2	3
Fighter	2	5	7
Air Regiments	13	32	45
Bomber	4	9	13
Ground Attack	3	7	10
Fighter	6	15	21
Reconnaissance	-	1	1
Aircraft			
Total	243	754	997
Operational	199	573	772
Bomber	120	189	309
Ground Attack	10	100	110
Fighter	69	264	333
Reconnaissance	-	20	20

Manstein, constrained by Hitler's insistence on defending every foot of occupied territory and his mania for centralized control, developed a two-phased attack which sought to stabilize the Dnieper region. Given the sparsity of German forces, he realized that it would be

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<sup>18</sup>Dupuy, Op. cit., p. 134. The figures attributed to the Second Air Army represent only those which took part in the operation. Second Air Army was also supporting the Belorussian Front. After 3 February, one additional ground attack corps comprised of two ground attack divisions, one fighter corps of two fighter divisions, two independent ground attack divisions, and one independent fighter division of the Second Air Army also were assigned to support the 1st Ukrainian Front.

impossible to counter all the Soviet penetrations. Consequently, he turned his attention to the region with the most grave consequences. The Soviet 1st Tank and 40th Armies (in the north) had driven between First and Fourth Panzer Armies thereby creating a 75km gap.<sup>19</sup> The first phase of the counterattack envisaged First Panzer Army deploying the III Panzer Corps against the soviet 40th Army on the eastern part of the gap. In order to decrease its defensive frontage, the Army was to withdraw the VII and XLII Corps to the Ross River. In the second phase of the operation, scheduled to begin eight days later, III Panzer Corps would turn west into the left flank of the Soviet 1st Tank Army while XLVI Panzer Corps, which Fourth Panzer Army would have shifted south by then, attacked the right flank of the Soviet 1st Tank Army. Hitler approved the plan in general but strictly prohibited the proposed withdrawal of the VII and XLII Corps to the Ross River.<sup>20</sup>

#### EXECUTION OF PLANS

At dawn on 24 January, the flash and roar of a massive artillery barrage signalled the opening of the

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<sup>19</sup> Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 507.

<sup>20</sup> Manstein, Op. cit., p. 508; see, also, Ziemke, Op. cit., p. 224.

Soviet attack. Konev's 2d Ukrainian Front drove forward with 4th Guards and 53d Armies. At dawn the next day, the main bodies of both armies had penetrated and, at noon, Rotmistrov's crack 5th Guards Tank Army moved into the wedge, surging forward toward Shpola-Lebedin. Having a shorter distance to traverse, Vatutin's offensive began on 26 January with 40 minutes of artillery fire and 27th, 40th, and 6th Tank Armies attacking in the direction of Zvenigorodka. As soon as 27th Army broke through to the north, Vatutin ordered 6th Tank Army to move a mobile group into 27th Army's area to outflank Vinograd and drive on Zvenigorodka.<sup>21</sup>

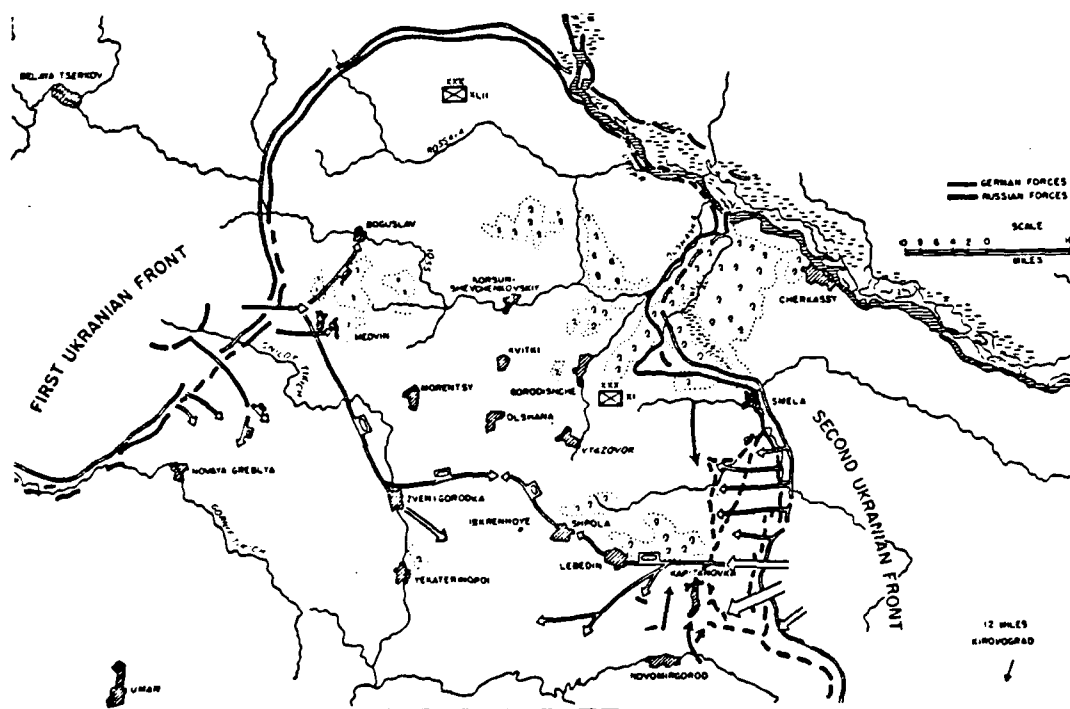
The 233d Tank Brigade of the 5th Mechanized Corps formed this "mobile group." Under the command of Maj. Gen. Savelev, deputy commander of 5th Mechanized Corps, it cleared Lysanka late at night on 27 January and, by morning, worked its way into the northwestern outskirts of Zvenigorodka. Lt. Gen. Shtevnev, the Commander of 1st Ukrainian Front's Armored Forces, formed an "operational group" with the echeloned Tank Corps, ripped between the flanks of VII and XLII Corps, and drove in a more southerly direction to form the external ring of encirclement. By the afternoon of 28 January, the 20th Tank Corps from the 2d Ukrainian Front had linked up with the 233d Tank Brigade from the 1st Ukrainian Front just

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<sup>21</sup>Erickson, The Road to Berlin, p. 176.

east of Zvenigorodka--the XI and XLII German Corps had been encircled!<sup>22</sup>

Map 4-3: THE ENCIRCLEMENT AT KORSUN-SHEVCHENKOVSKIY



Source: DA Pamphlet 20-234, p. 122.

<sup>22</sup>There exists a number of good accounts on this maneuver. For a Soviet perspective, I recommend Werth's Russia at War. Erickson's The Road to Berlin, pp. 176-7, and Grylev's "Korsun-Shevchenkivskii Operation," especially pp. 40-2. Manstein's account is rather sketchy. But a synthesis of Ziemke's Stalingrad to Berlin, pp. 225-8, the cited Erickson work, and DA Pamphlet 20-234, pp. 105-7 and 121-3, can be productive.

The XI Corps consisted of three infantry divisions: the 57th, 72d, and 389th. Corps troops comprised one assault gun brigade totaling six batteries and one battalion of light artillery. XLII Corps included Task Force B, the 88th Infantry Division, and, from the end of January, the 5th SS Panzer Division Wiking.<sup>23</sup> Task Force B was a cover name given to the 112th Infantry Division for operational security measures.<sup>24</sup> Although the task force carried a corps standard, it consisted of only three regiments, the normal complement of artillery and a strong anti-tank battalion, but neither tanks nor assault guns. The 88th Division had been heavily attrited during the preceding engagements. It consisted of two regiments totaling a mere five battalions with its artillery seriously depleted. The Wiking Division was, by far, the strongest division in the pocket. A fully equipped armored division, it consisted of two armored infantry regiments, one tank regiment with 90 tanks, the Belgian volunteer Wallonien Brigade organized in three battalions, and one

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<sup>23</sup>The Wiking Division was under the operational command of XI Corps until the end of January when it was shifted to XLII Corps.

<sup>24</sup>This unit had been formed from the remnants of three badly mauled infantry divisions: the Silesian 332d, the Saxon 255th, and the Saar-Palatinate 112th. In recording prisoners from this force, the Soviets undoubtedly assumed that the divisions were complete and present as a body. This may account for the Soviet contention that 10 divisions had been surrounded. See Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 474-7.

replacement regiment of about 2,000 men. The Wiking Division had an effective strength of approximately 12,000 men.<sup>25</sup>

The Soviets had applied successfully the double envelopment maneuver. As a result, they had not only surrounded six divisions and an independent brigade, but had ripped a breach 60 miles wide into the German front. Without any German operational reserves to confront it, the Red flood could now pour through that breach towards Rumania. Was Zhukov going to bypass the pocket, leaving behind a strong interior ring, and drive toward the Bug River thereby destroying the entire German southern wing? Or would he undertake an operation to annihilate the encircled force? Believing that he had surrounded the bulk of the German Eighth Army--to include its strong armored formations and its entire headquarters--Zhukov opted for the annihilation effort.<sup>26</sup> Had his assessment of the encircled forces been correct, it seems likely that the operational aim--the disintegration of the German southern wing--would have been accomplished. But the truth of the matter is that he let the unique opportunity of destroying the entire German southern wing west of the Dnieper slip through his fingers.

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<sup>25</sup>Department of the Army Pamphlet 20-234, Operations of Encircled Forces (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 107.

<sup>26</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, pp. 467-70.

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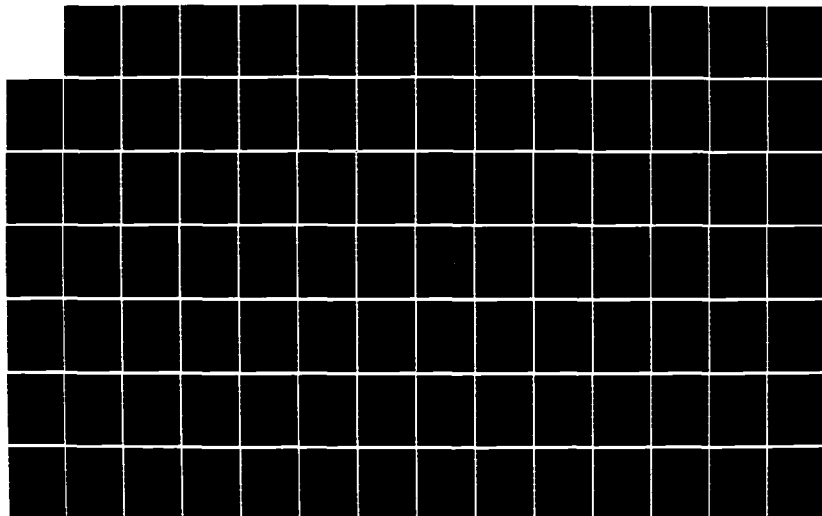
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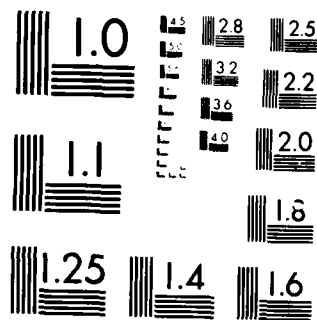
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Such was the situation which awaited Manstein when he returned to Army Group Headquarters southwest of Vinnitsa on 28 January.<sup>27</sup> On the first of February, Manstein ordered the First Panzer Army to release III Panzer Corps, Eighth Army to release the 3d Panzer Division and the XLVII Panzer Corps headquarters, and the Sixth Army to provide the 24th Panzer Division as reinforcement to the XLVII Panzer Corps. The Army Group's plan envisioned a two-pronged attack. Gen. Brieth's III Panzer Corps (comprised of 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions, the 1st SS "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" Panzer Division, and the Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke) was to launch an attack in the general direction of Medvin. After destroying the Soviet units that were operating against the XLII Corps, Gen. Brieth was to pivot his III Panzer corps due east to converge with the other arm of the pincers--the forces of Gen. Vormann's XLVII Panzer Corps. The XLVII Panzer Corps was to thrust into the rear of the Soviet forces that were threatening the southern front of XI Corps. The convergence of the two German panzer corps, believed Manstein, would liberate the encircled units, close the gap between First Panzer and Eighth Armies, and

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<sup>27</sup>On 27 January, the Fuehrer had summoned all army group and army commanders from the Eastern Front to his General Headquarters to address the need for "National - Socialist education inside the army." Mainstein, Lost Victories, p. 511.

simultaneously turn the tables on Zhukov by trapping a good part of his forces between the two relief columns and the southwest front of the pocket.<sup>28</sup>

The relief operation was to be launched on 3 February. It was mid-winter in the Ukraine and temperatures were well below zero. Moreover, a blizzard was sweeping the frozen land between the Dnieper and the Bug dropping two feet of snow on the first day of February. True, the bad weather was preventing German airborne resupplies. But that must have been considered a small price to pay for weather which was neutralizing the Soviet Air Force, buying time for the encircled force, and endangering Soviet ground units. Unfortunately for the Germans, the weather broke on the second of February. With the warm weather returned Soviet air strikes and, more importantly, came rasputitsa. While this sea of mud complicated the assembly of German relief units, the frost which returned that night concreted the armored vehicles into the deep, hard-frozen mud. These had to be freed with blowtorches on the morning when the attack was to begin. The relief would be delayed one day.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, during a commander's conference on 3 February, Gen. Wohler, the Commanding General of Eighth

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<sup>28</sup>Manstein, Lost Victories, pp. 515-6. See, also, Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, pp. 228-9.

<sup>29</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, pp. 471-2.

Army, questioned the plan's feasibility. Noting the unfavorable force ratio and the impact that the quagmire would have on the relief thrusts, he thought the overall plan too ambitious. He recommended, instead, that the attack by the III Panzer Corps be made in a more easterly direction so as to assure early coordination and mutual reinforcement with the advancing elements of the XLVII Panzer Corps.<sup>30</sup> In rejecting this proposal, Manstein complied with Hitler's directive. Moreover, it appears that he feared that Wohler's direct approach would pursue a head-to-head confrontation between Soviet armored units and his two panzer corps--a meeting engagement that the withering German Army could ill afford.

The forces inside the pocket, in an attempt to keep the enemy from separating XI and XLII Corps, had shifted their main effort to the southern portion of the perimeter.<sup>31</sup> Despite their heavy losses, they could not afford to give ground in that sector as their only remaining airfield, at Korsun, had to be protected. Requesting and receiving the authority from Eighth Army for limited withdrawals on the northern and easter sectors, the corps fell back gradually to a perimeter centering on and west of Korsun.<sup>32</sup> Their movements benefited somewhat from the

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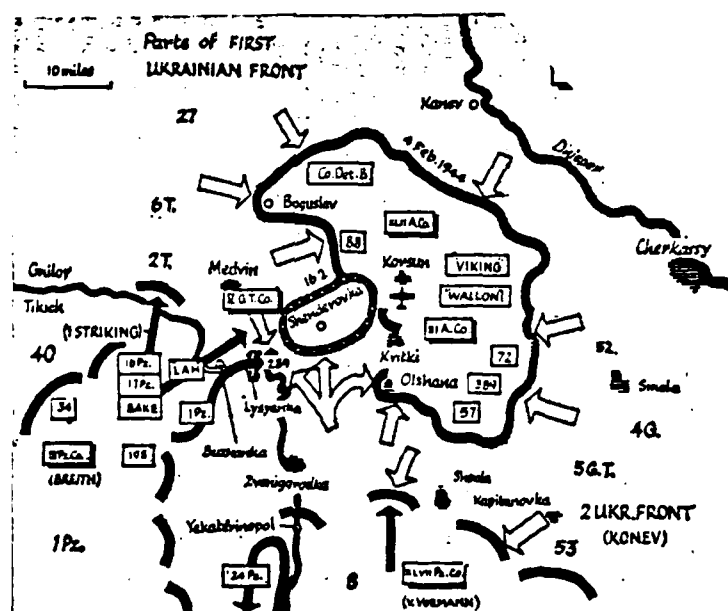
<sup>30</sup>DA Pamphlet 20-234, p. 124.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, p. 231.

planning and preparations which had taken place in the first week of January for the potential withdrawal to the Ross River. Accordingly, food stocks had been collected and transported south of the Ross River to the vicinity of Korsun. Consequently, air resupply efforts could be focused primarily on replenishing ammunition and fuel.<sup>33</sup>

Map 4-4: KORSUN-SHEVCHENKOVSKIY SITUATION  
(4-15 February 1944)



Source: Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 468.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

The attack began on 4 February in bright sunshine and a temperature well above freezing. Only part of Gen. Breith's forces, the 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions and the Heavy Panzer Regiment under Lieut. Col. Baeke, were in position for the attack. Reinforcements from Gen. Hube's First Panzer Army, the 1st Panzer Division and the Leibstandarte Panzer Division, had not yet arrived. But with his flanks covered by the 34th and 198th infantry divisions, Baeke's phalanx of 34 Tigers and 47 Panthers attacked northward blasting a hole in the Soviet outer encirclement. Vatutin rushed up the 2d Soviet Tank Army to seal off the breach. The four corps from the 2d and 6th Soviet Armies, aided by the worsening quagmire, combined to bring Breith's relief column to a halt.

The Eighth Army effort was even less promising. Gen. Vormann had awaited anxiously the arrival of Edelsheim's proven 24th Panzer Division. On the evening of 3 February, Gen. Edelsheim reported to Gen. Vormann that his division, the proud successors of the ancient East Prussian First Cavalry, would be ready for action the next morning. Vormann's plan was clear and simple. Edelsheim's 24th Panzer Division was to drive through the Russians on the morning of the fourth and, in doing so, sweep along with it the combat groups of the corps' remaining four divisions. The spearheads were already directly south of Zvenigorodka, where the Russians had linked up five days

earlier. To their front was Rotmistrov's Tank Corps--not an insurmountable obstacle for the powerful East Prussian Division. Moreover, the Soviets were quite overextended, not yet having completed the effort to reinforce both the exterior and interior encirclement rings.<sup>34</sup>

As Vormann's relief column began its final preparations, the situation at Nikopol took a turn for the worse. The Russians were threatening to break through Gen. Kleist's Army Group A. Since the departure of 24th Panzer Division, Gen. Schorner's Sixth Army had no operational reserves left. Naturally, reinforcements were requested. Hitler, worried about the Nikopol group, decided on 3 February that the 24th Panzer Division must return to Apostolovo at once.<sup>35</sup> Kleist realized that the division's return would be too late and, not wanting to deny Army Group South the armored punch that might make all the difference in getting through to the encircled grouping, offered to take an infantry division instead. Hitler, however, refused to change his orders. One of the most capable divisions in the German arsenal at the Eastern Front was thus of no use either to Manstein's Army Group South or to Kleist's Army Group A at a critical junction of the war.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>A synthesis of the cited sources by Carell, Ziemke, Erickson, Grylev, Manstein, and DA Pam 20-234.

<sup>35</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, pp. 474-5.

<sup>36</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, p. 232.

Konev, meanwhile, committed the 52d Army to the attack south of Korsun to clear German units from Olshanka and to "thicken" the belt between the encircled force and Vormann's weakened XLVII Panzer Corps. By 6 February, Manstein, Hube, and Wohler were convinced that neither of the relief columns would be able to punch through all the way to the Korsun pocket. That night they finally received Hitler's approval to develop a preparatory order for a breakout; the execution was still to depend on "further developments."<sup>37</sup>

Army Group South immediately issued new orders. After regrouping its units, III Panzer Corps was to shift its attack due east, its right flank advancing via Lisyanka toward Morentsy. At the same time, Gen. Stemmermann, the senior corps commander in the pocket, was to assume command of all forces therein and prepare for an attack in the direction of III Panzer Corps.<sup>38</sup>

During the next four days, while Stemmermann repositioned his forces inside the pocket, Breith's III Panzer Corps inched forward through snow, mud, and fog. Small-scale attacks were conducted with the aim of bringing up enough tanks for a final push onto the pocket. On the 10th, rain softened the ground even more. Manstein and Wohler decided the final link-up attempt would have to

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<sup>37</sup>Op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>38</sup>DA Pam 20-234, pp. 110, 125-6.

be made the next day. The XI Corps, having started with only one fit division out of three, appeared on the verge of collapse. Breith's III Panzer Corps was to begin its final drive on the 11th "no matter what, and without tanks if necessary."<sup>39</sup>

The Soviets, meanwhile, spared no efforts to liquidate the encircled grouping. Konev's assault divisions, unable to split the Korsun pocket, continued to compress the tactical ring around it so that, by the evening of 10 February, the pocket had been reduced to a perimeter six miles by seven.<sup>40</sup> Also on the 10th, General von Seydlitz called for capitulation and promised the Germans "good food and accommodation, complete safety, and employment of units in a body under their own officers."<sup>41,42</sup> According to Gen. Lieb's (XLII Corps) diary, this declaration had no effect on the morale of the troops.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, he admitted that "nothing gets done unless officers are constantly behind (the German soldiers)."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, p. 232.

<sup>40</sup>Erickson, The Road to Berlin, p. 177.

<sup>41</sup>Seydlitz was captured at Stalingrad by the Russians. Thereafter, he became the leader of the National "Free Germany" Committee composed of German officers in Russian hands.

<sup>42</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 485.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid. Also quoted by DA Pam 20-234, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup>DA Pam 20-234, p. 112.



Spurred by a mood of near desperation, III Panzer Corps attacked early on the 11th, its forward elements pushing through into the southern quarter of Lisyanka and establishing three small bridgeheads across the narrow but fairly deep Gniloy Tikich River.<sup>45</sup> The concentration of Soviet 6th and 2d Tank Armies on the outer ring, however, prevented any further advance. Inside the pocket, Stemmermann executed a local counterattack to the southwest in order to threaten from the rear the Soviet force which was blunting III Panzer Corps' relief effort. This attack reached the villages of Khilki and Komarovka.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, the III Panzer Corps' leading elements, the 1st Panzer Division and Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke, had pushed to the northern outskirts of Lisyanka--only two miles away from Hill 239. A mere six miles from the encircled units, Hill 239 was considered crucial to the relief effort because it commanded the approaches to Khilki and Komarovka.<sup>47</sup>

Stalin was livid with his commanders for having permitted the encircled grouping to breakout in the Shanderovka-Stablev area. Directing severe criticism toward Zhukov and the two front commanders, Stavka ordered

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<sup>45</sup>DA Pam 20-234, p. 112.

<sup>46</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, p. 232.

<sup>47</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 478.

that the German forces be quickly liquidated.<sup>48</sup> Konev was given control of the 27th Army to complete the mission of the interior ring while Vatutin was ordered to eliminate the relief forces. Demanding a better performance from the ground troops and the air force, Stalin recalled Khudyakov (Stavka "representative" for air force matters) to Moscow and sent Marshall Novikov, the Soviet Air Force commander, himself. The Second Air Army was specifically tasked to prevent any German supply or support for the encircled divisions; the Fifth Air Army was assigned to support Vatutin's operations on the outer encirclement.

The seven tank and mechanized corps from 6th and 2d Tank Armies and 5th Guards Tank Army intensified their counterattacks against the German relief columns. The Soviet V Guards Tank Corps was specifically tasked with the mission of securing Hill 239.<sup>49</sup> Attacking from Medvin, the corps prevented the German III Panzer Corps from seizing control of Hill 239. With all his units desperately fighting for preservation, Breith reported that he could not get through to the pocket. Manstein had reached the conclusion earlier that day. He told Wohler that Stemmermann would have to be given a directive to mass his forces for an all-or-nothing attempt at breaking out.<sup>50</sup>

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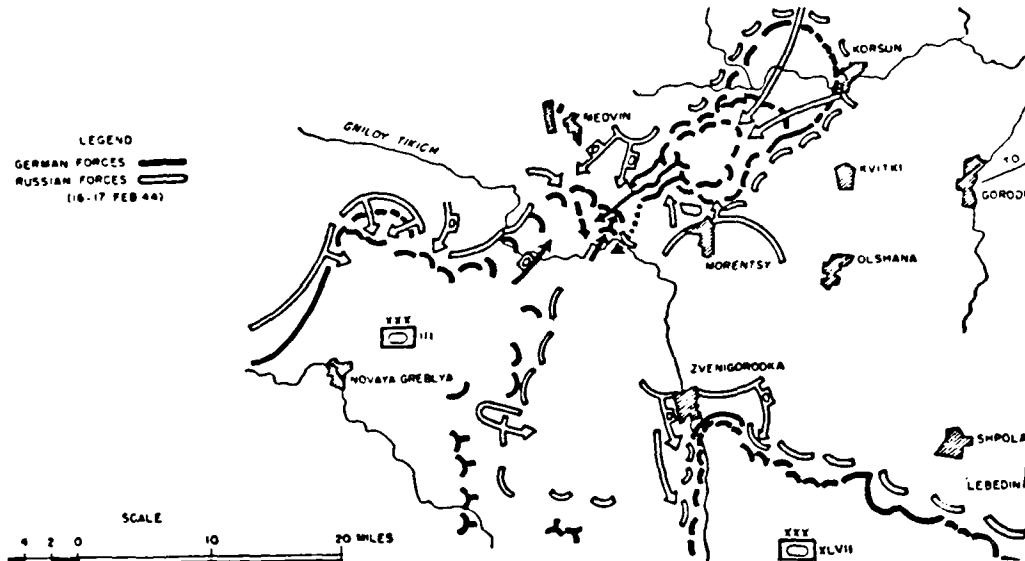
<sup>48</sup>Erickson, The Road to Berlin, pp. 177-8.

<sup>49</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 479.

<sup>50</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, p. 233.

At 1105 hours of 15 February, Wohler radioed Stemmermann: "Capacity for action of III Panzer Corps limited. Group Stemmermann must perform breakthrough as far as Dzhurzentsy/Hill 239 by its own effort. There link up with III Panzer Corps."<sup>51</sup> This order was ambiguous in one important point. It left unsaid that Hill 239, in spite of continuing attempts by III Panzer Corps, was not in the hands of the relieving German force. Stemmermann concluded, understandably, that when he reached the range of supporting fire from the commanding hill, he would receive friendly assistance.

Map 4-5: SITUATION, 16 FEBRUARY 1944



Source: DA Pamphlet 20-234, p. 127.

<sup>51</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 485.

Stemmermann, however, must have suspected the gravity of the situation. On the 16th he radioed Eighth Army: "Group Stemmermann can break through the enemy along its own front but will not be able to force second breakthrough through enemy in front of III Panzer Corps."<sup>52</sup> Clearly, he correctly deduced that the precondition for a successful breakout of his encircled force was the liquidation of the Soviet exterior force in zone. Such a demand, unfortunately, was beyond the capability of Manstein, Wohler, or Breith's mauled III Panzer Corps. One might argue, given these concerns, that Wohler's orders were deliberately vague about the dangerous circumstances involving Hill 239 so as not to discourage Stemmermann's battered divisions from the outset--they would need all the courage and confidence they could muster to complete their risky enterprise. Would Stemmermann mount his breakout if he was told of it? Or would he hesitate and waver as Paulus had done at Stalingrad 14 months earlier? The uncertainties that had led to the fatal postponement of the breakout order to Paulus had ended in catastrophe. That same spectre was mounting again. Hitler, despite all of Manstein's arguments, still refused to authorize a breakout of the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy encirclement.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 486.

Disregarding all questions of conditions, responsibility, and authority, Manstein radioed the following laconic but clear order to Stemmermann on the 16th: "Password Freedom, objective Lisyanka, 2300 hours."<sup>53</sup> Stemmermann's order read, in part, as follows:

At 2300, on 16 February, Task Force B, 72d Division, and 5th SS Panzer Division Wiking will attack in a southwesterly direction from the line Khilki-Komarovka, break the enemy's resistance by a bayonet assault, and throw him back in continuous attack toward the southwest, in order to reach Lisyanka and there to join forces with elements of III Panzer Corps. Compass number 22 (see note 54) indicates the general direction of the attack. This direction is to be made known to each individual soldier. The password is: "Freedom."

For the attack and breakout each division will be organized in five successive waves, as follows: First wave: one infantry regiment reinforced by one battery of light artillery (at least eight horses per gun, plus spare teams) and one engineer company. Second wave: antitank and assault gun units. Third wave: remainder of infantry (minus one battalion), engineers, and light artillery. Fourth wave: all our wounded that are fit to be transported, accompanied by one infantry battalion. Fifth wave: supply and service units.<sup>55</sup>

The rear guard, under the direct command of General Stemmermann, will be formed by

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<sup>53</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 486.

<sup>54</sup>The German magnetic compass of World War II had 32 consecutively numbered questions. Number 22 equates to an azimuth of 236 degrees.

<sup>55</sup>Note that the sixth division, the 389th Infantry Division, was deactivated a week earlier. Its 200 men were attached to the 57th.

the 57th and 88th Divisions, which will protect the rear and the flanks of the forces launching the breakout attack. By 2300 on 16 February, the rear guard divisions will withdraw from the present locations to a previously determined defense line; further withdrawals will be ordered by General Stemmermann, depending on the progress of the breakout.

The entire medium artillery and certain specifically designated units of light artillery will support the attack. They will open fire at 2300 on 16 February, making effective use of their maximum range. Subsequently, all artillery pieces are to be destroyed in accordance with special instructions (see note 56).

The radios of each division will be carried along on pack horses. To receive signal communications from corps, each division will, if possible, keep one set open at all times, but in any event every hour on the hour. The corps radio will be open for messages from divisions at all times.

The corps command post will be, until 2000, 16 February, at Shenderovka; after 2000, at Khilki. From the start of the attack the corps commander will be with the leading regiment of the 72d Division.<sup>57</sup>

Hence, Lieb (XLII Corps) was told to command the assault force. Stemmermann (XI Corps) was to remain with the rear guard. Manstein waited out the night aboard his command

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<sup>56</sup> Because of the weather fluctuations and the ground conditions, it had been decided that heavy equipment would not be towed during the breakout. Hence, to prevent its capture by the Soviets, the equipment was to be destroyed to the extent possible.

<sup>57</sup> DA Pamphlet, 20-234, p. 114.

train in Uman, where First Panzer Army had its headquarters.<sup>58</sup>

During the day of 16 February, the 1st Panzer Division and Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke tried again to reach Dzhurzentsy, but they were unable to push beyond the northern tip of Lisyanka. In the afternoon, the Soviets retook Komarovka, on the southern anchor of the breakout front. The loss of this shoulder endangered the southern flank, particularly the elements which were to follow the first assault waves.

On the line of departure, Task Force B was on the right (north) in Khilki, the 72d Infantry Division in the center, and the SS Wiking Division in the south (see Map 4-5). After Komarovka was lost, the latter two divisions had to occupy the sector originally intended for one. At this time, the total strength of the encircled force was 45,000 men, including some 2,000 wounded and medical personnel that were to be left behind.<sup>59</sup>

The attack began on time in a starless and moonless night. Though the weather was barely below the freezing mark, the icy wind swirling the ground snow made

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<sup>58</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, p. 234.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. Although Lieb had initially decided to evacuate the German wounded, after consulting with Stemmermann they concluded that it would be best for the overall force to leave them behind as their transportation assets were almost nonexistent. See Lieb's diary, as translated and quoted, in part, in DA Pam 20-234, pp. 108-13.

it feel much colder. Fortunately, it was a tail wind for the marching columns and a head wind for the Soviets, all in all, favorable weather for an enterprise seeking stealth. Using only knives and bayonets as instructed, the leading regiments cut through the Soviet outpost line and tactical encircling ring catching the enemy by surprise. The 258th Regiment of Task Force B met hardly any resistance until it arrived at the Russian line between Dzhurzhentsy and Hill 239, which it pushed through rather easily. It linked up with the 1st Panzer Regiment of the relieving 1st Panzer Division at the northern tip of Lisyanka by 0500.<sup>60</sup> The 105th Grenadier Regiment, leading the assault of the 72d Infantry Division, fared even better. But Armored Reconnaissance Battalion 5, spearheading the Wiking Division's assault, was not so fortunate. Passing east of Dzhurzhentsy, it encountered heavy machine gun, antitank, and tank fire. It diverted one battalion to attack the Russian position while the main force turned due south, apparently to avoid heavy tank fire from the direction of Hill 239. By doing so, however, the regiment extended its distance from the main body and placed itself southeast of the link-up point. To reach the town of Lisyanka, it had to cross the Gniloy Tikich River. Having gone south of the crossing site, it

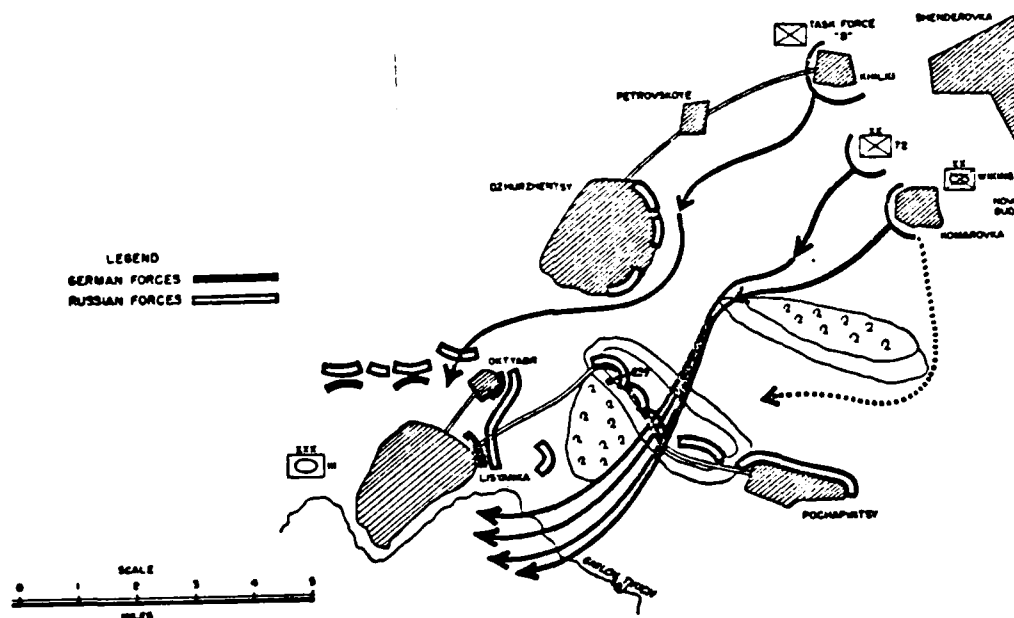
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<sup>60</sup>Units involved were derived from Carell. Scorched Earth, pp. 489-91; time, Ziemke, Op.cit., p. 234.



was forced to swim across. All of the heavy equipment which had come that far stayed on the east bank; and most of the weapons were discarded in the frenzied crossing of the rapid flowing river. Even so, many soldiers drowned, the first of thousands who shared the same fate in that icy body of water.<sup>61</sup>

Map 4-6: THE BREAKOUT



Source: DA Pamphlet 20-234, p. 116.

<sup>61</sup>Carell, Op. cit., provides a chilling account of the human drama that took place at the river. See, especially, pp. 498-505.

The next waves joined in the breakout effort. But, subjected to heavy enemy fire and armored thrusts, the mass of German troops breaking out of the pocket deviated from their original direction of attack. Instead of approaching the forward rescue position established by the III Panzer Corps, they followed the "path of least resistance" heading, like their comrades of Armored Reconnaissance Battalion 5 before them, south of the link-up site. Exacerbating the situation, Lieb had been separated from his signal unit and thus had no radio; and Stemmermann's radios had been destroyed by enemy artillery fire. Hence, when the Soviet V Guards Tank Corps counterattacked the breakout force, neither leader was able to exert the moral influence over his command.

Lieb had anticipated such a deterioration of command and control. Two entries in his diary on 15 February reflect his concern:

With me, at my command post, were the three division commanders with whom I am supposed to perform the miracle tomorrow. One of them is doing this for the first time, the two others are old hands.

I left no doubt in their minds that, in my opinion, this is going to be one giant snafu, and that they should not get rattled, no matter what happens. You need a guardian angel to bring you through this kind of thing.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Translated and quoted in DA Pamphlet 20-234, p. 113.

The details of the breakout are tactical in nature and, consequently, will be omitted from this account. In all, 30,000 German soldiers escaped annihilation. It appears that Manstein and the two army commanders were pleased and relieved to have gotten that many out. The two corps had been spared the fate suffered by the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad. In this case, too, Hitler had called for the pocket to be held. In the end, however, he consented retroactively to the operation ordered by Manstein.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, the psychological site of the men who survived the operation was such that Manstein decided he would have to send all survivors back into Poland for "rest and recuperation." First Panzer Army reported:

It must...be recognized that these troops were encircled since 28 January and, consciously or subconsciously, had the fate of Stalingrad before their eyes.

It observed that the "inner substance" was still there, but added,

One must not fail to recognize that only the few soldiers who possess inborn toughness, as opposed to that which might be instilled by military discipline, would be able to withstand such strain more than once.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Manstein, Op. cit., p. 517.

<sup>64</sup>First Panzer Army after-action report, dated 18 February 1944. Translated and quoted, in part, by Ziemke, Op. cit., p. 113.

## OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

The analysis of the Demyansk Operation in the last chapter included some general observations pertaining to the relationship between the four primary variables of the combat power model and the war on the Eastern Front. These generalities established the start point for subsequent analytical study of the constraints imposed upon, and opportunities presented to, both antagonists of that prodigious struggle. Of the observations proffered, three seem particularly significant. First, the vastness of the Soviet plains can be deemed a contributing factor to the eventual superiority of Soviet relative combat power. That is, the immense space provided the Soviets time with which to relocate key industry, to mobilize the Russian production system, and to bring the German invaders to their "culminating point."<sup>65</sup>

Second, as the operational style of war on the Eastern Front changed from a blitzkrieg to a more static form, the Soviets benefited proportionately. Invariably, the attritional style of war offers more advantages to the side with greater numbers. Unable to match Allied production efforts, Germany should have maintained, above all, a maneuver-oriented style of warfare at the operational

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<sup>65</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 528.

level to achieve its strategic aim. Instead, Hitler became increasingly fixed on the idea of retaining terrain as if ground in and of itself would provide a haven for his illusory objectives.

The third generalization was the maturation of Soviet operational art. Simply put, the harmony achieved among Soviet operational doctrine, organization, and systems by 1944 matched the material superiority and the Soviet penchant for offensive action. Consequently, the decisive results which the Soviets were about to achieve should not have been unforeseen.

These might be noted again in the analysis of the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy Operation which follows.

#### Firepower

During the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy Operation, the Soviets employed their advantage in war resources more judiciously than they had done at Demyansk. They again enjoyed a quantitative advantage in men, guns, armored vehicles, and aircraft. More important, however, was the modification of their view regarding the application of their combat power so as to bring about the desired effects.

While they continued to adhere to a broad-front philosophy aimed at preventing the German forces from concentrating sufficient armored reserves for a decisive

counter blow, no longer were Soviet forces equally distributed along this broad front. On the contrary, forces were massed at those areas where success was being realized so as to achieve the overwhelming combat power necessary for exploitation to German operational depths. The 1st Ukrainian Front's 27th, 40th, 2d Tank, and 6th Tank Armies in the area of Belaya Tserkov represented this effort in the north; 2d Ukrainian Front's 52d, 53d, 4th Guards, and 5th Guards Tank Armies north of Kirovograd achieved the decisive concentration in the south.

As for the Germans, while the operation must be considered successful in that a preponderance of the encircled force was extricated, one can deduce a number of shortcomings concerning firepower effects. Two of these are operationally significant. First was the failure to concentrate the relief force against one decisive point of the Soviet external ring of encirclement. The III Panzer corps and XLVII Corps conducted their attack against different sectors of the encircling ring. Consequently, there was insufficient combat power concentrated at the decisive point, in time and space, with which to achieve the breakthrough. As a result, the safety corridor through which the encircled force could withdraw safely was never established.

The second error involved the breakout force. The failure to integrate the various arms into the march order

made each arm unnecessarily more susceptible to enemy fire. It also complicated the efforts to synchronize the combat power of each arm. Not surprisingly, the potential combat power of the "whole" force was never attained. The phasing of the breakout force into "waves" also appears to have diminished the combat power potential of the force. The piecemeal commitment of these waves allowed the Soviet armored and cavalry units to address each one independent of the firepower effects of the other.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, several actions undertaken by the Germans enhanced the relative firepower effects and, consequently, contributed to the successful extrication of the encircled force. The first involved the airfields in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy area. By focusing their defense around these critical lifelines, the Germans enhanced their relative combat power. While they were not usable as forward bases for fighter aircraft, several hundred casualties were evacuated and several thousand tons of resupplies were air landed into these airfields. There can be no question that the extrication of the encircled force must be attributed, to a large degree, to the concerted effort directed toward securing these critical lines of communication in order to sustain the force until the impending breakout effort.

The second noteworthy action which enhanced the firepower effects and, hence, contributed to the

successful extrication of the encircled force was the German attack both from within and without the encircled force. Admittedly, the two efforts were not as well orchestrated as one might have hoped. This was due primarily to Hitler's refusal to relinquish his "control" of the terrain. Nevertheless, the threat to the Soviet forces from two sides did have a telling effect on the operation. Principally, Soviet firepower had to be directed so as to attend to contingencies along both rings of encirclement. Indeed, one might conclude a priori that the degree of success experienced by the Germans can be traced back to the Soviets being faced with this "horns of a dilemma "

Lastly, the use of surprise by the breakout force achieved an initial superiority of combat power at the decisive point and a lasting psychological advantage as well. Several factors aided the German breakout effort which sought stealth above all. The attack began on a starless and moonless night, a condition favoring the attacking force. Further, the icy headwind enticed the defending Soviet soldiers, fatigued and expecting a pause in the action, to seek shelter from the falling temperature, thus reducing their mental alertness. Most importantly, the "bayonet assault" by the leading units, reverting to direct and indirect fires only upon detection, tipped the balance of relative combat power in favor of the Germans. The cumulative effects of these factors



enabled most of the leading regiments to cut through the Soviet tactical ring of encirclement rather easily--a feat which served to reinforce the Soviet paranoia of German warfighting superiority.

### Maneuver

The foregoing discussion reflects clearly the intricate relationship between firepower and maneuver. Because only through maneuver can the optimum effects of firepower be realized, it is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the latter intelligibly without making reference to the former. Similarly, maneuver should be considered in concert with the desired firepower effects to be derived therefrom.

The most striking feature of the Soviet encirclement of the two German corps was their rapid exploitation of favorable conditions by the early commitment of mobile groups. Embryos of today's operational maneuver groups (OMG), they were poised to quickly exploit the success of forward assault elements into the enemy's operational depths. Accordingly, the 1st Ukrainian Front committed Shtevnev's Tank Corps within 24 hours after 6th Tank Army had assigned its 233d Tank Brigade to conduct a tactical exploitation. Meanwhile, 2d Ukrainian Front committed the 5th Guards Tank Army to the exploitation within 24 hours after the attack of its leading assault units. The effect

of these maneuvers was twofold: the two German corps were tactically encircled and, almost simultaneously, the armored units were thrust to operational depths so as to establish an external (operational) ring of encirclement. To this point, one must admire the degree to which the Soviet commanders were able to implement the recently disseminated doctrine for the annihilation of large encircled groupings.

Another noteworthy feature of the Soviet encirclement effort was the use of second echelon armies. Vatutin (1st Ukrainian Front) discerned the counterattack by the German III Panzer Corps in time to commit his 2d Tank Army. This timely maneuver sealed the breach of Vatutin's external ring of encirclement thereby denying a withdrawing corridor to the two encircled corps. His appreciation for the operation's center of gravity is particularly noteworthy. Recognizing Hill 239 as the decisive terrain for the relief operation (only a few miles from the encircled force to the east and the river crossing sites to the west; and it dominated the entire valley around it), he specifically directed the Soviet V Guards Tank Corps to hold it at all costs. The operational concept was sound. Unfortunately for Vatutin (and fortunately for the Germans) the tactical failure to conduct aggressive patrolling allowed the breakout forces to achieve surprise--a disadvantage from which the Soviets were not to recover

during this operation. Further to the south, Konev (2d Ukrainian Front) also discerned XLVII Corps' counterattack and committed his 52d Army to thicken the belt thereby stopping the relief column well short of its objective.

The German achievements were, as discussed previously under "firepower" effects, threefold: maneuvering to secure the critical lifelines (airfields around Korsun), attacking both from within and without, and maneuvering to achieve surprise. The effort, however, could have been more successful had the Germans adhered to some fundamental principles. Unity of effort towards a single, achievable objective should have prevailed from the beginning. It was ludicrous to expect two weakened corps (III Panzer and XLVII) to successfully envelop and destroy several enemy armies and then to link up with the encircled force. Moreover, Manstein and Hitler should have realized that the combined effects of two corps employed to a single effort produces results which are more than additive--the synergistic effect.

Secondly, it is likely that the operation would have been more successful had the attacks from within and without the Korsun area been initiated before the combat power of the relief and encircled force had been dissipated. Of course, for such an operation to be properly orchestrated, it is imperative that the operational commander be given the authority and latitude to use his

knowledge of operational art. Unfortunately for the German soldiers involved in this operation, Hitler did not see fit to provide either of those to Manstein.

Lastly, it seems plausible to assert that the counterattack either to relieve the encircled units or to maneuver against the encircling force should have been executed without delay. Any indecisiveness on the part of the counterattacking force allows the encircling force time with which to strengthen its defenses, reduce the pocket, continue to drive forces to greater depths, or any combination thereof. Again, decentralized authority for such execution is essential. Equally important is the retention of an adequate operational reserve and the preparation of various contingencies for the employment of such a force. As in any other attack, when the time comes to execute the plan, it must be determined whether or not the means available are sufficient to substantiate the plan as a prudent one--only the operational commander can make such a determination in a timely fashion.

#### Protection

At this point, there is only the need to reemphasize the salient points that have already been made in the other two analytical discussions. The static, or attritional, style of warfare which is oriented on terrain rather than on the objective which will bring about the

strategic aim made the German force unnecessarily vulnerable. Had Hitler permitted his operational commanders the freedom to maneuver and not to be restricted by territorial considerations, the German Wehrmacht might have remained a formidable opponent.

Also, the Germans failed to insure a combined arms philosophy and a unity of effort, focused on a single objective, during the operation. As stated before, these shortcomings prevented the counterattack forces from wresting the initiative from the Soviets and from attaining the necessary synchronization with which to accomplish their mission while protecting their force. Moreover, the lack of effective command and control during the breakout effort caused a disintegration of morale and esprit which resulted in unwarranted losses of men and equipment. A more timely decision to execute the breakout would have gone a long way toward enhancing the preservation of the force.

For their part, the Soviet commanders overextended their supply lines and the limits of their soldiers. At the decisive moment when the encircled forces were most vulnerable to being severed into two or more "disarticulated" parts, the Soviets were unable to maintain the momentum necessary to do so. Furthermore, by allowing the breakout force to achieve surprise, they lost for the remainder of the operation the overwhelming

advantage in relative combat power that they had previously achieved.

Again, the Germans executed many actions in a sterling fashion. The night attack, the bayonet assault, and the innate ability for some obscure junior leader to take charge at a decisive point (the river crossing as an example) served to protect the force while simultaneously degrading the Soviet combat power effects.

#### Leadership

Field Marshal Sir William Slim wrote, "An army whose plan of campaign is founded on fundamental errors in organization cannot hope for success unless it has vast superiority over the enemy in numbers and material."<sup>66</sup> Germany certainly did not possess any superiority over Russia in numbers and material. And it became clear that Hitler's centralization of command and control over the army was the fundamental error that no amount of operational genius on the part of his commanders could overcome. But Slim also wrote that there are "lessons to be learned from defeat--they are more than from victory."<sup>67</sup>

The failures and successes of both Soviet and German leadership in the planning and execution of the

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<sup>66</sup>Slim, Defeat into Victory, p. 92.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy Operation have been addressed. Two facets of a military commander in such an operation are nonetheless worthy of further scrutiny. The first of these pertains to the special leadership demands on the operational commander confronted with the phenomenon of having part or all of his force become encircled. The mental strain of combat while encircled appears to have been so great that it led the army commander to comment that, "only the few soldiers who possess inborn toughness, as opposed to that which might be instilled by military discipline, would be able to withstand such strain more than once."<sup>68</sup> In fact, German concern over the combat ineffectiveness of units after being encircled led to their adoption of the term Kesselfieber (encirclement fever).<sup>69</sup>

It was alarming to read about the rapid disintegration of discipline, and consequently, combat effectiveness as a consequence to encirclement. Mobs of unarmed soldiers trying to proceed on their own, captured transportation means loaded down with superfluous equipment, and other similar depressing reports were not uncommon during the breakout of XLII and XI Corps. Such breaches of discipline had a cascading effect on the morale and confidence of soldiers. My own limited exposure

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<sup>68</sup>Ziemke, Op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>69</sup>Lucas, War on the Eastern Front, p. 178.

to such a situation confirms the general tone of the after-action reports.<sup>70</sup>

Studies by senior German officers after the war stressed high standards of discipline, swift and drastic countermeasures to breaches thereto, and the force of character of the commander as key ingredients for retaining combat effectiveness.<sup>71</sup> That strength of character should rate so highly is not surprising. After all, Clausewitz listed it as a key ingredient of military genius.<sup>72</sup>

The second facet of the operational commander concerns the concept of "vision." The French refer to it as coup d'oeil. The concept refers to the quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection. To the operational commander, it is in part the ability to anticipate future operational requirements based on an almost intuitive appreciation of the factors of METT-T/S, the associated risk, and the timeliness of the decision.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>In April and May 1972, I had the opportunity to serve as an advisor to the 15th ARVN Regiment which was attached to the 21st ARVN Division in its effort to relieve the siege around An Loc, Vietnam. The relief column became encircled during the operation.

<sup>71</sup>DA Pam 20-234, p. 141.

<sup>72</sup>Clausewitz, On War, pp. 100-12.

<sup>73</sup>METT-T/S is an abbreviation for mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, and time-space considerations.



That Manstein possessed a degree of such "vision" is certain. He had correctly assessed Soviet intentions as well as the relative strengths and weaknesses. He was unsuccessful, however, in obtaining the necessary authority from Hitler to carry out his plan for stabilizing the southern wing of the Eastern Front. Under the realm of resourcing the force, he took steps to concentrate all available fighter aircraft, bombers, and transporters to the operation. And finally, unable to maintain even a modicum of respect for Hitler, he ordered Stemmermann to execute the breakout on 16 February 1944.

#### SUMMARY

The Demyansk case study led to the formulation of three general principles associated with a successful operational commander whose force, or part thereof, incurred encirclement. These were: (1) counterattack early, (2) shift or reallocate resources, and (3) anticipate future operational requirements.

All three principles were confirmed by the analysis of the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy Operation. Moreover, five additional generalizations were derived.

\* Massing of the relief forces as combined arms, both tactically and operationally, may be necessary in

order to achieve sufficient combat power at the decisive point.

- \* Airfields and air lines of communication may be the decisive centers of gravity for sustaining, and maintaining maximum combat effectiveness of, the encircled force.

- \* Attacks from both within and without the encirclement places the encircling force in a "horns of a dilemma" and produces a synergistic result both physically and psychologically.

- \* Surprise and deception may be the quintessential principles in operations involving encircled forces.

- \* The Operational Commander must be granted the resources and freedom of action in order to extricate the encircled force (or achieve similar operational objectives consistent with the strategic aim).

In the next case study, we will explore these principles in more detail.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE KAMENETS-PODOL'SKIY OPERATION

The essence of all military planning is timing. A brilliant plan wrongly timed put into operation too early or too late, is at the best a lame thing and at the worst may be a disaster.

--Field Marshal Sir William Slim<sup>1</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

In March 1944, German Army Group South was involved in heavy fighting with Russian forces near the junction of the pre-war borders of Russia, Rumania, and Poland. A Russian breakthrough early in the month severed contact between the First and Fourth Panzer Armies. Manstein, the commander of Army Group South, ordered the First Panzer Army to close the gap.<sup>2</sup>

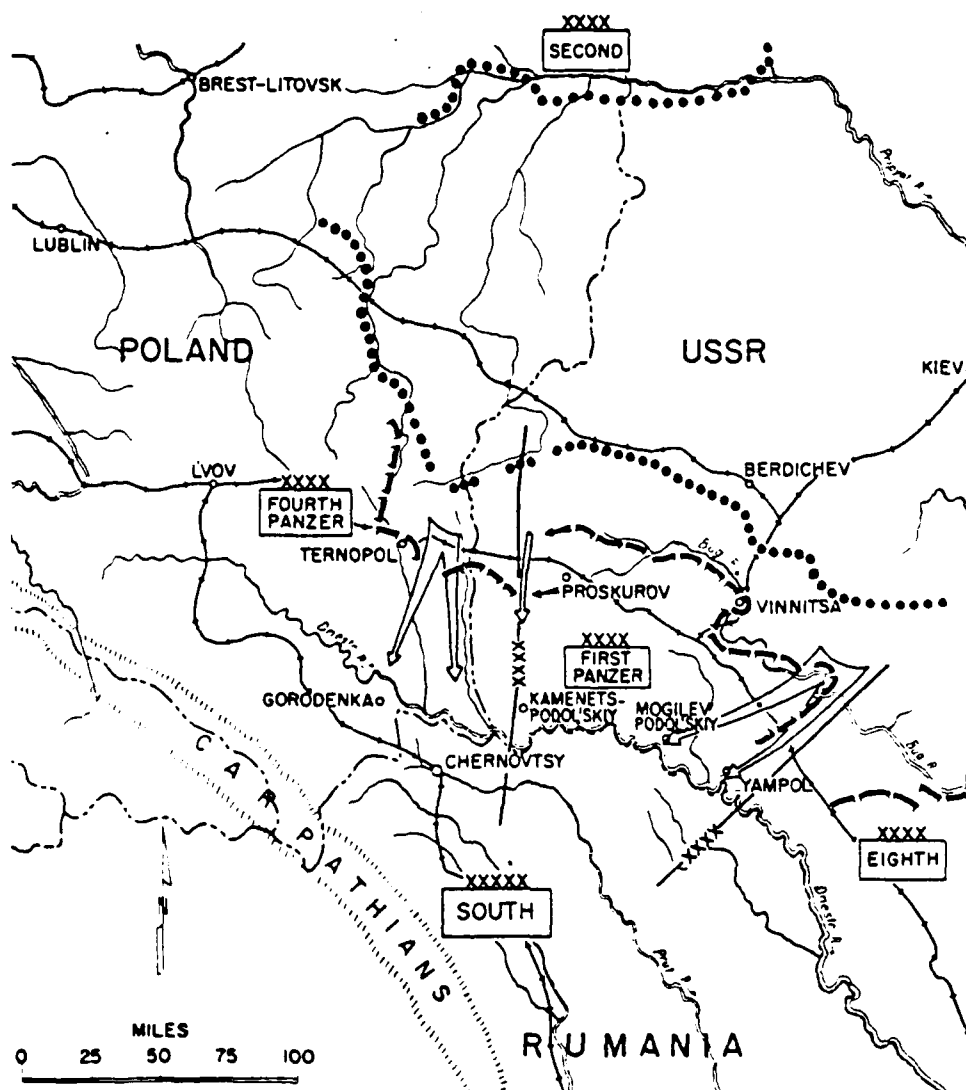
The First Panzer Army, under General der Panzertruppen Hans Hube, reestablished tenuous contact with the

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<sup>1</sup>Slim, Defeat into Victory (New York: David McKay, 1961), p. 252.

<sup>2</sup>Maj. Gen. Hellmuth Reinhardt, "Encirclement and Breakout of First Panzer Army," in Selected German Army Operations on the Eastern Front (Operational) (Carlisle Barracks: U. S. Army War College, 1983), p. 345. Reinhardt was Chief of Staff, Army Group South. After the war, he was one of a group of German officers who took part in the U. S. Army effort to record combat operations that took place on the Eastern Front.

Map 5-1: ARMY GROUP SOUTH (March 1944)



## LEGEND:

- ..... GERMAN FRONT - 1 MARCH 1944
- GERMAN FRONT - 15 MARCH 1944
- > RUSSIAN BREAKTHROUGH TO 24 MARCH 1944
- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Source: Reinhardt, "Encirclement and Breakout of First Panzer Army," p. 346.

Fourth Panzer Army on 17 March. Contact was again broken when the Russians renewed their attack and forced the right flank units of the Fourth Panzer Army to withdraw to the west. The Russians then turned the left flank of the First Panzer Army and reached the Dnestr River north of Gorodenka on 24 March.

Meanwhile another Russian attack had struck the right flank of the first Panzer Army, severing its contact with the Eighth Army. Large mobile forces poured through this second gap, crossed the Bug River, and on 18-19 March reached Yampol and Mogilev-Podol'Skiy.<sup>3</sup> The First Panzer Army had lost all contact with other army group elements. Its communication lines north of the Dnestr River were cut. Hence, for all intents and purposes, it was encircled.

#### OPERATIONAL SETTING

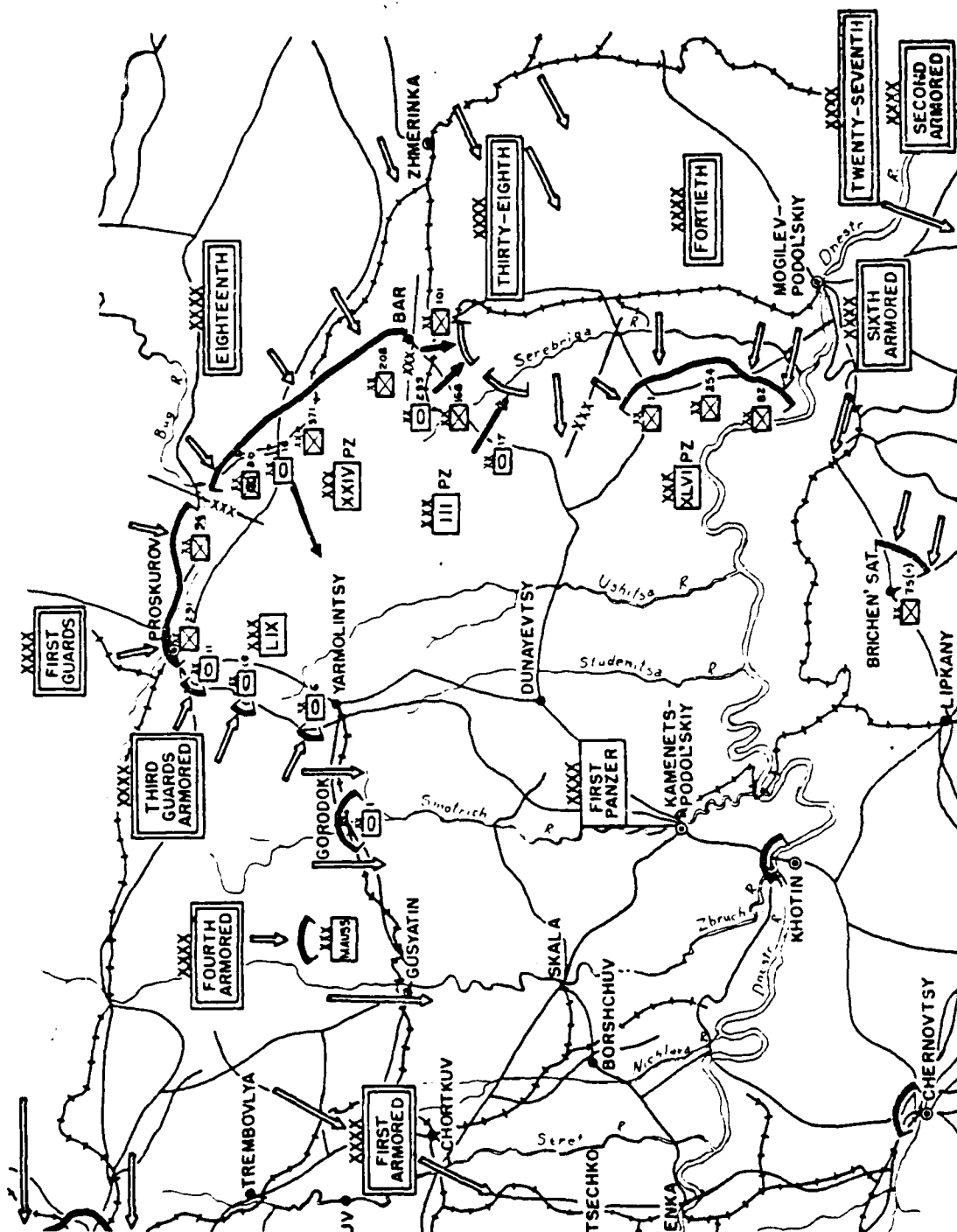
The bulk of the Russian forces operating against the First Panzer Army was controlled by the 1st Ukrainian Front.<sup>4</sup> In the north, the 1st Guards Army, with 11 infantry divisions and supported by the tanks of the 3d Guards Tank Army, was massing its forces near Proskurov for an attack designed to collapse the German left flank. West and south of these forces, the 1st and 4th Tank

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<sup>3</sup>Erickson, The Road to Berlin, p. 185.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Map 5-2: SITUATION, 23 MARCH 1944



Source: Reinhardt, p. 348.

Armies were pouring southward through the gap between the German First and Fourth Panzer Armies along the Zbruch and Seret Rivers. Elements of the 4th Tank Army had advanced through Gusyatin on their way to Skala; and the tanks of the 1st Tank Army had severed the road connecting Ternopol and Chernovtsy.<sup>5</sup>

In the south, the 27th Army and 2d and 6th Tank Armies had crossed the Dnestr River below Mogilev-Podol'skiy. The bulk of these forces seemed to be moving south in pursuit of the German Eighth Army, but the 6th Tank Army had swung westward against the far right flank of the First Panzer Army.<sup>6</sup> Between these two gigantic enveloping arms, the 18th, 38th, and 40th Armies, with a total of more than 28 infantry divisions and a number of nondivisional armored units, were exerting great pressure against the German XXIV, III, and XLVI Panzer Corps.<sup>7</sup>

#### The First Panzer Army - 23 March 1944

The XLVI Panzer Corps, on the right flank of the German First Panzer Army, was split by the Dnestr River. North of the river, the 1st, 82d, and 254th Infantry Divisions were attempting to stop the advance of the Russian 40th Army. South of the river, the 75th Infantry

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<sup>5</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, pp. 277-9.

<sup>6</sup>Erickson, The Road to Berlin, p. 185.

<sup>7</sup>Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin, pp. 185-6.

Division and elements of the 18th Artillery Division were slowly withdrawing under heavy pressure of the Soviet 6th Tank Army. There was no direct contact between the northern and southern elements of the corps.<sup>8</sup>

Between the northern flank of the XLVI Panzer Corps and the southern flank of the XXIV Corps there was a gap of approximately 25 miles. The III Panzer Corps had been committed to close this gap. While it had succeeded in narrowing the gap, the Corps was unable to halt the westward advance of the Russian 38th Army.

The XXIV Panzer Corps and LIX Corps were conducting a planned withdrawal from phase line to phase line. Proskurov was still in German hands. Southwest of that town, the 6th, 11th, and 19th Panzer Divisions were in position along the Proskurov-Kamenets railroad, holding off Russian infantry and armored attacks from the northwest; 96th and 291st Divisions were withdrawing; and 1st Panzer Division, on the corps left flank at Gorodok, had orders to hold the supply road between Yarmolintsy and Gusyatin. Russian tanks, however, had already crossed the supply road and, west of Gorodok, Russian infantry and armor were pouring southward. As a result, the LIX Corps had to draw units from the infantry divisions on its right to protect its exposed left flank.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Reinhardt, "Encirclement and Breakout of First Panzer Army," p. 34.

<sup>9</sup>Carell, Scorched Earth, pp. 510-12.



The First Panzer Army troops were exhausted. They had been fighting continuously for weeks, and had gone without rest and warm food for days at a time. Morale was low. Discipline was slack in the rear areas, and it had become necessary for the army commander to issue stringent orders and take measures to intercept stragglers.<sup>10</sup>

The army's supply bases had been shifted from Kamenets to the south bank of the Dnestr River on 20 March. During the withdrawal, a large number of supply installations were either captured by the Russians or destroyed by the Germans themselves. It had become impossible to supply the XLIV Panzer Corps and, by 23 March, service to the other corps was also interrupted. The army still had the use of a rail line south of the Dnestr River, running through Chernovtsy, but the capacity of the line was limited. Ammunition was scarce, fuel even more so. A four-day supply of rations was still available. The movement of supplies was complicated by muddy roads and traffic blocks resulting from vehicles stalled for lack of fuel. Strict orders had to be issued to clear the roads, and special traffic control detachments were set up to keep traffic moving.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 541.

<sup>11</sup>DA Pamphlet 20-234, pp. 43-5.

Terrain and Weather

The terrain in the First Panzer Army area is gently rolling, with sections of brush and woods. It is generally favorable ground for maneuvering. The region is traversed by a number of rivers flowing south to the Dnestr, many of which are about 300 feet wide and have steep banks. The Dnestr is a formidable obstacle; between Mogilev-Podol'Skiy and Us'Tsechko it is 450-750 feet wide, 6-12 feet deep, and bordered by steep cliffs several hundred feet high. Only a pontoon bridge constructed by German engineer troops at Khotin remained along this stretch.

A fairly well developed roadnet existed, though only the paved roads were of any use to the German motorized traffic. After the army's main supply routes (the L'viv--Ternopol--Proskurov--Vinnitsa highway and a parallel railroad) were lost, only four paved roads remained north of the Dnestr. South of the river, one paved highway and a railroad led from Chernovtsy to Mogilev-Podol'Skiy.<sup>12</sup>

The weather in March 1944 was typical Ukrainian. Rain and snow fell alternately, and the temperature fluctuated around the freezing point. Most of the unpaved roads were quagmires.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Reinhardt, Op. cit., pp. 351-4.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 352.

## OPERATIONAL PLAN

Following the Russian penetration between the First and Fourth Panzer Armies, Manstein had ordered Hube to anchor the right flank units of the First Panzer Army on the Dnestr River. Hube was then to leave a minimum of forces to hold his center and concentrate strong forces on his left flank to reestablish firm contact with the Fourth Panzer Army.

The army's mission was changed after the right flank of the Fourth Panzer Army was forced back southwest of Ternopol. On 23 March, Manstein directed the army to "...halt the Russian forces moving south along the Zbruch River, regain control of the Chortkuv-Yarmolintsy railroad, and extend the army's line of defense to the Seret River at Trembovlya."<sup>14</sup> Fourth Panzer Army elements including the 7th Panzer Division, 1st SS "Leibstandarte" Panzer Divisions, and 68th Infantry Division were transferred to the First Panzer Army to assist in carrying out this task. These units were still east of the Zbruch River, separated from the bulk of the Fourth Panzer Army.

Manstein further ordered Hube to shorten his lines in order to make forces available for deployment on the left flank. In addition, Hube was given operational

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 355.

control over the Hungarian VII Corps in the Stanislav-Kolomyia area to the west. The Hungarians were to establish bridgeheads on the northern bank of the Dnestr River and secure all bridges between Us'Tsechko and Galich.<sup>15</sup>

On 24 March, advance elements of the Soviet 4th Tank Army passed through Skala and attacked toward Kamenets-Podol'Skiy. Concurrently, the soviet 1st Tank Army reached the Dnestr northeast of Gorodenka and sent spearheads across the river. These moves severed the First Panzer Army's last escape routes north of the Dnestr and seriously threatened its communications lines through Kamenets-Podol'Skiy, Khotin, and Chernovtsy.

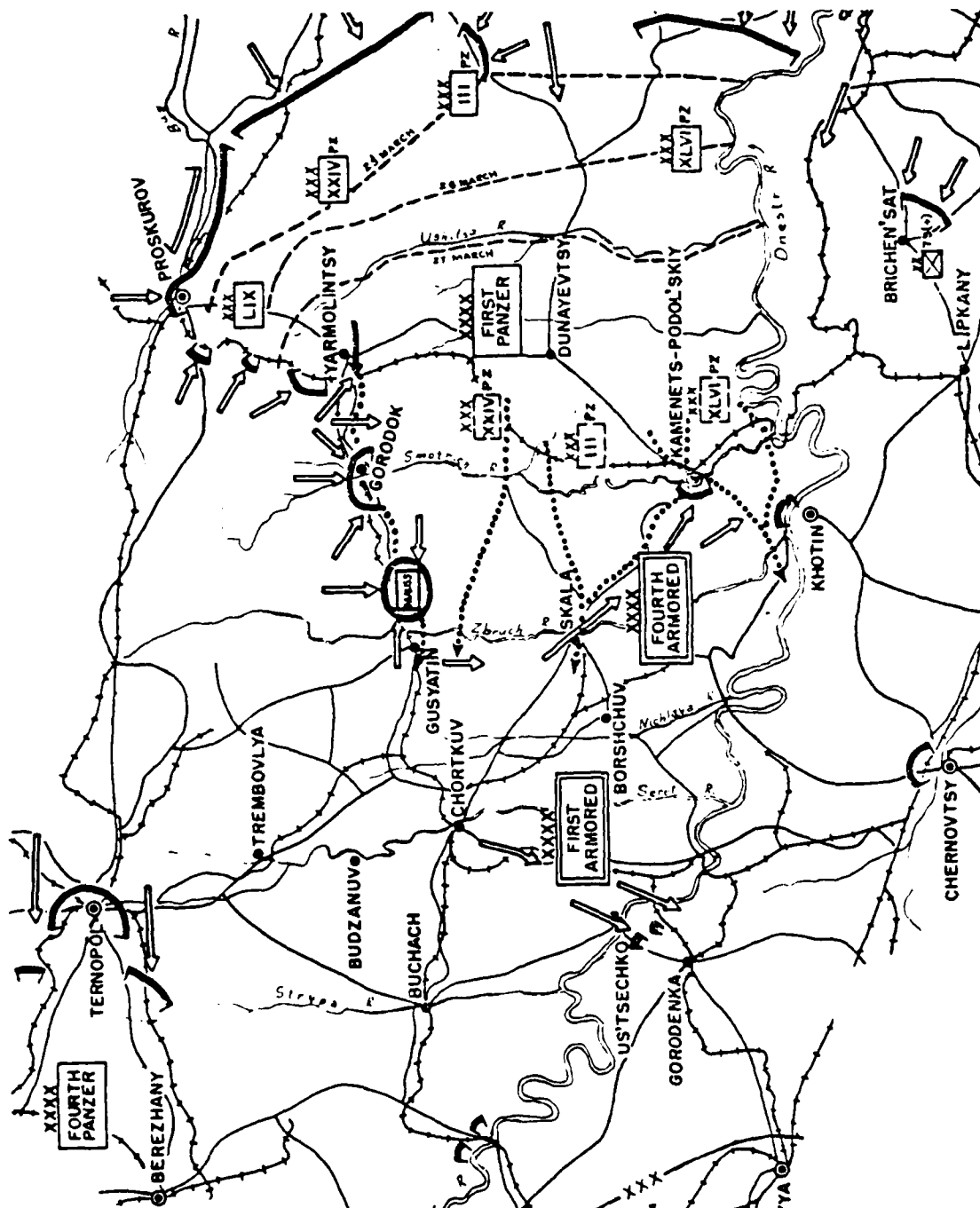
General Hube's first inclination was to attempt to breakout toward the south. An attack to the west would probably encounter strong resistance and the Germans would be seriously hampered by numerous rivers crossing their line of movement. The Russian ring of encirclement south of Kamenets appeared weaker. Also, the situation below the Dnestr would give the army greater freedom of action. Moreover, the Dnestr might prove to be a formidable obstacle to the Russians.

At the same time, it would be difficult to move the entire army across the Dnestr over the single military bridge at Khotin and the few available ferries. South of the river, the army would be confined between the Dnestr

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Map 5-3: SITUATION, 24 MARCH 1944



Source: Reinhardt, p. 408a.

and the Carpathian Mountains. Here it might not have the power to fight its way through the Russian armored forces advancing on Chernovtsy, in which case it would have to withdraw southward into Rumania.<sup>16</sup>

In Manstein's the opinion this was precisely what the Russians wanted the First Panzer Army to do. It was also what Manstein wanted at all costs to avoid. If the army withdrew to Rumania, a large gap would open between the Carpathians and the southern flank of the Fourth Panzer Army, and the Russians would be able to pour through to the west unopposed.<sup>17</sup>

If the Soviets intended to force the First Panzer Army into Rumania, it meant that they would move the bulk of their armored forces south of the Dnestr to close the trap. It followed, then, that Russian resistance to a breakout should be weaker in the west than in the south. There was also a possibility that the Fourth Panzer Army could assist a breakout attempt to the west by sending forces south to link up with the First Panzer Army. No hope of such help existed south of the river. For these reasons, Manstein ordered Hube to make his breakout effort to the west.<sup>18</sup>

Upon receipt of this order, Hube instructed his three panzer corps to send strong advance detachments to

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<sup>16</sup>Manstein, *Op. cit.*, pp. 538-40.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 538.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 540.

seize the crossing sites over the Zbruch River. Rear guard units consisting chiefly of infantry were to protect the movement from interference from the east. The LIX Corps and Task Force Mauss were to cover the army's northern flank between the Ushitsa and Zbruch Rivers, while the 75th Division and attached artillery elements (designated as Task Force Gollnick) and the Hungarian VII Corps provided what cover they could south of the Dnestr River.<sup>19</sup>

#### EXECUTION OF PLAN

The operation began on 25 March with strong panzer elements pushing west from Yarmolintsy. Russian resistance was strong, and the German tanks were unable to contact even the 1st Panzer Division at Gorodok during the day. Meanwhile, heavy Russian pressures forced German units southward and severed the important Yarmolinstky-Gusyatin road. Hube requested permission from Manstein to attempt a breakout to the south across the Dnestr River.<sup>20</sup>

A radio message from Manstein received at army headquarters at 0150 on 26 March stated tersely: "Solution west, orders follow."<sup>21</sup> Clearly, the army group commander looked upon the strategic consequences of a withdrawal to

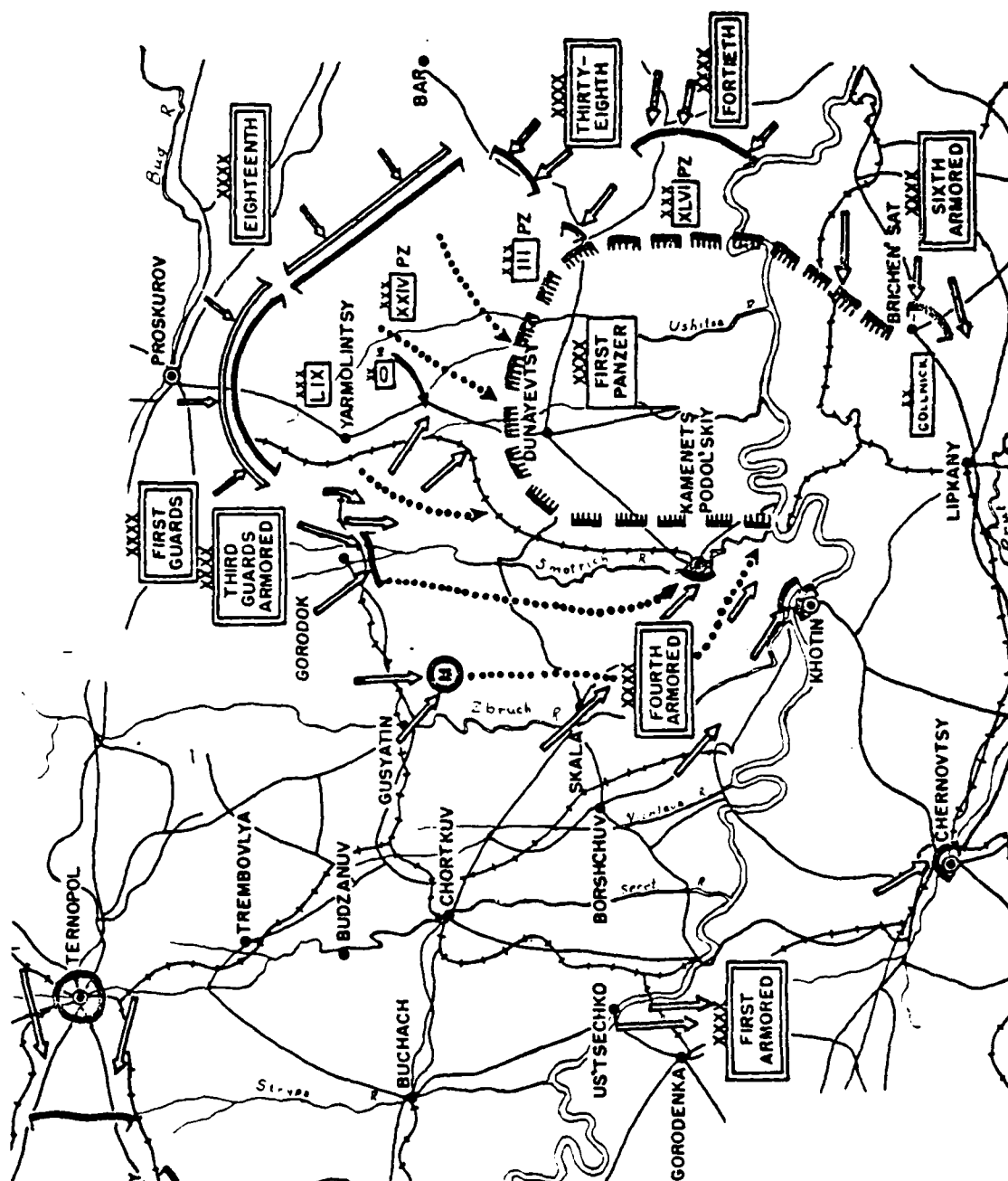
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<sup>19</sup>Reinhardt, Op. cit., p. 358.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>21</sup>Ziemke, Op. cit., p. 281.

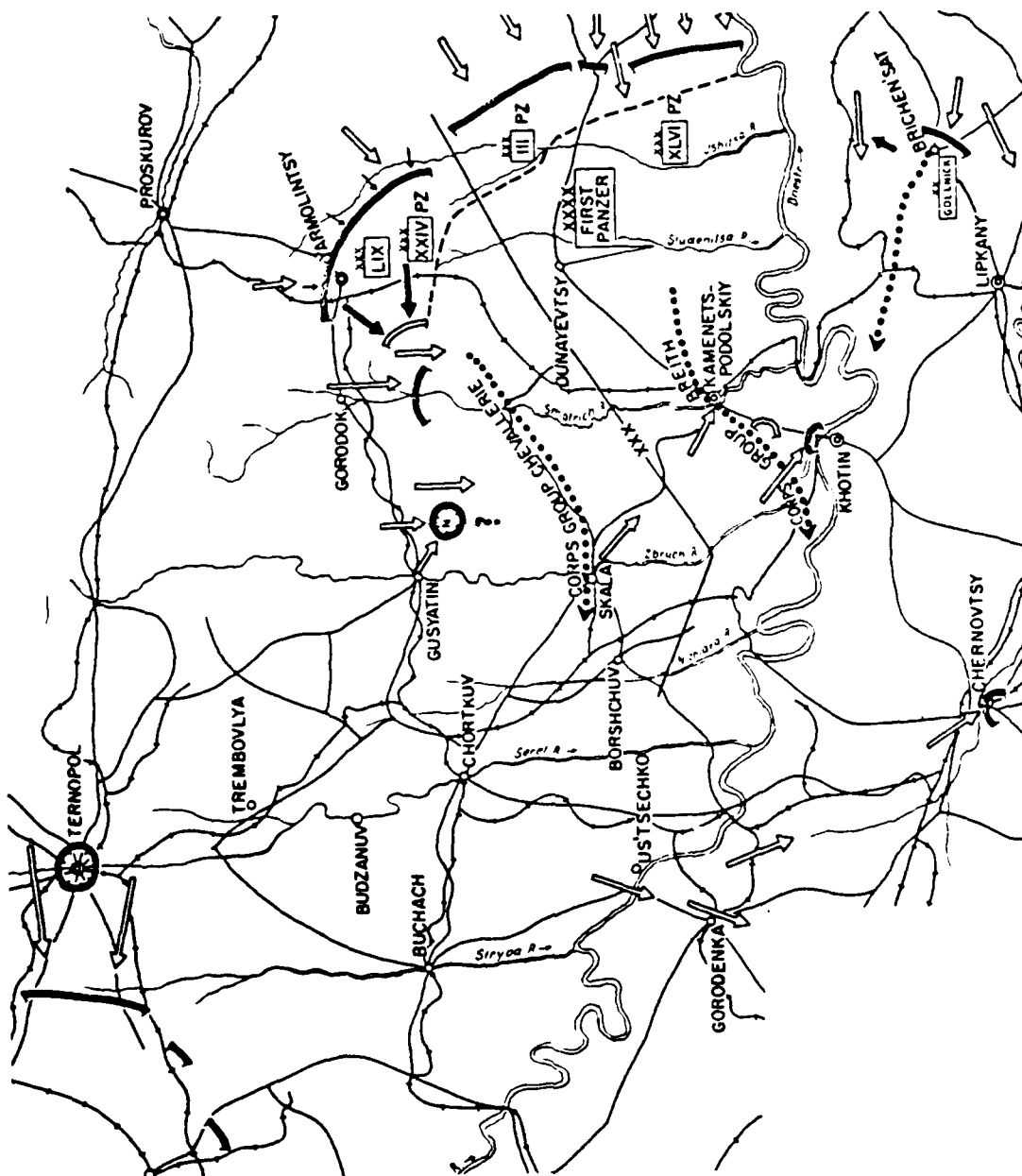
Map 5-4: SITUATION, 25 MARCH 1944



Source: Reinhardt, p. 360.



Map 5-5: SITUATION, 26 MARCH 1944  
(Operation Plan)



Source: Reinhardt, p. 363.

the south as being more harmful than the tactical difficulties inherent in a breakout to the west. Moreover, reinforcements were on their way to join the Fourth Panzer Army, and were to be sent south to link-up with the First Panzer Army.<sup>22</sup>

#### Reorganization and Planning

One of Hube's most important requirements was to reorganize his forces. Unless all movements were rigidly controlled and coordinated during the breakout, the Russians would disperse his army and destroy it piecemeal. As the means of achieving this control, and at the same time simplifying the chain of command, General Hube consolidated his forces into provisional corps groups.<sup>23</sup>

Each corps group, within its zone, was to be responsible for both the conduct of the attack to the west and the rear guard action in the east. The armored divisions of each corps group were to spearhead the army's attack, while the infantry divisions covered the rear.

The first objective of the breakout was to be the capture of crossing sites over the Zbruch River. Corps Group Chevallerie was to establish contact with the 1st Panzer Division at Gorodok and Task Force Mauss in the area between the Ushitsa and Zbruch Rivers. It was then to

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<sup>22</sup>Manstein, Op. cit., p. 540.

<sup>23</sup>Reinhardt, Op. cit., p. 361.

Figure 5-1: FIRST PANZER ARMY ORDER OF BATTLE,  
26 March 1944

Headquarters  
First Panzer Army

Corps Group Chevallerie

Hq LIX Corps  
Hq XXIV Panzer Corps

1st Panzer Division  
6th Panzer Division  
11th Panzer Division  
16th Panzer Division  
19th Panzer Division  
20th Armd Inf Division  
96th Infantry Division  
208th Infantry Division

Corps Group Breith

Hq III Panzer Corps  
Hq XLVI Pancer Corps

2nd SS Panzer Division  
17th Panzer Division  
1st Infantry Division  
82nd Infantry Division  
101st Jaeger Division  
168th Infantry Division  
254th Infantry Division  
371st Infantry Division

Task Force Mauss

1st SS Panzer Division  
7th Infantry Division  
68th Infantry Division

Task Force Gollnick

75th Infantry Division  
18th Artillery Division  
Commandant, Khotin  
All Other German Forces  
South of the Dnestr  
River.

Source: Reinhardt, p. 362.

cover the northern flank of the army between the Ushitsa and Zbruch Rivers and establish a bridgehead across the latter at Skala.

Corps Group Breith was to recapture Kamenets-Podol'Skiy, regain control of the Kamenets-Khotin road, and establish a bridgehead across the Zbruch River northwest of Khotin. Task Force Gollnick, in close contact with the south flank of Corps Group Breith, was to delay the Russians below the Dnestr River and was to retire to and hold a bridgehead at Khotin. Although each corps group was to be responsible for its own rear guard security, army headquarters was to assign phase lines and contact points for the rear guard units to insure coordination during the withdrawal.<sup>24</sup>

While the First Panzer Army made its preparations, the Russians were not idle. The 38th and 40th Armies continued their attack west. South of the river the Russians were pressing along the road to Lipkany, the Prut River, and Khotin; north of the river their main effort appeared to be southeast of Dunayevtsy. Further north, the 18th Army exerted comparatively light pressure on the withdrawing divisions of XXIV Corps. The 1st Guards and 3d Guards Tank Armies, on the shoulder of the Russian penetration, were concentrating in the area between the Ushitsa and Zbruch Rivers, pressing heavily against the

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 361-2.

German north flank and moving steadily southward through gaps in the German lines. Elements of the 4th Tank Army had penetrated into Kamenets-Podol'Skiy. The 1st Tank Army had crossed the Dnestr at Gorodenka and was driving toward Chernovtsy, Kolomyia, and Stanislav. The Soviets were about to complete their double envelopment of the First Panzer Army.<sup>25</sup>

Virtually encircled, the German First Panzer Army had to breakout through the Soviet 4th Tank Army units north and south of Kamenets-Podol'Skiy before it could even begin its drive to the west. Speed was important, for any delay gave the Russians time to dig in and prepare defensive positions along the Zbruch River. The sooner the breakout began, the easier it would be for the Germans to overrun these positions. An army order to Corps Group Chevallier on 27 March stressed the necessity of seizing a bridgehead across the Zbruch as quickly as possible. This action would cut the communications of the Russians at Kamenets-Podol'Skiy and thereby assist Corps Group Breith.

The entire breakout operation would have to be carried out swiftly enough to prevent the Russians from bringing back forces from south of the Dnestr River and intercepting the army. The Dnestr bridges could be left intact as long as the Russian forces continued to move southward across the river. Once the First Panzer Army

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<sup>25</sup>Erickson, *Op. cit.*, p. 185.

reached the area west of the Zbruch River, these bridges would have to be destroyed to delay the movement of Russian units back to the north. It was also important that the Russian divisions at Ternopol be prevented from wheeling back to attack the army from the north. German forces operating on the southern flank of the Fourth Panzer Army would prevent this by attacking to join the First Panzer Army.<sup>26</sup>

#### Air Supply

Arrangements were made with the German Fourth Air Fleet to assemble five air transport groups and a number of bomber wings at L'vov in Poland to fly essential supplies into the pocket. These operations were controlled by the Second Air Transport Command, utilizing Ju-52 and He-111 aircraft. The First Panzer Army was responsible for requisitioning and distributing the supplies, and for establishing suitable landing and air drop areas. During the initial stages of the operation, the army constructed and used an airfield at Dunayevtsy. Later, another field was built at Kamenets-Podol'Skiy. When the army moved west, each corps group was held responsible for establishing airfields and drop areas within its own zone.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Manstein, Op. cit., p. 540

<sup>27</sup>Reinhardt, Op. cit., p. 366.

The first supplies were flown in to the encircled army on 26 March. After the first few days, flights were restricted to the hours of darkness so as to incur less risk of interference by Russian fighter aircraft. After the evacuation of airfields at Dunayevtsy and Kamenets-Podol'Skiy, most supplies had to be air dropped. Although fuel and medical supplies were flown in, air transportation was used primarily to supply light and heavy infantry weapons, close range antitank weapons, and limited amounts of ammunition for light field howitzers. There were no provisions to fly in rations; troops were expected to supplement their remaining rations with food procured from local sources. Aircraft returning from the pocket were to evacuate the wounded, of whom there were approximately 2,500.<sup>28</sup>

#### Final Preparations

When the army's supply and other non-tactical units were being withdrawn across the Dnestr River, Hube ordered that crossing operations be drawn out so as to deceive the Soviets--they had to believe that the entire army was withdrawing south. The German VIII Air Corps prepared to destroy the Dnestr bridges downstream from Mogilev-Podol'Skiy, to delay the Russian pursuit from the east. No bridges west of Mogilev were to be destroyed, even if controlled by the Russians.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 366-7.

General Hube issued instructions to cover the behavior of his troops while on the march. Demanding absolute obedience to orders, he warned that strict measures would be taken to enforce discipline. The instructions stressed that antitank weapons were to be included in the march column--if necessary, at the cost of leaving field artillery behind. As protection against Russian tank attacks, units were to march at night and go into well camouflaged positions, organized for perimeter defense, during the daylight hours. Night marches were to be conducted in close order.<sup>29</sup>

#### Initial Phase of the Breakout

Advance elements of the First Panzer Army set out on 28 March. A light frost had temporarily improved road conditions, and units of Corps Group Chevallierie succeeded in establishing contact with the 1st Panzer Division and Task Force Mauss during the day. Fuel captured from the Russians enabled the Germans to push on, and on 29 March they seized bridgeheads across the Zbruch River at, and north of, Skala. These bridgeheads were expanded the following day.

Elements of Corps Group Breith, meanwhile, attacked Kamenets-Podol'Skiy and, with the support of a task force driving north from Khotin, encircled the Russian forces in the town. Other Corps Group units drove

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.



to the west and, together with elements of Task Force Gollnick, established two bridgeheads across the Zbruch River during the night of 30 March. The Russian forces west and northwest of Kamenets-Podol'Skiy, handicapped by supply difficulties, made little effort to interfere with the Germans.

Spearhead units of both corps moved rapidly. On 31 March, they reached the Nichlava River. The 7th Panzer Division established a bridgehead west of Borshchuv. Units driving toward Chortkuv, however, made little progress due to strong resistance northwest of Skala.

As the army's attacking panzer divisions moved west, the rear guard units of each Corps Group fell back from the Ushitsa River. The adherence to a rigid time schedule for occupying successive phase lines helped maintain a continuous front. On 31 March, the rear guard elements of both Corps Groups reached the phase line along Kamenets-Podol'Skiy. Hube felt that the First Panzer Army had successfully carried out the initial phase of its breakout effort.<sup>30</sup>

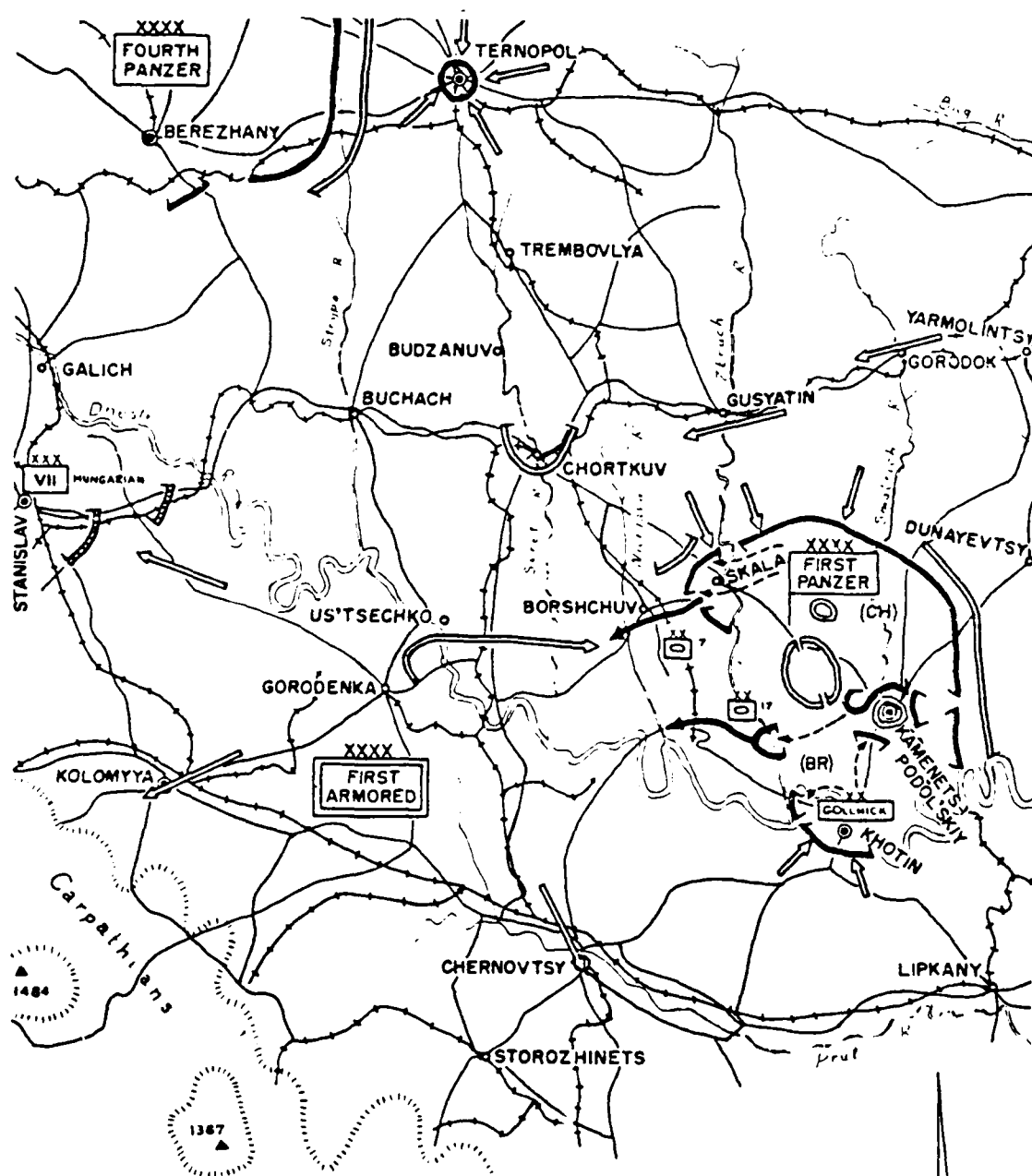
#### Situation on 31 March

Despite the general success of the operation in its early stages, Hube was gravely concerned on two points. First, the supplies coming in by air were

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 369.

Map 5-6: SITUATION, 31 MARCH 1944



(CH) - CORPS GROUP CHEVALLERIE

(BR) - CORPS GROUP BREITH

MILES  
0 5 10 15 20 25

Source: Reinhardt, p. 370.

inadequate. The estimated daily requirements for the army was 150 tons of ammunition and 200 tons of fuel. Only 40-50 tons had actually been flown in between 26 and 28 March. The rear guard units were seriously short of ammunition. Of the wounded, whose number had increased to 3,000, only 300 were flown out by the returning aircraft. The situation had improved on the night of 30 March, when more than 70 tons of supplies were flown in and over 800 wounded flown out. This gave Corps Group Breith the ammunition it needed. But fuel remained in short supply. The army's forward units would be forced to abandon their tanks within a few days unless supplies reached them.

Hube was also concerned about the situation on the army's flanks. Intercepted radio messages revealed that the Russians were moving strong forces west from Yarmolintsy through Gusyatin. Already, four divisions had crossed the Zbruch River. These developments, confirmed by air reconnaissance, indicated that the Russians were attempting to intercept the First Panzer Army west of the Zbruch River. Danger also threatened from the south. Here, the spearheads of the First Panzer Army had at first encountered only rear elements and outposts of the 1st Tank Army north of the Dnestr River. On 31 March, however, a brigade of this Soviet army which had previously been located near Gorodenka appeared near Borshchuv, north of the river. It was the first indication that the 1st Tank Army was preparing to reverse its direction of attack.

Following a review of the over-all situation, Hube concluded that the army would not be able to break out as an integral unit. Nor could it hold against heavy attacks from the north, if it were intercepted west of the Zbruch River. His armored units, organized as task forces, could break through immediately to meet the Fourth Panzer Army; but the infantry would not reach the Seret River for another six days. In order to escape, he determined that the infantry would have to break up into detachments of about 100 men each and make their way through the Russian lines on a broad front.

Hube also feared that his forces might not be able to reach the Fourth Panzer Army with its fuel and ammunition shortages. In such a case, he would wheel the entire army southward in the area west of the Seret River, cross the Dnestr near Us'Tsechko, and strike out in the direction of Stanislav to link up with the Hungarian VII Corps. Recommending both as tentative plans, he stressed that developments might require a quick decision. Manstein disapproved the first plan and made the execution of the latter subject to later approval.<sup>31</sup>

#### The Linkup

Blizzards during the first two days of April slowed the breakout effort. Encountering only weak

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 371.

resistance, the 7th Panzer Division of Corps Group Chevallerie and the 17th Panzer Division of Corps Group Breith reached the Seret River on 2 April. They proceeded to establish crossings south of Chortkuv and north of the confluence of the Seret and Dnestr rivers. The 1st Panzer Division established another bridgehead north of the 7th Panzer Division on the next day.

Rear guard units in Corps Group Chevallerie's zone reached the western bank of the Zbruch River on 2 April. Sizeable elements of Corps Group Breith, however, were still east of the river at Kamenets-Podol'Skiy and Khotin. Poor roads and traffic jams had delayed the withdrawal of these units. The last rear guard elements did not reach the west bank of the Zbruch until 4 April. General Hube ordered a temporary halt to permit the infantry to catch up with the armored units. Meanwhile, pressure increased on the rear guard units of Corps Group Chevallerie. It appeared that they would be unable to hold up their lines unless reinforced by troops from the attacking forward divisions. This being impossible, Hube accepted the risks which an echeloned rear guard line involved, and ordered the rear units of Corps Group Chevallerie to pull back from the Zbruch River. He also shifted the boundary between the two corps groups to facilitate the related operation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Carell, Op. cit., pp. 522-6.

Map 5-7: SITUATION, 2 APRIL 1944



Source: Reinhardt, p. 373.

Strong Russian forces continued to move westward through Chortkuv in what now appeared to be a determined effort to envelop the army before it linked up with friendly forces. Five infantry divisions and strong elements of the 3d Guards Tank Army were pressing southward east of the Seret River by 3 April. Another three divisions had already crossed the river. On 4 April, elements of these divisions were west of the Strypa River.<sup>33</sup>

On 4 April, Hube was informed by Army Group South that the II SS Panzer Corps would attack from the vicinity of Berezhany toward Buchach to link up with the First Panzer Army.<sup>34</sup> He immediately issued an order to strengthen that sector by directing the main effort of Corps Group Chevallerie to check the Russian advance at Chortkuv, thereby protecting the army's northern shoulder east of the Seret River. He also directed that strong advance detachments be sent forward to keep open the Chortkuv-Buchach road. Corps Group Breith units were to seize crossing sites over the Strypa River and, if necessary, attack from the south in order to open up the Buchach crossing. Corps group elements on the southern flank were to close the Dnestr River crossings and demolish the remaining bridges.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Reinhardt, Op. cit., p. 372.

<sup>34</sup>Manstein, Op. cit., p. 540.

<sup>35</sup>Reinhardt, Op. cit., p. 375.

Unaffected by operations on the northern and southern flanks of the army, the 6th Panzer Division in the center drove through to the Strypa River on 5 April. Remaining east of the river, the division wheeled northward toward Buchach and entered the town on the following day against determined Russian resistance. Late in the afternoon on 6 April, it joined forces with the lead elements of the relief column, the 10th SS Panzer Division (II SS Panzer Corps), which had been advancing from the northwest. Contact between the First and Fourth Panzer Armies thus was reestablished.<sup>36</sup>

#### Establishment of a New Line of Resistance

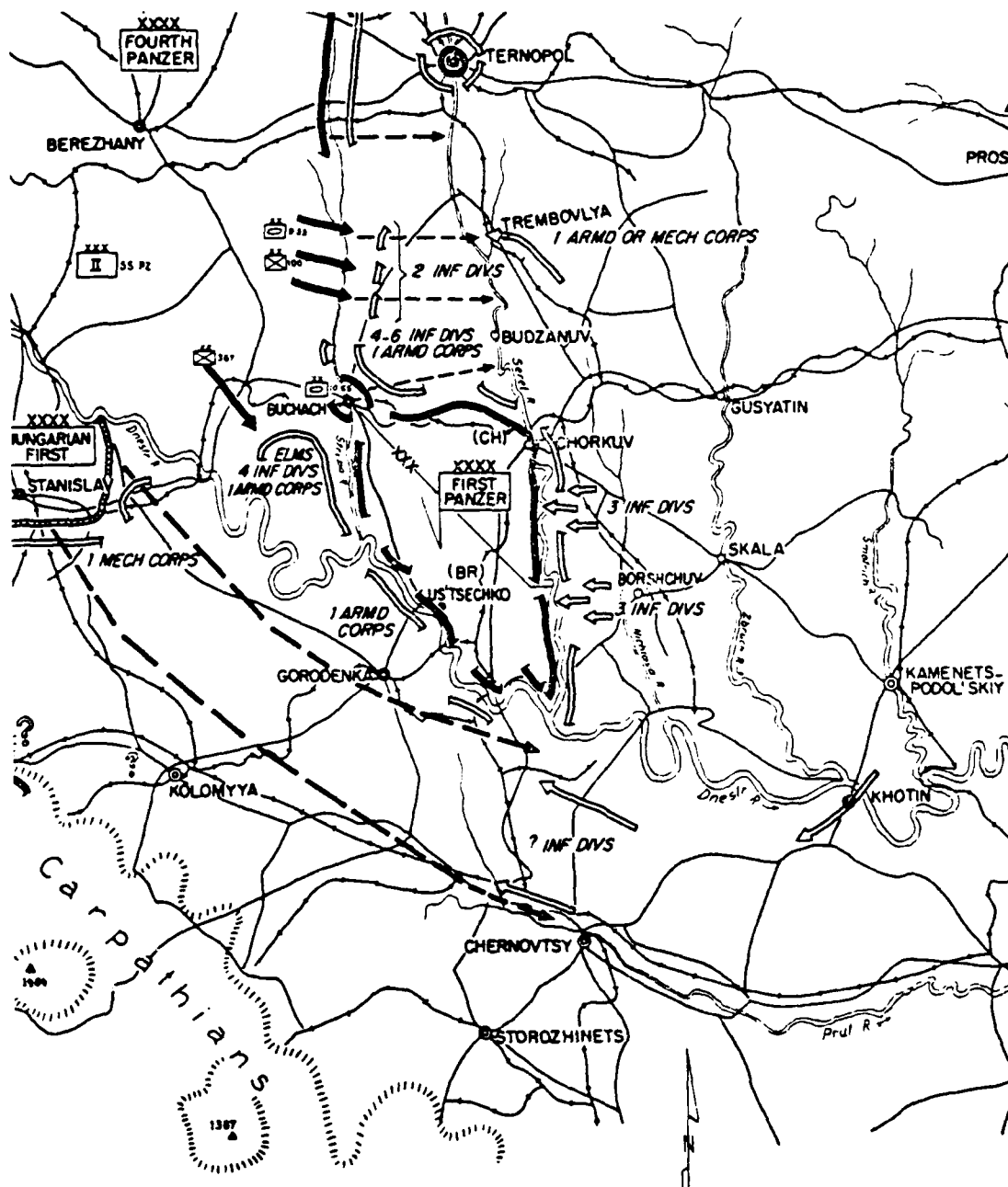
Immediately after the First Panzer Army established contact with the 10th SS Panzer Division, General Hube took steps to prevent his troops from crossing the Strypa River. He also prohibited the further destruction of weapons, equipment, and vehicles, and set about reorganizing his forces along the Seret River. The most urgent requirement was to clear the roads leading east and southeast from Buchach to accommodate the traffic they would have to bear once contact with the Fourth Panzer Army was firmly established. Specific priorities were designated to regulate the use of these roads, the highest priority going to the combat units of the II SS Panzer Corps.

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<sup>36</sup> Ziemke, Op. cit., p. 282.



Map 5-8: LINKUP AT BUCHACH  
(6 April 1944)



Source: Reinhardt, p. 376.

Second and third priorities, respectively, were reserved for 600 tons of supplies held available by the panzer corps for the First Panzer Army and for the evacuation of the latter's wounded.<sup>37</sup>

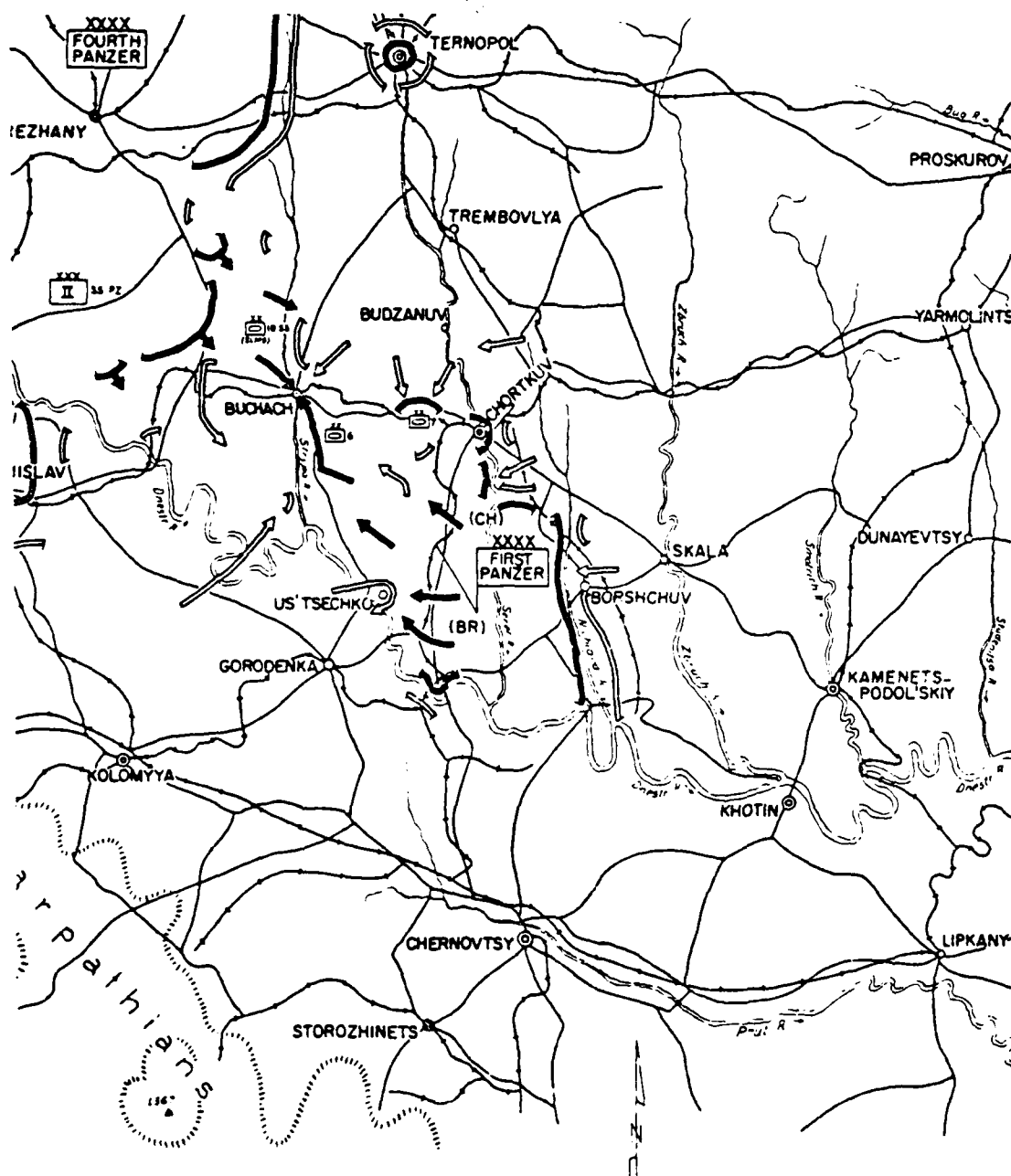
#### Further Withdrawals

Although the First Panzer Army now held a continuous line along the Seret River, its flanks and rear were exposed and there were clear indications that the Russians intended to take advantage of the fact. In analyzing the situation on 9 April, Hube concluded that the First Panzer Army would be unable, in its weakened condition, to hold the Seret River line up to Trembovlya when the II SS Panzer Corps moved north to attack Ternopol. Much of the army's strength was tied down along the Dnestr and Strypa Rivers. Moreover, the reorganization of divisions, urgently necessary, would have to be carried out while they were in action. Hube therefore recommended to the army group commander that the First Panzer Army be allowed to withdraw behind the Strypa River while the attack by the II SS Panzer Corps was still in progress. This move would release the units tied down along the Dnestr and Strypa Rivers and make it possible to rotate them to the rear for reorganization.

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<sup>37</sup>Reinhardt, Op. cit., p. 377.

Map 5-9: SITUATION, 9 APRIL 1944



Source: Reinhardt, p. 378.

Approving the plan on the evening of 9 April, Army Group issued the following order: "Effective immediately, the First Panzer Army will retire the bulk of its forces by phases to the western bank of the Strypa River, establishing and holding an outpost line in the <area extending from Us'Tsechko to Buchach> to a depth of 7 miles east of the river."<sup>38</sup> The order assigned the II SS Panzer Corps to the First Panzer Army and directed Hube to coordinate plans with the Hungarian First Army for a joint operation to begin no later than 17 April. In this operation, the Russian forces east of Stanislav were to be destroyed and a firm main line of resistance established between the Carpathians (east of Kolomyia) and the confluence of the Strypa and Dnestr Rivers.

Hube dissolved Corps Group Breith and Chevallerie on 12 April in order to return to a more conventional organization (see Figure 5-2).<sup>39</sup> At the same time, Hube also assigned new missions to each of his corps. The III Panzer Corps was to attack and destroy the Russian forces west of the Strypa River. The XXIV Panzer Corps was to withdraw and prepare the army's main line of resistance along the west bank of the Strypa from its confluence with the Dnestr north to Buchach. The LIX Corps and XLVI Corps were to withdraw in two phases and establish an outpost

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 377-9.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 381.

Figure 5-2: FIRST PANZER BATTLE ORDER OF BATTLE,  
12 April 1944

HEADQUARTERS FIRST PANZER ARMY			
<u>III PANZER CORPS</u>	<u>XXIV PANZER CORPS</u>	<u>XLVI PANZER CORPS</u>	<u>II SS PANZER CORPS</u>
6th Panzer Division	16th Panzer Division	68th Infantry Division	10th SS Panzer Division
17th Panzer Division	19th Panzer Division	75th Infantry Division	100th Jaeger Division
101st Jaeger Division	1st Infantry Division	82nd Infantry Division	
356th Inf Division	254th Infantry Division	96th Infantry Division	
	18th Artillery Division	168th Infantry Division	
		208th Infantry Division	
	<u>LIX CORPS</u>	<u>ARMY RESERVE</u>	
	7th Panzer Division	1st Panzer Division	
	20th Amd Inf Division		
	291st Infantry Division		
	371st Infantry Division		

Source: Reinhardt, p. 381.

line of resistance running north from Us'Tsechko to the Chortkuv-Buchach railroad line.

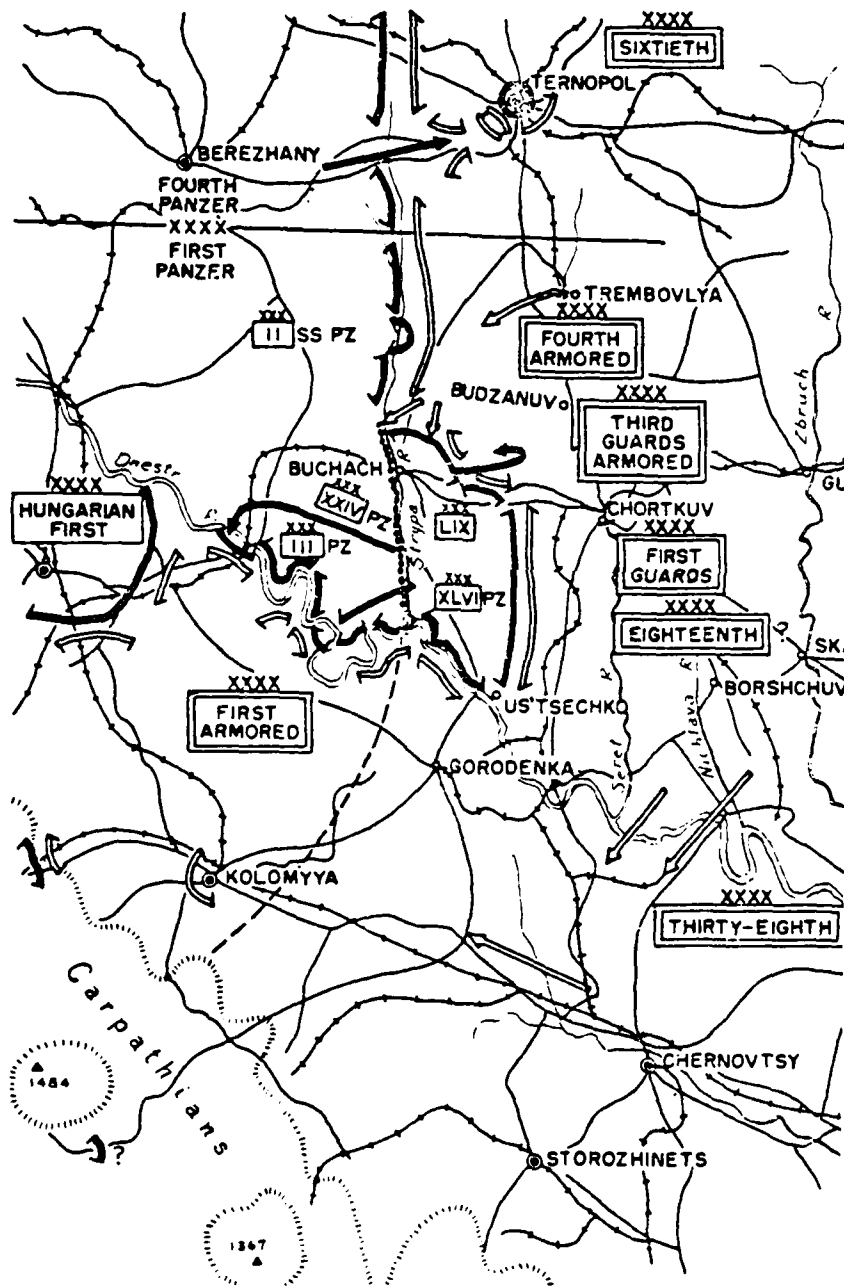
LIX Corps elements were to make a simultaneous limited-objective attack east of Buchach, to divert the Russians during the corps' withdrawal to the outpost line. The II SS Panzer Corps was to launch an attack northeast of Buchach, to assist in covering the withdrawal of LIX Corps and also to pin down the Russians while the Fourth Panzer Army made its relief attack on Ternopol. The panzer corps was then to prepare a main line of resistance on the west bank of the Strypa, from Buchach north to the boundary between the First and Fourth Panzer Armies.<sup>40</sup>

The III Panzer Corps drove west across the Strypa River as ordered. By evening on 12 April the corps had troops across the Dnestr at two points and expanded the bridgeheads during the next few days. The LIX Corps and XLVI Panzer Corps meanwhile withdrew to the outpost line, completing the move by 14 April. At the same time, elements of the LIX Corps and II SS Panzer Corps attacked east and northeast of Buchach. The Germans were able to advance nine miles in this area, but finally halted in the face of determined Russian resistance. Units on the north flank of the II SS Panzer Corps were slower in clearing the west bank of the Strypa. Nevertheless, the impression grew at Army Group headquarters that the Russians were

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

Map 5-10: SITUATION, 12-14 APRIL 1944,



Source: Reinhardt, p. 382.

were shifting to the defensive all along the front, and that they would have to regroup their forces and move up reserves before resuming their offensive.<sup>41</sup>

So by the middle of April, the First Panzer Army was firmly entrenched along the Strypa River, and had brought the Russian drive to a standstill. Over 90 percent of its force had been saved and the dangerous gap north of the Dnestr River had been closed.

#### OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

The analysis from the previous case studies produced the following tentative principles common to successful operations by encircled forces:

- (1) Counterattack early.
- (2) Shift or reallocate resources to critical points.
- (3) Mass the relief forces to gain maximum combat power at the decisive point.
- (4) Attack from within and without the encirclement, simultaneously if possible.
- (5) Airfields and air lines of communication are the decisive centers of gravity of the forces encircled.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.



- (6) Surprise and deception prove of greater importance than other METT-T/S factors in determining a course of action.
- (7) Provide the operational commander the resources and freedom of action to achieve his objective.
- (8) The operational commander must possess the vision to anticipate future operational requirements and necessary improvisations to the plan.

We shall seek to confirm, confute, or otherwise modify these tentative principles with the operational analysis of the Kamenets-Podol'Skiy Operation.

#### Firepower

As was the case during the two other historical case studies, the Soviets enjoyed a significant superiority in the quantities of men, guns, and materiel. Vatutin (1st Ukrainian Front) deployed five combined arms armies (1st Guards, 13th, 18th, 38th, and 60th) and three tank armies (1st, 3d Guards, and 4th).<sup>42</sup> Konev employed seven combined arms armies (4th, 5th, 7th Guards, 27th, 40th, 52d, and 53d) and also three tank armies (2d, 5th Guards, and 6th).<sup>43</sup> In all, nearly 199 Soviet divisions

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<sup>42</sup>Erickson, Op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

were committed to the battle against 27 German divisions.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the Soviets possessed a tremendous advantage in fighters and bomber aircraft.

The Soviets were superior in every category of supply as well. Units were continually resupplied with more than their basic load. And, as stated in the previous chapter, the production rates by this stage of the war greatly favored the Soviets.

#### Maneuver

At the beginning of March, Reinhard Gehlen, then a Colonel in the General Staff, produced a fairly accurate assessment of the Soviet intentions. On the strength of espionage and reconnaissance reports he was able to discern STAVKA'S plans.

The Russians are ready to mount a pincer operation against the German southern wing. For that purpose they will shortly (commit) the 1st Ukrainian Front to launch a large-scale attack against our LIX Corps south of the Pripet marshes in order to strike towards Poland. Simultaneously they will wheel southwards towards the Dnestr, to turn the German southern wing. Konev's 2d Ukrainian Front will strike from the Zvenigorodka area to break through the weakened Eighth Army, thrust towards Rumania, and in cooperation with the 1st Ukrainian Front encircle the forces of our First and Fourth Panzer Armies which are still east of the Dnestr.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Derived from Erickson and Manstein, Op. cit.

<sup>45</sup>Carell, Op. cit., p. 508.

A few days later, Gehlen's analysis was to be proven correct. The 1st Ukrainian Front, Stalin's most powerful group of armies, attacked Manstein's left wing. Directed by Marshal Zhukov, who had succeeded Vatutin at the end of February after the latter had been mortally wounded, the Soviet 13th Army attacked Hauffe's XIII Corps while the main effort comprised of four armies struck at Schulz's LIX Corps. Simultaneously, Konev's armada tied down Wohler's Eighth Army while his main effort was westward to envelop the German First Panzer Army. The endless crocodile of Soviet infantry and armor pushed on through the mud and over the tributaries of the Dnestr.

Manstein's nightmare had become a reality. This was the catastrophe of which he had forewarned Hitler--and the one he had hoped to avert. The Fourth Panzer Army was ripped open and forced back to the west. The Eighth Army was helpless. The Sixth Army (on the lower Dnieper) was fixed by Malinovskiy's 3d Ukrainian Front. Worst of all, Hube's First Panzer Army was trapped in a huge pocket between the Bug and Dnestr Rivers, separated from the bulk of Fourth Panzer Army by a gap of over 50 miles. Stalin was on the point of achieving his great triumph!

Because the leadership effects were so prevailing in this operation, and to maintain the continuity of this analysis, the "protection" aspects will be discussed later.

### Leadership

This may have been the most exciting phase of the war on the Eastern Front. While it approached the final phase of Germany's defeat, it also showed a flash of Manstein's military genius--and the hopes of what might have been had Hitler not usurped all of his commanders' flexibility and authority in the war against Russia.

Confronted with the absence of sufficient resources with which to "be strong everywhere," Manstein had already made provisions for averting the impending catastrophe. He had weakened his own central sector by withdrawing strong armored formations from the lines and positioning them behind the northern wing of his Army Group. These included the "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" SS Panzer Division, and the 1st, 6th, 11th, and 16th Panzer Divisions. These were formed into two Panzer Corps--the III under Breith and the XLVIII under Balck. Balck slowed the momentum of the Soviet attack; Breith prepared to deal the decisive blow.

In developing his plan, Manstein clearly had to choose between two evils. Hube (First Panzer Army) and Wohler (Eighth Army) both insisted on a breakthrough to the south. A consideration of all possibilities suggested that the lesser risk was a withdrawal to the south, where all engineer battalions and bridge-building columns were already assembled on the Dnestr. Pulling back the encircled army across the seemingly open sector of the

Dnestr without costly fighting was a tempting proposal. More tempting, certainly, than a breakout to the west, where half a dozen rivers and several crack Soviet armies would have to be tackled. Moreover, having been faced recently with the dilemma of having two of his corps fight through strong rings of encirclement at Korsun-Shevchenk-ovskiy, Hube did not look forward to what he expected to be a repeat of that effort.

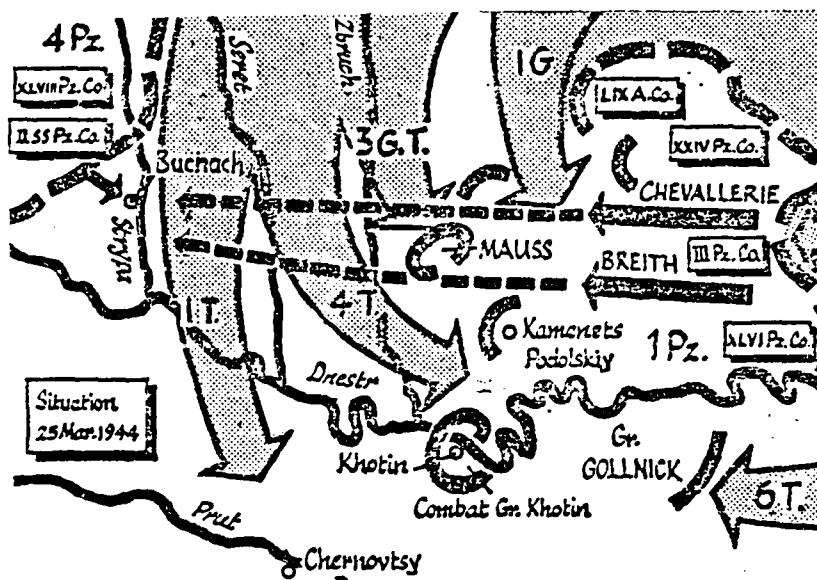
What neither Hube nor Wohler were able to judge correctly was the overall development of the situation. If the First Panzer Army were to fall back to the south, the gap between it and Fourth Panzer Army would become enormous. The Soviets would at last be able to advance unimpeded through Galicia to Breslav and Prague.

And what would First Panzer Army have gained? Nothing. By 25 March, Zhukov and Konev had deployed their main armored spearheads south of the Dnestr. The remaining forces of these main efforts were being brought up. Hence, First Panzer Army would escape but would be walking straight into another encirclement, in an even more dangerous pocket whose rear would be formed by the pathless Carpathians.

Manstein had deduced that danger. More important, he appreciated the strategic necessity of not allowing the gap between First and Fourth Panzer Armies to get any wider. He arrived at this conclusion even before receiving

confirmation from intelligence sources.<sup>46</sup> It was clear to Manstein that the weak point of the Russians was north of the upper Dnestr--so long as the infantry armies had not closed to the armor spearheads.

Map 5-11: Manstein's Genius



Source: Carell, Scorched Earth, p. 518.

<sup>46</sup>Manstein, pp. 358-40.

Manstein envisaged the operation accurately. Balck's XLVIII Corps would hold Fourth Panzer Army's southern shoulder; Hube's XLVI Corps would contain the southern part of the pocket against Konev's forces; and LIX, XXIV Panzer, and III Panzer Corps would disengage to the west to the Strypa River. But there was one more prerequisite for success--a relief thrust from the west. After heated debates with Hitler--which would cost Manstein his command--Manstein finally received the forces for the relief thrust from without.<sup>47</sup> Hitler decided to let him have the II SS Panzer Corps, comprised of the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions (from France) as well as the 367th Infantry Division and the 100th Jager Division (from Hungary).

Zhukov had been too sure of himself. Convinced that Hube would breakout to the southwest, he had deployed his tank armies so as to intercept and destroy the First Panzer Army south of the Dnestr. By the time he realized his mistake, it was too late. He only managed to turn a single tank corps (11th Guards) around from the southern bank of the Dnestr. It was not enough. He tried to compensate for his disastrous error by a piece of psychological warfare on 2 April 1944.

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<sup>47</sup>Manstein provides an interesting account--which was substantiated by several other sources--on his last week in command and his confrontation with Hitler. See especially his Lost Victories, pp. 540-6.

German soldiers and officers...you are encircled on all sides, hope is pointless...(those) who lay down their arms voluntarily may expect good treatment. Only those commanders will be shot, and moreover in front of their units, who ...refuse to cease their pointless resistance by this evening. They will be shot as a punishment for pointlessly shedding the blood of the troops entrusted to them.

--Zhukov, Commander of the Front and  
Marshal of the Soviet Union.<sup>48</sup>

This attempt, by way of open radio transmission in German, appears to have heightened rather than weakened the fighting spirit of the German soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

The success or failure of the Kamenets-Podol'Skiy Operation hinged upon several other important factors. The consolidation of the First Panzer Army's widely scattered forces into provisional corps groups resulted in a simplified and clear chain of command. Together with Manstein's preparations, this reorganization facilitated the westward thrust by the army as a "moving pocket." Fewer losses in equipment and materiel would have been incurred, however, if Hube had not waited until 26 March to effect this reorganization.

Once the forces were reorganized, Hube was able to exercise command with varying degrees of control. The corps spearheading the drive westward were assigned

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<sup>48</sup>Carell, Op. cit., p. 527.

<sup>49</sup>DA Pamphlet 20-234, p. 50.



missions and objectives which allowed for a wide range of initiative--the urge to move west was considered to be inherent. The movements of the rear guard, however, were restricted to precisely defined lines and timing. Here, Hube saw that independent decisions by the commanders of these units might have an adverse impact on the operation of the army as a whole.

As the commander of the First Panzer Army, Hube also located his command post close to the critical point. Initially, he considered this point to be with the breakout forces of Corps Group Breith. But after the attacking divisions reached the Zbruch River, Hube shifted his command post to a point behind the rear guard units, Corps Group Chevallerie. Still later, when tenuous contact had been established with the II SS Panzer Corps, Hube transferred his command post to a position as close as possible to the linkup point. Only after the situation had been stabilized and the danger of a second envelopment averted was the headquarters moved to a "normal" distance behind the lines.

The question of whether the operational commander of an enveloped force should be inside or outside the pocket may be problematical. On the one hand, firm control of the troops encircled must be assured; on the other hand, the overall view of the operation paramount for the proper planning to take place usually cannot be obtained

unless the commander is outside the pocket. The Kamenets-Podol'Skiy solution was ideal: Hube, by remaining with his troops, was able to exert the moral force essential for the proper execution of his mission; by remaining outside the pocket, Manstein was able to derive a broader perspective and to exert his leadership qualities for making decisions based on analytical and reasoned judgment.

That Hube was concerned primarily with the extrication of his army is clear. Given his experiences with encirclements, he cannot be faulted. But, it is also true that objective analysis is a prerequisite for success. It was in this venue that Manstein, in Clausewitzian terms, proved his military genius. Moreover, Hube's common educational background (German General Staff) helped him to overcome his skepticism and execute the plan, as envisaged by Manstein, even after the latter had been relieved. First Panzer Army came out of its encirclement in better shape than anyone expected. No large number of its troops suffered the complete collapse of morale that had been observed in the survivors from the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy pocket. The army's feat was celebrated as a victory, albeit clouded by Manstein's relief of command and by Hube's death.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Gen. Hube lost his life in a plane crash in the Austrian Alps the day he went to Berchtesgaden to receive the diamonds to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.

### Protection

The predominant effect that served to protect the First Panzer Army was manifested by its deception plan. Wanting desperately to believe that the encircled army would breakout to the south, Zhukov became increasingly susceptible to the deceptive efforts. The fact that the deception plan was plausible made its impact so much the greater.

The weather also provided the First Panzer Army its own brand of protection. The quagmire facilitated the German countermobility efforts while the on-again, off-again blizzard prevented the Soviet Air Force from exploiting its superiority. As a result, the First Panzer Army incurred greater relative combat power by achieving all three variables associated with survivability on the battlefield: concealment, exposure limitation, and damage limitation.

Lastly, the army's survivability was enhanced by two other factors. Throughout the discussion, it has been evident that the First Panzer Army, indeed the entire Army Group, deployed its units as combined arms. The Second factor might not have been as obvious. But the fact that airfields assumed the top priority as terrain objectives was true nonetheless. During the last three weeks of the operation, the army could be resupplied only by air. Moreover, as part of the withdrawal of the fighting

formations, expedients had to be used to move and construct airstrips almost daily.

#### SUMMARY

The foregoing analysis appears to support the assertion that eight general principles are common to successful operations by encircled forces at the operational level of war.

- \* Unlike the Stalingrad encirclement of Paulus' Sixth Army, the early decision to attack the encircling ring(s) contributed to the success of the Kamenets-Podol'Skiy Operation by not waiting for the encircling force to strengthen its position.
- \* As was the case in the previous case studies, the shifting or reallocation of forces to the critical place of the operation enabled the encircled force to withstand enemy annihilation efforts and allow the force to be extricated.
- \* Relief and breakout forces were massed to gain maximum combat power vis-a-vis the enemy at the decisive point.
- \* Simultaneous attacks from within and without the encirclement brought about a synergistic effect which contributed to the extrication of the force.

- \* Airfields and air lines of communication were the decisive centers of gravity for sustaining the encircled force as a combat effective unit.
- \* Surprise and deception proved to be of primary importance in the selection of courses of action involving encircled forces.
- \* The operational commander was given ample resources and the freedom of action with which to achieve the operational objective.
- \* Among his attributes, the operational commander possessed the vision to anticipate future operational requirements and to affect necessary improvisations to the plan.

## CHAPTER 6

### A SYNTHESIS

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who's actually in the arena; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

--Theodore Roosevelt

### INTRODUCTION

We began this study by considering the nature of the future mid-to-high intensity battlefield and the offensive doctrine of our most dangerous adversary, the Soviet Union. The dynamic combination of the characteristics associated with the two subjects, it was determined, suggests that the encirclement of one's force may become the norm rather than the exception.

A review of U. S. Army literature, however, disclosed a disconcerting void in our current doctrine. Woefully, our doctrinal manuals do not provide to our key war-fighters any guidance concerning encircled forces at

the operational level of war. A hypothesis was thus formulated: There exists a set of historically justifiable principles for the successful employment of encircled forces at the operational level of war.

The aim of the study was twofold. Appalled at the doctrinal deficiencies on the subject, the author wanted foremost to stimulate reflective thought on the matter of encircled forces at the operational level of war. He also wanted to derive some insights which might be of help in the conduct of future reviews of U. S. Army doctrine.

The criteria established for choosing the historical examples for analysis resulted in the selection of three case studies from operations on the Eastern Front during the Second World War. There were recognizable dangers, however, in trying to draw immutable conclusions on historical "evidence." Hence, the object of the study was defined as an attempt to derive general principles which represent the underlying patterns to which successful operations by encircled forces tend to conform over the long run at the operational level of war.

It was emphasized, moreover, that care had to be taken to insure that the derived principles were not limited to a single set of operational and environmental factors--mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time-space considerations. Therefore, the derived principles would have to be tested for applicability in different theaters

of operations, involving different antagonists and reflecting varying results.

The primary aim of this chapter, then, is to provide a synthesis of the eminent features of this study in the form of a set of historically justifiable principles pertaining to encircled forces at the operational level of war. A subsidiary effort is made to define the implications that these principles might suggest to our military system.

#### EVALUATION OF THE DERIVED PRINCIPLES

##### Attack the encircling forces early.

In the three case studies, each representing a degree of relative success, it was noted that the early commitment to an attack against the encircling forces contributed to the favorable outcome of the operation. In Demyansk, the timely decision to conduct a counterattack reestablished a corridor through which the divisions could be supported and eventually extricated. In the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy operation, it became apparent that the timely commitment of the III Panzer Corps and the LXVII Corps relieved a great deal of the pressure on the encircled force. On the other hand, one could argue that the untimely decision to allow the two encircled corps to execute a breakout in the direction of the relieving



columns resulted in unnecessary and futile loss of both men and materiel.

A review of the Kamenets-Podol'Skiy operation, however, confutes this principle as stated. The First Panzer Army did not attack the encircling force early. In fact, Manstein directed that the army delay its effort to breakout of the encirclement. He recognized that, if it were to breakout early, the army would expose its northern flank to the encircling force, especially the Soviet 1st and 4th Tank Armies. Thus the delay would allow the breakout to be conducted through the rear of these armies--hence, cutting their lines of communication and support--and before the Soviet echeloned infantry closed with its armored units. Manstein also wanted the deception plan to make its impact before the breakout took place. In Manstein's opinion, the encircled force should wait to execute the breakout until the Soviets had reacted to the deception plan--a plausible but false breakout in a southerly direction. The army would then face a weaker force in its actual breakout zone. Furthermore, the Soviets would be unable to mass their improperly disposed forces in time to effectively react and pursue the breakout force.

It appears that the principle, then, should be revised. Indeed it was not, in any of the case studies, a matter of counterattacking the encircling force early. The salient feature that contributed to the success of the

operation was, instead, the early decision on which option to adopt. What made these operations successful was not that the attack took place "early," but that the operational commander made his decision early so that whatever option he selected had the timely and desired effect at the decisive point of the battle.

The test for applicability supports this view. In defeating the Japanese at Imphal-Kohima (March-September 1944), Field Marshal Slim initiated a timely, not an early, counterattack to bring victory to his encircled Fourteenth Army.<sup>1</sup>

The plan that Scoones and I had hammered out was, I was sure, the right one.<sup>2</sup> It only remained to decide when it should be put into force. The essence of all military planning is timing. A brilliant plan wrongly timed, put into operation too early or too late, is at the best a lame thing and at the worst may be a disaster <my emphasis>.<sup>3</sup>

The successful breakout from the Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir by the U. S. First Marine Division (November-December 1950) provides further evidence to support this view. It was only through the use of a series of timely

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<sup>1</sup>See Slim's Defeat into Victory, pp. 245-310. Especially noteworthy was the campaign plan he selected and the condition he stipulated for the initiation of his counterattack, pp. 248-53.

<sup>2</sup>Lt. Gen. Geoffrey Scoones commanded IV Corps in Slim's army on the Assam front. He had responsibility for Imphal while Lt. Gen. M. G. N. Stopford, employing the XXXIII Corps, was responsible for Kohima.

<sup>3</sup>Slim, Op. cit., p. 252.

attacks and counterattacks from 27 November to 11 December 1950 that Maj. Gen. Smith's division was able to extricate itself from encirclement by seven Chinese infantry divisions.<sup>4</sup>

A consideration of an unsuccessful operation involving encircled forces also supports this thesis. The inability of the Kwantung Army high command to make early decisions regarding employment options for its encircled forces resulted in uncoordinated and ineffective attempts to stop the Soviet invasion of Manchuria (August 1945).<sup>5,6</sup> "The disjointed and futile efforts of the Kwantung Army high command to stem the Soviet tide reflected the total paralysis of the Japanese command and control system."<sup>7</sup>

The principle, then, must be revised accordingly. The operational commander must decide early on the operational mission which is to be performed, and the effect to be produced, by the encircling force. It follows

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<sup>4</sup>See Paul Tiberi et al., "Withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir," (a battle analysis for the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, May 1984), pp. 49-70.

<sup>5</sup>The Kwantung Army was the Japanese organization responsible for the operations in Manchuria.

<sup>6</sup>See David M. Glantz, "August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria," Leavenworth Papers No. 7 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Command and General Staff College, 1983).

<sup>7</sup>Glantz, Leavenworth Papers No. 8 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Command and General Staff College, 1983), p. 202.

that the mission he selects must be consistent with the overall plan. And, per FM 100-5, the order must communicate clearly three essential points: the commander's objective (that which he wants done and why he wants it done), the limits or controls established to insure coordination, and the delineation of resources and support for the operation.<sup>8</sup>

Shift or Reallocate Forces to the Critical Point.

The analysis of the three case studies revealed that, in each operation, forces were shifted or reallocated to critical points with decisive effect. At the Demyansk pocket, Kuechler's decision to shift the 58th, 225th, and 254th Infantry Divisions from the 18th Army to the Demyansk battle prevented Timoshenko from severing the "mushroom" at its stalk. Committed to hold the critical shoulders of the collapsing corridor, the divisions kept the encircled force from annihilation.

At the Korsun-Shevchenkovi operation, two related actions tipped the scales in favor of the encircled force: forces were reallocated in order to constitute relief columns (III Panzer Corps and XLVII Corps) and forces inside the pocket were shifted and reorganized to enhance security and firepower. And at Kamenets-Podol'skiy, Manstein succeeded in convincing Hitler to shift the II Panzer Corps to the battle.

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<sup>8</sup>FM 100-5 (February 1985 DRAFT), p. 2-19.

At Imphal-Kohima, Slim's timely decision to reallocate maneuver forces and logistical resources had a decisive impact on the outcome of the battle. The decision to shift the 5th Division from Arakan to Imphal is a vivid example. Clearly, its arrival in Imphal during the latter part of March prevented the Japanese 31st Division on the 4th of April from overrunning the encircled garrison.<sup>9</sup>

Maj. Gen. Smith also shifted his forces to critical points during his division's breakout from the Chosin Reservoir. On 29 November, for example, the commanders of Regimental Combat Teams 5 and 7 formed a composite battalion to relieve an encircled unit which was defending a key hilltop, Company F, 2/7th. Although initially unsuccessful due to overwhelming enemy forces, it later made the difference between failure and success.<sup>10</sup>

The Japanese, however, demonstrated no such agility in Manchuria. Their failure to react to the Soviet Trans-Baikal Front by shifting available forces to defend the difficult Khingan mountain passes is but one example. The Japanese failure to capitalize on Soviet problems with tenuous lines of support is another.<sup>11</sup> The attempt here is not to demonstrate a cause and effect relationship; it is only to point out that efforts to shift or reallocate

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<sup>9</sup>See Slim, Op. cit., pp. 262-2.

<sup>10</sup>See Tiberi et al., Op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>11</sup>See Glantz, "August Storm: The Soviet Strategic Offensive in Manchuria," pp. 81-112, 182.

resources to critical points were common among successful operations involving encircled forces while they were conspicuously lacking in those operations that were unsuccessful. It seems appropriate to assert, then, that the validity of this principle has been substantiated.

Mass the relief and breakout forces.

Clausewitz opined that "the general who is to command the army in the field usually has to accept the size of his forces as a given."<sup>12</sup> It follows then that "the forces available must be employed with such skill that even in the absence of absolute superiority, relative superiority is attained at the decisive point."<sup>13</sup> The derived principle appears to validate Clausewitz's position.

The operational analyses disclosed cases in which this was done and others in which it should have been done better. At Demyansk, the operation did not include a relief force per se. But the main effort clearly was identified and sufficient relative combat power at the decisive point was insured. During the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy operation, however, we determined that "unity of purpose" was violated. The designation of a dual objective was beyond the capability of III Panzer Corps. It could not hope to destroy an overwhelming opponent and relieve

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<sup>12</sup>Clausewitz, On War, p 196.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

the encircled corps (XLII and XI). Furthermore, the diverging axes of advance between the two relief columns (XLVII and III Panzer Corps) violated Clausewitz's dictum concerning mass. While the operation eventually succeeded, unnecessary loss of valuable soldiers and equipment was its penalty.

The breakout of First Panzer Army at Kamenets-Podol'Skiy, meanwhile, reflected the degree of combat effectiveness that can be achieved with synchronization. The actions of all the encircled maneuver and support forces were concentrated in time and space to support the main effort. The coordination of the relief column, II Panzer Corps, with the effects of the breakout force insured mutual and complementary support toward one main effort rather than being parcelled out to secondary endeavors.

Slim espoused a similar philosophy in the Imphal-Kohima operation. Always careful to ensure "greatly preponderating strength," he tells of a story to reinforce this point:

Once when I was studying the plan for such an operation of this kind submitted by the local commander, a visiting staff officer of high rank said, "Isn't that using a steam hammer to crack a walnut?" "Well," I answered, "if you happen to have a steam hammer handy and you don't mind if there's nothing left of the walnut, it's not a bad way to crack it."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Slim. Op. cit., pp. 162-3.

Sure enough, he developed an astute plan to attrite the Japanese forces to the point where he would have overwhelming superiority over them; and then he pursued them relentlessly.<sup>15</sup>

Smith, it appears, also considered the principles of "mass" and "objective," the combat imperatives of "unity of effort" and "designate/sustain the main effort," and "synchronization"--one of the four tenets in U. S. Army's AirLand Battle doctrine.<sup>16</sup> He repeatedly maneuvered his forces and shifted his indirect fires to concentrate overwhelming combat power at the decisive point. He even appointed an assistant S-3 to head the center for all supporting fires according to the latest change in the fluid situation.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, the Japanese in Manchuria achieved neither the requisite mass nor the synchronization of effort with which to overcome the Soviet aggression.<sup>18</sup> With reasonable confidence, then, we should be able to assert that the third principle derived from the case studies--mass the relief and breakout forces--has been substantiated.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 245-443.

<sup>16</sup>See FM 100-5, appendix B, pp. 2-21, and 2-8, respectively.

<sup>17</sup>See Tiberi et al., Op. cit., pp. 34-7, 83-5, and 36, respectively.

<sup>18</sup>See Glantz, "August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria," pp. 166, 184-5. The entire manuscript should be read to appreciate the extent of the Japanese shortcomings.



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ENCIRCLED FORCES: THE NEGLECTED PHENOMENON OF WARFARE  
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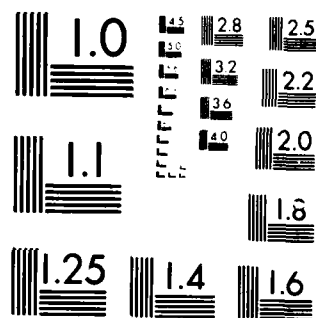
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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
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Attack simultaneously from within and without.

This principle is inexorably linked to the previous three. By attacking the enveloping force from two sides, the enemy is confronted with the possibility of encirclement and all its negative consequences. The principle also implies a battlefield effect through orchestrated maneuver and firepower which is more than additive. Let's quickly review its applicability in our case studies.

The initial fight to reestablish a corridor, however narrow at the base, through to Demyansk proper was conducted by German forces both from within and without the pocket. The converging attack on Timoshenko's northern group of divisions, which initially had encircled more than six German divisions, created the necessary combat power to reopen the corridor.<sup>19</sup> And during the operation to evacuate the pocket, three divisions west of the pocket presented the Soviets from pursuing and enveloping the withdrawing forces. Meanwhile, Lt. Gen. Hohne's divisions (on the shoulders of the corridor) prevented the corridor from collapsing until Lt. Gen. Laux's divisions conducted a withdrawal under heavy enemy pressure. It was the combat power generated through the synchronization of the various attacks that confused and disrupted the Soviet commanders and contributed to the success of the operation.

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<sup>19</sup>See Gen. Der Infanterie Gustav Hoehne, "In Show and Mud: 31 Days of Attack under Seydlitz during Spring 1942 (Russia); and Carell, Hitler Moves East, pp. 426-34.

Similarly, at Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy, the German combat power on both sides of the encircling rings increased the threat to the Soviets. Failing to synchronize their efforts, the Germans did not achieve their relative combat power potential. Nevertheless, the mere positioning of the forces within and without the Soviet encircling rings had operational impact.

The Kamenets-Podol'skiy operations, as stated earlier, demonstrates the synergistic effect of a well-coordinated attack both from within and without the pocket. Slim's operational plan in Burma likewise depended on combat power delivered both from within and without the encircled forces. In his particular case, however, the devastation from without had to be accomplished initially with airpower--of which he enjoyed overwhelming superiority. The second Chindit expedition in March 1944, when some 30,000 men and 5,000 animals were air landed well behind enemy lines and were sustained for several months, serves to demonstrate the applicability of this principle. By proper synchronization, Slim achieved an effect that was greater than the sum of the parts of his force.<sup>20</sup>

Although conducted at the tactical level, the First Marine Division also used combat power from both within and without to achieve greater combat power vis-a-vis the enemy at the decisive point. Two examples in

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<sup>20</sup> See Slim, Op. cit., pp. 214-44.

addition to that discussed previously supports this view. First, on 7 December 1950, eight sections of "brockway" bridge were airdropped into Koto-ri, well south of the breakout force. While not to be confused with an attack from without, there is no doubt that the division would have been stranded and then annihilated north of the 2,500-foot high and 16-foot wide chasm had this element of combat power not been positioned outside the encircled force.<sup>21</sup>

The other example occurred at Chinghung-ni, about 14 miles further south and along the single-lane main supply route of the division. Here, Task Force DOG, comprised of the 3/7th Infantry, 92d Field Artillery Battalion, and numerous service attachments (all from the 3d Infantry Division), relieved the 1/1st on the afternoon of 7 December. This allowed the 1/1st to attack north to seize the Funchilin Pass, thereby facilitating the attack south from Koto-ri by the rest of the First Marine Division.<sup>22</sup>

Again, the operation by the encircled Japanese force in Manchuria does not reflect any attempt to employ its combat power in this mode. Since this principle was common among successful operations and lacking among unsuccessful operations involving encircled forces, we can conclude that its applicability has been substantiated.

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<sup>21</sup>See Tiberi et al., *Op. cit.*, pp. 65-6.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

Airfields and air lines of communication are decisive centers of gravity.

The three historical examples that have been analyzed in this study demonstrated that air support provided significant material and psychological aid to the encircled force. They also indicated that the functions of aerial resupply and evacuation of casualties were at least as significant as that of delivering ordnance against the enemy.

Slim's own words eloquently address this subject:

The fabric of our campaign was woven by the close intermeshing of land and air operation.

One of the characteristics of air power is its ever increasing flexibility.

During our rapid advances we made airfields the primary objectives.

A most distinctive aspect of our Burma war was the great use we made of air transport.

Unfortunately, the lack of training aircraft prevented our using parachutists on a large scale, but even so we were undoubtedly the most air-minded army that ever existed. We had to be.

The air battle had to be won first--and from now on it will always have to be won first.

The land and air commanders responsible at each level must not only be in close touch, they should live together as we did. Ours was a joint land and air war; its result, as much a victory for the air forces as for the army.

In overcoming pessimistic estimates, he writes:

It is quite easy theoretically to demonstrate that what we were doing was impossible to continue over any length of time. Yet the skill, courage, and devotion of the airmen, British and American, both in the air and on the ground, combined with the hard work and organizing ability of the soldiers, not only did it, but kept on doing it month after month.

But warning us not to consider air power a panacea, he stated:

Among the most strategically dangerous ideas that half-baked thinking on air supply provoked, was that, even if surrounded, positions could be held for months provided they might be maintained from the air. In fact, troops thus cut off even if fed and maintained eventually lost heart, and air supply is so easily interrupted; the weather or a few well-sited antiaircraft weapons can easily put a stop to it. Air supply is only half the answer. The other half is an adequate relieving force which, however good the prospect of air supply, must appear in a reasonable time and which the beleaguered garrison must know will appear (my emphasis).<sup>23</sup>

Similar considerations were ongoing in Maj. Gen. Smith's headquarters as staff officers continually reassessed the situation and revised the plan accordingly. Constant fighter support helped in repelling Chinese attacks and resupplies were air landed to the extent possible--for example, an airstrip was constructed to accommodate C-47s, four of which landed on 1 December in the vicinity of Hagaru. The evacuation of casualties, however, may have been the key feature of this operation

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<sup>23</sup> See Slim, Op. cit., pp. 452-55.

in that it provided the psychological comfort to the beleaguered marines.<sup>24</sup>

The Japanese possessed no such capability in their efforts to repel the Soviet invasion of Manchuria. Nor do I suggest that they would have been successful had they been able to employ such combat power. Theirs was a more pervasive deficiency, one that was similar to that which affected British and Indian soldiers in Burma before Slim's astonishing success in rebuilding the Fourteenth Army. Of the 1942 defeat, Slim wrote:

The completely inadequate air forces and their total elimination in the campaign were most grievous disadvantages to the army. Had we, however, had enough well-trained and suitably-equipped divisions I do not think this handicap, serious as it was, would have been fatal; we could still have beaten the Japanese. Nor would a superior air force have enabled us to defeat the Japanese with the troops we had.<sup>25</sup>

The Japanese in Manchuria similarly would not have been saved by the mere application of a superior air force; they too needed to rebuild their military system. The principle--that airfields and airlines of communications are decisive centers of gravity--has been, nonetheless, validated.

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<sup>24</sup>See Tiberi et al., Op. cit., especially pp.58-66; and Lynn Montross, "Breakout From the Reservoir: Marine Epic of Fire and Ice," in Marine Corps Gazette (November 1951), pp. 22-37.

<sup>25</sup>Slim, Op. cit., p. 116.



Develop the plan around surprise and deception.

That surprise and deception were determined to be so influential in the outcome of operations involving encircled forces should not be surprising. Over 2,000 years ago Sun Tzu posited that "All warfare is based on deception." In his opinion a commander had to master the complementary arts of simulation and dissimulation. "While creating shapes to confuse and delude the enemy (the commander) conceals his true dispositions and ultimate intent."<sup>26</sup> Clausewitz asserted that "surprise lies at the root of all operations without exception."<sup>27</sup>

The relative success achieved by the Germans in the three case studies substantiate the assertions by Sun Tzu and Clausewitz. Two major actions initiated by the Germans with regards to the Demyansk salient deceived and surprised the Soviets. Von Kuechler's decision to shift the 58th, 225th, and 254th Infantry Divisions from the 18th Army to the Demyansk battle was the first. The timely committment of these divisions to critical sectors of the corridor totally surprised Timoshenko, the Commander of the Northwest Front, who had concluded that Army Group North had no operational reserves. Hence, the unexpected committment of the three German divisions frustrated the

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<sup>26</sup>Sun Tzu, The Art of War, translated by Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 40, 66.

<sup>27</sup>Clausewitz, On War, p. 198.

Soviet commander's operational plan. Befuddled by the arrival of the German divisions, Timoshenko became increasingly susceptible to deception efforts. The Germans accommodated him. A well-orchestrated deception plan, which included dummy radio traffic and false orders, created the illusion that additional German reinforcements were being deployed to the battle at Demyansk proper. Instead, the Germans were well on their way to extricating over 100,000 men.

The other two historical examples that were examined in this study also reflect the value of surprise and deception. The surprise achieved by the timely bayonet assault against the ring of encirclement contributed significantly to the extrication of the XLII and XI Corps from the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy encirclement. And at Kamenets-Podol'skiy the deception plan, which portrayed a breakout to the south, facilitated the linkup between the First Panzer Army and the II Panzer Corps.

Other successful operations by encircled forces also achieved a degree of surprise and deception. Slim asserted that surprise was one of the four principles on which he planned all operations.<sup>28</sup> His campaign in Burma certainly reflected it--and the outcome supports his faith in this principle. He achieved it by a careful analysis of the enemy plan and by adopting an operational concept

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<sup>28</sup> Slim, Defeat into Victory, p. 181.

which sought to deceive the Japanese operational commanders and exploit their rigid adherence to a preconceived plan. Slim envisaged dissipating the Japanese strength by voluntarily submitting to encirclement and counterattacking once the Japanese had reached their culminating point. It worked beautifully. But it did so, in part, because he created the illusion that the "outposts" were being forced back by Japanese superior combat power. Smith also used surprise and deception in the execution of his breakout. Speed and control of critical terrain were means by which he achieved it. They were also means by which he denied success to the Chinese Communist Forces.

Conversely, none of the Japanese operations in Manchuria reflected any element of surprise or deception, neither in the planning nor in the execution phase. In fact, Japanese apathy allowed the Soviets to achieve surprise at all three levels of war.<sup>29</sup> By the commonality of surprise and deception among successful operations, and their absence among unsuccessful ones, the applicability of this derived principle has been substantiated.

Give the operational commander resources and freedom of action.

In the evacuation of the Demyansk pocket, Field Marshal von Kuechler, the Commanding General of Army Group

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<sup>29</sup>See Glantz, "August Storm: Soviet Tactical and Operational Combat in Manchuria, 1945," pp. 35., 40-3, 55-6, 110-4, 132, 163-7, 200-1.

North, had to overcome Hitler's mania for centralized control and "hedgehog" strategy. During the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy operation, Field Marshal von Manstein took it upon himself to provide the resources and the freedom of action to the operational commander, General Wohler. In both cases, the failure of the German High Command to resource the operation adequately and to provide the corresponding freedom of action to the field commander nearly caused catastrophic results. Only the initiative of the Army Group Commanders saved the operations from disaster.

Of the three case studies, the Kamenets-Podol'Skiy operation reflected the greatest degree of harmony between the designated mission and the prescribed means with which to accomplish it. And even there, Manstein had to confront Hitler in order to produce that harmony--a confrontation which finally resulted in Manstein's relief from command.

In Burma, Slim discovered that one of his primary tasks was to achieve a balance between these ends and means--and then to provide his subordinates the maximum freedom of action possible.

My corps and divisions were called upon to act with at least as much freedom as armies and corps in other theaters. Commanders at all levels had to act more on their own; they were given greater latitude to work out their own plans to achieve what they knew was the army commander's intention. In time they developed to a marked degree a flexibility of mind and a firmness of decision that enabled them to act swiftly to take advantage of sudden information or changing

circumstances without reference to their superiors.<sup>30</sup>

Similar flexibility and decentralization of control were evident in Smith's First Marine Division. The tone for command and control within the U. S. X Corps was set by its Commanding General, Lt. Gen. Edward Almond, who insisted on mission-type orders to his division commanders.<sup>31</sup> Such Auftragstaktik as a means of command enabled the subordinate units to operate independently for days at a time.

Contrasting these effective command systems was that of the Japanese High Command who, according to David M. Glantz, "reacted sloppily and indecisively . . . Confusion reigned at the top, and area army and army orders conflicted. Thus, many units withdrew from combat, while others were swallowed up by it." Because of their rigid system and cultural bias toward absolute obedience without deviation, "from the very beginning, Japanese forces were off balance, and they remained off balance throughout the short campaign."<sup>32</sup>

It appears that once more the derived principle has been substantiated. There remains only one from our list.

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<sup>30</sup>Slim, Op. cit., pp. 450-1.

<sup>31</sup>See Tiberi et al., Op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>32</sup>Glantz, "August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria," pp. 184-6.

The operational commander must possess vision.

More than 150 years ago, Clausewitz wrote that "Four elements make up the climate of war: danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance."<sup>33</sup> If we consider the combination of these elements and then the effect they have on a commander on whose judgment rests so much, is it any wonder that few of history's captains have acquired the label of "military genius?"

Perhaps the commanders of the successful operations that have been examined do not satisfy all the criteria of Clausewitz's "military genius."<sup>34</sup> In each case, however, they displayed the ability to anticipate operational requirements and make necessary improvisations to the plan in time to avert disaster. We have discussed this principle as it pertains to the three case studies. But how well does it withstand closer scrutiny?

Slim certainly meets the criteria established herein. In fact, one could argue that few, if any, great captains of history have displayed as much genius in the course of one campaign. He started with a comprehensive rebuilding program for his army to prepare his soldiers and his staff physically, mentally, and psychologically for the rigors that lay ahead. Then, he developed a campaign plan with the object of defeating the Japanese

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<sup>33</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 100-12.

forces in Burma. Deducing correctly the Japanese center of gravity--strict conformity to orders, inflexibility, and lack of initiative--and their need to win before the monsoon set in, he chose to fight the decisive battle in the Imphal Plain. He then disposed the force for the operation, stated his intent, coordinated air and navel support for the ground maneuver, and set the terms for the conduct of the battle.<sup>35</sup>

His plan, then, focused on massing his units to withstand the expected Japanese onslaught, attrite the enemy in order to gain relative combat power, and at the proper moment counterattack to destroy him in detail. Few will argue the point: he brought the enemy to battle under the best terms possible given the circumstances. He also made timely improvisations to the plan based on changes in the situation. Moreover, when pressed to relieve the encircled forces at Imphal, he resolutely maintained his course. His presence of mind and determination proved invaluable in the course of the operation. As was the case with the other successful operations, the operational commander was able to "sense" the nature of the battlefield after the battle and to envision subsequent battles.

To a lesser degree Smith also demonstrated this acumen. He determined that the Chinese centers of gravity were their relative inferiority in mobility and their

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<sup>35</sup>See Slim, *Op. cit.*, pp. 245-254.

absence of aerial support. Consequently, his plan sought to take advantage of the Marine advantage in both--maximum speed even at the cost of destroying superfluous supplies and equipment, especially in the daytime when attacking Chinese would be repelled by close air support aircraft.

He also discovered that U. S. Marine Corps doctrine was invalid. He enjoyed neither secure lines of communication nor the linear form of combat foreseen by the doctrine. Since his units were encircled by the enemy, they had to adapt to the situation somehow. The solution was to establish a 360 degree perimeter and, for all intents and purposes, attack to the rear. While this does not seem to be earth shattering now, it was certainly a radical change from preconceived notions of combat--especially from a nation that had recently taken part in two world wars and ascribed a philosophy of a linear battlefield.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas the successful operational commanders of encircled forces displayed a certain coup d'oeil, those whose operations were unsuccessful did not. In the encirclements of Minsk, Kiev, and Uman (1941), for example, the Soviets demonstrated rigid adherence to a preconceived plan in spite of overwhelming evidence which cried for a

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<sup>36</sup>See Tiberi et al., Op. cit., especially pp. 81-5.



change to the operational plans.<sup>37</sup> And in Manchuria, the Japanese commanders were completely dysfunctional.<sup>38</sup>

Having examined this eighth principle, its commonality among successful operations and its absence among unsuccessful operations, it seems appropriate to assert that its applicability was substantiated. Two parts, however, must be added: the commander's ability to sense the outcome of the battle and the power to envision subsequent battles.

But we are not yet finished. In the process of reviewing other historical examples, against which to evaluate the previously derived principles, another principle that should have been deduced in the first chapter became obvious. It concerns the mental strain and the potential for the moral disintegration of an encircled force--in Chapter 4 it was introduced at Kesselfieber, encirclement fever.

It is difficult to capture the significance of the subject with simple language. But the fact remains that encirclements appear to instill an acute form of despair on the part of the soldiers. It seems that the successful commanders involved in operations where their force or a

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<sup>37</sup>See Lucas, War on the Eastern Front and Fugate, Operation Barbarossa.

<sup>38</sup>See Glantz, "August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria," pp. 183-7.

part thereof became encircled were able to overcome this feeling of despair. Conversely, commanders of encircled forces which were unsuccessful were unable to do so. In each of the successful operations there existed some related actions: dissemination of information throughout the command, presence of commanders at decisive points, trust in the competence of leadership, and an effective casualty evacuation system.

Slim discusses the subject in terms of "morale." And he does so in quite some detail, discussing morale on 11 separate instances and reserving 16 consecutive pages in one section to analyze it thoroughly.<sup>39</sup> He postulates that morale is:

A state of mind. It is that intangible force which will move a whole group of men to give their last ounce to achieve something, without counting the cost to themselves; that makes them feel they are part of something greater than themselves. If they are to feel that, their morale must, if it is to endure--and the essence of morale is that it should endure--have certain foundations. These foundations are spiritual, intellectual, and material, and that is the order of their importance. Spiritual first, because only spiritual foundations can stand real strain. Next intellectual, because men are swayed by reason as well as feeling. Material last--important, but last--because the very highest kinds of morale are often met when material conditions are lowest.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Slim, Op. cit., pp. 25, 29, 123, 126, 130, 133, 141, 152, 153, 155-70, 250, and 314.

<sup>40</sup>Slim, Op. cit., pp. 155-6.

Some would contest part of the cited quote. Ardant du Picq and S. L. A. Marshall, for example, might underscore the impact that the spiritual foundations have on the soldier and his decision of whether or not to fight. While Slim insists that soldiers must have a great and noble cause and that its achievement must be vital, Marshall downplays its importance. Instead, he claims that in the face of danger men fight because of the measures taken by his leaders and because he is serving among men whom he has known for a long period--comradeship.<sup>41</sup>

Ardant du Picq wrote that it is "The sense of duty, discipline, pride, the example of their officers and above all their coolness, (that) sustain them and prevent their fear from becoming terror."<sup>42</sup> My limited review of the phenomenon in the historical examples noted tends to support the views of Marshall and Ardant du Picq.

Differences of opinion concerning the means with which to attenuate it notwithstanding, the subject of "encirclement fever" remains valid. And so does the principle that operational commanders of encircled forces need to attenuate its effects. It is clearly beyond the

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<sup>41</sup>Marshall, Men against fire: the problems of battle command in future war (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1978), especially pp. 138-56.

<sup>42</sup>Charles J. J. Ardant du Picq, Battle Studies: ancient and modern battle, translated from the 8th ed. in the French by Col. John N. Greely and Maj. Robert C. Cotton (New York: MacMillan, 1921), p. 120.

scope of this study to deduce the methods with which to accomplish such a task. Our purpose is merely to recognize the operational necessity to do so. The solution will have to be produced elsewhere.

The ninth principle, then, should read as follows: Operational commanders must attenuate the effects of "encirclement fever." Having completed the evaluation of the principles, it seems appropriate that they be summarized.

#### OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR ENCIRCLED FORCES

- \* The operational commander must decide early on the operational mission which is to be performed and the effect to be produced by the encircled force.
- \* The operational commander must shift or reallocate forces to the critical point.
- \* The relief and breakout forces should be massed.
- \* The operational commander should synchronize the simultaneous attack from within and without.
- \* Airfields and air lines of communication are decisive centers of gravity.

- \* Develop the plan around surprise and deception.
- \* Provide subordinates freedom of action.
- \* The operational commander must possess the vision to anticipate future operational requirements, to affect necessary improvisations to the plan, to sense the character of the battlefield following the battle, and to envision subsequent battles.
- \* The operational commander must attenuate the effects of encirclement fever.

#### IMPLICATIONS

There is no simple formula for winning wars. There is no guarantee that the adherence to any set of principles, however carefully derived, will insure victory. Indeed, defeating the enemy forces in battle may not produce victory. Other national instruments of power will influence, either implicitly or explicitly, the results of future conflict.

While the conditions which set the terms for success are beyond the purely military realm, it is

difficult to conceive of wars being won in the absence of military forces and a national will equal to the challenge. Although successful military operations do not guarantee victory, they are an indispensable part of winning. The job of preparing the U. S. Army to win includes those efforts relating to developing a coherent doctrine, equipping the force, and training the force. This study provides implications which concern all three of these efforts.

The history of warfare is replete with examples of the encirclement of significant forces during large unit operations. This study substantiates that, as in other combat phenomena, there are general principles which are common to successful operations involving encircled forces. Given that future wars will most likely preserve, if not exacerbate, those conditions which facilitate encirclements, it follows that the U. S. Army should not neglect the operational aspects of encircled forces.

But a thorough examination must be conducted before ascribing to a set of principles concerning encircled forces. In this regard, this study serves only as a point of departure. A great deal more research and study is required before doctrine can address this phenomenon coherently. Then tests have to demonstrate the relevance of that doctrine to the conduct of war. And

lastly, there must be constant reevaluation of that doctrine to prevent its ossification.

The revision of U. S. Army doctrine and its dissemination to the field, however, is not enough to warrant optimism in future warfare. Doctrinal methods have seldom survived intact the first days of battle. Therefore, the most essential prerequisite of our Army is an officer corps capable of quickly analyzing the actual situation through accurate observation and adapting to new realities as rapidly as possible.<sup>43</sup> Only such capabilities will produce the moral ascendancy with which to overcome the quantitative advantage of our potential enemy. Hence, the subject of encircled forces must be studied comprehensively in our military schools, included in field training exercises, applied in command post exercises, and discussed thoroughly during battle simulations. Only then will we have a reasonable assurance that we have "got it right."

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<sup>43</sup>A number of recent efforts address the challenge of officer education. Of those, I recommend Col. Huba Wass de Czege, "Toward a New American Approach to Warfare," Op. cit.; Gen. F. K. Maheffey, "Planning for a High Performance Army," Army Vol. 33, No. 10 (October 1983), pp. 151-61; HERO "In Pursuit of the Essence of War," Army Vol. 34, No. 1 (January 1984); Howard, Op. cit., Paret, Op. cit.; Gen. Donn A. Starry, "To Change an Army," Military Review 63 (March 1983), 20-7; and William S. Lind, "Preparing for Maneuver Warfare," Marine Corps Gazette (June 1984), 47-55.

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#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The body of general literature dealing with the German-Soviet conflict is large and growing. When the Allied armies overran Germany in the spring of 1945, they uncovered tons of German official records. The military collections were brought to the United States and remained in military custody until their transfer to the National Archives in 1958. Microfilm copies of these records and guides containing descriptions are available from the National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Washington, D. C. 20408.

In the continuing absence of significant Soviet documentary evidence, the German military records remain the best source for the study of the prodigious struggle. Of the German collections, the Armed Forces High Command (OKW), Army High Command (OKH), and field commands (corps, armies, and army groups) are the most useful. In matters pertaining to the Eastern Front, the OKW records have several limitations: the collection is incomplete, the Eastern Front was not an OKW theater, and the OKW was deliberately excluded from direct knowledge and influence on events and decisions relating to the Eastern Front.

The OKH was the central staff for the conduct of the war against the Soviet Union and, after September 1942, the Eastern Front was its exclusive and sole operational responsibility. Unfortunately, the OKH records that have survived, though substantial in bulk, are

fragmentary. The most nearly continuous of the OKH files are those of the Eastern Intelligence Branch (Fremde Heere Ost). This agency produced a number of intelligence estimates, summaries, and comparisons of German-Soviet strengths. Enough of these have survived to form an accurate intelligence picture for the Eastern Front as it appeared to the Germans.

One important set of high-level documents not properly belonging either to the OKH or the OKW collections is Fuehrer Conference Fragments (Fragmentes des Stenographischen Dienstes in F. H. Qu.), translated excerpts of which have been published in Felix Gilbert, ed., Hitler Directs His War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), and which have been published in full in Helmuth Heiber, ed., Hitler's Lagebesprechungen (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1962).

For the history of war against the Soviet Union, the army group records are the prime sources. The army group commands were the direct link between the High Command (Hitler and the OKH) and the front; and, within the limits imposed by Hitler's method of command, they were originating agencies for operational decisions. In accordance with German practice, they each kept an operations war diary comprised of incoming and outgoing orders, summaries of reports and conferences, situation estimates, the progress of operations, weather,

temperature, and other items of operational or historical significance. Of the army group operations war diaries the following have survived: Army Group A (South Ukraine, South) 1 October 1942-31 March 1945; Army Group Don (annexes only) 7 December 1942-28 February 1943; Army Group North, 1 October 1942-15 June 1944; Army Group Center, 22 August 1943-24 September 1944; and Army Group Vistula, 21 January-29 April 1945.

To provide the U. S. Army with a comprehensive record of the German military experience in World War II, the Foreign Military Studies Program of the Historical Division, United States Army, Europe, produced by the time it was terminated in 1961 some 2,400 manuscripts. The authors were, for the most part, former high-ranking German officers.

Beginning in 1948, more comprehensive projects were initiated. These were assigned to teams who made use of records secured through private sources, interviews, and their own experience. The over-all supervision and direction was in the hands of the Control Group, headed throughout its existence by Generaloberst a. D. Franz Halder. In 1954, the Historical Division, United States Army, Europe, published a complete list of the manuscripts. A full set of these is on deposit in the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, D. C.

Some works available in English are particularly noteworthy. Gerhard L. Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954) covers the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact and Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union. Other excellent efforts on this subject include John Keegan, Barbarossa: Invasion of Russia, 1941 (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), Gen. Walter Warlimont, Inside Hitler's Headquarters (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), and Barry A. Leach, German Strategy Against Russia, 1939-1941 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), especially chapters three and four. A comprehensive history of the German occupation is contained in Alexander Dallin, German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1957). There exists a plethora of works providing accounts and analysis of the conflict. T. Dodson Stamps and Vincent J. Esposito, eds., A Military History of World War II With Atlas (West Point: United States Military Academy, 1953) contains a summary of military operations and excellent maps. Albert Seaton, The Russo-German War, 1941-45 (London Arthur Barker, 1971) provides a very comprehensive treatment. Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader (New York: Dutton, 1952) and Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1958) are also invaluable. Both are memoirs and to some extent display the deficiencies of that genre; but both contain analysis and operational narrative which are

clearly indispensable. Two books by Paul Karl Schmidt <Paul Carell>, Hitler Moves East (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971) and Scorched Earth (London: Harrap, 1970), though suspect in the treatment of Soviet sources, are an absolute must.

Soviet sources perforce make any claim to comprehensive identification and listing pretentions, if not absurd. The several revisions of the wartime history of the Soviet Union--prompted by political exigency--necessitate careful consideration of these materials. Wartime censorship and the need for morale-boosting propaganda, designed for internal and external consumption, all too obviously impregnated this wartime output. Istoriia velikoi otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soivza, 1941-1945 <IVOVSS>, History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945 (Moscow: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1963), a six volume official Soviet history, reflects all the expected flaws but is, nevertheless, essential to the coverage of the conflict.

Extremely valuable within all of the Soviet literature is the Voenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal, Military History Journal. Resuming publication in 1959, the journal contains material of prime importance, often being a more technical and reliable version of wartime operations. A feature which became more pronounced in the mid-1970s was

the journal's stringent analysis of Soviet operational decisions, operational performance, and command systems.

I owe particular thanks to three monumental works in respect to Soviet sources. W. E. D. Allen and P. Muratoff, The Russian Campaigns of 1941-1943 and The Russian Campaigns of 1944-1945 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1944 and 1946) remain a remarkable achievement even at this distance and can be read with tremendous profit, not the least for their elucidation of terrain factors. Alexander Werth, Russia at War (New York: Dutton, 1964) utilizes a great deal of Russian material and presents a major chronicle of the Soviet side of the war in considerable, if not systematic, detail. Lastly, John Erickson's two-volume manuscript, The Road to Stalingrad (London: Harper and Row, 1975) and The Road to Berlin (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983) must be considered the high-water mark in the treatment of sources and references.

Having discussed the general characteristics of the sources and materials relating to the Soviet-German conflict, I must address two principal shortcomings of this study. First, it should be recognized that, lacking the linguistic skills in both languages, I had to resort to the literature which had already been translated into English. Second, even limiting the study to the material available in English proved to be no simple undertaking. Sheer bulk apart, the material was characterized by

diversity, complexity, and disparity. In terms of "raw data" (order of battle, dispositions, weapons performance, and so on) derived from contemporary sources, the German and Soviet materials do not differ appreciably. What has been constructed in retrospect is another matter. But I have tried here to assemble a collection which can represent the "comparability" of Soviet and German sources--hence (i) the key command decisions at Army/Army Group level, (ii) that agglomeration of intelligence material from both antagonists which has been translated under the auspices of various United States agencies, and (iii) the multiple collections of studies, analyses, statistical data, maps and records.

All this merely reinforces my earlier submission that any claim to a comprehensive, much less exhaustive, catalogue of sources and materials would border on the fatuous. Perhaps the best that can be managed is to register those prime materials which directly illuminate the command decisions, the operational narrative, and the analyses thereof. To this end I have divided the material into three categories of literature: Soviet, German, and Other. Each of these is further divided into either three or four sections, as required: books, government documents, periodicals/articles, and when appropriate, unpublished material.

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