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**Counterblitz: Conditions for a Successful
Counteroffensive**

**A Monograph
by
Major Herbert L. Frandsen
Infantry**



**School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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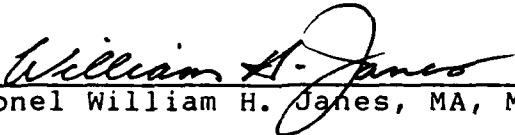
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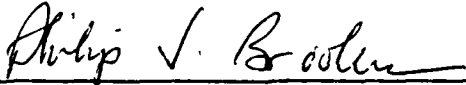
Major Herbert L. Frandsen

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Successful Counteroffensive

Approved by:

 Monograph Director
Lieutenant Colonel Gerald R. Thiessen, MS

 Director, School of
Colonel William H. James, MA, MMAS Advanced Military
Studies

 Director, Graduate
Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D. Degree Program

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ABSTRACT

COUNTERBLITZ: CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR A SUCCESSFUL COUNTEROFFENSIVE, by Major Herbert L. Frandsen, USA, 43 pages.

The purpose of this monograph is to determine the conditions necessary for a successful counteroffensive. The study seeks to identify these conditions through historical analyses of four of the greatest counteroffensives of modern military history: Manstein's counterstroke at Kharkov (1943), the Battle of the Bulge (1944), MacArthur's Inchon Landing (1950), and the Israeli counteroffensive in the Sinai (1973). Elements of operational design which facilitate the analysis include the center of gravity, lines of operation, the culminating point, and decisive points.

Analysis of these great counteroffensives suggests six conditions necessary for a successful counteroffensive. First, the defender should force the attacker's offensive to culminate before launching the counteroffensive. Second, operational reserves must be constituted from forces previously used in the defense. Third, air superiority needs to be established in the counteroffensive sector. Fourth, the counteroffensive should seek to cut across the enemy's line of operation to deprive him of sustainment and block his retreat. Fifth, use deception to confuse the enemy, and agility to exploit his mistakes, thus avoiding his strength and maneuvering into his rear to cut across his line of communication. Finally, a bold counteroffensive will be more decisive. Its execution requires a commander with determination to overcome not only the enemy, but also political and organizational resistance on his own side. These insights can assist operational planners in applying sound judgment to the challenges of the future.

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I. INTRODUCTION.

The military strategy of the United States is to secure its objectives and defend its interest by deterring aggression against the United States and its allies.¹ A major component of this strategy has been the forward deployment of U.S. forces in Europe and in the Pacific. For these reasons, the U.S. Army generally expects to begin a future conflict on the operational defensive. However, merely parrying the initial blow of the aggressor does not ensure a successful defense. Instead, the defender must strike back, or he courts destruction through relinquishment of the initiative. Or, as Clausewitz advises, "A sudden powerful transition to the offensive -- the flashing sword of vengeance -- is the greatest moment for the defense."²

This study will examine the operational defense's greatest moment, the counteroffensive. Specifically, this monograph seeks to identify the conditions for a successful counteroffensive. It will use historical analyses to deduce these conditions. The operations selected for analysis include four of the most spectacular counteroffensives of recent history: Kharkov, the Bulge, Inchon, and the Sinai. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find four better historical cases of the counteroffensive to study. Manstein's counteroffensive in 1943 against the Russians was arguably the greatest German counteroffensive of World War II. The Battle of the Bulge in 1944 was the largest battle ever fought by the U.S. Army and the last significant German counteroffensive of the war. MacArthur's 1950 counteroffensive in Korea reflects his superb understanding of amphibious operations, which he had

previously developed in World War II. Finally, the Israeli counteroffensive in the Sinai in 1973 gives us the opportunity to examine an operation more reflective of current technology, including precision guided munitions such as antitank guided missiles and surface to air missiles. From these four outstanding historical examples of the counteroffensive, we will then deduce insights relevant to future operational planning.

Our historical analyses must be concise to fit within the confines of this study. Clausewitz correctly warns us of the danger of cursory analysis: "...a single thoroughly detailed event is more instructive than ten that are only touched on," and "...superficial, irresponsible handling of history leads to wrong ideas and bogus theorizing."³ Accordingly, this study must stand on the shoulders of others to achieve its goal in the space permitted. This study stands on the shoulders of operational theory. More specifically, we will use elements of operational design (center of gravity, line of operations, culminating point, and decisive point) in the historical analyses.⁴ By using these elements we hope to avoid superficial treatment of our historical case studies that produces wrong ideas and bogus theorizing.

We are now ready to begin our search for the conditions necessary for a successful counteroffensive. We will briefly examine each of the four great counteroffensives and then deduce operational insights relevant to the counteroffensive.

II. HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES.

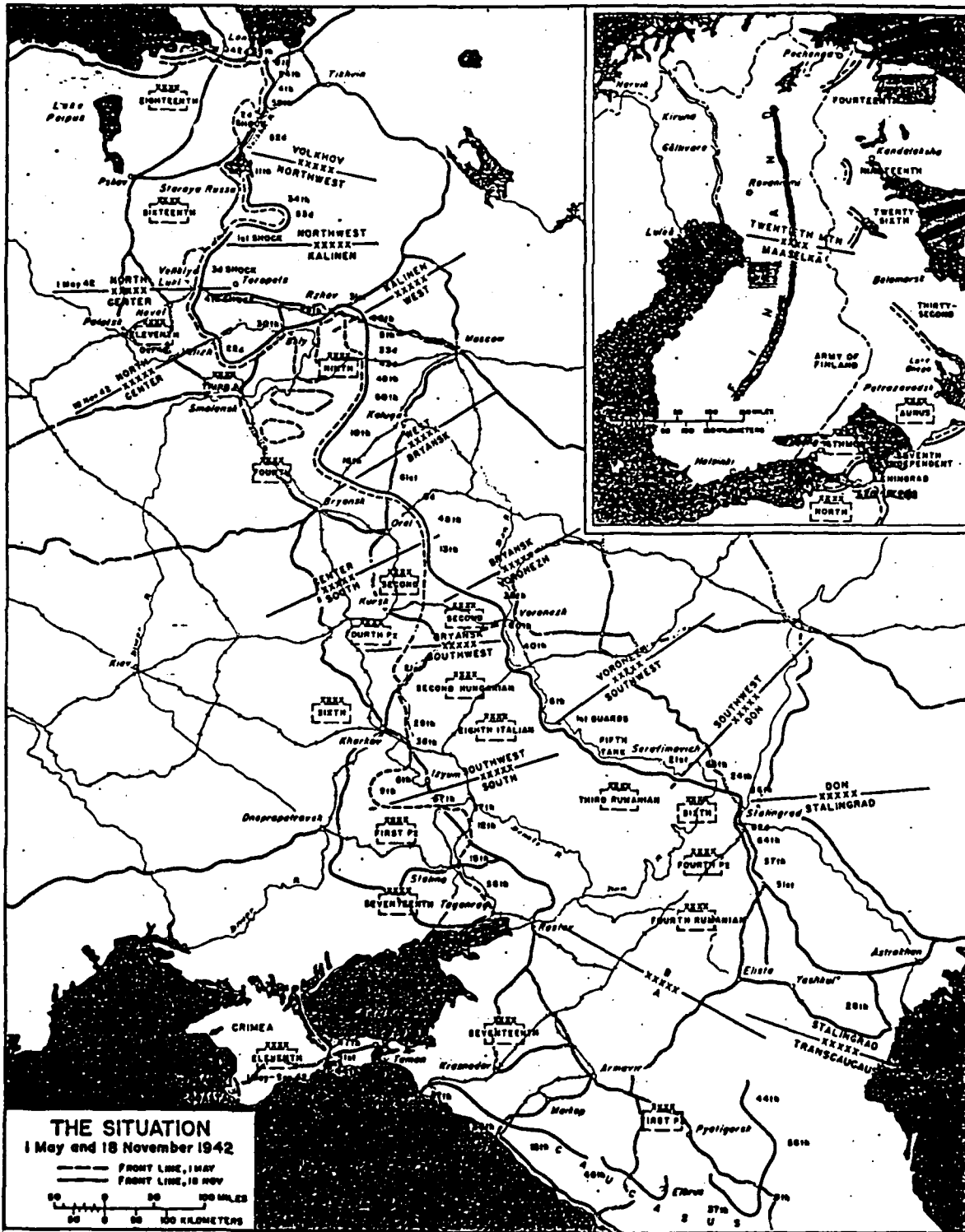
1. Manstein's Kharkov Counteroffensive.

The first campaign we will examine is Manstein's winter campaign on the Russian southern front during the winter of 1942-43. This campaign included one of the most brilliant operational counteroffensives of World War II. It began after the encirclement of the German 6th Army at Stalingrad and ended with the destruction of two Soviet fronts and the recapture of Kharkov, the fourth largest city in the Soviet Union.⁵

Before examining the campaign, we will first review the strategic setting. After the German invasion of Russia in the summer of 1941 and its culmination short of Moscow in December, Hitler renewed offensive operations in 1942 with his main effort in southern Russia (See Map 1, page 3.1). Instead of concentrating on one objective, he split Army Group South in two, and attacked divergent objectives. Army Group B attacked to seize Stalingrad, while Army Group A attacked to seize the oil fields of the Caucasus. Neither army group was strong enough to accomplish its mission. The German offensive again culminated. The Russians launched a counteroffensive in November 1942 that encircled the 6th German Army at Stalingrad, and threatened to destroy the remaining German forces in southern Russia.

Hitler appointed Manstein as commander of the newly created Army Group Don to relieve the encircled 6th Army. Manstein tried to relieve them, but lacked the necessary forces to break through the Soviet encirclement. Instead of relieving Stalingrad, Manstein's army group had to fight for its life.

MAP 1 - KHARKOV: SITUATION ON THE EASTERN FRONT, 1942



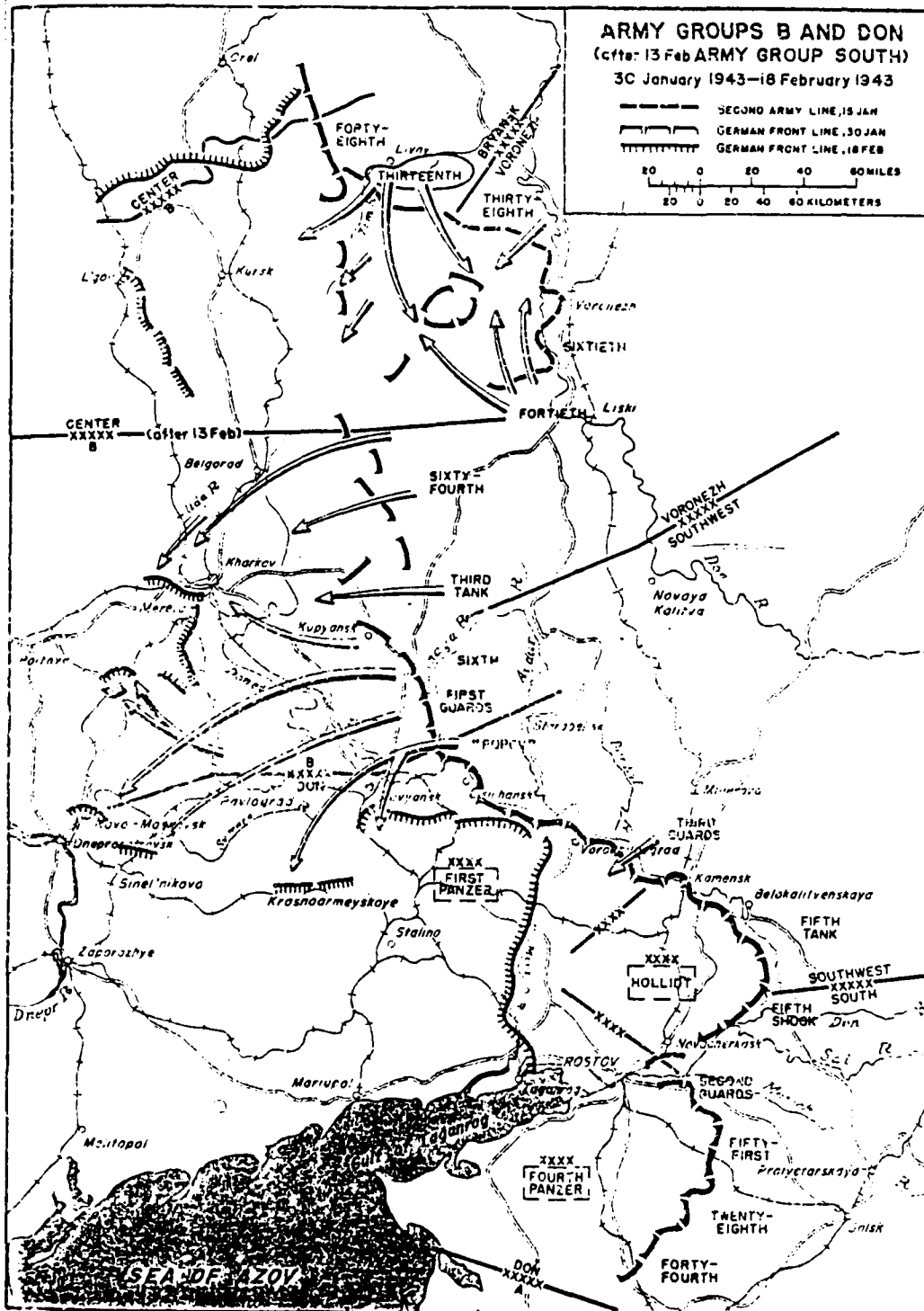
FROM: Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East by Earl Ziemke, p. 16.

By the beginning of February, the Russians had launched a series of successful multi-front offensives. After breaking through the Italian 8th and Rumanian 3rd Armies, the Russians eventually ripped a hole 100 kilometers wide and 200 kilometers deep in the German line that now threatened to envelop Army Group Don from the north and crush it against the Sea of Azov (see Map 2, page 4.1). Though the Soviet armies had been in almost constant combat for months, the STAVKA believed that the opportunities for continued offensive operations outweighed the risks of becoming overextended. They were convinced the Germans were on the verge of collapse. All that was needed was one more great push to destroy the entire German southern wing.⁶

However, Manstein's forces were not in disorganized retreat. Instead, his armies had been fighting a mobile defense against superior Russian forces. He had protected the rear of Army Group A as it withdrew from the eastern Caucasus. Now he was preparing to withdraw his own Army Group Don from south of the Don River, concentrate his forces north of the Sea of Azov, and unleash a counterstroke against the Russians. Thus, Manstein hoped to create the conditions for a successful counteroffensive by decreasing his frontage and falling back on his line of communication. Hitler, as usual, unwilling to give up any ground, had finally acceded to Manstein's wishes to conduct a mobile defense after repeated arguments.

Manstein proved himself to be exceptionally cool while seemingly on the edge of disaster. The Southwestern Front's 1st

MAP 2 - ARMY GROUPS B AND DON, 30 JAN 43 - 18 FEB 43



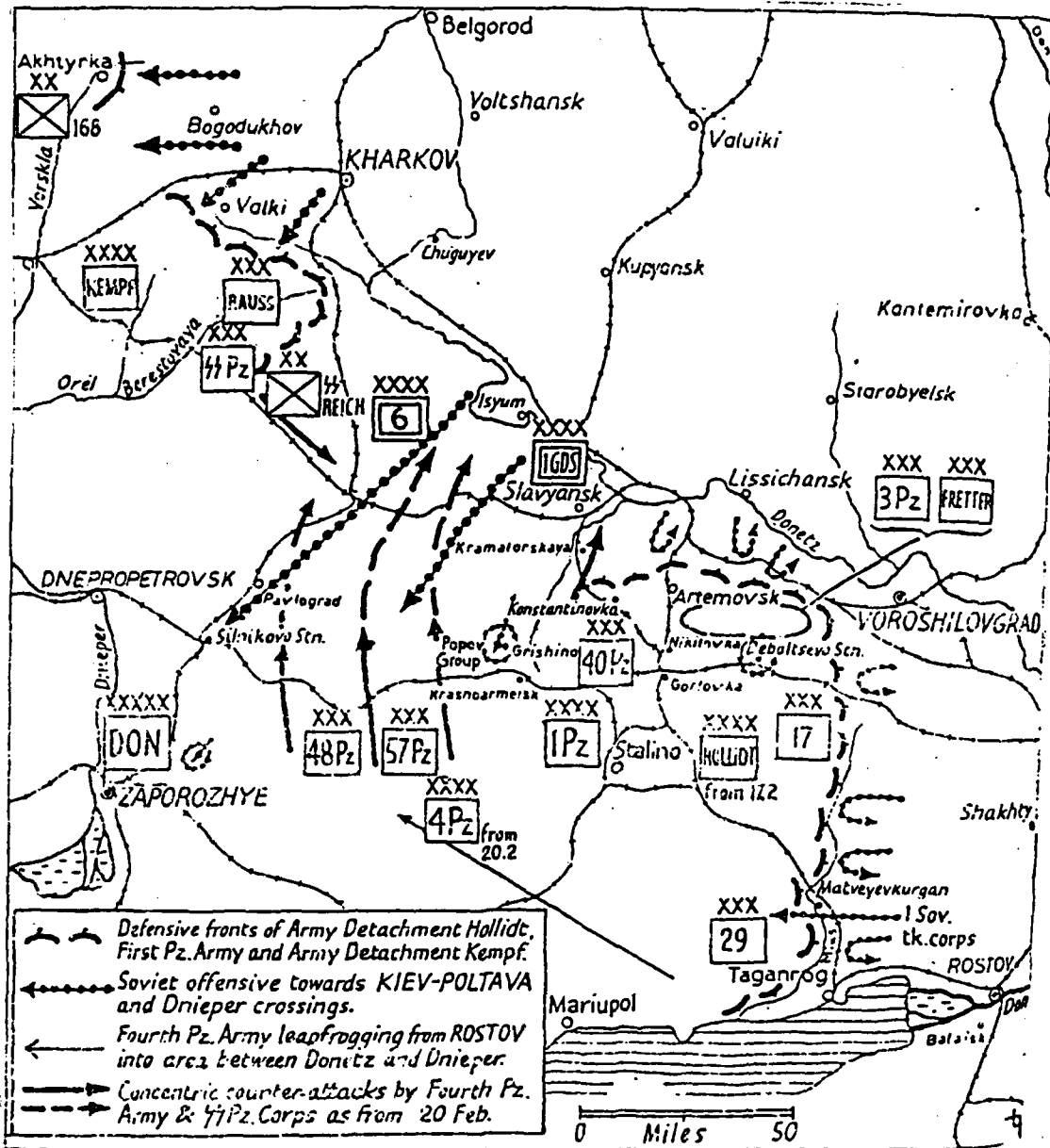
FROM: Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East by Earl Ziemke, p. 83.

Guards Army had penetrated to within 20 km of the Dnepr River, and Mobile Group Popov had cut Army Group Don's main rail line (Dnepropetrovsk-Stalino) located to the rear of the 1st Panzer Army. The Soviets were close to cutting Manstein's remaining LOC's across the Dnepr (the German crossing sites at Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye were decisive points), and completing their planned envelopment. When Hitler arrived at Manstein's headquarters at Zaporozhye on 18 February, tanks of Mobile Group Popov were only 36 miles away.⁷ "Paradoxically," as Manstein says, "it was in this very culmination of the crisis that the germs of a counterstroke lay."⁸

Hitler took Headquarters, Army Group B out of the front and divided its remaining forces between Army Groups Center and Don. Manstein received SS Panzer Corps in this reorganization and Army Group Don was renamed Army Group South. As the Soviet Southwest Front bore down on the Dnepr crossing, Manstein redistributed and concentrated his forces for a counterstroke in their flank (see Map 3, page 5.1). Manstein ordered Fourth Panzer Army to turn over the front along the Mius River to Army Detachment Hollidt. 4th Panzer Army would then strike the enveloping Soviet armies in the flank. To accomplish this, he gave 4th Panzer Army two panzer corps headquarters (57th and 48th Panzer Corps), two panzer divisions, and two infantry divisions from Army Detachment Hollidt and 1st Panzer Army. 4th Panzer Army also took control of the SS Panzer Corps vicinity Kharkov.⁹

Manstein planned a bold counterstroke on convergent lines of operation. The first phase of the plan called for Army Detachment

MAP 3 - MANSTEIN'S COUNTERSTROKE, FEB 1943



FROM: Lost Victories, by Erich von Manstein, p. 430.

Hollidt to act as an economy of force along the Mius River. 1st and 4th Panzer Armies would strike into the rear and flank of the advancing Soviet 6th Army, Group Popov, and 1st Guards Army. In the north, SS Panzer Corps would use two of its divisions to attack south, while its third division would hold the shoulder of the Soviet penetration to the west of Kharkov, thus protecting the rear of its two attacking divisions.¹⁰ In the second phase, 4th Panzer Army would continue to attack north to retake Kharkov. Richtofen's Fourth Air Force provided Manstein's air support. During Manstein's counteroffensive, Richtofen managed to average 1,000 sorties per day. This was the last time the Luftwaffe managed to provide offensive air support in the style of the 1940 blitzkrieg.¹¹

4th Panzer Army's attacks achieved surprise and great success against the advancing Soviets. SS Panzer Corps attacked first, cut the LOCs of the Soviet 6th and 1st Guard Armies, eliminated the threat to the Dnepr crossings, and trapped substantial forces south of the Samara River. By 24 February, SS Panzer Corps had linked up with the north-moving 48th Panzer Corps. Fourth Panzer Army then continued to attack north while focusing on the destruction of enemy forces. By 14 March, Fourth Panzer Army reached Kharkov, destroying enroute 1st Guards, 6th, and 3d Tank Army.¹²

The 1st Panzer Army also took the Russians by surprise. While the commander of Mobile Group Popov had intended to block the supposed German retreat, the 1st Panzer Army successfully encircled the Russians from the east.¹³ Manstein declared the operation

completed on 17 March. Army Group South now stood along approximately the same line the Germans had held before the 1942 summer offensive began.

Several important points should be emphasized concerning this brilliantly successful counteroffensive. First, Manstein began with no operational reserves. He created the opportunity for the formation of operational reserves by falling back on his line of communications, reducing his frontage, and accepting risk along the Mius River in the east, and along his line of communications in his rear. His newly created operational reserve, Fourth Panzer Army, became his center of gravity. He used it to conduct a decisive counteroffensive. As the Soviets approached the Dnepr, he did not panic into knee-jerk reactions that would have prevented him from concentrating for a decisive blow. Next, Manstein concentrated strength against weakness using convergent lines of operation. By striking the Soviet formations in their flanks and rear, he set the conditions for defeat of the over-extended Soviet armies. The following account of the SS Totenkopfdivision's counterattack vividly describes the favorable battle conditions they encountered:

Rumbling over the frozen steppe at 25 mph, Eicke's tanks and motorized columns drew alongside the retreating Russians at distances of twenty to thirty yards, machine-gunning at will the trucks crammed with infantry. Whole companies of T-34's ran out of fuel, coughed to a standstill, and were pounced upon and blasted to pieces...By February 24, the Russians had abandoned most of their vehicles and equipment and were trying to escape on foot.¹⁴

The Soviets had no reserves to oppose Manstein's counter-offensive. The STAVKA's inaccurate assessment that the Germans were on the verge of collapse proved to be a fatal underestimation

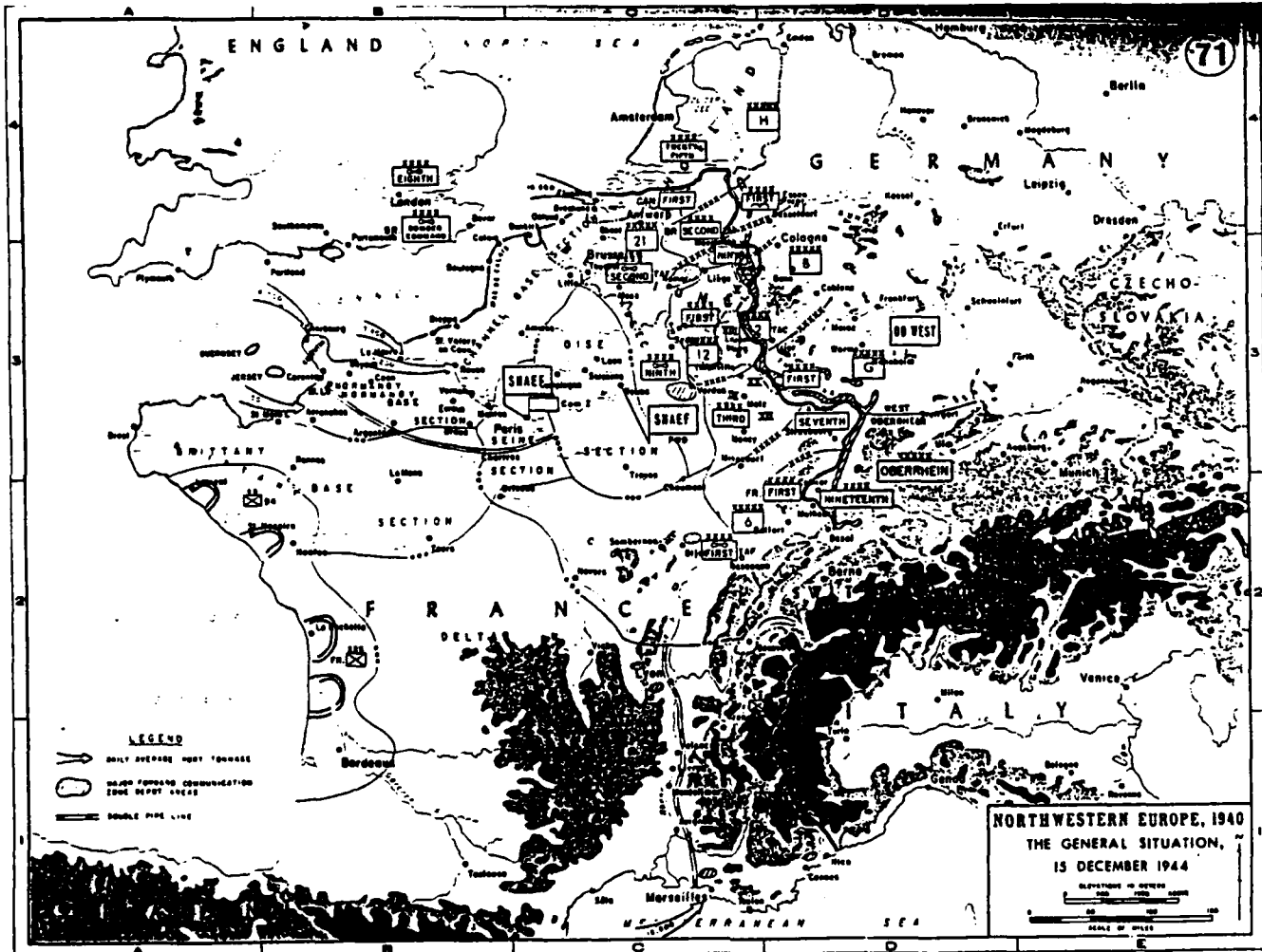
of their enemy. Manstein's bold counteroffensive achieved surprise, seized the initiative, and provided an operational victory. In our next case, we will examine a bold counteroffensive that achieved surprise, but failed.

2. The Battle of the Bulge

The Battle of the Bulge involved over a million soldiers.¹⁵ It is claimed by some to be the most decisive battle on the Western Front during World War II, "America's greatest single victory."¹⁶ This battle offers us the opportunity to examine the counteroffensive from two perspectives. First, from the German side, the Bulge represented Germany's last great counteroffensive of the war. And second, from the American perspective, actions taken to regain the initiative constitute yet another counteroffensive for study.

This German operation provides an example of the failure of the counterblitz. The plan was Hitler's, and though he is generally regarded as intuitive, and anything but analytical, we can still use our elements of operational design to examine the German campaign plan. In the fall of 1944, Hitler judged that he had reached a defensive culminating point on the Western Front -- the advantages of waiting had been exhausted. The Western Allies had reached the West Wall and were preparing for the final thrust to seize the vital Ruhr, a strategic center of gravity (See Map 4, page 8.1). Hitler judged that the Allied center of gravity on the Western Front was Eisenhower's main effort, Montgomery's 21st Army Group. By defeating Montgomery, Hitler hoped to knock the British

MAP 4 - GENERAL SITUATION, 15 DEC 44 & GERMAN PLAN



FROM: Atlas for the Second World War, Europe and the Mediterranean, Thomas E. Griess, Series Editor.

out of the war, establish a separate peace with the Americans, and then concentrate against the Soviet Union, whose own offensive had stalled at the Vistula River, still 300 miles east of Berlin.¹⁷

Hitler planned to use the indirect approach and attack Allied decisive points to achieve his goal. Like the brilliantly successful campaign of 1940, the main effort would be in the lightly defended Ardennes area. German panzers would then blitz to the northwest capturing the Allied supply base at Liege and ultimately the port of Antwerp. This maneuver would isolate the 21st Army Group and set the conditions for British defeat and a separate peace on the Western Front.¹⁸

Hitler's plan was a desperate gamble. The Ardennes is not suited for mobile warfare. His panzers only had to brush aside inexperienced French and Belgian reconnaissance units in this forested area in 1940, but this time he was opposed by a battle-hardened American Army. The Luftwaffe was no longer capable of winning air superiority, nor providing close air support, in the style of 1940. Instead, Hitler relied on poor weather to protect him from Allied air power. This very protection provided by the weather further impeded maneuver warfare. Finally, the true center of gravity for the Western Allies was not the British, but the American Army. Even if Hitler's counteroffensive could have reached Antwerp, the American Army's bases in Normandy and Marseilles would remain intact, providing convergent lines of operations for either a counterblow or a deep strike into Germany.

When the battle opened on 16 December, 200,000 Germans conducted a counteroffensive against 83,000 Americans. The German

concentration in the zone of attack gave them a three-to-one advantage in infantrymen along the Ardennes front, and six-to-one advantages where their spearheads struck. Including assault guns, they possessed a four-to-one advantage in armor.¹⁹ Their armor was concentrated in the 6th SS and 5th Panzer Armies against Bradley's thinly spread 1st Army.²⁰

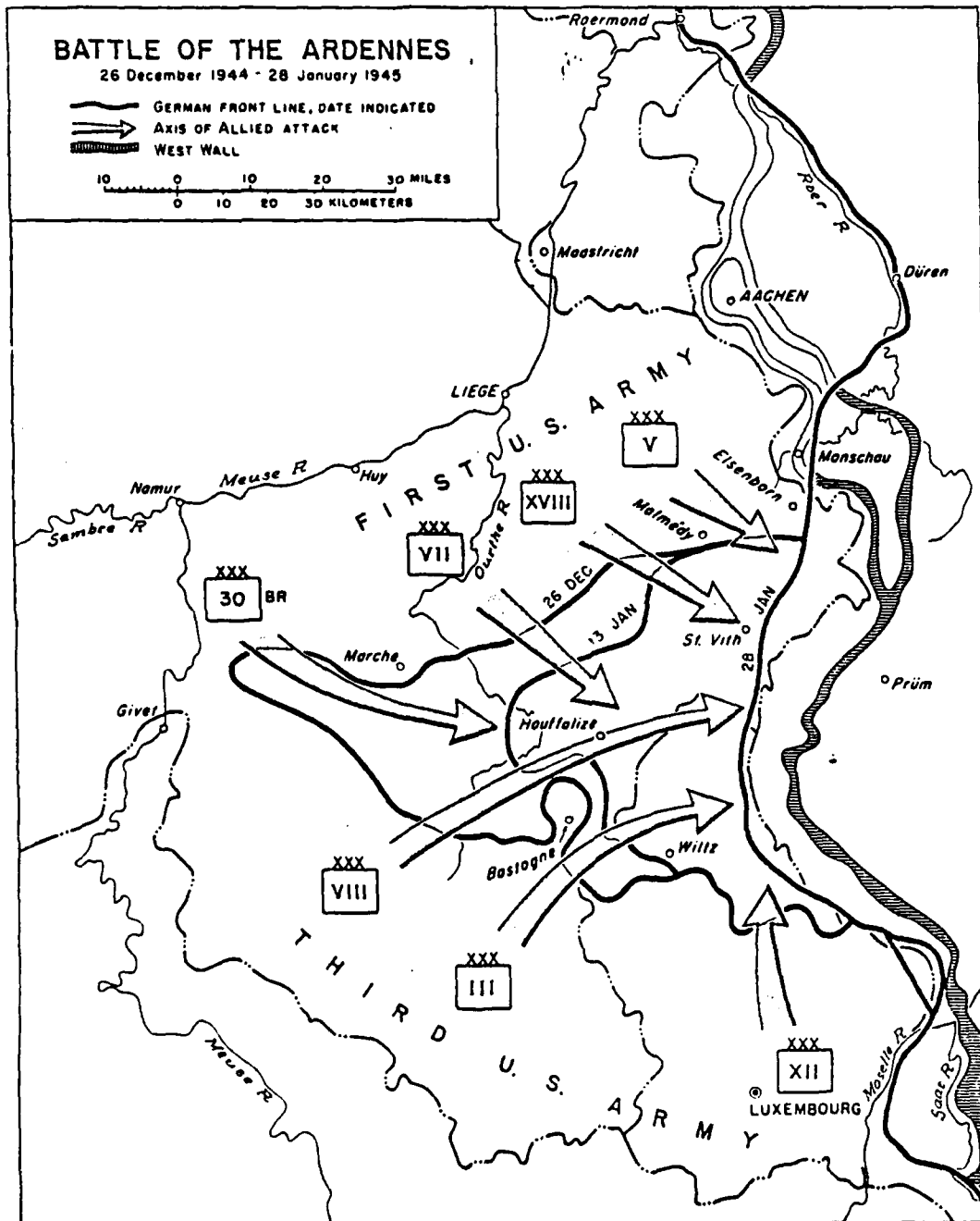
Unlike the French in 1940, the American command was not paralyzed by the surprise in the Ardennes. While slow to grasp the magnitude of the German effort, Eisenhower and Bradley did not withhold forces until the situation became more fully clarified. Eisenhower prompted Bradley to reinforce 1st Army with the 7th and 10th Armored Divisions. Eisenhower also sent his only reserve, the XVIII Airborne Corps, to 1st Army.

Eisenhower saw the German attack as an opportunity. The Germans had created a vulnerable center of gravity by concentrating their forces and coming out from behind the West Wall.²¹ Patton's G3 was thinking along the same lines as Eisenhower. The day after the German offensive began, he proposed to Patton an accelerated push eastwards, into the rear of the Germans in the Ardennes. He believed this deep attack would enable Patton to cut the enemy's LOC and trap them west of the Rhine. Patton agreed, but said the plan would be too daring for the higher command.²² Instead, Patton's 3rd Army attacked to the north. What is mainly remembered about Patton's drive into the flank of the German penetration is III Corps' timely relief of Bastogne. However, Third Army's six division, two corps counterattack was on a broad front, over 40

kilometers wide, with all six divisions abreast (See Map 5, page 11.1). Such a diffused attack was never capable of penetrating and trapping the Germans.²³ After the relief of Bastogne, Patton wanted to shift his main effort to the base of the bulge. A reinforced XII Corps, under Patton Eddy, would attack northeastwards into Germany to Bitburg and Prum, and link up with a southeastward drive by 1st Army from the Elsenborn Ridge, thus trapping the Germans.²⁴

Eisenhower had chopped 1st Army to Montgomery, and plans on the North side of the Bulge reflected Montgomery's cautious command style. On 25 December he told Bradley that it would be three months before 1st Army could attack. Montgomery expected another major blow against the 1st Army at any moment. Only Collins, who had blunted the German penetration at its sixty-mile deep apex with a bold counterattack by the 2nd Armored Division, favored attacking close to the base of the Bulge. Collins wanted to attack towards St. Vith and meet a northward drive from Patton. But the 1st Army commander, in view of Montgomery's concerns, favored a more cautious drive into the waist of the Bulge towards Houffalize. Bradley agreed with this less ambitious plan. Bradley provided Patton two additional divisions, but required Patton to send them to the VIII Corps vicinity Bastogne instead of to Eddy's XII Corps, thus ensuring Patton did not drive on Bitburg and Prum.²⁵ Still, the convergence of 1st and 3d Armies at Houffalize seemed to offer the opportunity of trapping the Germans. Unfortunately, the slow progress of Patton's wide-front attack in the south, the lateness of Montgomery's attack in the north, and stubborn German resistance

MAP 5 - ALLIED COUNTEROFFENSIVE



FROM: The Supreme Command, Forrest C. Pogue, Washington, D.C., Department of the Army, 1954, p. 394.

combined to permit the bulk of German forces to escape eastward before the trap was closed.²⁶

The fault of the Allies in the Battle of the Bulge lay mainly in the generalship's failure to fully seize the opportunities created by the valor of the men at such places as St. Vith and Bastogne. Eisenhower characteristically failed to follow up his intent with specific enough guidance to ensure a convergence in the Bonn-Cologne area.²⁷ Because of this, the Allied counterattack at the waist of the Bulge resembled more of a broad front attack designed to push the enemy back, rather than the decisive counterstroke Eisenhower wanted.

Though the Germans failed to reach their overly ambitious objectives, this battle again illustrates their significantly different operational approach to war. More to the point, even though the German strength in the West was less than the Allies, they still managed to concentrate large armored formations, as Manstein had against the Russians, for their counterblitz. But the Germans never achieved a breakthrough against the Americans. The rugged terrain canalized the panzers through key road junctions defended by "pick-up" detachments of American soldiers. The lack of a credible threat in other sectors provided Eisenhower no dilemma allowing him to move forces from less threatened areas. 60,000 men and 11,000 vehicles had arrived in the First Army area by midnight on the day after the German attack began.²⁸ Allied air superiority required German success to rely on the hope of bad weather. The Germans also hoped to be able to capture enough

Allied supplies to make up for their logistical shortcomings. Even if the German offensive had been able to reach the supply bases at Liege and the port of Antwerp, they lacked the forces to contain the enveloped Allies. Clearly, simply seizing Antwerp did not provide a defeat mechanism. This desperate gamble of Hitler's is a perfect example of the difference between boldness and rashness. Many were convinced that the next case we will examine was yet another rash plan overly dependent on luck.

3. Operation Chromite: The Amphibious Landing at Inchon

On 29 June 1950, four days after the North Koreans invaded South Korea, Douglas MacArthur stood on the south bank of the Han River. He could see dense smoke rising from Seoul, now occupied by the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). At that moment, he envisioned the destruction of the NKPA by an amphibious envelopment at Inchon.²⁹

However, a series of tactical disasters required MacArthur to continually divert forces from his amphibious counteroffensive. Initially, he had planned to use the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions to land at Pusan to stop the NKPA, while the 1st Cavalry Division landed at Inchon. Unfortunately, the Eighth Army's inability to stop the NKPA drive required the 1st Cavalry's commitment at Pusan.³⁰ MacArthur then decided to use the 2nd Infantry Division and a marine corps regimental combat team for the Inchon invasion. Again, these units had to be sent to reinforce the Pusan Perimeter. The Allied forces in the Pusan perimeter represented the Allied center of gravity. MacArthur correctly diverted his reserves to protect his center of gravity during this

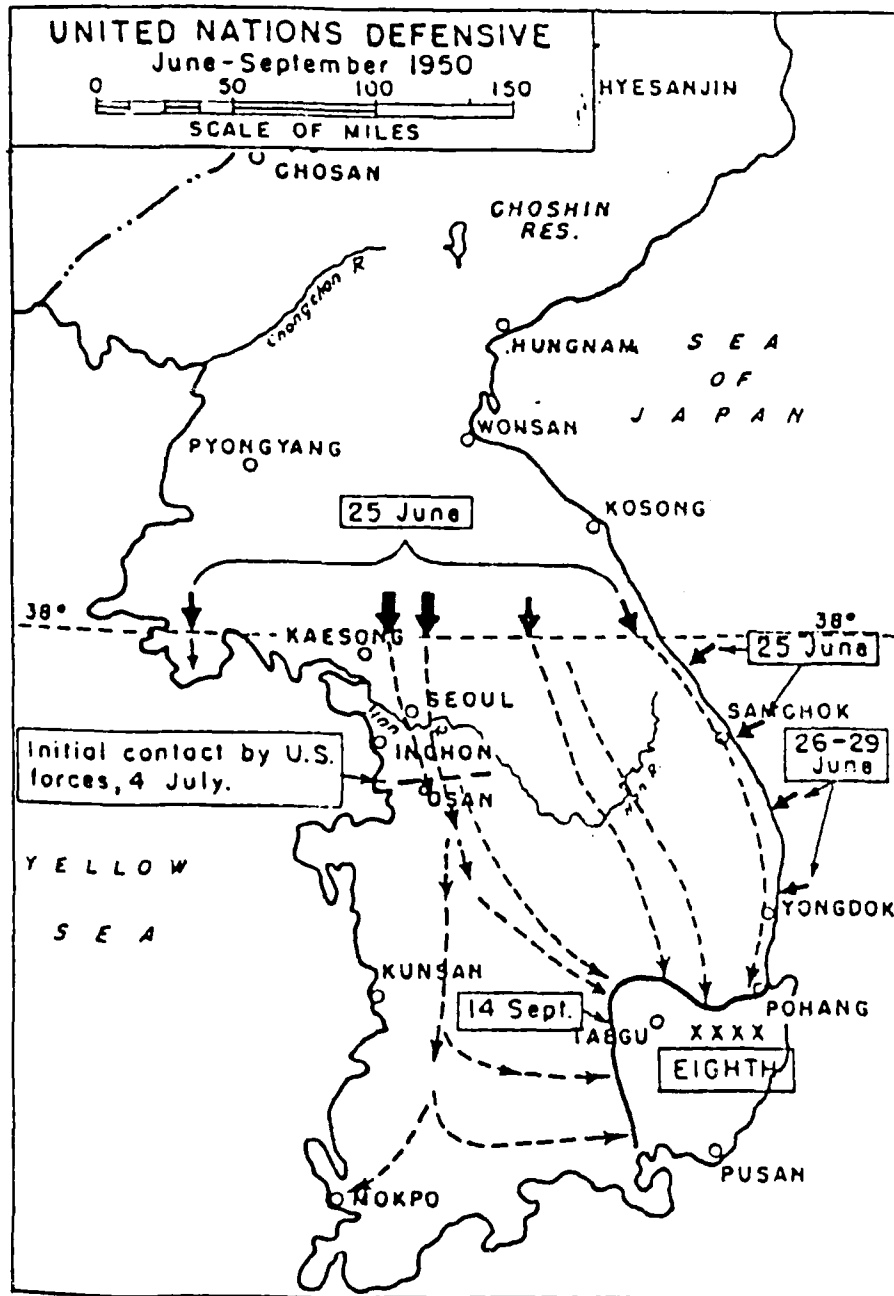
phase of the operation to maintain a foothold on the Korean Peninsula.

Slowly the advantage began to shift in favor of the US-ROK defense. Each mile the NKPA advanced took it farther from its supply base, and cost it increasing losses in casualties and equipment (See Map 6, page 14.1). By early August, NKPA strengths were down to about 55 percent in personnel and 25 percent in tanks. Additionally, due to American air and sea superiority, and the NKPA's ever-lengthening LOC, it could barely supply its dwindling forces.³¹ Conversely, the Allied withdrawal to the Pusan perimeter shortened their LOC, enabled the Allies to use interior lines to shift forces to threatened areas, and ultimately strengthened the defense.

By 8 August, MacArthur decided to carry out the Inchon landing with the 7th Infantry and 1st Marine Divisions. The Marines would spearhead the attack and establish a lodgement at Inchon. The 7th Infantry Division would follow immediately behind them. Both divisions would then fan out from the Inchon lodgement, cross the Han River, recapture Seoul, and cut the main NKPA supply lines. Simultaneously, Walker's Eighth Army would break out of the Pusan Perimeter, overrun the NKPA, and dash 180 miles northward to link up with the Inchon forces. The North Koreans would be trapped between these two "giant pincers."³²

MacArthur's plan seemed inordinately risky to every senior military officer who reviewed it, including the JCS and the Navy

MAP 6 - WITHDRAWAL TO PUSAN PERIMETER



FROM: U.S. Military Academy, Summaries of Selected Military Campaigns, West Point: Department of History, 1971, p. 173.

and Marine officers who commanded Operation Chromite.³³ Their concerns included:

1. Withdrawal of the 1st Marine Brigade from the Pusan Perimeter to complete the 1st Marine Division, would so weaken Eighth Army that the NKPA might break through.

2. A weakened Eighth Army might not be able to break out of the perimeter. The troops were exhausted from weeks of fighting.

3. Even if the Eighth Army could break out, many doubted it could "dash" 180 miles to Inchon against NKPA roadblocks.

4. If Eighth Army failed to make a speedy linkup, the Inchon forces would be dangerously exposed, and could be cut off and destroyed by reinforcements from North Korea, a mere 100 miles away.

5. Inchon was one of the worst possible places in the world to mount an amphibious assault because of its narrow channel, extreme tides, seawalls, potential for urban warfare, and requirement to cross the Han River in order to establish a beachhead.³⁴

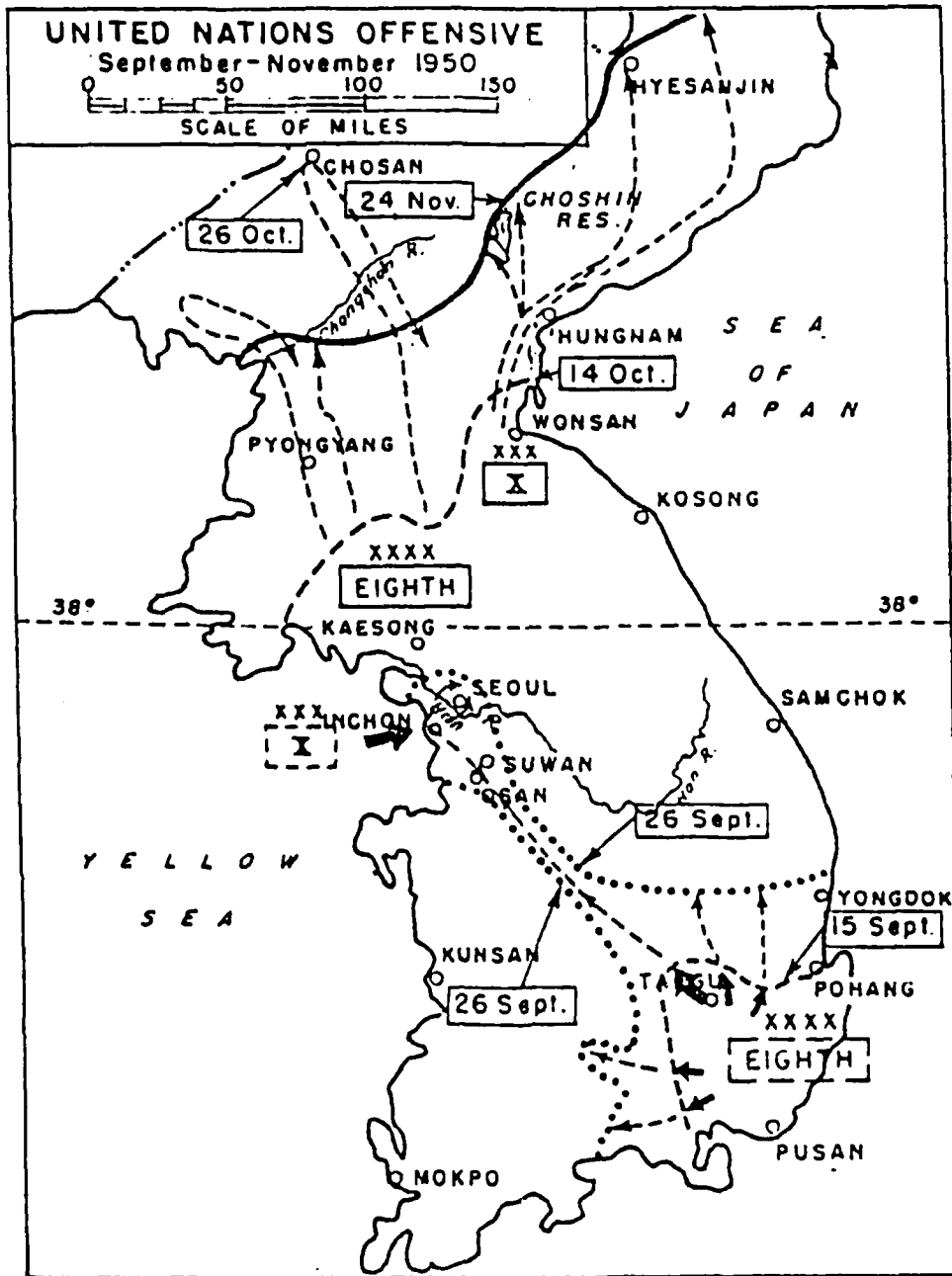
MacArthur argued that Inchon would succeed precisely because of the difficulties it presented. The problems were so great that the NKPA would never expect it. A successful landing at Inchon would not only cut the enemy's supply lines, but also deliver a knockout psychological blow. To lessen the risk, MacArthur would be at the landing site and would withdraw the forces if the landing failed.³⁵

The NKPA expected an amphibious assault, but did not know where it would occur. They decided the best defense was to quickly crack

the Pusan Perimeter. They combed both North and South Korea for reinforcements and launched an all-out offensive on 31 August. The defense of the Pusan Perimeter was a great victory for the Eighth Army. By 15 September, six NKPA divisions had been virtually wiped out.³⁶ The combined US and ROK (Republic of Korea) forces now outnumbered the NKPA two to one in personnel, six to one in artillery and heavy weapons, and still had unrivaled air and sea superiority. NKPA morale was at a low point with its troops suffering from undernourishment.³⁷ The NKPA offensive had culminated.

MacArthur's risk assessment proved to be correct. The NKPA center of gravity was now spent against the Pusan Perimeter. Concentration of forces in the south prevented the mounting of significant opposition to X Corps' landings in the north. Eighth Army launched its counteroffensive on 16 September, the day after X Corps landed at Inchon. Morale in the Eighth Army had soared at the news of Inchon. The troops immediately perceived its operational significance. But, by 19 September they still had not succeeded. Then, suddenly the NKPA divisions along the perimeter began withdrawing. Instead of breaking out, Eighth Army conducted a pursuit and exploitation.³⁸ By 27 September, Eighth Army and X Corps had linked up near Osan and secured Seoul (See Map 7, page 16.1). MacArthur's forces continued to pursue the NKPA into North Korea. Victory seemed certain until the surprise entry of Red China into the war. Still, MacArthur's counteroffensive remains one of the most outstanding of modern history.

MAP 7 - MACARTHUR'S COUNTEROFFENSIVE



FROM: U.S. Military Academy, Summaries of Selected Military Campaigns, West Point: Department of History, 1971, p. 173.

Before leaving this campaign, several more points should be highlighted. MacArthur was able to keep introducing operational and strategic reserves from Japan and the United States. In the beginning, he had to commit these in a reinforcing role to preserve the integrity of the Pusan Perimeter. The Allied forces in the Pusan Perimeter represented the Allied center of gravity. MacArthur correctly diverted his reserves to protect it. When he launched his counteroffensive, he did not have to break through the tactical crust of the enemy's defense. Instead, command of the sea and air provided him the opportunity to conduct an amphibious envelopment. The culmination of the NKPA's offensive and their lack of significant operational reserves made them extremely vulnerable to a deep envelopment. This indirect strike at a most decisive point, both psychologically and physically unhinged the enemy center of gravity, the spent NKPA opposite Eighth Army. In the next case we will examine, we will again see the pattern of the culmination of an attack followed by a counteroffensive using the indirect approach.

4. The Israeli Sinai Counteroffensive

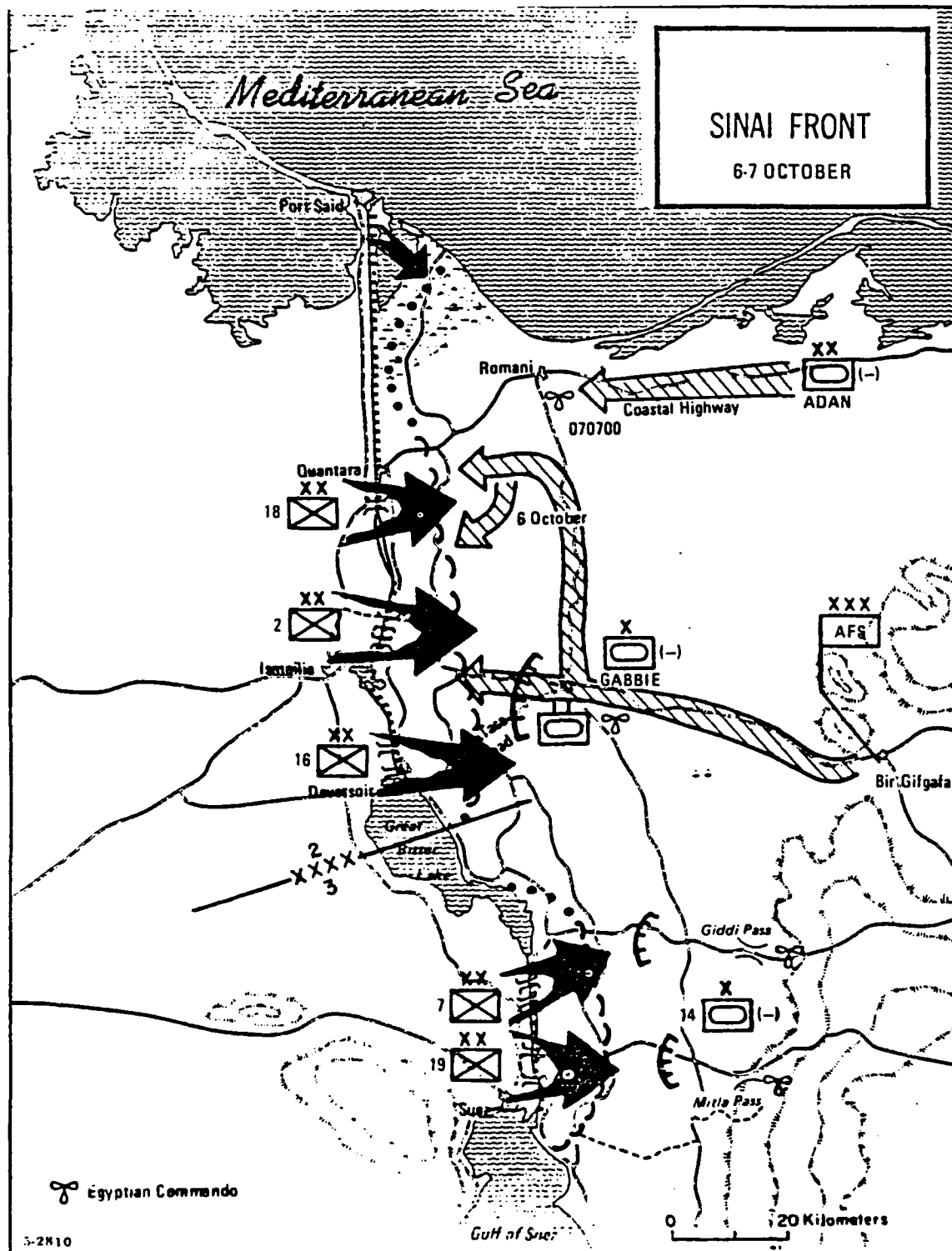
At 1400 hours on 6 October 1973, 240 Egyptian aircraft crossed the Suez Canal to strike Israeli airfields and command posts in the Sinai. Simultaneously, 2,000 artillery pieces opened up and a brigade of FROG surface to surface missiles launched its weapons. The entire east bank of the Suez became an inferno. Fifteen minutes later, the first wave of Egyptian infantrymen streamed across the canal.³⁹ Israeli aircraft, responding within minutes, were shot down by Egyptian surface to air missiles (SAMs) as soon

as they approached the canal. Counterattacking Israeli tanks were also annihilated by anti-tank guided missiles. The age of precision guided munitions had dawned. The ensuing Israeli counteroffensive in the Sinai provides us a more contemporary campaign to analyze in our quest to determine the conditions for a successful counteroffensive.

First, we will review the events leading to the Israeli counteroffensive. The Egyptians wanted the Sinai, which they had lost in the 1967 war, returned to them. Their military means to achieve this goal was defeat of the Israeli armed forces in the Sinai. Basically, they planned to conduct a broad-front crossing of the Suez to a shallow depth, and then hold the bridgehead while the Israeli army exhausted itself in counterattacks.⁴⁰ The plan initially worked. Supported by a sophisticated deception plan, the Egyptians achieved strategic surprise, and by 8 October had established a bridgehead 6 to 8 miles deep (See Map 8, page 18.1). Two Egyptian Armies defended against successive Israeli counterattacks: 2nd Egyptian Army in the north, consisting of three reinforced infantry divisions; and the 3d Egyptian Army in the south consisting of two reinforced infantry divisions. Three Israeli armored divisions opposed them.⁴¹

Adan's division, in the north, conducted the first major Israeli counterattack on 8 October. The plan was for Adan to attack from north to south, parallel and about two miles east of the canal. A second division would either continue the attack to the south or reinforce him. The attack was too shallow. Instead

MAP 8 - EGYPTIAN ATTACK



FROM: RB 100-2, VOL I, Selected Readings in Tactics -
The 1973 Middle East War, U.S. Army Command and
 General Staff College, Aug 76.

of rolling down the Egyptian flank, Adan's division moved across the Egyptian front. Poor tactics, lack of combined arms, and a breakdown in command and control, led to disaster. Adan failed and his division sustained heavy casualties.⁴² Both sides allowed an operational pause to ensue.

As the opposing lines stabilized, the Israelis developed a concept for a counteroffensive that ultimately led to victory. Part of the Israeli high command believed that no decision was possible unless the Israeli Army crossed the canal into Egypt, and then won a maneuver war. The concept called for a two division attack at the boundary between the Egyptian 2nd and 3d Armies. This weak point had been identified through aggressive reconnaissance.⁴³ The threat to the Israeli plan was the Egyptian operational reserve, two armored divisions. As long as they were on the west side of the Suez, any Israeli crossing would be in great risk. Fortunately for the Israelis, on 11 October the Egyptians decided to redeploy the two armored divisions to the eastern side of the Suez and commit them in battle. The intent of this second Egyptian offensive was to support the Syrian front, where things were not going well for Egypt's ally. This second Egyptian offensive was supposed to refocus Israel's attention on the Sinai. While the Israeli high command debated the feasibility of a cross-canal counteroffensive, they learned of the movement of Egyptian armor across the Suez and decided to postpone their counteroffensive until after the Egyptian attack.⁴⁴

The Egyptians had used the advantages of the defense against the previous Israeli counterattacks. This time, the Israeli's used

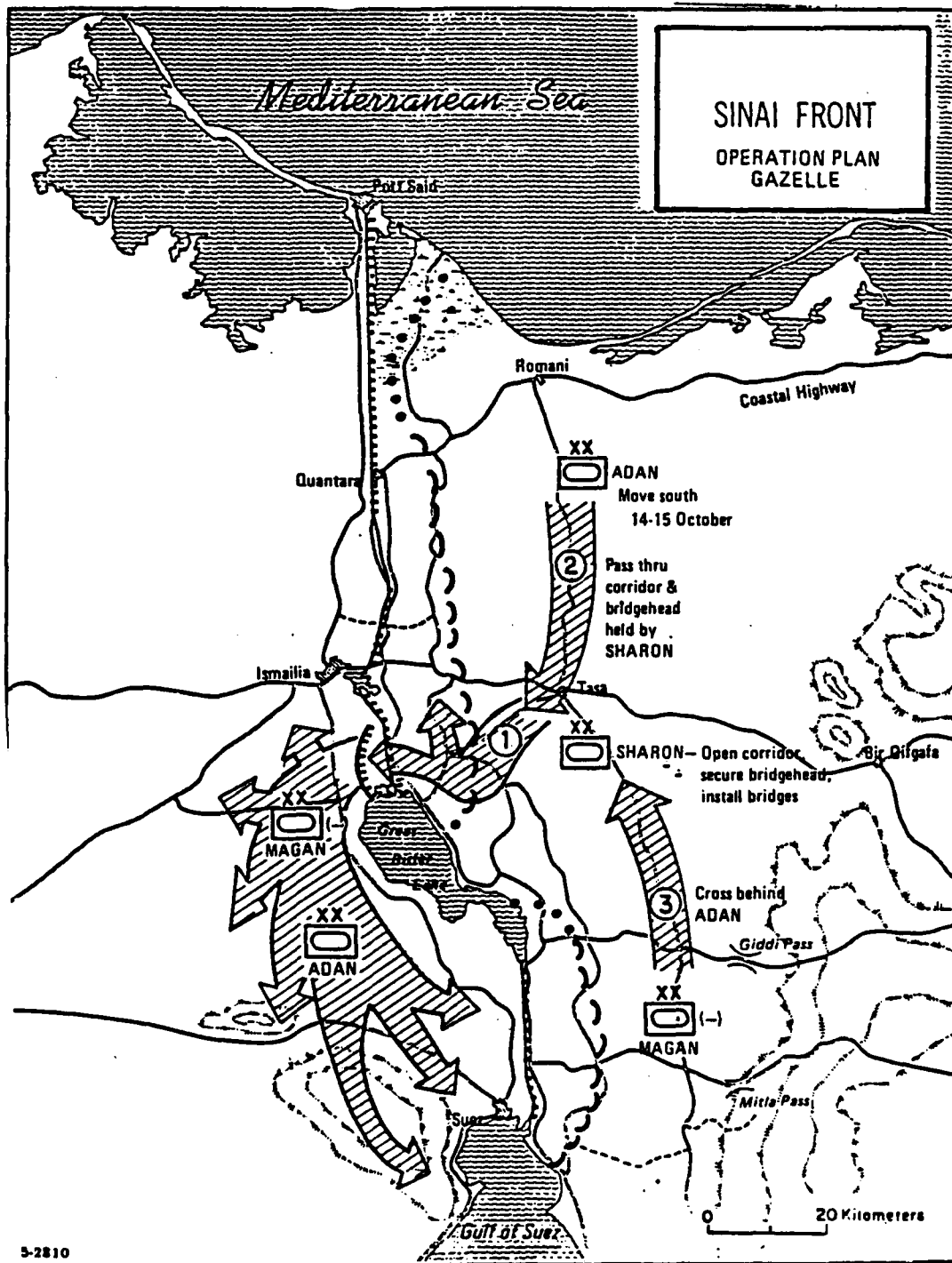
those advantages against the Egyptians. The Egyptians directed their offensive at the Milta and Gidi Passes, about thirty kilometers from the Suez and beyond the reach of their SAM umbrella. Israeli forces had carefully prepared themselves for this battle. This time the Egyptians met deadly tank and antitank fire, and the Israeli Air Force was able to pounce on the Egyptian tanks. By the end of the day, 264 Egyptian tanks had been knocked out versus Israeli losses of only 10 tanks. More importantly, the Egyptians had exceeded their defensive culminating point.⁴⁵

Unlike the Egyptians, the Israelis quickly exploited their defensive victory. They planned to cross the canal the following night in the still existing gap between the Egyptian armies. Two divisions would cross with a third prepared to cross on order (See Map 9, page 20.1). Their mission was to cut off the Egyptian Third Army and destroy it. Other Israeli forces would launch supporting attacks to pin the enemy down.⁴⁶

The lead Israeli division, Sharon's, reached the crossing site on the evening of 15 October. One of its brigades, tasked to provide flank security to the north, unexpectedly encountered the 21st Egyptian Armored Division at its reconstitution site. An intense battle broke out only six miles north of the crossing site. Despite this flank threat, the crossing continued. The first wave of paratroopers crossed the Suez at 0130 on 16 October. By 0800 the bridgehead extended three miles inland.⁴⁷

The Egyptian high command debated whether to launch its counterattack on the east or west side of the canal. A counter-

MAP 9 - COUNTEROFFENSIVE



5-2810

FROM: RB 100-2, VOL I, Selected Readings in Tactics - The 1973 Middle East War, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Aug 76.

attack on the west required withdrawing forces back across the Canal. Sadat refused this option as a sign of weakness. Instead the Egyptians launched their counterattacks on the east side -- into waiting Israeli flank guards. The Egyptian assaults were destroyed.⁴⁸

By 21 October, the Israelis had crossed two divisions to the west bank and successfully attacked south to trap the Egyptian Third Army. "Most importantly, the Egyptians had lost most of their fixed SAM sites, and the Israeli Air Force thus roamed the skies freely."⁴⁹ By the evening of 22 October, the Israelis had cut the Egyptian 3rd Army's LOC and surrounded it. Shortly afterwards the superpowers finally succeeded in imposing a cease fire. Hostilities finally ended on 27 October.

Before we leave this campaign we should emphasize the following points. The Egyptian center of gravity was its reserve armored divisions initially deployed west of the Suez. The Egyptians committed these to battle on the 14 October offensive. Their defeat provided the Israelis with the right conditions for a counteroffensive. The Egyptians lacked significant forces on the west side of the Suez. They had no depth. Rather than breaking through the Egyptian tactical crust, the Israeli counteroffensive took the indirect approach -- through the gap between the Egyptian armies. The Israelis also achieved air superiority indirectly -- by the army's elimination of fixed SAM sites. Since the Egyptians lacked sufficient forces on the west side of the canal, the Israelis not only cut across the 3d Egyptian Army's LOC, but also

threatened the LOC of the 2nd Egyptian Army, and threatened the security of Egypt's capitol and strategic center of gravity, Cairo.

III. CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COUNTEROFFENSIVE

The four case studies we have reviewed provide an opportunity to develop insights concerning the conditions for a successful counteroffensive. Analysis of these great counteroffensives suggests the following areas deserve our attention:

1. Culmination of the offense.
2. Generation of operational reserves.
3. Air superiority.
4. Lines of operation.
5. Indirect approach.
6. Boldness

1. Culmination of the Offense.

FM 100-5 says that the art of the defense is to hasten the culmination of the attack, recognize its advent, and be prepared to go over to the offense when it arrives.⁵⁰ Each of our cases illustrates how a successful counteroffensive depends on the culmination of the attack.

Manstein's withdrawal enticed the Soviets to advance beyond their culminating point. They mistook Manstein's withdrawal, part of his mobile defense, for a general retreat and thought the Germans were on the verge of collapse. The opportunity to sever the German army's LOCs and crush the Germans against the Sea of Azov seemed almost within grasp. All that was needed was one more great push. Thus, Soviet armies, that had been in almost constant

combat since Stalingrad, overextended themselves at the same time Manstein was concentrating an operational reserve to conduct a counterstroke.

The North Korean offensive culminated after trying to crack the Pusan Perimeter. The NKPA had decided that the best defense against a possible amphibious landing in their rear was to quickly defeat the combined US-ROK defensive perimeter. The North Koreans combed both North and South Korea for reinforcements to support their offensive. By the time MacArthur landed at Inchon the NKPA offensive had spent itself. Six of fourteen of its divisions had sustained severely heavy losses, and their troops were suffering from malnutrition.

The Egyptian army's offensive culminated after the unsuccessful drive to seize the Milta and Gidi Passes. They committed their reserve armored divisions, without air defense, in this unsuccessful attack against prepared Israeli positions. While the Egyptians were attempting to reconstitute themselves, the Israelis launched their counteroffensive.

Conversely, in the Bulge, the Western Allied offensive had not culminated. Instead, the general Allied situation can best be described as an operational pause, in preparation for another offensive, in which the main effort would be directed from north of the Ardennes at the Rhur, with a supporting effort from south of the Ardennes at the Saar. Eisenhower was able to redeploy forces earmarked for these offensive drives against the German attack. Eisenhower also had an operational reserve, 18th Airborne Corps, which he used to block key road intersections, such as Bastogne.

Further, Eisenhower was able to call on additional divisions from England -- he ordered the 11th Armored and 17th Airborne Divisions from there to the battle area two days after the battle started. Introduction of these forces compelled the German offensive to culminate before reaching its objective.

In each of the successful cases, the counteroffensive was launched after the attacker had become over extended; i.e., surpassed the point of culmination. The resulting weaknesses along the front and lack of operational depth (the attacker had committed his reserves) provided the defender's counteroffensive forces the opportunity for operational maneuver in the enemy rear. How the defender generated sufficient force to do this leads us to our next point.

2. Generation of Operational Reserves

The defender must generate operational reserves from units in contact. Manstein generated operational reserves by decreasing his frontage, falling back on his line of communications, and assuming risk in economy of force areas. He decreased his frontage almost fifty percent by withdrawing his army group from the south side of the Don River. Falling back on his line of communication also facilitated repositioning of forces on his initially interior lines of operation. He also assumed risk along the Mius River, an economy of force sector stripped of its panzers. These measures allowed Manstein to stage the 48th and 57th Corps for his counteroffensive.

The Battle of the Bulge provides an interesting contrast between the American and German approach to the use of reserves. The Germans again demonstrated the ability to create large, mobile operational reserves for the Bulge, even though outnumbered and under pressure on a broad front. In response to this German counteroffensive, Eisenhower never managed to concentrate a large operational reserve to conduct a decisive counterstroke into the enemy's depth. Instead, his piecemeal commitment of divisions and Third Army produced a broad-front counteroffensive that merely pushed the enemy back.

MacArthur had to keep diverting his reserves to keep a foothold at Pusan: the 1st Cavalry Division, the 2nd Infantry Division, and finally the 1st Marine Brigade. Even though MacArthur enjoyed a stream of reinforcing divisions from out of theater, he had to withdraw the 1st Marine Brigade from the Pusan Perimeter in order to have a sufficiently powerful amphibious assault force.

The Israelis also conducted their counteroffensive with divisions previously committed to the defense. The same three armored divisions that opposed the Egyptian offensive conducted the Israeli counteroffensive, crossed the Suez, and encircled the Third Egyptian Army. The Israelis took advantage of the lack of Egyptian initiative on the east bank. The Israelis used only two armored brigades to pin both Egyptian armies in a risky but effective economy of force.

In summary, our cases demonstrate the necessity of constituting reserves from committed forces. The ability of large units to quickly disengage, conduct battle hand-off, plan, move, and receive

new units before and even while in the process of executing a counteroffensive requires a high degree of agility.

3. Air Superiority

In each of our cases, the winning side generated air superiority. Manstein's counteroffensive represented the last time the Luftwaffe provided offensive air support in the style of the 1940 blitzkrieg. By 1943, the Soviets possessed five times the number of aircraft as the Germans.⁵¹ However, the Luftwaffe concentrated and managed to maintain air superiority in Manstein's sector. Besides providing close air support, the Luftwaffe hastened the enemy's culmination by effectively interdicting his rail lines of communication.⁵²

The Western Allies had established air superiority prior to the Normandy invasion. By September 1944, the German Air Force in the west was spent.⁵³ The Germans depended on poor weather to screen them during the Battle of the Bulge. After the poor weather lifted, German units were unable to conduct significant movement during daylight.⁵⁴

Air and sea superiority at Inchon allowed MacArthur's amphibious force to by-pass the enemy center of gravity. General Walker, Eighth Army Commander, stated that had it not been for close air support, the defense of the Pusan Perimeter would not have succeeded.⁵⁵ Air interdiction also greatly hampered North Korean resupply. For example, the North Koreans built two pontoon bridges over the Han River near Seoul (the retreating ROKs had destroyed the Han bridges). The Air Force destroyed and then

continued to bomb the bridge sites daily to prevent reconstruction. Night time reconstruction was prevented by delay action bombs dropped during the day. These bridge sites remained unrepaired until after the American forces recaptured Seoul.⁵⁶ It is no wonder the NKPA was suffering from malnutrition.

MacArthur's counteroffensive also illustrates the importance of mutual support between ground and air forces. The capture of Kimpo runway was one of the Inchon landing's major objectives. Possession of the airfield would greatly increase the ability of air power in the attack on Seoul and further increase the effectiveness of the interdiction campaign. Within five days after the Inchon landing, Kimpo had been captured. One day later, Marine Corsairs were flying missions out of Kimpo.⁵⁷

The Egyptian attack culminated partly because Egyptian armor left the protection of its air defense umbrella, and the Egyptian Air Force was incapable of providing air cover. The Egyptians had realized their air force was no match for the Israelis. Accordingly, the Egyptians had planned a limited objective offensive across the Suez and protected themselves with a sophisticated SAM defense. For a brief period the plan worked -- until Egyptian armor came out from underneath this protective coverage on their 14 October offensive.

The Israeli counteroffensive again demonstrates the requirement for mutual support between army and air force. One of the first missions assigned to Israeli battalions after crossing the Suez was destruction of Egyptian SAM batteries. Deprived of their SAM

defense, Egyptian army units became easy prey for the Israeli Air Force.

Thus we can emphasize several points concerning air superiority. As the Luftwaffe demonstrated in 1943, it may not be necessary to gain air superiority over the entire front (theater of war). Instead, air superiority need only be achieved in the counteroffensive area (theater of operations). Also, ground operations can greatly assist the air force in achieving air superiority as the Inchon and Sinai counteroffensives demonstrate. Finally, the increasing lethality of SAMs, as demonstrated in 1973, and the ability to deploy shoulder-fired SAMs, as in Afghanistan, suggest an increasingly important role for ground operations in gaining air superiority.

4. Lines of Operation

Our cases demonstrate the importance of the operational design concept, lines of operation, to counteroffensive planning. The most successful counteroffensives cut across the enemy's line of operations while protecting their own.

Manstein conducted his counteroffensive with the 4th Panzer Army on convergent lines of operation -- from the south with 48th and 57th Panzer Corps and from the north with SS Panzer Corps. They converged behind the Soviet Sixth and First Guards Armies, thus eliminating the threat to Manstein's own line of operations, the bait that caused the Soviets to overextend themselves. Fourth Panzer Army then turned north cutting across the line of operations and also trapping the Soviet Third Tank Army.

The Western Allies conducted their drive into Germany using convergent lines of operation, i.e., from bases at Antwerp, Normandy, and Marseilles. Thus, even if the German counteroffensive directed at Antwerp had succeeded, the American Army still could have driven into Germany. In contrast, the Germans conducted their counteroffensive on a single line of operations. Organization of flank protection is simplified on a single line of operation. The Germans successfully used infantry armies for flank protection, and the Allied broad-front counteroffensive was unable to cut across the German line of operation. However, the threat to the German's line of operation was significant enough to cause the Germans to withdraw. During their withdrawal, they shifted forces against various Allied units on interior lines to facilitate their escape back across the Siegfried line.

Command of the Sea at Inchon provided MacArthur the opportunity to also conduct his counteroffensive on convergent lines of operation. The amphibious line of operation cut across the North Korean line of operation at a decisive point, Seoul. Seoul is a decisive point because most of the roads in Korea north of it converge on the city, while those leading south from Seoul diverge from the city. Striking the NKPA line of operation at Seoul both physically and psychologically unhinged the NKPA, just as MacArthur had predicted.

Only in the Sinai do we have a successful counteroffensive on interior lines of operation. The Israelis secured their line of operation across the Suez while cutting across the 3rd Egyptian

Army's line of operations and threatening to do the same to the 2nd Egyptian Army.

In summary, we can see how the most successful counter-offensives cut across the enemy's line of operation, thus trapping and unhinging the main enemy force (center of gravity). This is what happened at Kharkov, in Korea, and in the Sinai. The Americans failed to do so in the Bulge, and many Germans escaped to fight another day. Also, three out of the four winners used convergent lines of operation (Kharkov, Bulge, Inchon). One wonders whether the Israeli operation, conducted on divergent lines, would have succeeded without the presence of the Suez Canal. These cases suggest convergent lines of operation provide greater opportunity for envelopment, deception, and flexibility.

5. The Indirect Approach

The indirect approach appears to provide the best opportunity for success. Liddel Hart explains the indirect approach as taking the path of least resistance. In the psychological sphere, this refers to taking the path of least expectation. Thus, the indirect approach often involves deception and/or placing the enemy on the "horns" of a dilemma.⁵⁸

Manstein's counteroffensive is an outstanding example of the indirect approach. The Soviets had achieved a breakthrough, 100 kilometers wide and 200 kilometers deep, on Manstein's northern flank. As German units continued to withdraw, the STAVKA judged that Manstein's defense was collapsing. One more push and the Red Army would have the vital German Dnepr crossing sites. Manstein

did not commit his reserves to a direct defense of these decisive points along his line operations. Instead, he used his operational reserves to hit the Russians where they least expected, in their flanks and rear.

MacArthur's amphibious envelopment is another great example of the indirect approach. In defending his plan, MacArthur argued that Inchon would succeed precisely because of the difficulties it presented; i.e., the NKPA would never expect it. The threat of amphibious landing in the NKPA rear also put them on the horns of a dilemma: how to contain the Allies in the Pusan Perimeter and react to an amphibious operation at the same time? They decided their best defense was to quickly destroy the Pusan Perimeter. By committing their reserves and culminating against the Pusan Perimeter, the North Koreans deprived themselves of forces to effectively counter the amphibious landing.

The Israeli counteroffensive struck at a gap between the Egyptian Armies. Aggressive Israeli reconnaissance identified this gap between the Egyptian Second and Third Armies. The Israelis quickly exploited this tactical error. Once they had established a bridgehead on the west side of the Suez they used the indirect approach again. By striking at Egyptian SAM batteries, army units helped the Israeli Air Force establish air superiority.

However, the indirect approach is not a panacea. The Germans tried the indirect approach in the Ardennes and failed. Indeed, the Ardennes was the weakest sector in the Allied line, but the American defense held. The rugged terrain canalized the panzers through key road junctions, valorously defended by American

soldiers. The Allies had not culminated. Eisenhower possessed operational reserves, other uncommitted reserves, and overwhelming air superiority. American agility made possible the rapid introduction of divisions and armies to contain the penetration. Unfortunately, there was nothing indirect about the Allied counteroffensive. The counterattacks had been anticipated and were held off by German infantry armies tasked to guard the flanks.

6. Boldness

A bold counteroffensive will be more decisive. James Schneider, School of Advanced Military Studies Theoretician, proposes, "Boldness is the quality to choose, in light of sound judgement, a course of action that will bring the greatest payoff on its success."⁵⁹

Manstein's counteroffensive is a classic example of boldness. One German general described the situation as "hair raising" when Russian tanks were only thirty-six miles from Manstein's headquarters with no Germans in between.⁶⁰ Manstein realized that only bold action could turn the tables. His education and experience had prepared him for just this sort of calculated risk. As a German General Staff officer, he had trained in the tradition of Moltke and Schlieffen, who especially admired the double envelopment of Cannae. German operational thought emphasized rapid, decisive maneuver. Victory was seen to lie in surprise, concentration of force at the decisive point, and in fast encircling movements creating the "cauldron battles."⁶¹ Using these principles, smaller forces could defeat larger ones.

Manstein designed the highly successful German victory in France in 1940 using these principles. His Kharkov design was very similar. As the Russian armies plunged forward, his panzers swept behind them, like a revolving door. German doctrine, education, and Manstein's own experiences helped him design just the sort of operation needed in a desperate situation.

MacArthur argued that the risk of an amphibious landing at Inchon was outweighed by the alternative -- a bloody battle up the Korean peninsula. While many thought MacArthur's plan reckless, we must remember that MacArthur had a great deal of experience in amphibious envelopment -- more than any general in history. Therefore, he possessed a highly developed capacity for sound judgement in amphibious operations. He also mitigated the risk through his personal presence in the landing area. He was determined to pursue this course of action in the face of almost unanimous dissent -- a superb example of Clausewitzian genius for command. MacArthur "saw the light."

The Israeli counteroffensive across the Suez was also a bold operation. On the morning after the crossing, the Egyptian threat to the flanks of the Israeli penetration on the east side of the canal especially worried Moshe Dyan, Minister of Defense. He proposed pulling back the paratroopers from the west bank: "We tried. It has been no go." He suggested giving up the crossing: "In the morning they will slaughter them on the other side."⁶² Bar-Lev, commanding Israeli forces on the Canal Front, disregarded Dyan's misgivings and continued to push across the Suez while simultaneously taking measures to protect his flanks from the

inevitable Egyptian counterattacks. This maneuver was consistent with Israeli warfighting doctrine: strike deep into the enemy's rear as soon as possible to bring about a quick defeat of his army.⁶³ Again, we have an example of the commander's "inner light" and determination in the face of not only the enemy's resistance, but his superior's doubts.

Selecting a course of action based solely on its perceived payoff is rashness, which subordinates sound judgement to the payoff and leads to gambling.⁶⁴ Hitler's Ardennes offensive is a good example of rashness. He gambled on the disintegration of the American defense, poor weather for protection from air attack, capture of American supplies to sustain his drive, and the seizure of Antwerp to defeat the British Army and unravel the Western Alliance. On the other hand, the Allied response was anything but bold. Indeed, Montgomery was over cautious on the northern flank. Bradley was also very conservative as evidenced by his complicity on the decision to drive at Houffalize instead of at the base of the Bulge. One could argue that by December 1944, the outcome of World War II was never in doubt. All Eisenhower had to do was keep from losing. Indeed, he did not face a desperate situation that could only be turned around by a bold counterstroke. However, had Eisenhower managed to organize the bold counterstroke he originally envisioned against the enemy center of gravity which had come out from behind the Siefried Line, the war may have been shorter and less costly.

In summary, a bold counteroffensive provided the most decisive results. Each of the commanders conducting a bold counteroffensive had to overcome the doubts of his superiors as well as the enemy. They used sound judgement to achieve the greatest payoff. On the other hand, Eisenhower's commanders used their judgement to minimize the risks, while Hitler's operation was never anything more than a desperate gamble.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR AFCEM.

So far, we have used historical analysis to deduce six conditions necessary for a successful counteroffensive. Can these conditions, based on insights from the past, assist operational planners in responding to challenges of the future? In this section we will examine the implications of these conditions on operational planning in central Europe. We will address the implications in the context of a post-Conventional Forces Europe (CFE) agreement.

Precisely defining the post-CFE military structure is beyond the scope of this paper. Essentially, the Soviets have agreed to parity in the Atlantic to Urals region in conventional forces, between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, at a level below NATO's current holdings.⁶⁵ This will probably require the Soviet Union to maintain the bulk of its army beyond the Urals, either against China or in strategic reserve. On the NATO side, CFE will require the withdrawal or deactivation of at least one U.S. corps. However, revolutionary political change recently swept through Eastern Europe, and virtually dissolved the Warsaw Pact. For this reason, we can expect unilateral reductions beyond CFE, as

governments seek to cash in on the "peace dividend." More to the point, there will be significantly fewer forces on either side, East Germany will probably be a demilitarized zone, and Allied Forces Central Europe's (AFCENT's) concept of forward defense along the Inter-German Border (IGB) will bear reevaluation.

In our historical analysis, we deduced that the counteroffensive should not be launched until the attacker's offensive culminates. Application of this condition has been relatively straightforward in the past. AFCENT's forward defense along the IGB ensured that any Warsaw Pact thrust to the Rhine or beyond would have to fight through a well prepared defense. In fact, CINCENT intended "...to take some risks, and wait for the decisive, culminating point of the battle" to seize the initiative.⁶⁶ However, forcing the enemy's attack to culminate in a future thrust by the Soviets across the Polish-German border will require new operational concepts. In some ways, the situation resembles the problem faced by the French in 1940. They hoped to force the German offensive to culminate in Belgium. Unfortunately, the French never recovered from rushing a significant portion of their operational reserves forward into Belgium in the Dyle-Breda Plan. Likewise, AFCENT operational planners will have to decide between rushing a significant force forward to stop an invasion close to the Polish-German border, or only sending covering forces forward, while the main battle area remains closer to the IGB. Herein lies the dilemma. If the invader's objective is limited, for example regaining East Germany, AFCENT will not be able to

force early culmination of the offensive if it defends near the IGB. Since a limited objective invasion is more probable, and German political leaders will probably refuse to cede East Germany, the objective of forcing early culmination, as close to the Polish-German border as possible, will most likely be an important political constraint that drives operational planning. Regardless of the option chosen, NATO will lack the necessary combat power to launch a successful counteroffensive to restore the Polish-German border, unless it first forces the attacker's offensive to culminate.

If the Soviets decrease the size of their army by half, they will still have about 100 divisions.⁶⁷ This large standing army, plus its proximity to Central Europe, gives the Soviets a significant reinforcement advantage over NATO. For these reasons, the objective of forcing the enemy's offensive to culminate will require all the forces NATO has on hand. In other words, unless the Soviets halt after a shallow attack (like the Egyptians did initially in the Sinai), NATO will not enjoy the luxury of retaining a large operational reserve for a counteroffensive to reestablish the Polish-German border. This does not mean that NATO's initial operational reserve should not be used offensively, i.e., as part of a mobile defense to force the enemy's culmination. Rather, just as our historical examples have shown, operational reserves will have to be generated from committed forces after the initial reserves have been committed. Reinforcements from the United States will help, but probably not be sufficient.

Before NATO launches its counteroffensive, it must establish air superiority in the theater of operations in which the counteroffensive will take place. If AFCENT lacks the necessary aircraft for this purpose, the principle of economy of force would suggest that air assets dedicated to AFNORTH, AFSOUTH, and naval aviation should be concentrated for the decisive battle. Cooperation between the Army and Air Force in joint suppression of enemy air defenses (JSEAD) will provide the synergism needed to help win the air superiority battle. Battle Command Training Program exercises also indicate that attack helicopters are far more effective when able to overfly areas already cleared by friendly ground forces.⁶⁸

Next, our historical analysis suggested that the counteroffensive should seek to exploit the indirect approach, and cut across the enemy's line of operations. A more mobile defense in a post CFE Europe will require a more reactive (versus preplanned) counterstroke to exploit opportunity. Forces previously committed to the defense will have to quickly disengage, conduct battle hand-off, and plan on the move (like the Israelis in the Sinai) to exploit opportunities identified through aggressive reconnaissance. Decisive points to attack along the Soviet line of operations would include the Army Mobile Supply Bases, normally located 50 to 100 kilometers behind the FEBA. A counteroffensive that successfully destroys these bases will not only incapacitate the Soviet resupply system, but also help paralyze their command and control system.

Finally, our historical analysis showed us that only bold counteroffensives achieve decisive results. Each of the commanders conducting a bold counteroffensive had to overcome the doubts of his superiors. This presents a special challenge to the AFCENT commander who commands the forces of seven (possibly eight, including France) different nations. The AFCENT commander may want to consider conducting a bold counteroffensive with only one national force. This would help minimize the possibility of political veto, or time consuming conferences with representatives of foreign national command authorities, who may be inclined to take counsel of their fears.

V. CONCLUSION.

In review, we have examined four of the greatest counteroffensives of recent history. These counteroffensives differed in types of weapons, geography, nationality of opponents, and their political purpose. We also saw considerable differences in technology. In spite of all these differences, the successful operations had remarkable similarities in certain aspects of their operational design. By identifying these similarities, we have deduced conditions necessary for a successful counteroffensive. These six "conditions for successful counteroffensives" can assist operational planners in the design of campaigns and major operations when we expect to initially be on the defensive:

1. Culmination. Force the attacker's offensive to culminate before launching the counteroffensive. Once the enemy's offensive culminates, his general weakness and lack of operational depth makes him especially vulnerable to the counteroffensive.

2. Operational Reserves. Plan to constitute operational reserves from the same forces that were used in the defense. This is because a successful defense against a strong opponent often requires the commitment of all available forces.

3. Air Superiority. Air superiority must be established in the counteroffensive area to protect ground forces as well as to provide offensive air support. Establishing air superiority is a joint operation -- ground forces must assist.

4. Lines of Operations. The counteroffensive should seek to cut across the enemy's line of operation, thus depriving him of sustainment as well as blocking his line of retreat.

5. The Indirect Approach. Use deception to confuse the enemy and agility to exploit his mistakes in order to avoid his strength and maneuver into his rear to cut across his line of operations.

6. Boldness. Expect that a plan using the indirect approach to attack the enemy's line of operation will entail risks. The commander must use sound judgement to properly weigh the risks. He must then have the determination to overcome both political and organizational resistance to his plan as well as the enemy.

These conditions are not meant to be rules. We must remember, as Clausewitz warns, that talent and genius operate outside the rules.⁶⁹ Rather, these conditions should serve as insights about what succeeded in the past. These insights from the past can assist operational planners in applying sound judgement to the challenges of the future.

ENDNOTES

¹Frank C. Carlucci, Annual Report to the Congress, FY90, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989, p. 34.

²Carl von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 370.

³Ibid., p. 173.

⁴Definitions of center of gravity, lines of operations, and culminating point can be found in Appendix B, FM 100-5, Operations, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1986.

⁵Lawrence L. Izzo, LTC, "An Analysis of Manstein's Winter Campaign on the Russian Front, 1942-43," SAMS Monograph, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1986, p. 1.

⁶Ibid., p. 27.

⁷Earl F. Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the West. Washington, D.C.: Army Historical Series, Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1968, p. 91.

⁸Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, Munich: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1982, p. 420.

⁹Ziemke, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

¹⁰Izzo, op. cit., p. 42.

¹¹Ziemke, op. cit., p. 93.

¹²Izzo, op. cit., p. 44.

¹³Ziemke, op. cit., p. 94.

¹⁴Charles W. Sydnor, Jr. Soldiers of Destruction, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 269.

¹⁵John Toland, Battle: The Story of the Bulge, New York: Random House, 1959, unnumbered page (author's note).

¹⁶Charles B. MacDonald, A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984, p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 20.

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¹⁹Russel F. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970, p. 574.

²⁰Ibid., p. 522-3.

²¹Weigley, op. cit., p. 420.

²²Ibid., 499.

²³Ibid., p. 522-3.

²⁴MacDonald, op. cit., p. 599.

²⁵Ibid., p. 599-600.

²⁶Weigley, op. cit., p. 561.

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²⁸Gregory M. Eckert, "Operational Reserves in AFCENT", Fort Leavenworth: SAMS Monograph, May 1986, p.19.

²⁹Clay Blair, The Forgotten War: American in Korea, 1950-1953, New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1987, p. 77.

³⁰Ibid., p. 87-88.

³¹Ibid., p. 172.

³²Ibid., p. 187, 223.

³³Allen R. Millett & Peter Maslowski, For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America, New York: The Free Press, Macmillan, Inc., 1984, p. 488.

³⁴Blair, op. cit., p. 224.

³⁵Ibid., p. 231-232.

³⁶Ibid., p. 238.

³⁷Roy E. Appleman, South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1986, pp. 546-548.

³⁸Blair, op. cit., pp. 280, 286.

³⁹Chaim Herzog, The Arab-Isareli Wars, New York: Random House, 1982, p. 241.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 251.

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⁴²Herzog, op. cit., pp. 251-3.

⁴³Ibid., p. 256.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 258.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 261.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 262.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 269.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 275.

⁴⁹Robert W. Nixon, Jr., "A Dramatic Challenge to Operational Theory. The Sinai Campaign, October 1973," SAMS Monograph, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1987, p. 28.

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⁵⁴Ibid., p. 364.

⁵⁵Appleman, op. cit., p. 477.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 379.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 511.

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⁵⁹James J. Schneider, "Theoretical Paper No. 3, The Theory of Operational Art," School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, March 1988, p. 48.

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⁶²Herzog, op. cit., p. 269.

⁶³George W. Gawrych, "The Israeli Path to the Operational Art of War: Divisional Operations at the 1956 and 1967 Battles of Abu Ageila in the Sinai," p. 74-75.

⁶⁴Schneider, op. cit., p. 48.

⁶⁵Paul Bracken and others, "Towards a Cooperative Security Regime in Europe," Synopsis of a study conducted under the auspices of the Cornell University Peace Studies Program, 1989, p. 3.

⁶⁶"Operational Art in the Central Region", CINCENT's lecture to the School of Advance Military Studies, Unpublished transcript, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1989, p. 9.

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⁶⁹Clausewitz, op. cit., p. 140.

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