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Analysis of Soviet deception operations during World War II with emphasis on Operation URANUS in November 1942 and Operation BAGRATION in June 1944. Discussion of the planning process, technical means employed, and the degree of success in preventing the Germans from discerning the main Soviet effort in time to take countermeasures. Based on published sources, including recent Soviet accounts of deception.

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Soviet Deception Operations during World War II

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Soviet Deception Operations during World War II

Doctrine

Prior to the German invasion, the Soviets recognized deception as the primary way to achieve surprise. According to the Regulations of the Red Army in 1939, deception involved concealment, simulation, misinformation, and demonstrations or feints. All of these methods were contained in the single Russian word maskirovka. The Soviets have retained this basic definition to the present time.

According to Soviet doctrine, the commander included maskirovka in his decision. This decision occurred early in the planning process. The normal Soviet planning process began with the task, generally an order received from a higher command level. The commander or chief of staff gave this task to the principal staff officers, who prepared suggestions for the commander. After hearing these suggestions, the commander made his decision. This decision usually would be very concise, often a map overlay with a few paragraphs of explanation. On the basis of this decision, the staff developed formal plans. As part of the commander's decision, maskirovka became integral to the formal planning process. In 1943, the new Field Regulations emphasized the importance of maskirovka by making it a command responsibility.

In accordance with Soviet military thought, there were three levels

of maskirovka. At tactical level, units from battalion through division conducted deception, usually concentrating on concealment. At operational level, armies and fronts developed maskirovka plans to achieve operational surprise. Beginning in the 1970's, the Soviets published extensive materials concerning operational maskirovka during the Second World War. Finally, at strategic level, the Supreme High Command and the General Staff developed maskirovka for strategic operations and campaigns.

Soviet doctrine did not specify a standard organizational concept. The commander organized his maskirovka effort as appropriate for a given operation. In a simple case, the Chief of Engineer Troops might be responsible for camouflage and elementary deception measures. In a more elaborate effort, the Chief of Staff at army or front level might create a special maskirovka control group composed of staff officers chosen for expertise in such areas as communications. This group would normally be headed by an officer from the operations directorate of the formation. It would normally report to the Chief of Staff or the head of his operations directorate, not to the commander directly.

Practice

Soviet military historians distinguish three major periods in the "Great Patriotic War:"

The period of initial reverses from June 1941 to November 1942. During this period, the Soviets seldom used maskirovka apart from simple

camouflage techniques.

The transitional period from November 1942 to December 1943. As the Soviets gained the initiative, they began to use maskirovka. Operation URANUS (Stalingrad encirclement) was the outstanding example.

The final defeat of Germany and Japan from December 1943 to August 1945. In this last period of the war, the Soviets routinely planned maskirovka to support their major operations. Their greatest success was in support of Operation BAGRATION (destruction of Army Group Center in Belorussia).

Period of Initial Reverses

On 22 June 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union, achieving virtually complete surprise. Stalin was informed of German preparations, but he believed these reports were tricks devised by Western powers to involve him in a war against Germany. His self-deception prevented the Red Army from mobilizing and deploying to counter the invasion before it began.

During the initial period of the war, the Soviets had little opportunity to develop any plans, much less extensive maskirovka. Through November 1941, they were reeling under catastrophic defeats and the very survival of the Red Army was in question. In these circumstances, the Soviets rarely used operational maskirovka and even camouflage discipline was often lacking. The first significant maskirovka supported Soviet preparations for a counteroffensive before Moscow in December. The Soviets concealed concentration of their

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forces, especially 1st Shock Army, by strict camouflage discipline. Forces concentrating for the offensive moved only at night under complete radio silence. There was a general prohibition on open fires that could reveal the presence of troops. Although German pilots detected part of the preparations, the High Command continued to think that the Soviets had exhausted their reserves until the counteroffensive began.

During the first winter, the Soviets began to experiment with deception at army and front level. On 10 January 1942, 20th Army started an offensive on the Lama River northwest of Moscow by firing an artillery preparation on a secondary axis to distract attention from the main effort. This simple technique apparently helped the army to achieve surprise and breakthrough. The 20th Army supported an attack during 16-19 February by simulating forces on its left flank using equipment mock-ups, explosive charges and loudspeakers broadcasting engine noise, while it actually attacked from its right wing. Also during this winter campaign, the Soviets made their first use of radio misinformation. On 18-31 January, Southern Front supported its offensive south of Kharkov by using radio transmissions to simulate the advance and concentration of five rifle divisions on a false axis of advance.

In spring 1942, Stalin again deceived himself concerning German intentions. He expected the Germans to renew their advance on Moscow and consequently believed that the signs of impending operations in the Ukraine presaged a feint. As a result, Hitler enjoyed operational .

surprise at the out..et of the summer campaign.

In July 1942, the Soviets planned and mounted their first maskirovka operation. For this operation, the West and Kalinin Fronts created special staff sections headed by a lieutenant colonel and a major. These special sections coordinated a variety of means to simulate concentration of forces on a false axis while the fronts prepared the main effort on the Rezhev-Vyazma axis behind German Ninth Army. The maskirovka operation involved four camouflage companies, three rifle companies and over 800 equipment mock-ups. It also included false encoded radio transmissions. However, the following offensive made only slow progress.

Transitional Period

Operation URANUS, that began on 19 November 1942, led to the destruction of German Sixth Army. (See map 1.) For this operation, the Soviet General Staff planned maskirovka on a multi-front scale using diverse means. The aim of this maskirovka was to deny intelligence concerning concentrations of forces on the flanks of Sixth Army, lightly defended by Italian, Hungarian and Rumanian armies. The conditions around Stalingrad made this deception difficult. The open steppe afforded little concealment. Only one main rail line each served the Southwestern and Don Fronts and both these lines were under German surveillance. Worse yet, the Soviets had to transport forces over the Don and Volga Rivers, particularly the Don north of Stalingrad. Despite these difficulties, the Soviet maskirovka was successful.

During October, the Soviets started to secretly build up their forces on the flanks of Sixth Army. They covered heavy equipment on railway cars with tarpaulins. They delayed much rail movement until the last possible time and then ran trains at short intervals in just one direction - towards the front. They went to great lengths to conceal military facilities in the rear area. In Uryupinsk, camouflage companies concealed an ammunition supply point by making it resemble a typical Russsian farm village. The Southwestern Front constructed twenty-two bridges over the Don into the crucial Serafimovich bridgehead. Of these bridges, five were simulations to draw German fire. The Soviets also displayed mock-ups of ferries with guns and ammunition to distract German attention.

The four _front_ subordinate air armies camouflaged their operational airfields and created false airfields, usually at formerly active sites. At these false airfields, engineer sappers set up aircraft dummies and constructed models of vehicles and antiaircraft guns using brush and tree trunks. Dummies of soldiers were placed near the simulated equipment to deceive German photographic reconnaissance.

During the last weeks prior to Operation URANUS, the Soviets minimized the usual signs of impending attack. _Front_, army and division newspapers published articles about defensive operations. The left wing armies of Don _Front_ north of Stalingrad prepared field fortifications to distract attention from the Southwestern _Front_ (Serafimovich bridgehead) where the main effort would occur. Roving artillery detachments conducted registration firing at random times well in advance of the

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operation and passed the results to newly arrived units. Assault forces
moved into their concentration areas at night directed by teams composed
of traffic controllers, engineers and unit representatives. The main
task was to conceal the arrival of 5th Tank Army into the Serafimovich
bridgehead south of the Don. The army began to cross the Don at night
during the first week of November. This movement was successful with
the exception of 1st Tank Corps that was attacked during daylight by
German aircraft.

The Germans were caught off guard by Operation URANUS even though
their Sixth Army was obviously in a dangerous situation. On 6 November,
Foreign Armies East (Fremde Heere Ost) in the German Army High Command
estimated that the Soviet main effort would be against Army Group Center
that had fought defensive battles throughout the fall. Thereafter,
German intelligence continued to receive reports of Soviet
reinforcements opposite Rumanian Third Army (target of Soviet 5th Tank
Army) and Rumanian Fourth Army south of Stalingrad. On 12 November,
Foreign Armies East estimated that limited operations against the
Rumanian Third Army were likely. But the Germans widely underestimated
the strength of the Soviet offensive and they failed to take defensive
measures in time. Hitler bore a large personal responsibility for this
failure.

On 17 December, the Soviet Supreme High Command created the first
special purpose radio jamming units. These radio battalions each had
eight to ten radio stations plus direction finders and were assigned at
front level. In addition to their basic jamming mission, these   ,

battalions also imitated German stations.

During the 1943 summer offensive in the Ukraine, the Soviets built twenty-two underwater bridges across the Oskol and Severskii Donets Rivers. The surfaces of these bridges were twenty to thirty centimeters beneath the water. After the failure of the German Operation CITADEL (Kursk salient) in July, the Soviets used these bridges to support their counteroffensive towards Kharkov.

Final Period of the War

At the beginning of 1944, the Soviets had the initiative and could plan an entire summer campaign for the first time in the war. By late April, the General Staff had an ambitious plan for offensive operations across the entire front. (See map 2.) First, the Leningrad and Karelian Fronts would drive Finland out of the war. Second, four fronts would destroy German Army Group Center, regaining the last area of Russia still occupied by the Germans. Third, the First Ukrainian Front would attack towards Lvov south of the Pripet Marshes. Fourth, if the situation permitted, the Soviets would conduct an offensive into Rumania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. In other words, the campaign would develop from north to south with the main effort in Belorussia. For the Belorussian operation, later codenamed BAGRATION, the General Staff considered surprise especially important. Accordingly, it developed a theater-wide maskirovka plan.

To distract attention from the preparations for Operation

BAGRATION, the General Staff decided to simulate increased threats north and south of Belorussia. On 3 May 1944, the General Staff ordered two fronts to simulate concentrations of forces. Third Baltic Front opposite Riga was to simulate concentrations of forces east of the Cherekh River south of Pskov. Third Ukrainian Front was to simulate eight to nine divisions on its right wing near the Moldavian border north of Kishnev. The simulations were set for 5 to 15 June, just prior to the scheduled start of Operation BAGRATION.

The General Staff also detailed the methods that fronts would use in maskirovka. The order to Third Ukranian Front specified that the false concentrations had to be animated with real equipment. In particular, the front had to defend dummy tanks and artillery with real antiaircraft guns and combat air patrols. Also, the front was to verify its maskirovka by observation and aerial photographs.

While simulating forces north and south, the Soviets concealed the redeployment of forces towards Belorussia. (See map 3.) As an example, when 5th Guards Tank Army redeployed from the Second Ukrainian Front, the front created false concentration areas to mask the army's departure. In all, the front created five concentration areas for tanks and twelve for artillery, as well as seventeen phony fuel dumps and twelve false ammunition storage points. The Soviets made tread marks, broadcast engine noise and imitated the tank army's radio nets. To facilitate the radio deception, the staff of 5th Guards Tank Army left a script of messages including some that were inadequately encoded. However, these simulations were not entirely effective, apparently .

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because the Germans received agent reports about the mock-ups.

Operation BAGRATION required large concentrations of forces in the rear areas of Third Belorussian Front and First Belorussian Front to conduct converging attacks towards the Minsk area. Third Belorussian Front would concentrate three armies drawn from other fronts (5th Guards Tank Army, 2nd Guards Army, and 11th Guards Army.) First Belorussian Front would receive four armies (51st Army, 28th Army, 8th Guards Army, and 2nd Tank Army.)

At the highest command level, the Soviets sought to conceal these concentrations of forces. On 29 May, the Supreme High Command issued a directive to the fronts involved in Operation BAGRATION (1st Baltic, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Belorussian). According to this directive, all redeployment was to be by night marches. Movement during the day was limited to small groups during non-flying weather. Troops were to be camouflaged during the day and contact with civilians was prohibited. The recently deployed units were to observe radio silence and their pilots were forbidden to fly reconnaissance over German-held territory. Antiaircraft units were prohibited from mass firing against single German reconnaissance aircraft. In sectors designated for assaults, the front line troops were to construct field fortifications, especially false minefields.

While the General Staff prepared Operation BAGRATION, it simultaneously concentrated forces in the rear of First Ukrainian Front opposite Lvov. These forces included three tank armies (1st Tank, 3rd

Guards Tank, 4th Tank). Prior to BAGRATION, these armies would divert
attention from the build-up of forces opposite German Army Group Center.
When BAGRATION was underway, these tank armies in the Ukraine would
spearhead the third major offensive of the summer campaign.

The Germans were more completely fooled prior to Operation
BAGRATION than they had been prior to Operation URANUS. In early May,
Foreign Armies East projected likely Soviet offensives towards the
Baltic Sea and into the Balkans. (See map 4.) On balance, Foreign
Armies East thought the latter course more likely and predicted relative
quiet opposite Army Group Center. By 12 May, the Germans revised this
estimate to include a secondary effort towards Lvov. Hitler was so
deluded by this false intelligence, that on 20 May he transferred LVI
Panzer Corps from Army Group Center to Army Group North Ukraine, now
practically in Poland. This move played directly into Soviet hands by
depriving Army Group Center of its only mobile reserve.

In late May and early June, three armies assigned to Army Group
Center detected preparations for an attack. (See map 5.) Third Panzer
Army recognized that the Soviets were preparing an attack southeast of
Vitebsk in the area of Third Belorussian Front. Fourth Army predicted
attacks by Second Belorussian Front. Ninth Army identified preparations
north of Zhlobin and an even more dangerous build-up west of the
Berezina, both within the area of First Belorussian Front. However,
this intelligence did not influence higher command levels to take
defensive measures while there was still time.

On 2 June 1944, Foreign Armies East dismissed the activity opposite Army Group Center as apparently a deception. Despite clear evidence of massive aviation build-up in the central region, the High Command continued to expect the Soviet main effort in the south up to 20 June, only two days prior to Operation BAGRATION.

At the very last, the Soviet General Staff employed another small deception. Rather than using the same start time for all elements, it staggered the attacks to give the appearance of isolated actions. First Baltic Front began reconnaissance in force on 22 June, by coincidence the anniversary of the German invasion, then went into a full offensive on the following day. Second and Third Belorussian Fronts started on 23 June, but First Belorussian Front waited until 24 June. By that time, the German High Command realized that the Soviets were mounting a major offensive, but not until 28 June did it recognize that the Soviets were aiming for Minsk. By that time, the trap was already closing. The Soviets encircled and destroyed about twenty-five divisions in Army Group Center, a total of about 350,000 men.

During late December 1944, First Ukrainian Front conducted an elaborate maskirovka operation in support of its offensive out of the Sandomierz bridgehead on the Vistula River. The false concentrations included fighter aircraft, several rifle battalions and artillery batteries to give realism to the displays. In addition, fifteen Soviet officers acted as an advance party, arranging billets for the units whose presence was simulated. This deception was directed against German agents in the Soviet rear. The maskirovka operation was only

partially successful because the Germans saw that the Sandomierz
bridgehead afforded the most suitable axis of advance.

In early April 1945, First Belorussian Front, then operating in
western Poland, regrouped to join Second Belorussian Front in destroying
German forces in Pomerania around Danzig. To conceal this regrouping,
the front broke contact and marched at night, leaving residual forces
still operating their original radio nets. The Soviets sealed the
radios of army units on the march and bypassed populated areas where
possible. In mid-April, Second Belorussian Front simulated preparations
for an attack towards Stettin on the Oder in support of First
Belorussian Front's final offensive on Berlin. It is difficult to
estimate the success of these deceptions because the Germans were sure
to be overwhelmed no matter what decisions they made.

The Soviets concealed their preparations for their successful
Manchurian campaign though fairly elaborate maskirovka. Soviet marshals
and other general officers sent to the Far Eastern Fronts temporarily
changed their names and ranks. Only units already in the border area
were permitted to use radios during the build-up of forces. Troops
moved into their final departure areas near the border only one or two
days prior to the offensive. At the outset, the lead battalions crossed
the border at night without artillery preparation. Although the
Japanese had long anticipated an attack, the Soviets were able to gain
some tactical and operational surprise.

Success of Soviet Deception

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Based on available sources, Soviet _maskirovka_ was not sophisticated, but it was clever and effective. It distorted the Germans' intelligence picture as determined by their collection means. During the later phases of the war, German intelligence relied primarily upon radio intercept, aerial photography and agents in formerly occupied territory. The Soviets played to these three sources by systematically denying intelligence on forces as they concentrated for offensive operations while revealing other forces, both real and simulated. As a result, the Germans acquired intelligence that concealed Soviet operational intentions, or at least made these very uncertain. The Germans seldom had an intelligence picture that allowed them to anticipate a Soviet offensive with timely countermeasures.

Consciously or not, the Soviets played well to the Germans' mental attitude. Hitler was recklessly optimistic and determined to hold territory, even when it was devoid of military value. As a result, he was predisposed to believe the distorted intelligence picture. His professional military advisors greatly underestimated Soviet industrial production and reserves of manpower. They continually expected the Soviet Union to exhaust its resources. As a result, they tended to underestimate the Soviet forces available for offensive operations. _Maskirovka_ encouraged them to persevere in this error.

The Soviets validated _maskirovka_ through their own reconnaissance means, the results of operations and debriefs of captured German officers. Currently, there is no evidence that the Soviets had an intelligence source comparable to Ultra in the West. However, they ,

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learned enough of the German side to become convinced that maskirovka
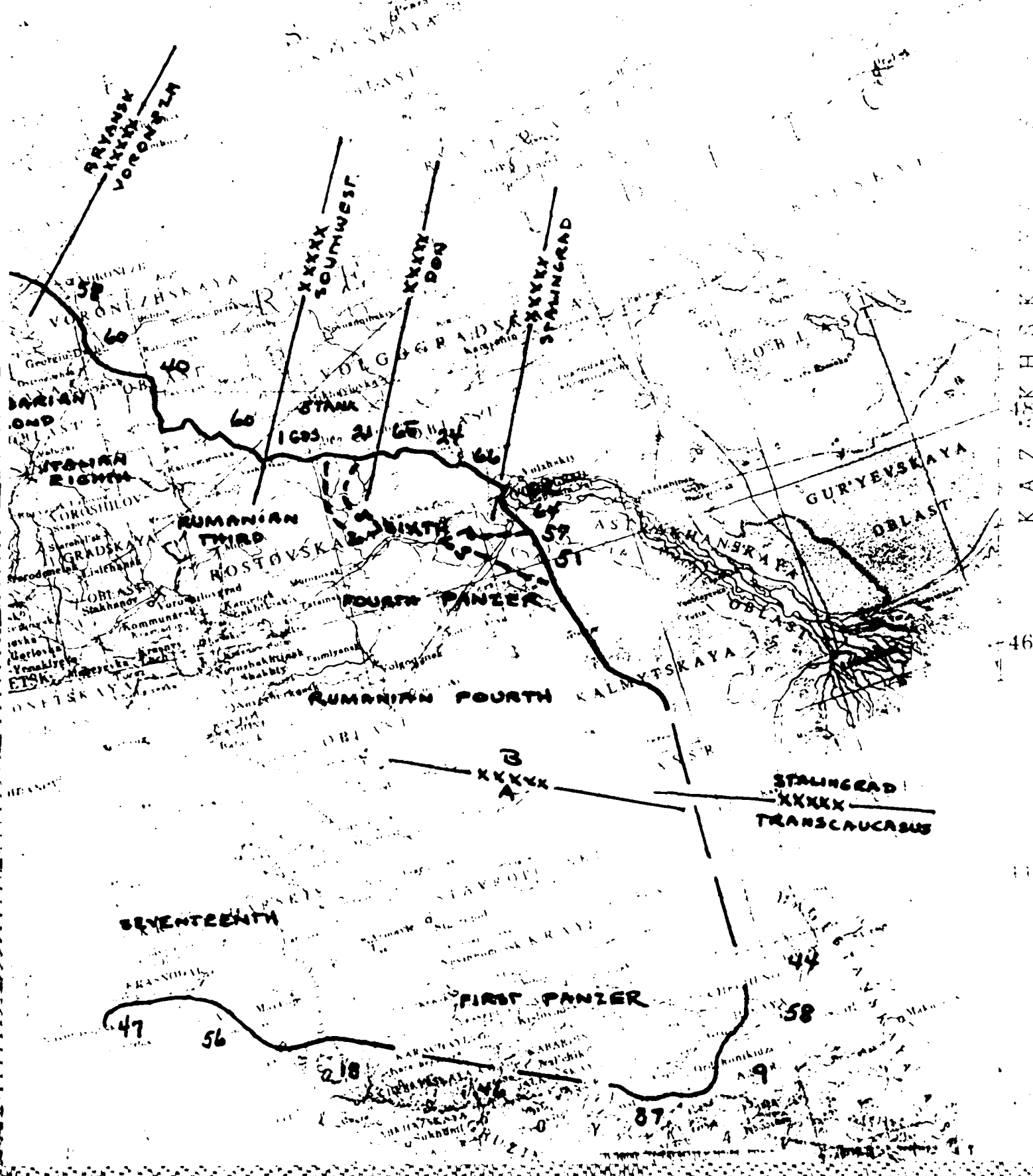was very useful.

Conclusion

Maskirovka was particularly effective in the operational sphere.
The Soviet aim was to deceive the Germans as to the location, timing,
strength and objectives of Soviet offensive operations. Maskirovka did
not have to succeed in every respect to be effective. Prior to
Operation BAGRATION, for example, German intelligence at army level
correctly anticipated most of the locations and the general timing of
the operation. But Army Group Center and the High Command
underestimated the strength of the attacks and failed to anticipate
Soviet objectives. By the time the German higher command levels became
alert to the danger of encirclement, it was almost too late too escape.

As a nation of chess players, the Soviets realized how threats
immobilize the opposing side. They created enough threats, both
simulated and real, to make the Germans defend along a wide front. At
the same time, the Soviets concealed the strength of their main effort
by strict camouflage. This combination of display and concealment,
directed at the highest command levels, typified their most successful
deception. Encouraged by their evident success, the Soviets made
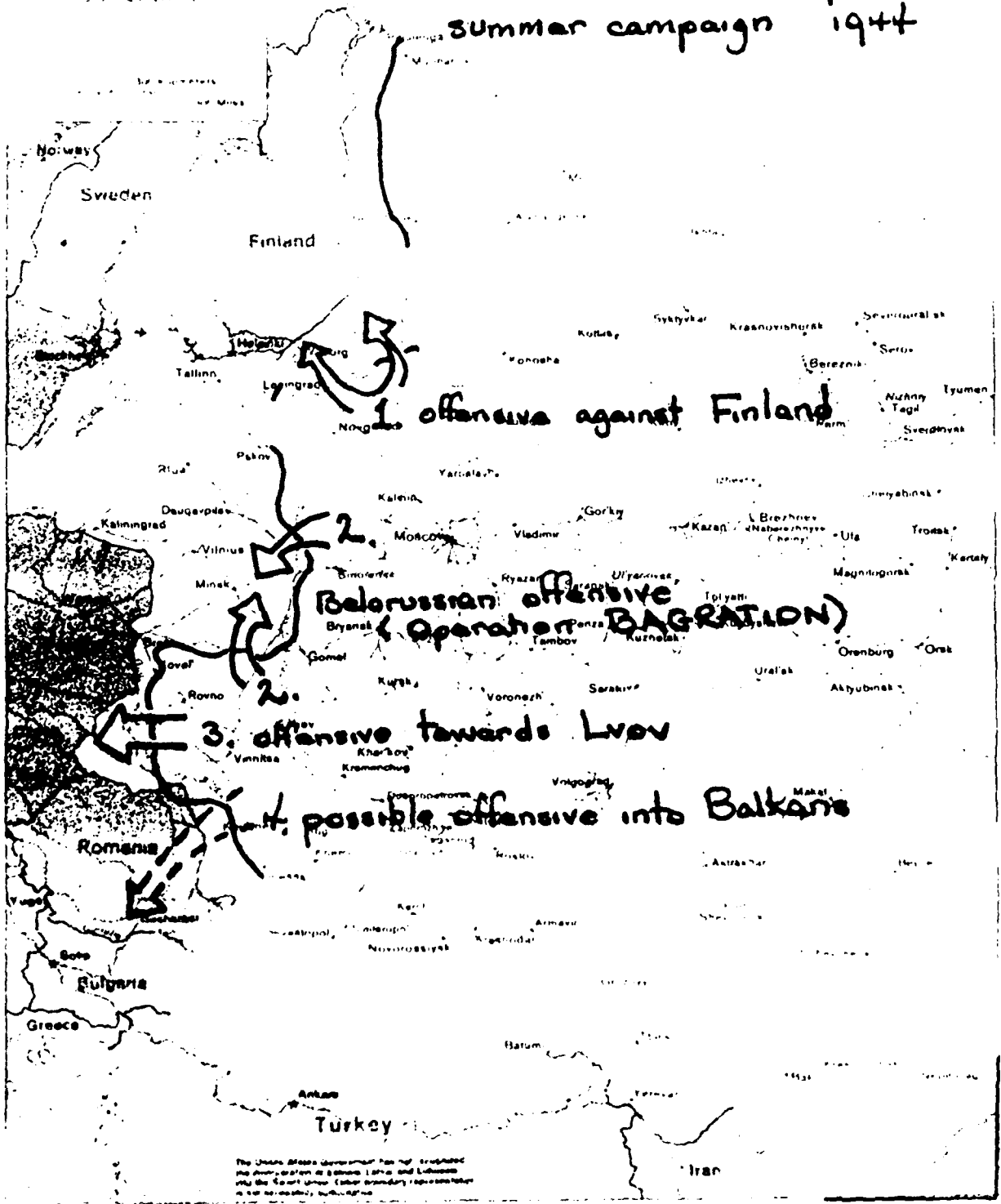maskirovka a regular part of their operational planning process.
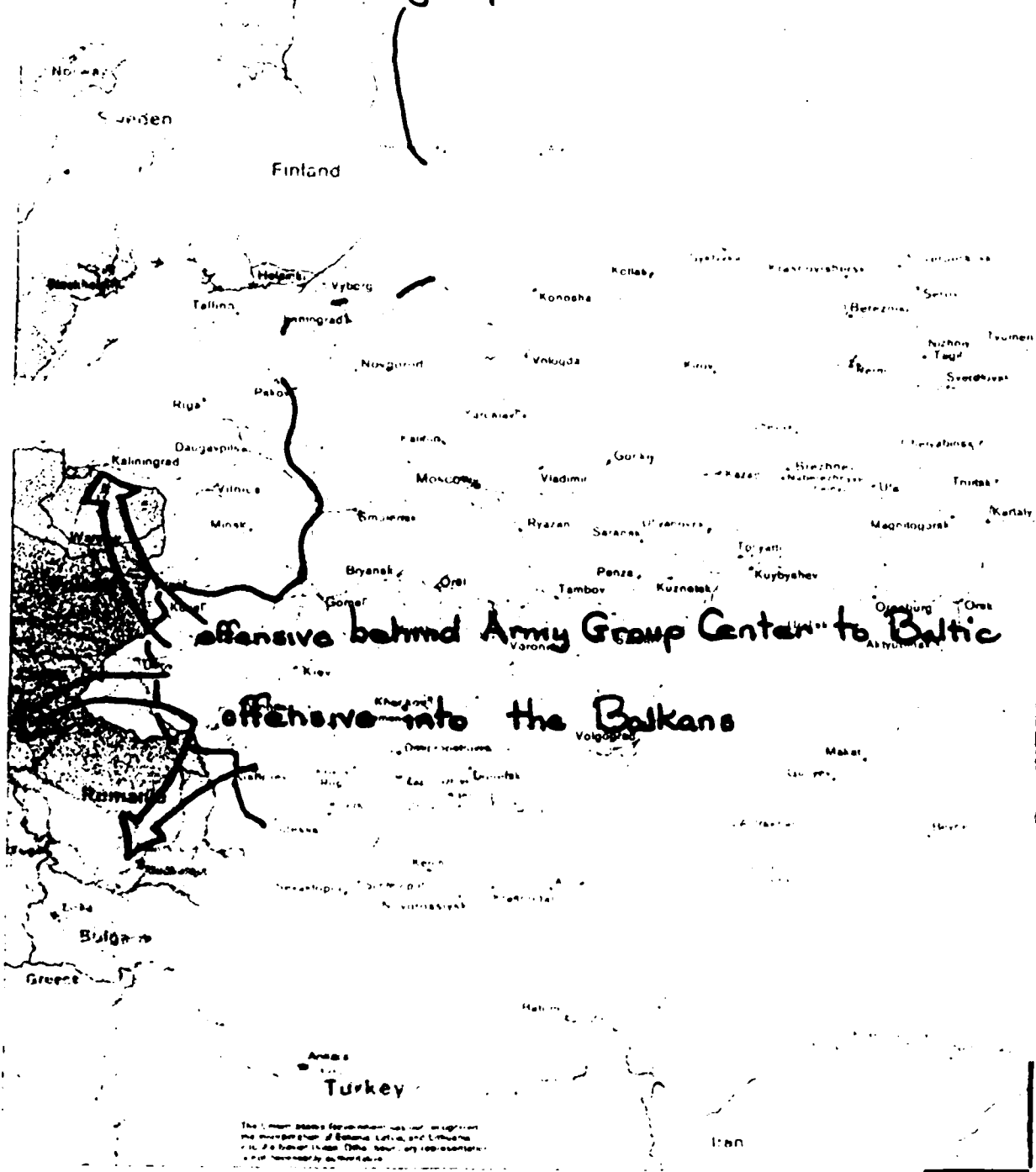
Operation URANUS
19 November 1942

1

BRYANSK
XXXXX
VORONEZH

XXXX SOUTHWEST

XXXX DON

XXXX STALINGRAD

58
60
40
60

STAVKA
1 GDS 21 65 24
66

RUMANIAN THIRD

SIXTH

57
51

FOURTH PANZER

RUMANIAN FOURTH

KALMYTSKAYA

B
XXXXX
A

STALINGRAD
XXXXX
TRANSCAUCASUS

SEVENTEENTH

44

FIRST PANZER

58

47
56

218

9

37

GUR'YEVSKAYA OBLAST

KAZAKHSK

Soviet General Staff plan
summer campaign 1944

1. offensive against Finland

2. Belorussian offensive (Operation BAGRATION)

3. offensive towards Lvov

4. possible offensive into Balkans

German intelligence estimate
May 1944

offensive behind Army Group Center to Baltic

offensive into the Balkans

Redeployment of armies for
Operation BAGRATION
May - June 1944
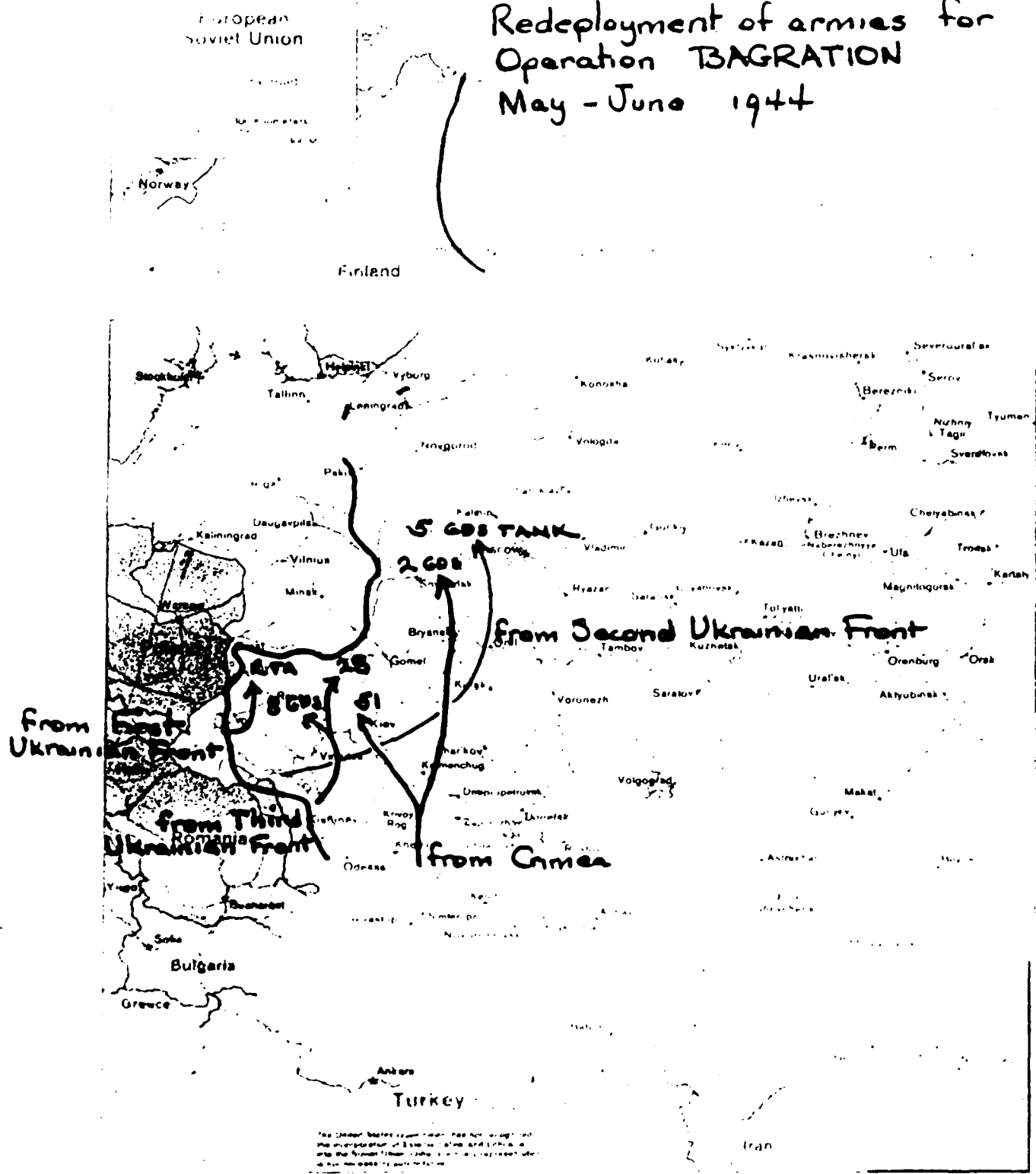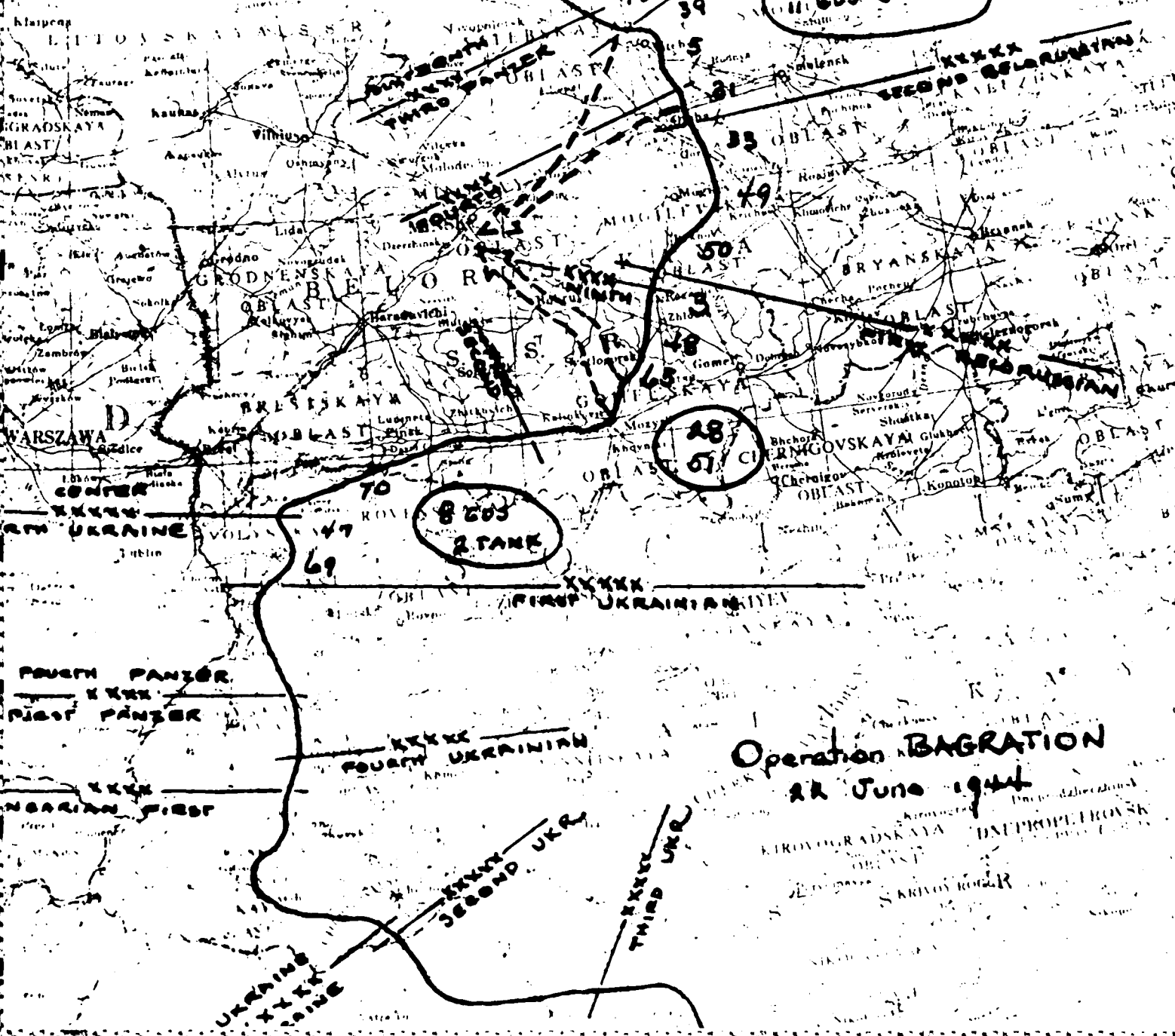
Operation BAGRATION
22 June 1944