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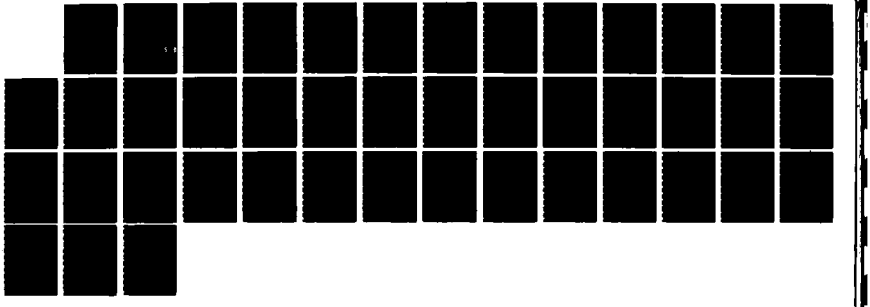

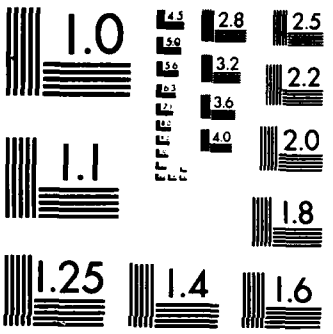

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Tactical and Operational Depth

by

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Infantry

School of Advanced Military Studies
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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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Historical analyzes based on the study of the Battle of Gazala, battle for the Kerch pennsula, and the Battle of Kursk revealed that tactical and operational depth are not related to the size of units or any specific depth, but are dependent on missions, objectives, employment of units, locations of reserves, and the perspective in which these are viewed. Units defending in the tactical depth had missions related to denying the attacker the ability to maneuver, while units positioned in the operational depth were oriented on destroying units that had penetrated the tactical depth.

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The study concludes that tactical and operational depth can be summed up in two words, denial and opportunity. The importance in understanding the difference in the two depths lies in the fact that when the attacker crosses the threshold between tactical and operational depth, a decision point has been reached. The attacker must decide how to respond to the opportunity presented to him, while the defender must adequately respond or face total destruction.

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ABSTRACT

TACTICAL AND OPERATIONAL DEPTH by Major Charles L. Crow, USA, 34 pages.

This study analyzes and defines tactical and operational depth. Simply stated, tactical depth is defined as the area occupied by defending units whose continued occupation maintains the integrity of the defense and denies the attacker the opportunity to destroy the mass of defending forces by maneuver, while operational depth is the area in which maneuver is achieved and if gained by the attacker provides the opportunity to destroy the defender without engaging the majority of the defenses.

Historical analyzes based on the study of the Battle of Gazala, battle for the Kerch peninsula, and the Battle of Kursk revealed that tactical and operational depth are not related to the size of units or any specific depth, but are dependent on missions, objectives, employment of units, locations of reserves, and the perspective in which these are viewed. Units occupying tactical depth in the battles studied range in size from brigade to army. In the term of size, tactical depth varied from five to sixty kilometers. Units defending in the tactical depth had missions related to denying the attacker the ability to maneuver, while units positioned in the operational depth were oriented on destroying units that had penetrated the tactical depth.

The study concludes that tactical and operational depth can be summed up in two words, denial and opportunity. The importance in understanding the difference in the two depths lies in the fact that when the attacker crosses the threshold between tactical and operational depth, a decision point has been reached. The attacker must decide how to respond to the opportunity presented to him, while the defender must adequately respond or face total destruction.

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TACTICAL AND OPERATIONAL DEPTH

Introduction

As war is both an art and a science, it is important that a differentiation be made between the two. Art requires an understanding and mastery of the subject which can lead to success on the field of battle. The science of war implies exactness including the ability to converse in precise terms which convey specific meanings and intent in as few words as possible.

Along with the acceptance of the operational level of war by the US Army, a "Pandora's box" of terminology has sprung open. Terms such as operational maneuver, operational reserves and operational depth are extensively used in describing various facets of the operational level of war. This has led to confusion, and should this uncertainty transmit itself into misunderstanding of a commander's intent during battle, the consequences could be catastrophic.

In Carl von Clausewitz's On War and Baron de Jomini's The Art of War, both authors emphasized the necessity of establishing specific definitions associated with key words. Both individuals realized that without a common basis of understanding, discussion would be fruitless. It has been

stated that Jomini grasped the simple notion that without clearly defined terms understood by all concerned, any study of sound military practice would be seriously hampered.[1]

We face that same challenge today in the joint and combined arenas. If we as a service are unable to agree on common definitions among ourselves for such terms as tactical and operational depth, then we will be unable to articulate our intent to our sister services and allies.

Defining tactical and operational depth and understanding their differences is the focus of this paper. It is much too simplistic and meaningless to state operational depth is located between tactical and strategic depth, and that tactical depth is that depth occupied by tactical units. I submit that tactical and operational depths are not tied to unit size nor a specified area of terrain, but are related to missions assigned units, employment of units, locations of reserves, objectives, and the perspective in which these are viewed. This is important because our concept of depth has been tainted by Webster's dictionary term of depth which primarily alludes to distance and size. One of the last connotations given in Webster's dictionary is that of perspective.[2]

In light of the above, the following definitions for tactical and operational depth are offered for consideration. Tactical depth is that which is occupied by defending units whose missions severely restrict their freedom of maneuver, and the continued occupation of which will maintain the

integrity of the defense thereby denying the attacker the opportunity to destroy or disrupt the mass of defending forces by maneuver. Operational depth is that area beyond tactical depth in which both defender and attacker can achieve freedom of maneuver, and if gained by the attacker provides the opportunity to destroy or disrupt the defender without engaging the majority of the defenses. These definitions will be scrutinized in comparison to a theoretical battlefield and historical examples.

As a framework for discussion, Jomini's description of a theater of operations is presented as a model for comparison (figure 1). Theaters of war and theaters of operations establish theoretical confines in which armies fight. A theater of war is defined as all territory upon which antagonists may fight. Within this theater of war is a more specifically defined theater of operations which is all territory an army may desire to invade, or may be required to defend.[3] A fraction of the whole theater of war traversed by an army in the attainment of its objective is known as a zone of operations.[4] An example would be the Mediterranean as a theater of war, North Africa as a theater of operations, while the specific area over which the Axis armies and the British 8th Army maneuvered and fought is the zone of operations.

Within the confines established by theaters and zones of operations, the majority of remaining areas of interest are primarily determined by the location and movement of opposing

forces. Jomini's strategic front is the area that is established by actual positions occupied by the masses of an army.[5] The forward edge of the strategic front equates to the forward line of troops (FLOT). Extending backward from both sides of the strategic front, Jomini defines a front of operations as the space separating the two armies extending "one or two marches" beyond the extremity of the strategic front and includes the ground upon which the armies will probably collide.[6]

Also found within the confines of a theater of operations are areas most commonly referred to by Jomini as "points." Some of these points maintain a permanent importance regardless of the relationship of opposing forces, such as the base of operations from which armies obtain reinforcements and resources', permanent geographical strategic points, and decisive strategic points whose importance is constant and immense (ie, capitals).[8] On the other hand, the importance of other points fluctuate over time and are directly related to the movement of opposing armies. For example, strategic points of maneuver only have a value from the relations they bear to the positions of the armies and to the enterprises likely to be directed against them.[9] Objective points of maneuver derive their importance from the situation of the hostile army.[10] Accidental points of maneuver result from the positions of the troops on both sides.[11]

Although we are unable directly to transpose the

battlefield of today onto that of Jomini's, his description is useful in establishing theoretical parameters from which to extract information helpful in understanding and defining tactical and operational depths. Jomini's battlefield establishes two specific areas that are directly related to the opposing armies: strategic front and front of operations.

Beyond the definitions established by Jomini for strategic front and front of operations, there is a distinct relationship between them. As the masses of a defender deploy along the strategic front, it would naturally follow that to conduct a penetration the attacker must fight his way through at least a portion of this front. I equate strategic front to tactical depth for several reasons. The "mass of defenders" are employed within this area. The term mass indicates that the *majority of defending* forces are deployed within a given area with a mission to defend. It is immaterial whether they are employed in a linear fashion or deployed in depth. Depth, as defined by some distance or size and number of units, is not discussed by Jomini as it is not relevant to a concept based on the relationship of opposing forces. Once passed this front an attacker finds himself within the subsequent area of the battlefield Jomini sets forth as the front of operations.

The only reference made to distance concerning front of operations is that it extends "one or two marches" beyond the extremity of the strategic front indicating some definitive depth.[12] The term "one or two marches" denotes a time

distance factor, the marching speed dictating how much distance may be covered in a given march.

The front of operations is the parallel to operational depth. It lies beyond the tactical depth (strategic front) and extends out to some distance determined primarily on the distance units can move within a given time. Additionally, this area "includes the ground upon which the armies will probably come in collision."[13] This is significant because it indicates an area where units maneuver and fight. Once past the tactical depth, an attacker gains a level of maneuver and may be able to dictate if and when he will engage subsequent enemy forces.

The attacker's determination to seek battle should be based on the objective of the operation. Jomini states there are only two objectives: territorial and destruction or disorganization of enemy forces. Operational depth becomes important when the objective is the destruction of the enemy because it is in this area that an attacker is capable of maneuvering into a favorable position to destroy the majority of defending forces. Complete destruction of the enemy is seldom achieved within the tactical depth because the attrition is prohibitive.

It is interesting that Jomini does not relate the depth of front operations to a specific size force occupying a given area, but simply to time and distance. This could indicate, at least to Jomini, that operational depth is not defined by unit size, but it is primarily related to time

distance factors.

A final note in analyzing the Jominian battlefield: because of the constant movement of opposing forces, Jomini concluded that few maxims can be extracted concerning the layout of a battlefield.[14] This is strikingly important when one considers how intent Jomini was on establishing principles concerning war. This notion was substantiated some seventy-five years later by Mikhail Tukhachevskiy when he wrote "that tactical depth is constantly extended as the enemy pushes his way into the rear and the defender feeds in more troops."[15] Both of these great theorists allude to the fact that because of the constant motion of opposing armies, tactical and operational depth expand and contract relative to a given time of battle. Now let us turn our attention from the strictly theoretical and examine some historical examples to see how they compare.

Historical Evaluations

Gazala Battles

On 27-28 May 1942 Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Axis armies attacked and routed the British 8th Army in what is known as the Gazala Battles. Figure 2 is a schematic of British defenses and Rommel's planned assault as they were on the first day of battle.

British 8th Army was organized into two corps, XIIIth

and XXXth. XIIIth corps, consisting of three infantry divisions and two tank brigades, was responsible for manning the main defensive line. Since 2nd South African division was tasked with defending Tobruk, it cannot be viewed as participating in the Gazala battles, consequently XIIIth Corps was defending with only two infantry divisions. XXXth Corps, with two armored divisions and two infantry brigades, concentrated to the south and rear of XIIIth Corps. Its mission was to counterattack Rommel's panzers when his main attack was identified.[6]

XXXth Corps was deployed in brigade sized packets in a line extending from north to south for a distance of some 80 kilometers. Although extensive use was made of minefields, the defense was not integrated and most brigade "boxes" were not mutually supporting. The depth of these forward brigade boxes varied depending on terrain, depth of the minefields, and how units were deployed. Since each division had all three of its brigades on line, the depth of combat units was limited to the depth of the brigade boxes. Supporting each infantry division was one tank brigade deployed approximately ten kilometers behind the brigade boxes. These armor brigades represented the only depth in terms of combat units to the divisional defenses. The primary mission of the armor units was to support the infantry divisions in maintaining their forward defense.

Behind the infantry brigade boxes and supporting armor brigades lay a series of column bases and boxes ready to be

occupied as forces became available or maneuvered about the battlefield. Beyond this was a distance of forty kilometers before the enemy would confront 2nd South African Division's defenses around Tobruk.[17]

XXXth Corps was disposed in a dissimilar manner because of its mission and mobility. Its primary orientation was along an east-west direction. Forward positions were represented by three infantry brigade boxes, and at the last moment one motorized brigade was dispersed between two of these boxes in unprepared positions. Twenty kilometers behind these forward brigades lay a series of armor and motorized brigades with a mission to counterattack Rommel's panzers when they penetrated the forward units.[18] These maneuver elements of British 8th Army were dispersed over a depth of thirty kilometers.

Analyzing these defensive positions we find two distinct depths and categories of units within each depth, and each category of unit with a distinct mission affecting dispositions and depths of employment. The two infantry divisions and armor brigades of XIIIth Corps, as well as the four forward infantry brigades of XXXth Corps, occupied defenses extending only about five kilometers in depth. The combat elements of these brigades and divisions, and the area they occupied and controlled, represent the tactical depth of the Gazala Line. Their mission was to defend and prevent penetrations.

As long as these units were able to prevent a

penetration a coherent defense could be maintained. Although the attacking Axis armies had the ability to maneuver behind their own lines and against the extended flanks of the defending British units, once they engaged the units deployed in the tactical zone maneuver was significantly reduced and depended heavily on coordination with fire. As long as these units prevented Rommel from penetrating their positions, they denied him the opportunity to gain the freedom of maneuver represented by the space between the defending units in the tactical zone and the armor divisions displaced further in the rear.

XXXth Corps' mission, minus the four forward deployed infantry brigades, was to counterattack and destroy any German penetrations. The area occupied by British 1st and 7th Armored Divisions represented operational depth. Once the panzers fought through or around the units deployed in the tactical depth of the British defenses, Rommel would gain a degree of freedom to maneuver. By this I mean he could move the mass of his panzer divisions about the battlefield and focus his combat power at a time and place of his choosing. If this occurred, it would be incumbent upon the British armored divisions to maneuver against Rommel if their counterattack was to succeed.

Rommel's objective was the destruction of British Eighth Army. To achieve this, he intended to outflank the majority of British tactical defenses, thrust into the operational depth, and outmaneuver the enemy armored divisions. This

would be followed by the piecemeal destruction of the static infantry divisions. As Rommel freed himself of the shackles represented by the tactical depth, he was then presented with several opportunities.

First, he was free to concentrate his panzer divisions and destroy piecemeal the British armored divisions, which he did. With the defeat of these units Rommel had in fact negated the effect of the tactical defenses on the Gazala Line and was in a position to totally destroy the British 8th Army. This could only be achieved by actions conducted within the operational depth.

Equating this scenario to the Jominian battlefield, the forward brigade boxes of XIIIth and XXXth Corps' as well as the supporting armor brigades, represent the strategic front. This represents tactical depth because the "mass" of the British army was deployed here, the defense was a potential inhibiting factor to Rommel's ability to maneuver, and as long as this line was not penetrated or bypassed, the integrity of the defense remained intact.

The area behind this tactical depth "includes the ground upon which the armies will probably come in collision," or the area in which the German panzer divisions were to engage the British armored divisions whose mission was not to restore the forward defenses, but counterattack German penetrations. The importance here lies in the fact that a blow in this area against only a portion of the British army, directly influenced the preponderance of troops in the

tactical depth without those units being engaged. Success by Rommel in the operational depth meant the tactical defense was untenable.

This example offers some observations concerning depth. First, there is a definite break between tactical and operational depth. Those units committed to limiting the enemy's maneuver capability along a line of defense appear to represent tactical depth. The size unit is not the decisive factor in determining the type of depth. In XIIIth Corps all divisions deployed their brigades on line with armor brigades in depth, consequently tactical depth is represented by the combined depth of the infantry brigade boxes and supporting armor brigades. In the vicinity of XXXth Corps however, tactical depth is represented only in the form of infantry brigade boxes. In the north tactical depth equated to divisional sized units, while in the south it was brigade sized elements. Secondly, operational depth appears to be a function of where the Germans attained the ability to maneuver, the location of British armored divisions, and where these units engaged in battle. This is not a specific depth as it depends on where each force maneuvers. The closer the maneuver takes place to the tactical depth, the more shallow the operational depth may become.

Operation Bustard Hunt

Operation Bustard Hunt, Colonel General Eric von

Manstein's plan to complete the conquest of the Kerch peninsula in the Crimea in the spring of 1942, resulted in the destruction of three Soviet armies along with the capture of the peninsula.

Defending Soviet forces consisted of seventeen rifle divisions, three rifle brigades, two cavalry divisions and four tank brigades organized into three armies: the 44th, 47th and 51st.[19] These armies were deployed with the 47th Army in the north, 44th Army in the south and 51st Army stationed directly behind the 47th Army (figure 3). The Soviets prepared two lines of defense; the first approximately five miles east of Parpach, and the "Sultanovka" line along the Tartar Ditch which divided the peninsula in half. All of the divisions of 44th and 47th Armies, except two, were deployed in the first line with the mission to defend and prevent any penetration.[20] With few forces occupying the "Sultanovka" line it represented little in the way of depth in terms of combat power.

With all but two divisions in the first defensive line, 44th and 47th Armies limited their tactical depth to that area occupied by the combat elements of the forward divisions. The only exception to this is where the two reserve divisions were deployed. The mission of these divisions was to conduct counterattacks to restore forward defensive positions, not to defend at a greater depth.

Using tenacious defense, the forward deployed divisions were tasked with preventing a breakthrough and maintaining

the integrity of the overall defense. As long as this defense held the Germans were forced to accept a battle of attrition as the only means of destroying the Soviet armies. Without the benefit of penetrating the tactical zone, Manstein's 11th Army would be limited in its maneuver capability and in fact would be unable to bring maximum combat power to bear against the 51st Army and destroy the cohesion of the defense.

There was a separation of some five to ten kilometers between 44th Army's defensive positions and the concentrated 51st Army. This distance is only important from the standpoint that it shows how operational distances vary. At Gazala, British armored divisions were deployed some twenty kilometers behind the forward defenses, while the distance here is only five kilometers. Although the missions of these units were the same, counterattack, mobility and terrain dictated the distance separating them from the forward line of defense.

Manstein was faced with basically the same problem as Rommel at Gazala. His objective was the destruction of the defending armies and in consequence the Kerch peninsula would fall. By penetrating the forward defenses he would gain maneuver space which he could use to encircle then destroy the 51st Army. The destruction of a part of the forward divisions would not lead to the defeat of all three Soviet armies, only the destruction of 51st Army could provide that opportunity.

While penetrating the first defensive line Manstein was restricted in maneuver space. Once the penetration was complete Manstein gained maneuver room, particularly in the south, as there were few forces to oppose him. This ability to maneuver allowed him to isolate and subsequently engage the 51st Army, thereby rendering the forward defenses untenable as they were no longer capable of contributing to the defense of the Kerch peninsula.

Manstein's ability to conduct a penetration opened the floodgates of maneuver for him. The fact that he was in the operational depth following the penetration is evidenced by the opportunities open to him. As he ruptured the tactical defenses Manstein was able to encircle two complete armies and render the remainder of the first line defenses ineffective. This put him in the enviable position of being able to destroy all three Soviet armies, which he did in a short time.[21]

Battle of Kursk

The Battle of Kursk is instructive for two reasons. First, it represents a highly developed defense in depth for analysis, and secondly it provides an example of what happens should the attacker fail to gain the operational depth of the defense. Hitler's objective in this battle was the total destruction of all defending Soviet forces. His plan envisioned a penetration of the tactical defenses followed by

a double envelopment within the operational depth. This would subsequently be followed by the methodical destruction of forces caught in the encirclement.

July 1943 found the Red Army occupying a huge salient jutting into the German lines along the boundary of Army Group Center and Army Group South (figure 4). The Soviets occupied this salient with two fronts, Central Front in the north and Voronezh Front in the south. The Central Front controlled four combined arms armies, one tank army, and two separate tank and infantry corps. Voronezh Front commanded four combined arms armies, and one tank army, as well as two separate tank and one infantry corps.[22]

According to Soviet writers, the Red Army established three depths of defense at Kursk. The tactical depth consisted of three defensive lines occupied by the forward deployed combined arms armies. Beyond this were a series of three more defensive lines established by each front. The second series of defensive lines did not follow a linear alignment because of the shape of the bulge and Front boundaries. Some of these lines ran north and south, while others ran east and west. Portions of the second belt positions were occupied by second echelon armies, while the remainder of these positions were prepared in anticipation of eventual occupation. The third and final level of defense consisted of the state strategic line of defense along the Don River.[23]

The divisions of the forward combined arms armies

deployed in the three defensive lines of the first belt, with orders to defend as far forward as possible. Should penetrations occur they were to counterattack and reestablish the defense. Immediately behind the combined arms armies each front deployed a tank army to be used in the conduct of counterattacks to restore the forward defense or destroy German panzers that had penetrated the first belt.[8]

Again we see two distinct missions associated with elements of different depths. Units within the combined arms army defenses were to defend in place while the tank armies, possessing a high degree of maneuverability, were to be used to counterattack and destroy penetrations behind the tactical defenses.

The combined depth of the first three defensive lines within the combined arms armies varied from 15-65 kilometers. The only apparent consistency associated with these varying depths is the missions of the units occupying them. The defending units were to defend and there was no latitude given in accomplishing this mission.

In trying to distinguish between the tactical and operational depths of defense, it is important to realize that although the size of units involved at Kursk is greater than in the previous battles analyzed, the conceptual deployment of these units is the same. The combined arms armies in the first belt were deployed in a linear fashion in order to cover their entire sectors. The Soviet tactical depth at Kursk is represented by the three defensive lines of

the forward combined arms armies because of their mission, the inhibiting factor they represented to the Germans ability to maneuver in depth, and the fact that the loss of only a portion of these positions could lead to the total destruction of both Fronts.

The Soviets realized this and that is why they constructed additional lines of defense throughout their operational depth. This second belt was occupied by armies only in specific areas. Armies deployed within the operational depth were not there to present a continuous defense in depth to prevent penetrations, but were concentrated in anticipation of counterattacking. Within this depth the Germans sought and achieved a battle at Prokhorovka on 12 July. The location of this battle was dependent upon both German and Soviet maneuver, and on its results the fate of the Voronezh Front hung. Had the Germans been victorious, the Wehrmacht was in a position to destroy the Voronezh Front without actually having to fight the mass of units defending in the tactical depth.

Comparative Analysis of Battles

Found in all three battles are commonalities that lend credence to my proposed definitions. Tactical depth has been highlighted in each case by forward deployed units whose mission has been intended to restrict the maneuverability of an attacker. The exact mission given a unit is immaterial

and may be defend, delay or screen. In each of these, the "defender" is responsible in varying degrees to restrict the enemy's ability to maneuver. The level to which the defender is restricted in his own ability to maneuver is a function of the specific mission given, method of employment, and type unit as well as other variables. Just by virtue of being in contact the defender's ability to maneuver is restricted.

At Gazala and in Operation Bustard Hunt the tactical defense was ruptured which gave the attacker the opportunity to destroy the defending army without actually having to engage all of the defenses in the tactical depth. By outflanking the tactical defenses and destroying two British armored divisions, Rommel forced the evacuation of over three infantry divisions and the remnants of British armor strength. Had the tactical depth been successfully defended, Rommel would have been forced into a battle of attrition which would not have led to the disintegration of the British 8th Army. Operation Bustard Hunt in the Crimea substantiates this. Had the Soviets successfully defended along their first line, thus maintaining the integrity of the defense, Manstein would not have had the opportunity to totally destroy three armies. In contrast, the Soviet defense at Kursk demonstrates how if a tactical depth is maintained, regardless of its depth, the attacker is forced into a battle of attrition and is denied the opportunity to destroy the defending army. The actual distance represented by the tactical depth in the examples discussed vary from five to

sixty five kilometers and demonstrate how little distance, by itself, plays in determining the tactical depth.

At this time it is important to discuss why tactical depth is dependent upon combat units and does not involve combat support and combat service support elements. By virtue of organization and weapons, only combat units can attack or defend. Although it is recognized that combat support and combat service support units may be required to conduct these missions in emergencies, they do not do so as a norm. Because of this, these units do not represent an impediment to an enemy's ability to maneuver. Since restricting the enemy's ability to maneuver is inherent in the definition of tactical depth, the location and employment of these units do not influence this depth.

Operation Bustard Hunt and the Gazala Battles demonstrate various levels of maneuver that can achieved when an attacker extricates himself from the tactical depth. Again, the distance of the tactical defense and operational depth is immaterial. The important factor is the ability to maneuver and the freedom of action operational depth represents. By penetrating the forward defenses Rommel and Manstein both set the stage for destroying or disrupting the complete mass of defenders without having to engage the complete enemy army. Conversely, at Kursk the Soviet tactical defense was successful thereby denying this opportunity to the Germans.

Taking the comparison a step further, in each of the

battles analyzed there is one additional commonality. The objective of the attacker in each case was the destruction of enemy forces. At Gazala Rommel's intent was the destruction of British Eighth Army, in Operation Bustard Hunt Manstein's focus was on the destruction of all three Soviet armies, and at Kursk Hitler sought to destroy the Soviet forces within the salient.

The objective of destroying defending enemy armies and how to accomplish it, is linked to the concepts of tactical and operational depths. In each battle presented attrition was never considered as an acceptable means of destroying the defender. Since the defending forces outnumbered the attacker in each instance, attrition could not have been seriously contemplated. Maneuver was the only potential key to victory and that is what each attacker sought.

Battle within the tactical depth is attritional and by itself normally does not result in the complete destruction of defending forces. Such battles are pyrrhic in nature unless the aggressor substantially outnumbers the defender. German assaults failed to break through the Soviet tactical depth at Kursk and, although significant gains were made in the south, the Germans utterly failed in their bid to destroy the Soviet armies. Conversely, at Gazala and the Kerch peninsula, Rommel and Manstein penetrated the tactical defenses and broke into the operational depth which led to the subsequent destruction of the defense.

The link between operational depth and the objective of

destroying defending forces is apparent. At Kursk the Germans failed to reach the operational depth of the Soviet defenses and they failed to destroy the Soviet armies. These battles seem to substantiate the relationship between achieving operational depth and the potential it represents, and success in the objective of destroying the defending masses.

Implications

Simply defining tactical and operational depth may appear to be a sterile exercise, but such is not the case. Defining these key words goes far beyond a purely academic exercise and assists in understanding operational maneuver. The concept of operational maneuver is closely tied to tactical and operational depth. Without fully understanding depth, the complete application of operational maneuver cannot occur.

The ability to shift from a limited degree of maneuverability to operational maneuver signals the crossover from tactical to operational depth. Knowing when this "line" is about to be crossed is the sign of a great commander. As a great commander knows he is approaching this threshold, he realizes it will open many possibilities for success hitherto not available.

Understanding the relationship between the concept of maneuver and how it relates to tactical and operational depth is vital. Commitment of reserves at a critical moment may

well depend on understanding when one has crossed the tactical threshold in an attack. Manstein superbly demonstrated this in Operation Bustard Hunt when he committed 22nd Panzer Division.

This elusive threshold cannot be identified by looking at a map, because it goes far beyond this. Clausewitz and Jomini termed the ability to identify intangibles such as this as coup d'oeil. When the commander realizes he is approaching this line, this may be the time to commit reserves as the window of opportunity has been thrust open.

Not all commanders and staffs possess this unique ability, consequently it is important they appreciate the structure of the battlefield and what this implies. Understanding of tactical and operational depth will assist them.

With an understanding that there is a link between operational depth and the objective of destroying enemy forces, commanders must constantly consider what must be accomplished when the threshold is crossed from tactical to operational depth. The potential key for victory is held when operational depth is achieved. Many times this may entail a change in plans to take advantage of opportunities presented when the operational depth is achieved. Rommel modified his plan to take advantage of sluggish British reactions in his bid to destroy the Eighth Army, while Manstein correctly predicted Soviet reactions and consequently Operation Bustard Hunt developed according to

his concept. Plans must be flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities presented.

Establishing definitive meanings for tactical and operational depth will help clarify intent. Intent at times is difficult to express and even more so when words lack precise meanings. Many times words relate only concepts, and this is the case of tactical and operational depth. These depths do not represent the size of a unit, the area a unit occupies with all its elements, or any specific distance. They relate to a concept that emphasizes maneuver or the lack thereof.

Conclusions

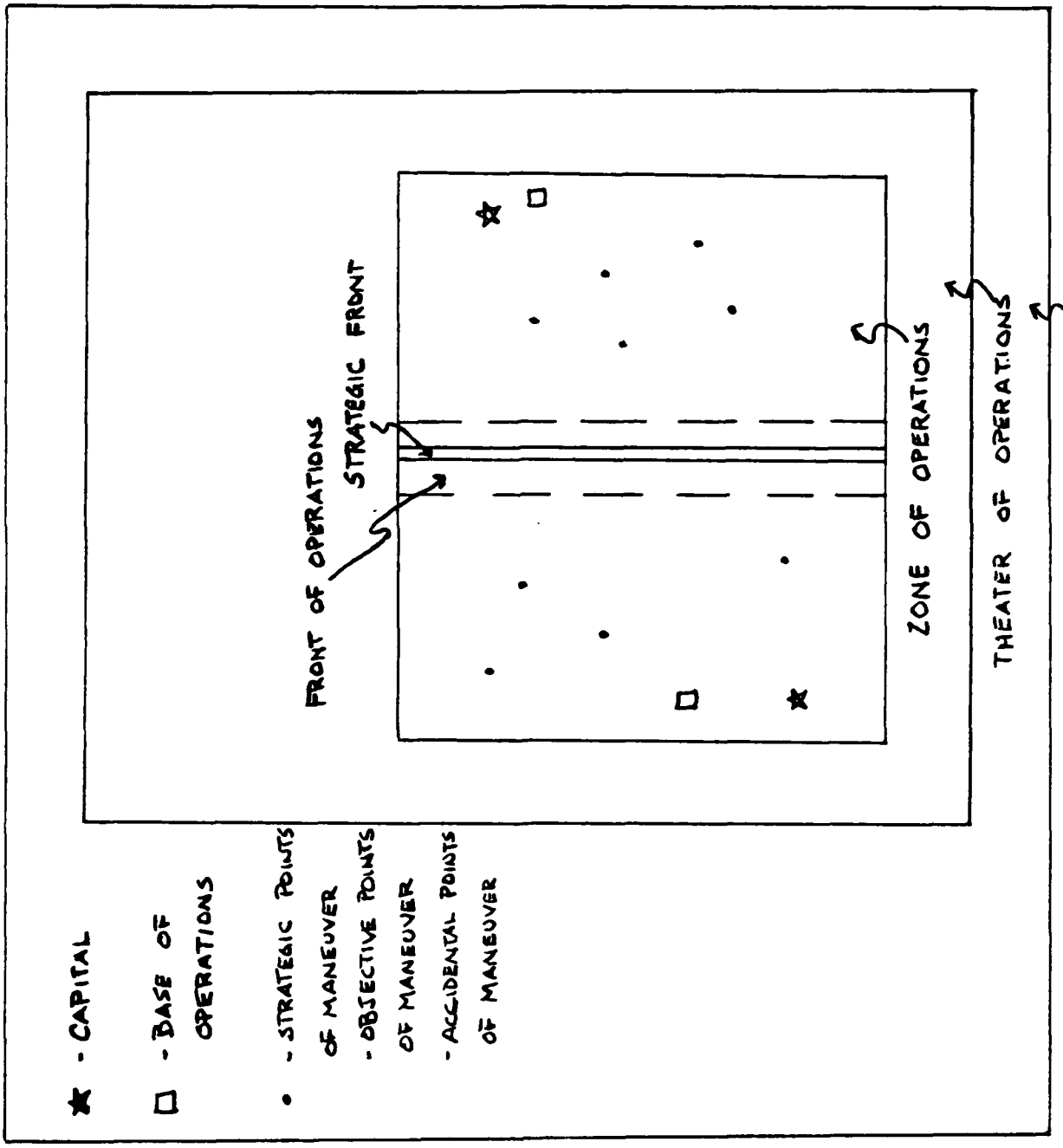
On a broad scope of understanding, tactical and operational depth can be equated to two words, denial and opportunity. Tactical depth is basically a function of denying maneuver and the opportunity to destroy the friendly army at minimum expenditure. Operational depth provides the opportunity to conduct operational maneuver and the potential to destroy the defending force.

Tactical and operational depths should not be thought of in conventional terms such as size of units, unit boundaries, and distance, but along the lines of missions, intent and maneuverability. To have real meaning one must clearly understand the separation of these depths is not always clear and consequently one must sense in the heat of battle when

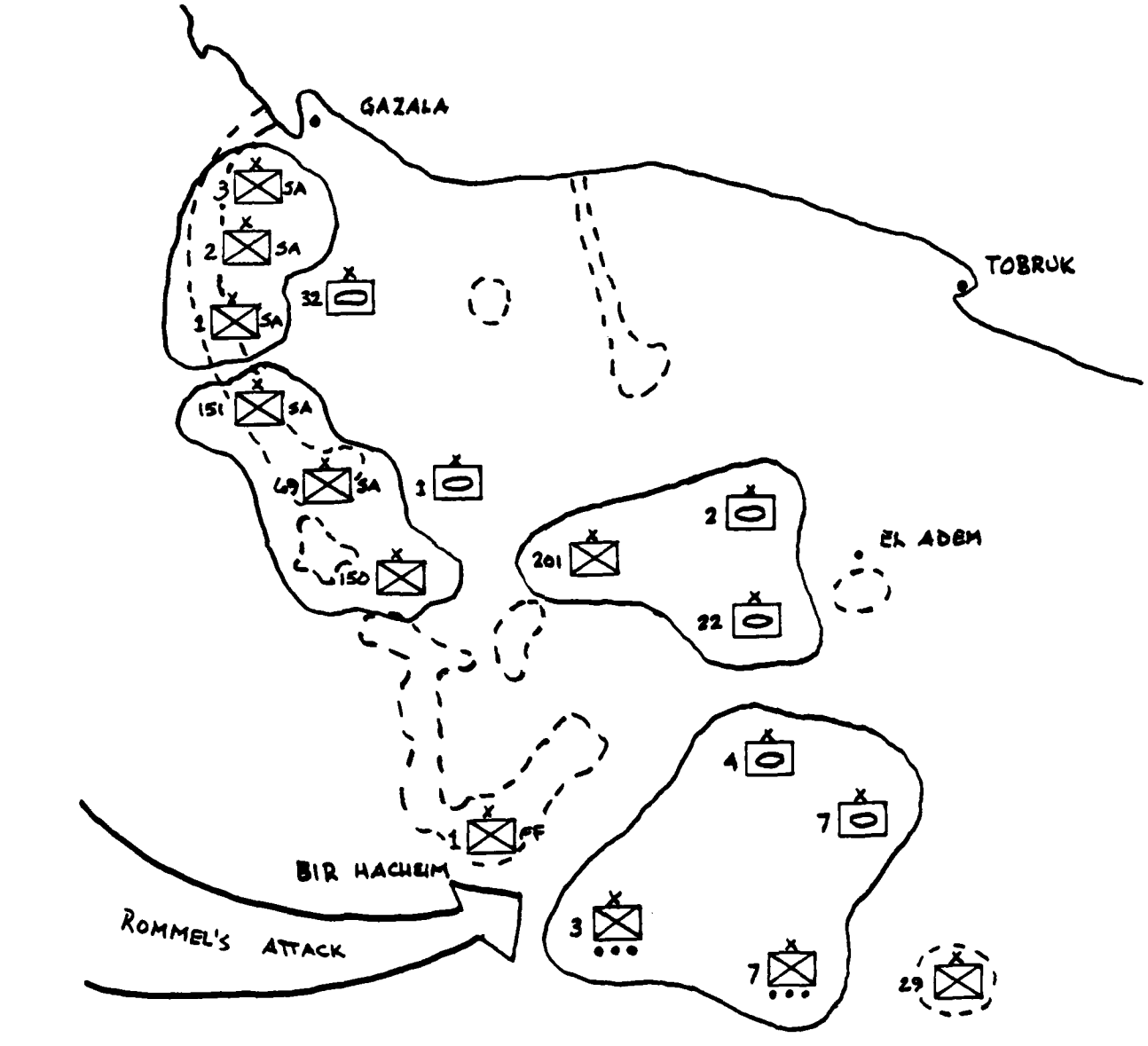
this threshold is approaching. Transmitting meaning into action implies one must be cognizant that transcending the threshold also means some decisive action is normally required.

Finally, tactical and operational depth are permanently linked together not because of some invisible line on the battlefield, but because of their relationship to maneuver and the destruction of enemy forces. Understanding this relationship and its implications will provide the potential for victory.

JOMINI'S BATTLEFIELD



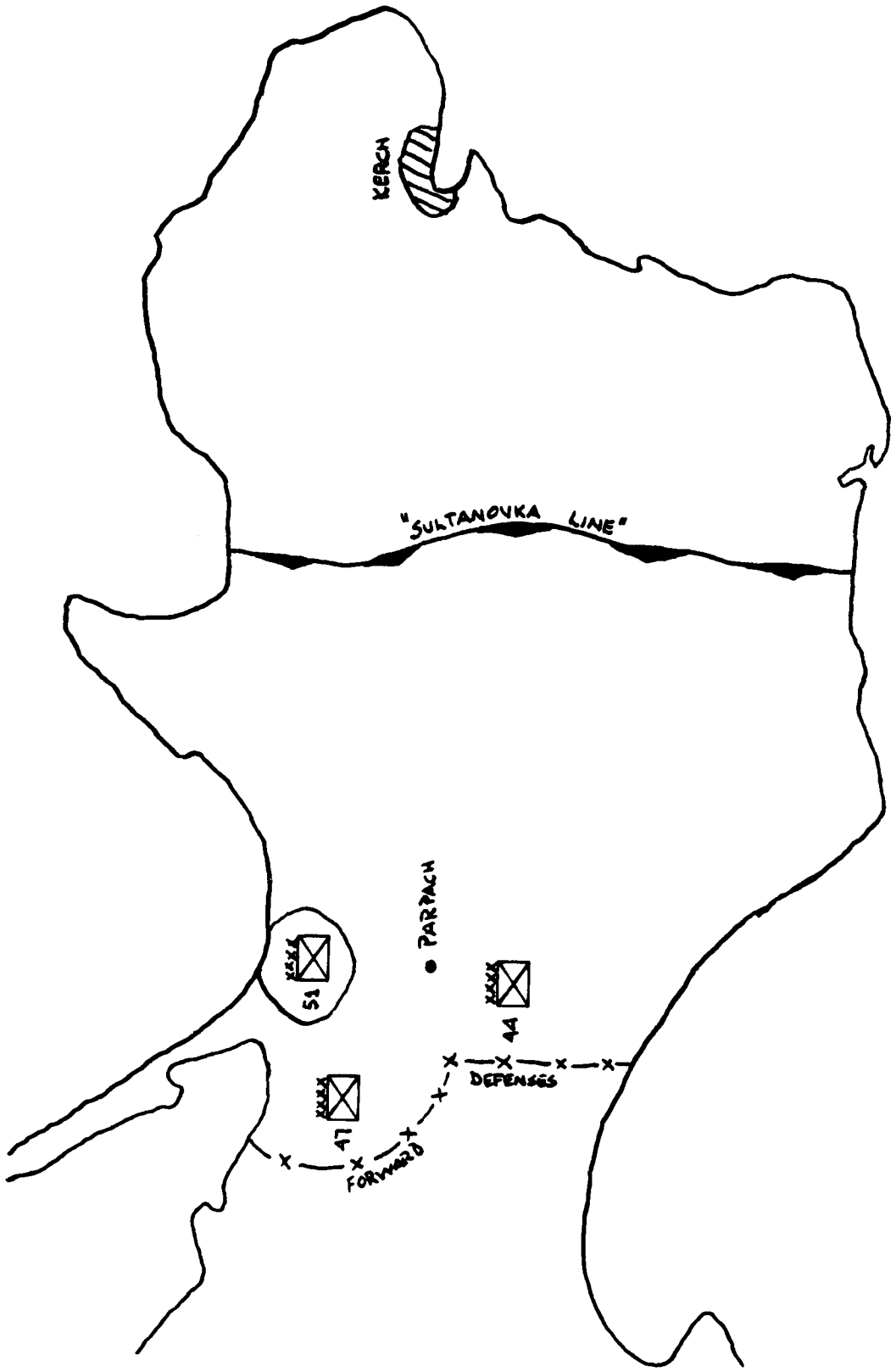
GAZALA BATTLE MAP



---- MINEFIELDS

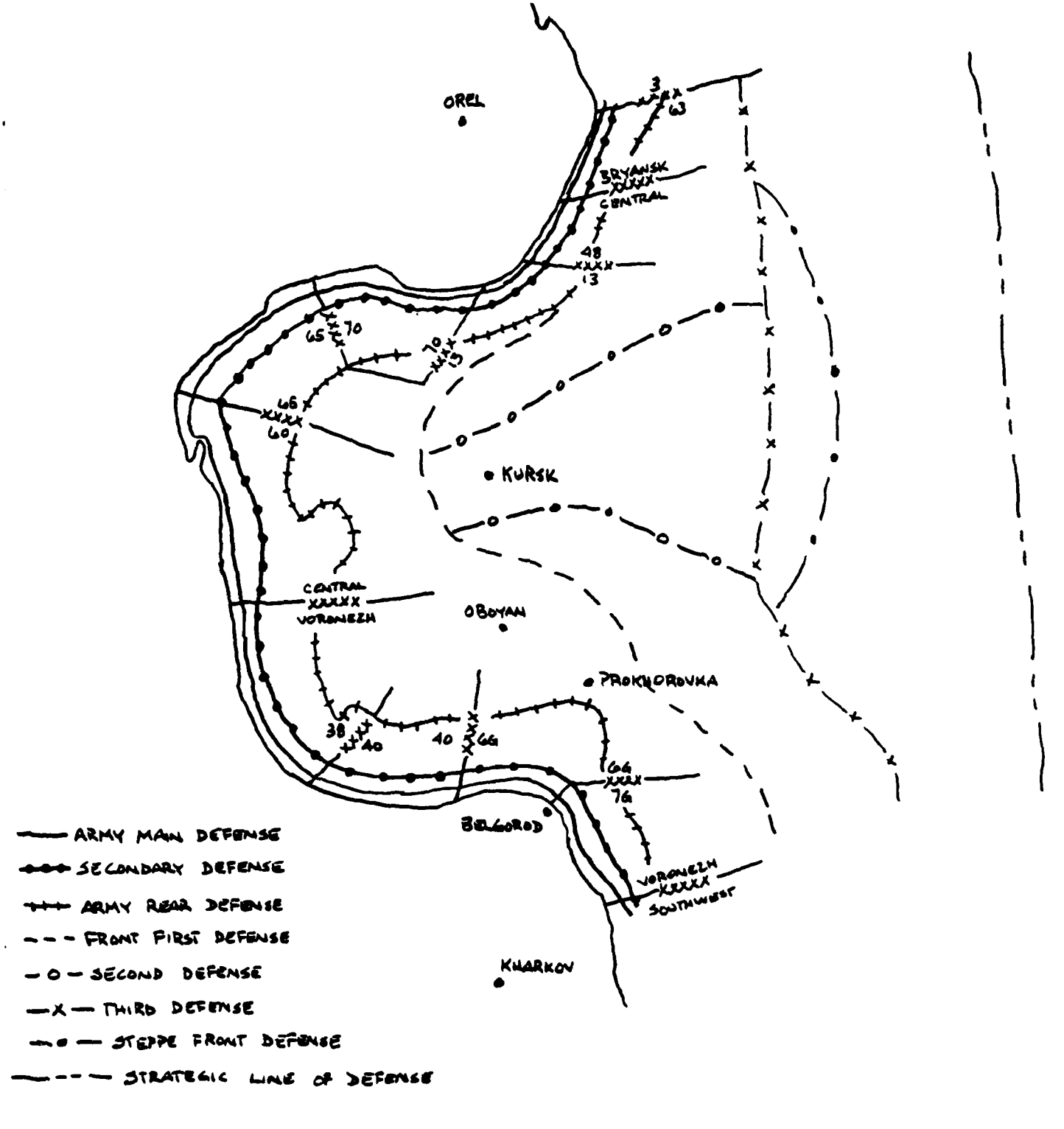
DIVISIONAL UNITS

OPERATION BUSTARD HUNT MAP



KERCH PENINSULA

BATTLE OF KURSK MAP



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