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/DRIVE TO THE DNIEPER/
THE SOVIET 1943 SUMMER CAMPAIGN

by

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INTRODUCTION

In the early hours of 5 July 1943, German forces of Army Group Center and Army Group South launched 'Operation Citadel' against the Soviet forces in the Kursk bulge. The German attack set in motion a Soviet plan to drive Axis forces from the Eastern Ukraine. The Soviet High Command (STAVKA) intended to bleed the Germans white at Kursk and then, when the Germans were most vulnerable, to launch a series of counter-strikes along the entire front from Velikiye Luki in the north to Taganrog in the south. The Soviet Army intended to accomplish two important objectives; first, to clear the Eastern Ukraine of Axis forces, and second, to establish firm bridgeheads on the west bank of the Dnieper River.

This study of Soviet operations during the summer and autumn of 1943 seeks to illustrate the importance of an otherwise neglected campaign. Whereas the Battle of Kursk receives significant attention, the ensuing Soviet offensive has in most cases been neglected in the west. In Major General von Mellenthin's Panzer Battles, the Soviet operations against Orel and Kharkov are all but ignored.¹ Von Mellenthin emphasizes that the German forces won repeatedly on the tactical level but had to retreat because of the Soviet superiority in men and materials. In Lost

Victories Field Marshal von Manstein claims that victory was within his grasp at Kursk. If only Adolf Hitler had allowed him to continue the offensive, the Soviet reserves would have run out and victory would have been achieved.² The view that only overwhelming superiority in men and materials combined with interference from Hitler defeated the superior German forces is far from accurate. It not only distorts history and negates the important accomplishments of the Soviet military during World War II, it demonstrates the failure of the German High Command to grasp the significance of operational art.

In contrast to the German view of the battle and the subsequent campaign, Soviet historians are less concerned with tactics. They view the 1943 summer - autumn campaign as an operational problem. Whereas the Germans were concerned with the next tactical victory, the Soviets were looking at the bigger operational picture and planning their next move. Unlike von Manstein, Marshal Zhukov in his memoirs, Zhukov's Greatest Battles, spends very little time on tactics.³ His primary concern was coordination of fronts, the concentration of forces, and preparations for the counteroffensive. The Soviet High Command was prepared for a long struggle, successive thrusts aimed at defeating the German forces in depth. These contrasting interpretations are central to understanding the German defeat and more importantly the Soviet way of war.

The 1943 summer - autumn campaign culminated in a decisive Soviet victory. For the first time during the war the Soviet Army waged a series of successful operations during the summer campaign season. The campaign lasted over five months, involved eight separate military fronts, and took place along a two thousand kilometer front. Soviet forces advanced 300 to 600 kilometers. By December 1943 the Soviet military had gained the initiative which it would never relinquish.⁴ To grasp the significance of the Soviet campaign, it is important to have an understanding of the forces involved, both German and Soviet, their organization, and military theory.

The 1943 campaign represented an important transition period between the Soviet Army of 1941-1942 and the army of 1944-1945. The Red Army up to 1943 had many problems which reduced its ability to apply Soviet operational art which had been developed prior to World War II. The 1941-1942 army lacked sufficient artillery, armored vehicles, and aircraft. Owing to large losses in 1941 adequate numbers of trained officers, noncommissioned officers and enlisted men were in short supply. The support forces, engineers, signal units and supply services, were also inadequate to meet operational needs. The Soviet Army of 1941-1942 could not effectively conduct deep offensive operations. By 1943 the supply of trained officers and modern equipment enabled the Red Army to

contemplate the implementation of their offensive doctrine. The increased production of equipment allowed the Soviets to mass artillery, armor and aircraft and create specialized armor and mechanized units. A growing supply of trained officers with up to two years of combat experience permitted the expansion of the support services. Nineteen Forty-three marked the transition between the bleak days of 1941-1942 and the victorious days of 1944-1945.⁵

The 1943 campaign demonstrated the growing maturity and skill of the Soviet military. The coordination of eight separate military fronts, numerous successive operations, the ability to maintain a rapid pursuit of the enemy, the crossing of numerous major rivers while on the march, an airborne assault in the Bukrin Bend, and the successful redeployment of armored forces to the Lutezh Bridgehead all demonstrated the growing technical skill of the Soviet military forces. The Soviet front and army commanders were not always successful, but for the first time they were strong enough to experiment and perfect the Soviet way of war. Sheer strength did not defeat the German forces in 1943. The professionalization and experience of the Soviet forces played a decisive role.⁶

The author has made extensive use of Soviet official histories of the campaign.⁷ Many of the articles appeared in Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal [Military History Journal].

Marshals G.K. Zhukov, A.M. Vasilevsky, and N.N. Voronov as well as many front and army commanders have written memoirs and articles.⁸ The Soviet sources fall into two general areas, general accounts of the campaign, usually on the operational level, and studies concerning specific aspects of military art during the war. The Soviet sources detail the development of various military branches and services as well as the problems associated with offensive operations. Western sources, primarily German memoirs and American military studies of the war in the east, usually deal with tactical matters.⁹ Taken together, Soviet and Western sources, illustrate the complexity of warfare on the Eastern Front, as well as the innovative Soviet approach toward the art of war.

CHAPTER I

SOVIET PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1943 SUMMER CAMPAIGN

As winter turned to spring in 1943, the situation on the southern sectors of the Eastern Front stabilized. Field Marshal von Manstein's counteroffensive halted the Soviet advance, regained Kharkov, and reestablished a continuous front in the east. With the coming of the spring rains and the muddy season a relative calm settled over the front lines. The Soviet High Command (STAVKA) set out during this pause to determine the German plan of action for the upcoming campaign season. In preparation for the coming summer campaign, the High Command began rebuilding its strategic reserve. On 1 March 1943, there were only four such reserve armies, the 24th, 62nd, 66th, and 2nd. By the first of April STAVKA had set in motion the creation of ten armies, the 24th, 46th, 53rd, 57th, 66th, 6th Guards, 2nd Reserve, 3rd Reserve, 1st Tank, and 5th Guards Tank Armies.¹⁰

The High Command agreed with the intelligence assessment of the Main Intelligence Administrative of the General Staff that the Kursk salient presented the best opportunity for the Germans to initiate offensive operations. After analyzing all available intelligence sources such as aerial

reconnaissance photos, partisan information, prisoner interrogation reports, and information from the Lucy spy ring in Switzerland, STAVKA determined that any German offensive planned for the summer would begin in the Kursk area.¹¹ From the Kursk salient the Germans could outflank Moscow from the south with a deep penetration or they could turn southward into the Caucasus for a second time. STAVKA then had to agree on a plan of action to counter the anticipated German attack. On April 8th Marshal G. Zhukov, STAVKA representative for the Central Front, informed Joseph Stalin that he did not recommend a preemptive strike by Soviet forces.¹² Zhukov suggested wearing down the German assault units on the Soviet defenses and then, after destroying the German tanks and reserves, a massive counteroffensive could be launched. Stalin decided to convene a special conference and asked the front commanders to supply estimates of the strategic situation and possible responses.¹³

The conference took place in Moscow on April 12th with Marshal Vasilevsky, Marshal Zhukov, First Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Chief of Operations of the General Staff A. I. Antonov, and Joseph Stalin in attendance. The majority of the front commanders expressed confidence that the Germans would launch a summer offensive in the Kursk area. They recommended taking a deliberately defensive posture. Only the Central Front command, General Vatutin and his staff,

felt that a preemptive strike was necessary. They felt that a combined attack by the Central, Bryansk, and West Fronts against the Orel salient was necessary to upset the German plans and to prevent the German use of the vital Bryansk rail junction. STAVKA decided that the Soviet forces would not risk a preemptive attack, a similiar operation had failed miserably in the spring of 1942, but would dig in and await the German move. After the Germans had committed themselves to the offensive, Soviet forces would launch an offensive of their own north and south of Kursk bulge. The adoption of a deliberately defensive policy by STAVKA led to a massive program of fortification along the entire front in the Kursk - Belgorod area. To provide rapid reinforcement of the defending forces STAVKA reserves were positioned east of Kursk where they could be committed for offensive or defensive use. After establishing the basic strategy for the upcoming summer campaign, Marshals Zhukov and Vasilevsky returned to the theater of operations to work out the details.¹⁴

These details included the reinforcement of front line units and the stockpiling of supplies, the fortification of the entire area around Kursk and Belgorod, increased air operations against enemy aviation and supply networks, and plans for increased partisan activity. The reinforcement of the Central and Voronezh Front increased throughout the spring of 1943. The armies were brought up to strength and

MAP I



The Eastern Front, July 1943

Source: *The Soviet Juggernaut*, p. 22.

additional support units were assigned. Extra artillery, mortars, and antitank units were added. To improve command and control, the rifle corps organization was reintroduced where possible and signal units were added. STAVKA organized artillery brigades, divisions, and corps to provide extra firepower in the decisive sectors. The combined-arms armies were reinforced by the formation of eighteen heavy tank regiments.¹⁵ By the first of July the Central and Voronezh Fronts had 1,337,166 men, 3,356 armored vehicles and 19,306 guns and mortars ready to meet the German attack.¹⁶ Against this force the Germans massed nearly 900,000 men, 2,700 armored vehicles, and 10,000 guns and mortars.¹⁷

As the units of the Central and Voronezh Fronts awaited the Germans, they dug in. The defenses consisted of six zones arranged to a depth of 250-300 kilometers. The first zone was five to seven kilometers deep and contained three parallel defensive positions. Each of the positions had four to five trenches connected by communications trenches. Nearly 6,000 kilometers of trenches were dug on the Central and Voronezh Fronts.¹⁸ Within the defensive positions were numerous antitank strongpoints. The strongpoints occupied key areas and usually consisted of a 76mm antitank gun battery, 9-12 antitank rifles, 2-4 mortars, a combat engineer platoon, and a section of submachine gunners.¹⁹ To strengthen the defenses further, nearly a million antitank

and antipersonnel mines were laid and 700 kilometers of wire entanglements were constructed. The mine density reached 1,700 antitank and 1,500 antipersonnel mines per kilometer of front.²⁰ By the first of July the Soviet defenses were some of the strongest ever seen.

During May and June the Soviet Air Force launched two major air operations against the German Luftwaffe and supply organization. From May 6th to May 8th aircraft of the 1st, 15th, 16th, 2nd, 17th, and 8th Air Armies attacked German airfields. According to Soviet sources, 506 enemy aircraft were destroyed.²¹ Between May 5th and May 15th the six air armies flew a total of 10,300 sorties against enemy airfields, railways, and roads.²² The air offensive was repeated from June 8th to 10th. A further 259 German aircraft were claimed as destroyed as well as numerous trains and motor vehicles.²³ The air operations had the dual purpose of reducing the number of German aircraft available for the upcoming offensive and also weakened the German transportation network to a depth of 200-250 kilometers.²⁴

STAVKA gave the partisan detachments the critical task of disrupting the enemy force behind the lines. The partisans were supplied with demolitions experts, explosives and other equipment. Prior to the German attack the partisans gathered intelligence and destroyed vital railways and communications networks in the German rear areas around Kharkov, Orel, and Bryansk.

While the Central and Voronezh Fronts prepared for the expected German offensive, STAVKA began planning its counteroffensive. The counteroffensive consisted of several operations. Operation Kutuzov had as its object the liberation of Orel and the elimination of the Orel bulge. An offensive against the Orel Bulge would prevent the transfer of German forces to the south and put pressure on the hinge between Army Group South and Army Group Center. A breakthrough in the Bryansk area would threaten the northern flank of Army Group South and aid the Soviet attack to the south. Operation Rumyantsev called for the liberation of Kharkov and the elimination of the German forces in that area. If successful the two operations, Kutuzov and Rumyantsev, would then be expanded. After clearing Kharkov the offensive would continue southwest toward the Dnieper. The troops were to cross and gain a line Kherson-Krivoi Rog-Kremenchug. The main goals of the Soviet summer offensive were to eliminate German troops in the Eastern Ukraine, establish bridgeheads on the west bank of the Dnieper, and by doing so breach the German "East Wall" and liberate the Eastern Ukraine and Donbas Region.

The Eastern Ukraine, Donbas region, and the Dnieper River were all of very important economic and military value. Unfortunately for the Soviet forces each of the three regions favored the defender. The Eastern Ukraine was important for

several reasons. The northern portion produced large quantities of grain, the liberation of this area would greatly improve the food situation in the Soviet Union. The southern section contained the manufacturing and mineral-producing Donbas region. The Donbas area contained the important cities of Stalino, Voroshilovgrad, Mariupol, Dnepropetrovsk and Melitopol. Mineral resources included coal in the Stalino area, nickel in the Nikopol area, and iron ore and manganese around Krivoi Rog. The nickel and manganese were vital to war production; and as Hitler ordered, the Germans fought stubbornly to retain control of the mines as long as possible.²⁵

The numerous rivers in the Eastern Ukraine presented the Soviet Army with a number of maneuver problems. The largest river, the Dnieper, and its tributaries generally ran north to south and thus perpendicular to the line of advance. The Germans defended each river barrier as they fell back thus forcing the Soviets to assault each river line in turn. The Dnieper River, the keystone of the "East Wall," is the third longest river in Europe, over 2200 kilometers long, and has seven major tributaries, five of which flow into the Dnieper from the east. The Sozh, Desna, Sula, Psel, and Vorskla run in a general north to south direction. After fighting across the tributaries the Soviet forces had to cross the Dnieper itself which presented many problems. The right bank of the

Dnieper is rugged with a higher elevation than the left bank. The German defenders on the right bank could fire down upon the Soviet troops as they approached. The Dnieper is also wide, up to 2000 yards at Dnepropetrovsk.²⁶ The few bridges over the river were in the cities of Kiev, Kanev, Kremenchug, Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhe, and Kherson. The geography of the Eastern Ukraine played an important role in the 1943 campaign. The Soviet forces had to overcome a large number of barriers in order to defeat the German forces.

CHAPTER II

SOVIET MILITARY ORGANIZATION

The Soviet High Command (STAVKA) led by Joseph Stalin controlled the Soviet military. Through the use of its representatives, STAVKA maintained close contact with the various front commands. During the spring and summer of 1943 Marshal Georgi Zhukov and Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevsky coordinated the activities of the Central and Voronezh Fronts while Marshal Nikolai Voronov aided the West and Kalinin Fronts. These men were moved about as needed. A Soviet front, the equivalent of a German army group, controlled a number of armies as well as independent divisions, corps, and support units. During the Soviet summer offensive no fewer than eight fronts participated in the drive to the Dnieper. At the beginning of July 1943 the fronts were organized as follows.

The Kalinin Front, commanded by General A.I. Yeremenko, covered a 360 kilometer sector north and northeast of Smolensk. Yeremenko, a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy, held several front commands and was wounded twice during 1941-1942. He commanded the Stalingrad and later the Southeastern Front in late 1942.²⁷ The Kalinin Front contained the 3rd Shock, 4th Shock, 39th, 43rd, and 3rd Air Armies.²⁸

The West Front, commanded by General V.D. Sokolovsky, extended nearly 300 kilometers from the Belev area on the left to the Yartsevo area on the right. The left flank of the West Front covered the northern side of the Orel bulge. A graduate of the Academy of the General Staff, Sokolovsky served as Chief of Staff for the Western Front during the period 1941-1943 before taking command in the spring of 1943. Sokolovsky's front contained the 50th, 31st, 10th, 49th, 33rd, 21st, 68th, 5th, 10th Guards, 11th Guards, and the 1st Air Armies. The 11th and 4th Tank Armies of STAVKA reserve were positioned behind the West Front.

The Bryansk Front, commanded by General M.M. Popov, extended 150 kilometers along the eastern edge of the Orel bulge from Belev to Novosil. Popov, a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy, began the war commanding the Leningrad Military District. After commanding the Northern and Leningrad Fronts he served as deputy commander for the Stalingrad and Southwestern Fronts. Popov controlled the 61st, 3rd, 63rd, and 15th Air Armies. Two STAVKA reserve armies, the 3rd Guards Tank and 4th Guards, were positioned behind the Bryansk Front. On July 10th Popov had 24 infantry divisions, 433,616 men, 952 tanks, 135 assault guns, 7642 guns and mortars, and 160 multiple rocket launchers.²⁹

The Central Front, commanded by Marshal K. K. Rokossovsky, extended 300 kilometers along the northern and

eastern faces of the Kursk bulge with the Bryansk Front to the north and the Voronezh Front to the South. Marshal Rokossovsky, a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy, was imprisoned during the 1930's during the purge of the Red Army. He survived to command various armies and mechanized formations early in the war. Before taking command of the Central Front he commanded the Bryansk and Don Fronts. The Central Front contained the 48th, 13th, 70th, 65th, 60th and 16th Air Armies with the 2nd Tank Army in reserve. Rokossovsky also had the 19th and 9th independent Tanks Corps. On the 1st of July Rokossovsky's force consisted of 41 rifle divisions, 711,575 men, 1,694 tanks, 91 assault guns, 11,076 guns and mortars, and 246 rocket launchers.

The Voronezh Front, commanded by General N. Vatutin, held the southwestern and southern sector of the Kursk Bulge. Vatutin, a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy, served as head of the Operations Department of the Soviet General Staff in 1941. He then went on to command the Southwest and Voronezh Fronts. To cover 240 kilometers of front Vatutin had the 38th, 40th, 6th Guards, 7th Guards, 69th, 1st Tank, and the 2nd Air Armies. In reserve Vatutin had the 5th Guards, and 2nd Guards Independent Tanks Corps. Vatutin's Front had 35 infantry divisions, 625,591 men, 1,662 tanks, 42 assault guns, 8718 guns and mortars, and 272 multiple rocket launchers available at the start of German offensive.

The Southwest Front, commanded by General R. Malinovsky, covered a 360 kilometer sector north and south of Izyum along the Donets River. Malinovsky, a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy, commanded several different armies in 1941 and 1942. He did head the Southern Front for a short time before moving to the Southwestern Front. Malinovsky had the 57th, 46th, 1st Guard, 6th, 12th, 3rd, 8th Guard, and 17th Air Armies.

The South Front, commanded by General F. Tolbukhin, held a 170 kilometer line along the Mius River. Tolbukhin, a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy, commanded an army before taking command of the Southern Front. He controlled the 44th, 28th, 5th Shock, 51st, 2nd Guards, and 8th Air Armies. The five armies had 28 rifle divisions and several independent units.

The Soviet High command positioned the Steppe Front in reserve east of Kursk. The front commander, I. S. Konev, began the war in charge of an army but quickly gained control of the Kalinin Front which he directed for nearly two years. The Steppe Front contained the 47th, 27th, 53rd, 5th Guards, 5th Guards Tank, and 5th Air Armies. It also controlled the 5th, 7th, and 8th Guards Cavalry Corps, the 2nd, 10th, and 4th Guards Independent Tank Corps, and the 1st Independent Mechanized Corps. At the beginning of July the Steppe Front contained 537,000 men, 8,500 guns and mortars, 1,630 tanks

and assault guns, and 550 aircraft. This represented a very formidable reserve positioned to counter any German move in the Kursk area.

During the first two years of the war, the Soviet army struggled to bring the war to the Germans. The German invasion had quickly destroyed the Soviet capability to execute their military doctrine. Despite their heavy losses the army continued to launch attacks, even though they lacked the resources and experience to conduct effective offensive operations. Only in 1943 did the army begin to receive sufficient equipment and weapons, and more importantly officers and soldiers skillful enough to execute deep, combined-arms offensive operations.

The largest standing unit in the Soviet military was the army. There were combined arms, tank, shock, and air armies. The combined arms army was the most common. The strength of the combined-arms army varied according to its assigned mission. An army participating in a main assault would have more men and support units than one guarding a quiet sector of the front. The combined arms army usually contained three rifle corps and support units. Support units, rather scarce early in the war, became more plentiful in 1943. The addition of artillery, tank, engineer, and construction units gave the combined arms army sufficient strength to conduct breakthroughs against even the stiffest defenses.

TABLE 1. Soviet Combined-Arms Army Organization

T.O.&E.	1943/1944	
3 Rifle Corps	Personnel	110,000-120,000
8-12 Rifle Div.	Tanks	250-400
4 Artillery Reg.	SP Guns	0-250
+ Attached Units:	Guns/Mortars	1,500-2,500
Infantry Support Tanks		
SP Gun Reg.		
Antiaircraft Reg.		
Antitank Brigades		
Breakthrough Art. Div.		
Support Forces		

Source: Erickson, John. "Historical Introduction: The Soviet Ground Forces, 1941-1960," in Myron Smith Jr. The Soviet Army: A Guide to Sources in English, p. xxxii.

TABLE 2. Soviet Tank Army Organization

T.O.&E.		1943	1944
2 Tank Corps	Personnel	46,000	48,000
1 Mechanized Corps	Tanks	450-560	450-620
2 Antitank Gun Reg.	SP Guns	25	98-147
2 Mortar Reg. (MRL)	Guns/Mortars	500-600	650-750
2 Antiaircraft Reg.			
2 SP Gun Reg.			
+ Attached units			

Source: Erickson, John. "Historical Introduction: The Soviet Ground Forces, 1941-1960," in Myron Smith Jr. The Soviet Army: A Guide to Sources in English, p. xxxiii.

In the spring of 1943 the rifle corps was gradually reintroduced into the Soviet military organization. After the German invasion, the lack of sufficient trained command personal led to the abandonment of the rifle corps organization. The rifle divisions were put directly under the control of the army commanders. As the Soviet manpower situation improved and more staff officers were trained, it became possible to reintroduce the rifle corps. The basic rifle corps contained anywhere from two to four rifle divisions and support units. A rifle corps usually contained between twenty and forty thousand men.³⁰

The basic unit in the Soviet army was the rifle division. In June 1941 the Soviet infantry division was modeled on western divisions and had a large number of organic support units. The Table of Organization & Equipment (TO&E) for a prewar rifle division called for 14,418 men.³¹ Following the invasion and the massive losses sustained, the army was unable to replace the large number of skilled personal needed to man the pre-war infantry division. By late 1942 the infantry division contained 9,435 men with limited organic support weapons. The only organic support came from mortars, 82mm and 120mm, and antitank guns, 45mm and 76mm. The infantrymen were the main strength of the division. As the war progressed the number of submachine guns increased dramatically, giving the Soviet infantryman

increased firepower. The strength of the rifle divisions crept upward as the Soviet manpower situation improved.

TABLE 3. Soviet Rifle Division TO&E

		Personnel	Artillery ¹	Mortars ²	Antitank Guns ³
April	1941	14,483	32	66	73
July		10,859	8	24	40
December		11,626	8	108	40
March	1942	12,795	12	94	56
July		10,386	12	103	76
December		9,435	12	104	82
July	1943	9,380	12	104	82
December	1944	11,705	12	104	86

- Notes: ¹ All guns and Howitzers larger than 76mm.
² 82mm and 120mm Mortars
³ 37mm, 45mm, and 76mm guns

Source: Erickson, John. "Historical Introduction: The Soviet Ground Forces, 1941-1960," in Myron Smith Jr. The Soviet Army: A Guide to Sources in English, p. xxxii.; War in the East: The Russo-German Conflict, 1941-1945, p. 117.

The existence of tank armies illustrated the improved equipment and personnel situation in the spring of 1943. After the terrible losses of both equipment and officers familiar with mechanized operations in 1941, the formation of large tank units became impractical. The Soviets were unable to command effectively or control large complicated units when the war began. In 1942 the increased production of tanks and assault guns made it possible to form tank corps and eventually tank armies. The reorganization of the tank army's component units simplified command sufficiently to ensure adequate control. The Soviet tank army, the

equivalent of a German Panzer corps, usually consisted of two tank corps, a mechanized corps, and support units. Support consisted of engineers, artillery, heavy tanks units, and supply services.

The Soviet tank corps was the main offensive weapon of the Soviet army. Although designated a corps, the units were actually more like divisions. The tank corps usually contained three tank brigades, an infantry brigade, and support units. The tank corps' one weakness was a lack of infantry which limited the units staying power when heavily engaged.

TABLE 4. Soviet Tank Corps TO&E

	1942	1943	1944
Personnel	7,800	10,977	12,010
Artillery/Mortars	90	90	158
MRL	8	8	8
Tanks			
Light	70	--	--
Medium	90	208	207
Heavy	8	--	--
SP Guns	--	49	63
AFV (Total)	168	257	270

Source: Zaloga, Steven J. and James Grandsen. Soviet Tanks and Combat Vehicles of World War Two, p. 222-223.: Krupchenko, I. "Wartime Employment of Tank Troops Described: Translated from Voyenno Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, September 1979," p. 56.

The Soviet mechanized corps were some of the largest units in the Soviet army. The 1940 TO&E called for 37,000 men, 1,031 tanks, 268 armored cars, 358 guns and mortars, and

5,000 motor vehicles.³² The corps were very quickly destroyed in the first months of the war for several reasons. The Mechanized corps were too large for the average Soviet corps commander and his staff to control effectively, the troops were poorly trained, and the equipment was in poor mechanical condition.³³

TABLE 5. Soviet Mechanized Corps TO&E

	1942	1943	1944
Personnel	13,559	15,018	16,442
Guns	36	36	80
Mortars	54	72	154
MRL	8	8	8
Tanks			
Light	75	42	--
Medium	100	162	183
Heavy	--	--	--
SP Guns	--	25	63
AFV (Total)	175	229	246

Source: Zaloga, Steven J. and James Grandsen. Soviet Tanks and Combat Vehicles of World War Two, p. 222-223.; John Erickson. "Historical Introduction: The Soviet Ground Forces, 1941-1960," in Myron Smith Jr. The Soviet Army, A Guide to Sources in English, p. xxix.

When the increased production of armored vehicles allowed the reformation of the mechanized corps in the summer and fall of 1942, the High Command attempted to correct the major weakness of the old organization. They reduced the size of the corps. The mechanized corps consisted of three mechanized brigades, a tank brigade, and support units. With a TO&E strength of 13,559 officers and men, the mechanized

corps was less than half the size of its pre-war predecessor. Despite the reduction in strength the mechanized corps was still the largest division sized formation in the Soviet army. Its main advantage was its staying power in combat. The mechanized corps was the equivalent of a German Panzergrenadier division.

Table 6. Soviet Artillery Unit TO&E

	Subunits	Weapons
Artillery Breakthrough Corps	2-3 Artillery Breakthrough and Mortar Divisions	524-1200 guns/ mortars/rockets
Artillery Breakthrough Division	Mortar Brigade 3 regiments (108x120mm) Light Artillery Brigade 2-3 regiments (48-72x76mm)	264-400 guns/mortars/ rockets
Consisted of several Brigades, usually 4-6.	Howitzer Brigade 2 regiments (76x122mm) Heavy Howitzer Brigade 4 Battalions (32x150mm) Guards Mortar Brigade 3 Regiments (72x132mm MRL)	
Antitank Brigade	3 Antitank Regiment (72x76mm)	72 AT guns

Source: War in the East: The Russo-German Conflict, 1941-1945, p. 123.

The German invasion led to the centralization of artillery within the Soviet army. The artillery strength of the rifle division was reduced to one regiment, 24 guns.³⁴ The remaining artillery was grouped into regiments, brigades, and later divisions. The massing of artillery made possible the development of the artillery offensive. By concentrating

up to three hundred guns and mortars per kilometer of front, the Soviets were able to neutralize German defense's and achieve major breakthroughs. As more guns and mortars became available, Breakthrough Artillery Corps were formed.

Aviation assets were controlled by the air army. Each front usually had an air army attached to provide necessary air support. By 1943 their average strength was from 550 to 1,000 aircraft. The air army made it possible to execute the air offensive by massing the available aircraft to provide close support for the ground forces. Centralized command maximized the use of limited resources.³⁵ Within any particular air army the number of attack aircraft ranged from thirty to fifty percent of the total aircraft available.³⁶ The mass production of the IL-2 (Sturmovik) ground attack aircraft greatly strengthened the air army's ground support capability. The air army played an integral role in offensive operations.

CHAPTER III

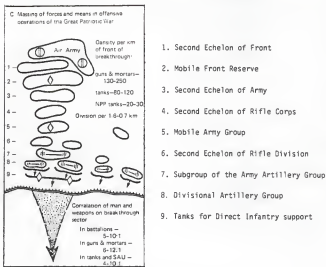
SOVIET MILITARY ART

By the summer of 1943 Soviet operational art had undergone many important refinements. The basic principles of Soviet operational art were: 1. Mobility and high rates of combat operations; 2. Concentration; 3. Surprise; 4. Combat activeness; 5. Preservation of combat effectiveness; 6. Conformity of goal and plan to actual situation; 7. coordination.³⁷ These principles were at the heart of Soviet planning and organization. The successful application of these principles enabled the Soviet military to implement its doctrine of successive operations, deep operations, and combined-arms warfare.³⁸ The main objective of the military doctrine was to defeat the enemy throughout his entire position. Only offensive operations could achieve that objective. The 'offensive' typified the Soviet way of war. The entire Soviet force structure was designed with one thing in mind, breakthrough and exploitation.

Soviet offensive operations stressed speed, concentration, and cooperation. The Soviet army used a system of echeloning to maintain the speed of their advances. Each unit in the army from the front down to division was normally divided into several echelons. In offensive

operations the first echelon had the responsibility of achieving the initial breakthrough while the second echelon, usually consisting of tank, mechanized, and cavalry units, exploited any gains made by the first echelon. This use of echeloning made it possible to maintain the momentum of offensive operations. If the first echelon bogged down, the second could join the battle and push ahead. Concentration--the massing of armored vehicles, artillery, and men on a narrow breakthrough frontage--insured local superiority.

TABLE 7. Echelons and Concentration



Source: The Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics, p. 204.

The most important element of the breakthrough force was the infantry. In the end the infantryman had the difficult task of dislodging the enemy from his defensive positions. The success of the infantry depended on the support he received from the artillery, tank units, aviation, and other auxiliary forces. The need for effective support became more important as the war progressed because, as the Germans lost the strategic initiative, they assumed a more defensive posture. Whereas in 1941 and 1942 the Germans had relied on a point defense, hedgehogs built around cities and town, they began defending in depth in 1943. The Germans tried to establish two defense zones with several positions in each zone. When given time, the German lines were well fortified with good fields of fire, trenches, obstacles, and bunkers. Only the cooperation of all the Soviet military forces ensured the success of a breakthrough operation.³⁹

Soviet breakthrough operations were usually launched against the linking point between two German units. They preferred to attack between two German corps or armies. This increased the confusion on the German side. The main goals of the breakthrough operation were to destroy the enemy units in the Soviet zone of attack, open the enemy flanks, and then exploit the opening. The breakthrough forces were to: 1. destroy the entire tactical depth of the enemy positions from front to rear; 2. penetrate the German positions with a

combined arms force of infantry, tanks, and mechanized forces; 3. break up the German units into small isolated groups; and 4. eliminate any garrisons holding out in the breakthrough area.⁴⁰ A successful breakthrough operation required much planning and preparation.

Breakthrough operations were usually preceded by a reconnaissance in force. In 1941-1942 a reinforced company usually undertook the task, but by 1943 there were usually sufficient forces to send in reinforced battalions.⁴¹ The reconnaissance would provide intelligence concerning the enemy's final dispositions and weak spots. The breakthrough operation proper would begin with an intense artillery and air bombardment designed to eliminate enemy strongpoints and artillery. By 1943 anywhere from two to three hundred guns and mortars per kilometer of breakthrough frontage shelled the enemy forward positions. At the same time several hundred aircraft would hit the German positions. The depth of destruction of the artillery and air preparation increased from 1.5 to 2.5 kilometers in 1941-1942 to 6 to 8 kilometers in 1944.⁴² The artillery tactics changed as well during the period. As the availability of guns and ammunition increased, it became possible to fire single and later double barrages against enemy positions. The effectiveness of the supportive fire increased as a result. As the barrage lifted, the attacking formations moved forward supported by

infantry support tanks and assault guns. The success of the attack depended on the tempo of the attacking units. If the assault forces moved up too early they risked destruction by their own artillery and if they moved up too late the Germans had time to regain their senses and climb out of their holes.

The assault force and its supporting units were concentrated against an ever decreasing sector of the enemy line. At the start of the war the average division attacked on a 7 to 14 kilometer front. By the summer of 1943 the average attack frontage had decreased to 2-2.5 kilometers.⁴³ The decrease in frontage made it possible to achieve three to one superiority in men and a four or five to one advantage in tanks and artillery against the enemy in the breakthrough sector. At the same time the attack frontage per division was decreasing the distance the assaulting units had to cross to reach the enemy was decreasing as well. In 1941-1942 the assault forces usually began the attack six to eight hundred meters from the German positions. While the artillery preparation was underway, the attacking units would leave their poorly engineered positions and advance to within two to three hundred meters of the German lines. By 1943 the attacking forces were able to start within two to three hundred yards of the Germans.⁴⁴ This was made possible by better engineering of the forward positions and more support forces. By reducing the distance from the jumpoff point to the German lines the time under enemy fire was minimized.

The infantry support (NPP) tanks provided immediate cover for the advancing infantry. These tanks were attached directly to the infantry units and were to provide close gunfire support. The main task of the NPP was to destroy enemy infantry with high speed maneuvering. Up to 1943 the tanks in the infantry units had been dispersed which weakened their combat effectiveness. By 1943 there were sufficient tanks to mass the NPP tanks and maximize their combat power. Against a weak defense the tanks attacked in single echelon of two waves but against a strong dug-in defense they usually attacked in two to three echelons with a depth of one kilometer. The second echelon led the infantry.⁴⁵ The support tanks operated with the infantry through the entire first German tactical defense zone. Once the first zone was penetrated, the tanks would sometimes be combined with forward infantry units and sent on ahead to take the second defense zone before the Germans firmly entrenched themselves.

Once the breakthrough was established, the second echelon, the mechanized units, would rush through the gap and attempt to exploit the situation. Early in the war the large tank units had been largely destroyed without achieving any major success. When tank corps were reestablished in the spring of 1942, the Soviets attempted to learn from their past mistakes. Whereas the tanks were distributed along the entire zone of advance in 1941, they were massed for the

offensive at Stalingrad. The exploiting tanks of the tank and mechanized corps were massed to gain the maximum shock power possible. The exploiting force had several important objectives once it pushed through the German line. The most important task was to prevent German reserves from sealing off the breakthrough. Second, the exploiting units were to get behind the German units holding the flanks of the breakthrough. By threatening German units with encirclement, they could be destroyed or forced to retreat. Either way the breakthrough area was expanded. The last objective of the breakthrough force was to achieve a jumping off point for the next offensive operation. If the Germans were falling back on a river it was important that the advance units of the second echelon gain and hold a bridgehead when possible. A bridgehead reduced the defensive value of a German river line.⁴⁶

Air operations were a crucial part of the Soviet offensive. The air offensive consisted of three phases and involved hundreds of planes. The air offensive began with the preparation phase. The preparation phase consisted of the preliminary and immediate stages. The preliminary stage began several days before the attack, usually three, and consisted of air strikes against enemy transportation, communication, and front line areas. In the main breakthrough area the bombing density sometimes reached a

hundred tons per square kilometer.⁴⁷ The immediate stage of the air offensive took place anytime from ten minutes to two hours before the attack and lasted about fifteen minutes. The primary targets were the front line enemy positions and reserves. The second phase consisted of air support for the attacking units. The ground attack aircraft undertook most of the sorties during this phase but all aircraft were used. The aircraft attacked the enemy positions according to the needs of the Soviet ground forces. The third phase was accompanying air support. Undertaken by specially selected large air units, the primary mission during this phase was to destroy enemy operational reserves, including aircraft, provide cover and support for the ground units, and to fly reconnaissance missions. The success of the air offensive communication with the ground units was assured by the assignment of air representatives down to division level and the establishment of auxiliary command posts at the front. The attacking aircraft were guided to their targets by radio equipped observers. Colored panels and smoke were used to designate friendly units. The first full scale use of the air offensive was slated for the summer of 1943.⁴⁸

The airborne forces were under the direct control of the Soviet High Command. The primary mission of airborne forces was to disrupt enemy rear areas while other ground units staged a breakthrough operation. The paratroopers were

to delay German reinforcements and supplies thereby aiding the breakthrough. The 1941 field regulations established guidelines for the use of airborne forces. Early in the war the airborne forces put into the line as regular infantry and lost. During the Moscow counteroffensive, airborne forces were dropped; but except for local tactical successes, the operation was a failure. A breakdown in planning and cooperation led to the loss of the units involved. After the losses and failures of 1941 the airborne forces were reconstituted. They saw little action until 1943. A successful airborne operation depended on a thorough reconnaissance of the drop zone, secrecy and surprise, reliable transportation support, accurate calculation of the time needed to do the job, and reliable communication within the paratroop units and to the rear headquarters. Finally, it was important that the various branches cooperate to achieve the overall objective.⁴⁹

The Soviet concept of the offensive underwent relatively little change during the war. As the war progressed the Soviet military finally received the necessary experience and materials to execute its military doctrine. In 1943 the scope of Soviet operations increased dramatically. But more important than the massive amounts of equipment was the Soviet ability to put that equipment to work. Soviet operational art made it all possible.

CHAPTER IV

GERMAN MILITARY PLANNING & ORGANIZATION

The German Army launched Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 with a formidable force of 151 divisions. The Germans fielded 3,050,000 officers and enlisted men, 3,350 tanks and assault guns, 7,184 artillery pieces and mortars, and nearly 600,000 motor vehicles.⁵⁰ Heavy losses in the initial campaign led to a manpower shortage in the spring of 1942. The situation was corrected to some extent by the introduction of large numbers of Axis allied troops. In September 1942 the German military strength dipped to two and a half million. The Hungarians, Rumanians, and Italians had contributed nearly 650,000 men by the summer of 1942. The Finns contributed around 400,000 men to the war effort in the north.⁵¹ By July 1943 German strength in the East had risen to 3.1 million men. More importantly, tank and assault gun strength surpassed the 1941 level, increasing to 2,269 and 997 respectively.⁵² The coming of summer, a new campaign season, gave the German Army a renewed sense of confidence.

The German offensive, Operation Citadel, envisioned two separate thrusts aimed at reducing the Kursk bulge from the north and south. The offensive would encircle two Soviet military fronts and open the way for future military

operations. Adolf Hitler and the High Command were confident that the combination of reinforcements, new armor and German military skill would insure victory over the Soviet forces. The armor reinforcements consisted of new Mark V Panther and Mark VI Tiger tanks and the Elephant assault gun. The army hoped that the new vehicles, with their 75mm and 88mm high velocity guns, would prove more than a match for the Soviet T-34 tank. Hitler's desire to have more of the new armor led to repeated delays in starting the offensive, originally slated for early May.⁵³ The offensive did not get underway until July 5th.

Army Group Center (AGC) and Army Group South (AGS) had the responsibility for implementing Operation Citadel. Field Marshal von Kluge commanded AGC. Von Kluge had commanded the 4th Army through the Polish, and French campaigns. He continued to command that army through the opening campaign in Russia. In December 1941 he took command of AGC.⁵⁴ In July 1943 AGC held a front extending from Velikiye Luki to the Seim River north of Belopolye. To cover nearly a thousand kilometers of front von Kluge had five armies.

The 3rd Panzer Army, commanded by Generaloberst Georg-Hans Reinhardt, held the northern most sector of AGC. Reinhardt had commanded the 4th Panzer Division during the Polish campaign. In France and the opening campaign in Russia, he led a motorized corps. In late 1941 he took

command of the 3rd Panzer Army. Comprising four corps, one composed of luftwaffe Infantry, the army contained six infantry, four Luftwaffe infantry, and one Panzergrenadier division. The 3rd Panzer Army held the Velikiye Luki to Smolensk sector.⁵⁵

The 4th Army, commanded by Generaloberst Gotthard Heinrici, occupied the German line between Smolensk and Kirov. Heinrici had commanded the 16th Infantry Division in Poland and the XLIII Infantry Corps in 1941-1942 before becoming commander of the 4th Army in late 1942. The army contained five corps, two of which were designated Panzer Corps, and had 18 infantry divisions. All of the Panzer Divisions were transferred to 9th Army or were in Army Group Reserve.

The 2nd Panzer Army, commanded by General der Panzertruppen Rudolf Schmidt until July 13, 1943 and then by General Walter Model, occupied the north and eastern sectors of the Orel Bulge. Rudolf Schmidt had led the XXXIX Panzer Corps during the French campaign. He commanded the corps until December 1941 when he took over command of the 2nd Panzer Army following the dismissal of General Heinz Guderian. The main mission of the army's three corps and fourteen divisions, thirteen Infantry and one PanzerGrenadier, was to protect the rear of 9th Army as it attacked south from the Orel Bulge toward Kursk.

The 9th Army, commanded by General Model, had the difficult task of spearheading the German northern thrust toward Kursk. Model had commanded the 3rd Panzer Division in 1941. He took over command of the 9th Army in early 1942. Following the start of Operation Kutuzov in July 1943 he took command of the 2nd Panzer Army in addition to the 9th Army. For the Kursk offensive his army was reinforced and equipped with the newest tanks and assault guns. Of its five corps three were designated Panzer and contained four Panzer divisions. The remainder of the army consisted of 14 infantry divisions. The 9th Army was to drive south from the Orel Bulge, push through the Soviet defenses and link up with the 4th Panzer Army in the area of Kursk.

The 2nd Army, commanded by General der Infanterie Walter Weiss, held the western edge of the Kursk Bulge. Weiss had commanded the I Infantry Corps during the French campaign and the XXVI Corps in Russia during the winter of 1942-1943. In May 1943 he took command of the 2nd Army. The army's two corps contained seven divisions and the remnants of two others. His main task was to hold the western front of the Kursk bulge while covering the right flank of 9th Army and the left flank of 4th Panzer Army as they advanced toward Kursk.

In the AGC rear Field Marshal von Kluge had a large security force and a substantial reserve. Four Hungarian and

three German security divisions were responsible for security and anti-partisan duty. The reserve consisted of four Panzer, one Panzergrenadier, and several infantry divisions. The armored reserve was available to exploit any breakthrough achieved by 9th Army.

Army Group South, commanded by Field Marshal von Manstein, held the German line from the Seim River south to the Sea of Azov. Von Manstein had served as Chief of Staff for Army Group South during the Polish campaign. He was the architect of the thrust through the Ardennes which led to the fall of France. In March 1941 von Manstein took command of the LVI Panzer Corps. During the initial campaign in the Soviet Union he directed his Panzer Corps to the outskirts of Leningrad. In September 1942 he took command of the 11th Army in the Crimea. After taking Sevastopol he returned North but Before he could defeat Leningrad in late 1942, von Manstein became the commander of the Don Army Group. He was instrumental in stopping the Soviet Stalingrad counteroffensive. In the spring of 1943 after his recapture of Kharkov von Manstein became commander of AGS. To hold nine hundred kilometers of front, von Manstein had four armies at his disposal, two of which were earmarked for the Kursk offensive.

The 4th Panzer Army, commanded by Generaloberst Hermann Hoth, consisted of three corps, two of which were Panzer.

Hoth was one of the leading Panzer commanders in the German army. He had led the 3rd Panzer Army in the 1941 campaign. In 1942 his 4th Panzer Army participated in the Stalingrad campaign. The 4th Panzer Army had five Panzer divisions, three of which were SS divisions, the GrossDeutschland Panzergrenadier Division, and four infantry divisions. Fourth Panzer Army was to drive north through Oboyan to Kursk thus linking with 9th Army and pocketing large Soviet formations.

Army Detachment Kempf (ADK), commanded by General der Panzertruppen Werner Kempf, covered the right flank of 4th Panzer Army. Kempf had commanded the 6th Panzer Division in 1940 and the XLVIII Panzer Corps from 1941 to early 1943. Following the Soviet Stalingrad Counteroffensive Kempf took command of an ad hoc formation which was designated Army Detachment Kempf. ADK became the 8th Army in mid-August 1943. Containing three corps, including one Panzer Corps, the army was to attack from its bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Donets River and move north-northeast covering the right flank of 4th Panzer Army as it advanced north. To accomplish this task ADK had three Panzer and six infantry divisions.

The 1st Panzer Army, commanded by General der Kavallerie Eberhard von Mackensen, held the sector along the Donets River north and south of Izyum. Von Mackensen had served as

Chief of Staff of the 12th Army in 1940. After commanding a Panzer corps in 1941, he became commander of the 1st Panzer Army in late 1942. He had four corps, three of them Panzer. One Panzer corps, held in reserve, contained three Panzer divisions and was available for redeployment to 4th Panzer Army or ADK if needed. The 1st Panzer Army had only nine infantry divisions in the line along the Donets.

The re-created 6th Army, commanded by General der Infanterie Karl Hollidt, held the southernmost sector of AGS. He had commanded the XXVII Corps from 1942 to early 1943 when he took over command of the 6th Army. Dug in along the Mius River, 6th Army had three corps with seven infantry, one mountain, one Luftwaffe infantry, and one Panzergrenadier division along with an infantry Kampfgruppe. Its primary task was to protect the right flank of AGS while holding on to the important Donbas region with its mineral resources.

In the area of military organization the summer of 1943 was a period of transition for the German army. Two years of heavy fighting had put an immense strain on the German manpower pool and thus led to a serious shortage of soldiers for the Eastern Front. The army attempted to correct the deficit in two ways. First, they squeezed surplus manpower from their economy. This provided enough men in the spring of 1943 to stabilize troop strength in the East temporarily. Because of the massive loses sustained during the autumn and

winter of 1942-1943, the German army implemented a reorganization of their military units and reduced their table of organization strengths. Fortunately for the Germans, the reduction in manpower was in most instances offset by the introduction of more and better weapons. The inclusion of a 120mm mortar platoon in each infantry regiment compensated to some extent for the reduction in infantry strength.⁵⁶ In the Panzer and Panzergrenadier divisions the introduction of the new Panther and Tiger tanks as well as the newer versions of the Stg III assault gun gave the German units more firepower. German divisions of 1943 were showing signs of fatigue but were far from defeated.

The basic unit in the German army, the infantry division, had a triangular organization based on three infantry regiments with three infantry battalions each. The divisional support units consisted of an artillery regiment, an antitank battalion, an engineer battalion, a reconnaissance battalion, a signal battalion, and divisional services. The 1939 table of organization called for a strength of 17,200 officers and men, but divisions on the Eastern Front were seldom if ever at full strength.⁵⁷ After improving briefly in the spring of 1943, the manpower situation deteriorated rapidly after the Battle of Kursk. The manpower shortage led to a reorganization of the infantry division. The 1944 table of organization, introduced in the

autumn of 1943, established a divisional strength of 12,300. The reduction was achieved by eliminating one of the battalions from each of the regiments.⁵⁸

TABLE 8. GERMAN INFANTRY DIVISION ORGANIZATION

T&E	1939-1943	1944 ¹
MEN	17,200	12,352
Infantry	8,000	5,500
Mortars		
81mm	58	48
120mm	--	28
Antitank Guns		
37mm	75	--
75mm Towed/Sp	--	21/14
Artillery		
75mm I.G.	20	18
150mm I.G.	6	6
105mm How.	40	36
150mm How.	8	12
Motor vehicles	942	615
Horses	5375	4656

¹ The 1944 T&E organization was implemented in the Fall of 1943.

Source: The Organization of German Ground Forces, DATA SHEET. Simulations Publications, Inc., 1971.: German Army Order of Battle 1939-1945, Vol. I, p. 77.

The main strengths of the infantry division were its artillery regiment and the superior training of the German infantrymen. As the situation on the Eastern Front deteriorated after Kursk, the infantry divisions became more vulnerable. The loss of air superiority made the divisional artillery vulnerable to Soviet air attack. The need for manpower led to a decrease in the amount of training given to

infantrymen. The main weakness of the Infantry division remained its lack of motorization. The immense frontage which a division had to cover, sometimes up to 25 kilometers, precluded any fixed defense in depth and the lack of motorization made a mobile defense difficult.⁵⁹ The armored and mechanized forces had to carry the full burden of mobile defense.

The Panzergrenadier division (PG) was basically a motorized infantry division, two infantry regiments of three battalions each, with motorized support units. The 1941 Table of Organization established the divisions strength at 16,400. The introduction of a tank or assault gun battalion in 1942-1943 gave the PG division an armored component and thus more striking power. Late in 1943 the Panzergrenadier divisions were reorganized. The TO&E strength was reduced to 13,876. The main strength of the PG division was its offensive punch combined with its staying power. This kind of division was able to keep up with the rapid advance of the Panzer divisions but, unlike the Panzer divisions, could hold its own when dealing with enemy infantry.

The Panzer division was the main offensive component of the German army. The organization of the Panzer division remained fairly constant from 1941 onward. The division was reorganized and trimmed down slightly in late 1943. The 1941 TO&E called for 14,000 officers and men while the 1944 TO&E

TABLE 9. GERMAN PANZERGRENADIER DIVISION ORGANIZATION

T&E	1941-1943	1944 ¹
Men	16,400	13,800
Mortars: 81mm	42	52
120mm	--	24
Antiaircraft Guns	12	66
Antitank Guns		
Towed	75	38
Self-propelled	--	44
Artillery		
Towed	44	24
self-propelled	6	30
AFV: Tanks	--	48
Armored Cars	30	38

¹ note: The 1944 T&E organization was implemented in the Fall of 1943.

Source: The Organization of German Ground Forces, DATA SHEET. Simulations Publications, Inc., 1971.: German Army Order of Battle, Vol 1, p. 93.

TABLE 10. GERMAN PANZER DIVISION ORGANIZATION

T&E	1941-1943	1944 ¹	SS
Men	15,600	13,700	17,200
Mortars: 81mm	30	46	58
120mm	--	16	24
Antiaircraft guns	74	82	122
Antitank Guns			
Towed	83	20	24
Self-propelled	31	47	71
Artillery			
Towed	56	24	24
Self-propelled	6	42	84
AFV: Tanks	108	103	126
Armored Cars	30	38	38

¹ note: The 1944 T&E organization was implemented in the Fall of 1943.

Source: The Organization of German Ground Forces, DATA SHEET. Simulations Publications, Inc., 1971.: German Army Order of Battle, Vol 1, p. 93.

called for 13,725. The main change was a reduction in the number of tanks per division. The main strength of the Panzer division was its firepower and mobility, its shock effect. Whereas the armored forces had begun the Russian campaign with obsolete Mark I, Mark II, and Czech 38 tanks, by July 1943 they were receiving the new Mark V Panther and Mark VI Tiger tanks.⁶⁰ Although the total number of vehicles per division decreased the offensive combat power of the division increased. Whenever the Germans could organize a Panzer division at full strength, the Soviets had cause for alarm. In July 1943 the German Panzer divisions were rested, refitted, and reequipped for combat.

Although the Infantry, Panzergrenadier, and Panzer were the major divisional organizations, the Germans had several others in limited use. The SS had four Panzer divisions which had priority with regard to replacements and equipment. The SS divisions were usually up to strength and had more equipment than a regular army Panzer division. To alleviate the manpower shortage in 1942, the Luftwaffe formed its own infantry divisions for combat on the Eastern Front. The divisions were poorly trained and took up valuable men and materials that could have been better utilized. Most of the Luftwaffe divisions were eventually integrated into regular infantry units. There were also a few German mountain divisions on the Eastern Front, mainly in northern Finland.

Finally the Germans had a considerable number of troops tied up in security divisions. The security forces were responsible for maintaining order in the rear area.

Hitler's allies, the Rumanians, Hungarians, Italians, and Finns, all contributed military units following the invasion. The Axis allies suffered very heavy losses in the Battle of Stalingrad. As a result of the heavy casualties suffered and the deteriorating situation in southern Europe, the Italian government withdrew its surviving units in the spring of 1943. Rumania and Hungary rebuilt their units. By the summer of 1943 there were several Hungarian security divisions aiding Army Group Center and several Rumanian divisions were located in the Crimea.⁶¹

CHAPTER V

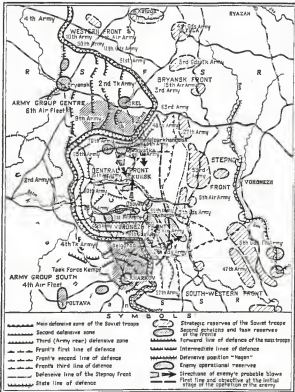
PHASE ONE: THE BATTLE OF KURSK

The first phase of the Soviet summer campaign divides into two stages, the defensive (July 5th-23rd), and the counteroffensive (July 12th-August 23rd). During the latter the army conducted two major operations: the Orel Offensive (Operation Kutuzov, July 12th-August 18th), and the Kharkov Offensive (Operation Rumyantsev, August 3rd-23rd). At Kursk the Soviet forces assumed a deliberately defensive posture and destroyed the German's offensive capability and ended the myth of German invincibility during the summer campaign season. At Orel and Kharkov the Germans lost their last chance for victory in the East, and the Soviet forces gained the strategic initiative. By the end of August the German offensive forces were in ruins, the reserves built up during the spring were gone, and the remaining German units were spread thinly along the entire Eastern Front. The fighting during the Battle of Kursk opened the way to the Dnieper.

KURSK: THE DEFENSIVE STAGE

During the first stage of the Kursk battle, the Soviet army implemented a very active defense. The Soviet defense emphasized maneuver and counterattack. Armored forces formed

MAP II



Situation On The Eve of the Battle of Kursk, 5 July 1943

Source: Soviet Military Review, No. 7 (July 1968), p. 2.

the backbone of the defense. Both the Central and Voronezh Fronts had a tank army in the second echelon as well as several independent tank corps. In strategic reserve, the Steppe Front had an additional tank army, three tank corps, and a mechanized corps. The Soviet strategy at Kursk was to stop the enemy in the defense zones and then destroy him with aggressive counterattacks.

To penetrate the Soviet defenses the Germans massed an impressive force. The 9th Army fielded fourteen infantry, six Panzer, and one Panzergrenadier division against the Central Front. General Rokossovsky's 13th Army backed up by the 2nd Tank Army had the task of defeating the northern thrust. In the south the 4th Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf (ADK) massed ten infantry, eight Panzer, and one Panzergrenadier division.⁶² The 6th and 7th Guards Armies supported by the 1st Tank and 69th Armies opposed the southern thrust.⁶³ The Steppe Front, in reserve east of Kursk, contained another tank army, four combined-arms armies and several tank and mechanized corps. Against a combined strength of over 900,000 men, nearly 10,000 guns and mortars, and 2,700 armored vehicles the Central and Voronezh Fronts fielded over 1.3 million men, 19,300 guns and mortars and 3,306 armored vehicles. The Steppe Front contained a further half a million men, 8,500 guns and mortars, and 1,500 tanks.⁶⁴ Although outnumbered in total forces, the Germans were able to gain local superiority at the point of attack.

At 2230 on July 4th, after analyzing intelligence reports from the forward units, the artillery of the 6th Guards Army commenced firing. The counterbombardment fire was directed against the German assembly areas and the masses of troops and machines preparing for the next day's attack. Early the next morning, at 0400, General Vatutin repeated the counterbombardment in the sectors of the 6th and 7th Guards Armies. To the north General Rokossovsky's 13th Army began its artillery counterbombardment early on July 5th. The Soviet fire caused considerable damage and confusion within the German units. The German attack was delayed two hours in the north and three in the south.⁶⁵

The long awaited German offensive began early on July 5th. In the north Model's 9th Army quickly bogged down in Soviet defenses. The attack along the Olkhovatka axis managed to advance a mere four kilometers the first day.⁶⁶ On the 6th General Rokossovsky introduced his 2nd Tank Army into the battle. The Soviet armor fought a meeting engagement with a Panzer formation and suffered heavy losses. As a result Rokossovsky ordered his units over to the defensive and strengthened the 13th Army sector with units from the 60th and 65th Armies, both occupying quiet stretches of the front. Repeated attacks supported by large numbers of tanks failed to break the Soviet defenses. In an attempt to regain the initiative, Model shifted the main thrust of his

attack to the Ponyri axis. The 9th Army threw itself at the Ponyri defenses for four days but failed to dislodge the Soviet defenders. After six days of fighting the 9th Army had managed to make a twelve kilometer indentation in the Soviet line.⁶⁷ The German units were exhausted and their ranks depleted.

To the south Generals Hoth and Kempf were only slightly more successful. The 4th Panzer Army advanced seven to nine kilometers in the center of the 6th Guards Army while Army Detachment Kempf managed to establish a small bridgehead on the east bank of the Donets River. By evening Vatutin had ordered his second echelon and reserves into the battle. To strengthen his antitank defenses, many of the 1st Tank Army's armored vehicles were dug in and used as immobile antitank weapons. Despite the infusion of reinforcements the German armored units continued to fight their way forward, six kilometers on the 6th, another seven on the 8th and five more on July 9th.⁶⁸ To stop the advance of 4th Panzer Army, additional reinforcements were committed. The Steppe Front entered the battle. The 27th Army and 4th Guards Tank Corps moved to Kursk while the 53rd Army and 1st Mechanized Corps took up positions southeast of Kursk along the Seim River. The 5th Guards Army entered the front line between Oboyan and Prokhorovka. The 5th Guards Tank Army moved north of Prokhorovka.

On the 11th the 4th Panzer Army altered directions and moved against Prokhorovka. Army Detachment Kempf continued to drive north along the both banks of the Donets. Early on July 12th the 4th Panzer Army met the 5th Guards Tank Army west of Prokhorovka. The resulting engagement, the greatest tank battle of World War II, involved more than twelve hundred tanks and assault guns.⁶⁹ The Soviet tanks moved in close and negated the German advantage in long-range gunnery and armor. At close range the guns of both sides were equally effective. The 5th Guards Tank Army lost more than four hundred armored vehicles while the Germans lost over three hundred.⁷⁰

The German forces in the Prokhorovka area continued to probe the Soviet defenses for several days but lacked the means to continue the offensive. Worried about the probable collapse of Italy after the Western Allies invaded Sicily on July 10th, Hitler ordered the offensive cancelled on July 13th. General Model, now commanding both the 9th and 2nd Panzer Armies, had already ceased offensive operations in order to halt the Soviet drive for Orel. Even though the northern thrust of the offensive had been stopped, von Manstein felt that the attack in the south should continue. He argued that the Soviet reserves of armor were nearly gone and that if the pressure was maintained a little longer the Soviets would be unable to launch offensive operations for

some time. Hitler gave von Manstein permission to destroy the remaining Soviet armored formations. Von Manstein claims that even this was denied him when Hitler ordered several of his armored formations transferred to AGC. Short of armor the 4th Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf began pulling back on July 16th. By the 23rd they were back to their original jumping off points. The defensive phase of the Battle of Kursk ended.⁷¹

During the defensive phase of the battle the Soviet forces fulfilled their objectives. They repulsed the German offensive, destroyed most of the enemy reserves, and defeated the best troops the Germans could muster. The Panzer divisions, a necessary part of an effective mobile defense, were decimated. The II SS Panzer Corps with three divisions, the elite of the German armored forces, had only 183 out of 425 tanks and 64 out of 110 assault guns remaining.⁷² The other Panzer divisions were even worse off. The Soviets claimed 70,000 German officers and men killed, and 2,952 tanks and 195 assault guns destroyed.⁷³ The combination of defensive zones, well positioned strategic reserves, and the tenacity of the Soviet soldiers defeated the German forces. The Battle of Kursk severely wounded the German army in southern Russia. The Soviet High Command had no intention of letting the Germans recover.

Field Marshal von Manstein's view of the Kursk campaign demonstrate his failure to grasp the key features of Soviet operational art. He views the Battle of Kursk not as an operational problem but as a tactical one. Throughout the battle the German forces continually shifted their axis of attack in search of the tactical solution. Von Mellenthin's account of the battle deals almost exclusively with the tactical problems at Kursk. He attributes the German defeat to the failure of the new armor and the strength of the Soviet forces. The new Panther tanks had a tendency to catch fire, and the Henschel Tiger tank had no machine gun for close in support.⁷⁴ The Germans kept searching for the one big victory that would end the war. Once their tactics failed the Germans were militarily bankrupt. The only solution von Manstein could come up with was to continue the battle in order to destroy the remaining Soviet armor reserves. He advocated a battle of attrition even though his reserves were gone and his forces depleted. His solution typified the failure of German military thinking on the Eastern Front.⁷⁵

The Soviet authors approach the Battle of Kursk from a different direction. Rather than dealing almost totally with tactical aspects, the Soviets examine the battle as part of a whole. General A. Luchinsky in "On Certain Questions in the Development of Strategy and Operational Art in the Battle of

Kursk" stresses that the defensive phase of the Battle of Kursk was merely the first phase in a Soviet plan to defeat the Germans east of the Dnieper River.⁷⁶ The Soviet High Command approached the 1943 summer - autumn campaign as an operational problem. They wanted to drive the Germans out of the Eastern Ukraine. Their solution was to pit strength against weakness. They adopted a deliberately defensive posture and let the Germans burn themselves out. At the appropriate time the Soviets began offensive operations. Unlike German Blitzkrieg theory which envisioned a quick victory in a single campaign, Soviet doctrine called for the destruction of the enemy not with one blow but with a series of successive operations.⁷⁷ On July 12th the first of many offensive operations against AGC and AGS began.

The OREL OFFENSIVE: OPERATION KUTUZOV

The STAVKA plan, "Operation Kutuzov," called for a three-pronged attack. The 11th Guards Army, commanded by General Bagramyan, of the West Front was to strike south while the 3rd, 61st, and 63rd Armies of the Bryansk Front attacked west toward Orel. The Central Front would drive northward linking up with the 11th Guards Army west of Orel. The three thrusts were to encircle most of the 2nd Panzer Army in the Orel area. The High Command hoped to reduce the Orel Bulge and eliminate the German forces in the area.

The offensive began at 0320 on July 12th. All along the front thousands of Soviet guns and mortars opened fire, three thousand on the West Front alone.⁷⁸ Along the north face of the Orel bulge, Bagramyan's 11th Guards Army quickly pierced the German forward defenses. Unfortunately, Bagramyan lacked the necessary armored and mechanized forces to exploit the breakthrough. STAVKA transferred the 4th Tank Army to the West Front. The 11th Guards Army advanced twenty-five kilometers the first two days but stiffening German resistance and a lack of armored units hindered any further advance.⁷⁹

By the time the Central Front's 13th Army joined the offensive on July 15th, the 2nd Panzer and 9th Armies were beginning to stabilize their positions. In the north they halted Bagramyan's advance and continued to occupy Bolkhov. In an attempt to regain the initiative General M. Popov ordered the 3rd Guards Tank Army, commanded by General P. Rybalko, into the offensive. Directed to advance toward Kromy, the tank army promptly ran into two Panzer divisions. Rybalko's advance came to a halt with the loss of many tanks. The 3rd Guards Tank Army then turned northeast and managed to disengage.

While the fighting raged around Orel, Soviet partisans did their part to disrupt the German transportation and communication network. On July 17th, the Central Staff of

the Partisan Movement issued orders calling for a campaign against the rail network in German rear. In the last half of July the partisans destroyed 7,500 rails in the Orel oblast alone.⁸⁰ The effort to deny the Germans use of the railroads was a limited success and diverted large numbers of German troops for guard and construction duty.

North of Orel the German line hinged on Bolkhov. The Soviet forces repeatedly assaulted the town but were unable to dislodge the German defenders. On July 26th the 4th Tank Army, having finally arrived at the front, attacked Bolkhov with the 11th Tank and 6th Guards Mechanized Corps. The next day the 30th Tank Corps joined the battle. In two days of heavy fighting the 4th Tank Army managed to advance only two kilometers. As the 4th Tank Army threw itself at the Bolkhov defenses, the 61st Army advanced against the town from the east. To avoid encirclement the German defenders pulled out and the 61st Army occupied the town on July 29th.

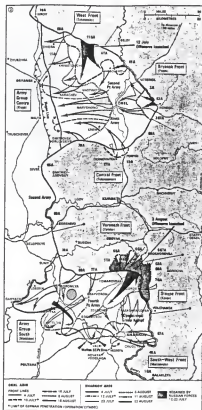
As the Soviet and German forces fought for control of the Orel bulge, Adolf Hitler decided the issue. Worried about the defection of Italy, Hitler ordered Army Group Center to pull back to the Hagen Position, a defensive line running north and south through Bryansk. He hoped to free troops for Italy by shortening his lines. On August 1st Hitler ordered the immediate evacuation of the Orel salient. The Soviet forces pursued the retreating Germans, liberating Orel on August 5th.

Following the liberation of Orel, STAVKA expanded the offensive in the north. On the 7th of August the Western Front, with the 5th, 10th Guards, 33rd, 68th, and 10th Armies, attacked the German positions in the Spas-Demensk area. The plan called for a drive on Roslavl which would open the way to Smolensk and enable Soviet units to outflank the German Hagen positions. Spas-Demensk fell on August 13th. On Sokolovsky's right flank, the 39th and 43rd Armies of the Kalinin Front, commanded by Yeremenko, joined the offensive. The two armies attacked toward Smolensk from the northeast. After five days of heavy fighting the two armies were only able to advance three kilometers.⁸¹ Faced with heavily fortified German positions around Smolensk and Bryansk STAVKA ordered the offensive halted on the 18th in order to regroup.

In support of Operation Kutuzov the South Front assaulted the Mius River line, beginning on July 17th. The battle raged until the end of July at which time General Tolbukhin's troops were forced back across the Mius. The offensive on the South Front failed to break the German line but did serve an important function. Badly needed German troops were tied down along the Mius when they were needed farther north.

Although a major success, Operation Kutuzov demonstrated several weaknesses in Soviet operations and tactics. The use

MAP III



The Kursk Counteroffensive, 5 July - 23 August, 1943

Source: Atlas Of The Second World War, p. 205.

of the armored forces proved disastrous. Both tank armies were quickly neutralized in head-on bouts with German Panzer divisions. The tank units were not introduced at the appropriate time nor given the correct mission. When they could have been used to achieve major encirclements, the two tank armies were sent against fortified German positions. Despite its problems the Soviet military succeeded in retaking Orel and eliminated the Orel bulge. The offensive further weakened the German 9th Army and eliminated any remaining reserves in the Orel - Bryansk area. As Orel fell the forces of the Voronezh, Steppe and Southwest Fronts were already moving on Kharkov.

THE KHARKOV OFFENSIVE: OPERATION RUMYANTSEV

The Voronezh, Steppe, and Southwest Fronts began Operation Rumyantsev on August 3rd. The operation had two objectives; the liberation of Kharkov and the destruction of the 4th Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf. In conjunction with the Rumyantsev Operation STAVKA began preparing a general offensive to destroy the German forces in the Eastern Ukraine while gaining bridgeheads on the west bank of the Dnieper River. While Operation Rumyantsev was in progress, Soviet forces kept the German forces engaged both north and south of Kharkov. In the north the West Front attacked as part of the expanded Orel offensive; in the south the Southwest and South Fronts struck along the Donets and

Mius Rivers. The two flank attacks had the dual purpose of tying up German reserves along the front and gained important jumping off points for the upcoming Dnieper offensive.

Preparations for the drive on Kharkov began as the German assault on Kursk ground to a halt. To strengthen the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts, additional units and supplies were stripped from other fronts. Four artillery divisions were removed from the Bryansk Front and sent south. During the last two weeks of July, ammunition for twelve to fifteen days of continuous operations, food for a week, and fuel for ten to twelve days was stockpiled.⁸² While supplies were relatively easy to assemble, the refitting of the armored units was more difficult. The 1st Tank Army had lost half its tanks during the intense fighting south of Oboyan. To rebuild its strength, Katukov relied on rebuilt and repaired tanks and had to search the field and rear area hospitals for tank crewman.⁸³

Marshal Zhukov hoped to avoid the mistakes of the Kutuzov Operation. Zhukov wanted better artillery preparation, more air support, and better utilization of armored units. Zhukov planned to achieve a decisive breakthrough by massing artillery, tanks, and aircraft. Each tank army was assigned one corps of ground attack aircraft.⁸⁴

Zhukov emphasized the need to commit the armored forces at the appropriate time. The failure to do so during the Orel

operation had slowed the advance dramatically. For the Kharkov offensive, Zhukov massed seventy tanks and 230 artillery pieces per kilometer of front in the 1st and 5th Guards Tank Armies sectors.⁸⁵

Zhukov planned to hit the junction between the 4th Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf. Vatutin's Voronezh Front was to force Hoth's units westward while Konev's Steppe Front forced Army Detachment Kempf south. Malinovsky's Southwest Front was to send an army west to cut off Kharkov from the south. To execute the plan Vatutin massed the 6th Guards, 5th Guards, and 53rd Armies as well as the XLVIII Rifle Corps of 69th Army. Vatutin's second echelon consisted of the 1st and 5th Guards Tank Armies. On the right flank the 40th and 27th Armies would attack toward Akhtyrka. To mask the attack preparations, the 38th Army on the far right flank of the Voronezh Front undertook a deception operation. On the Steppe Front Konev had the 69th and 7th Guards Armies for the assault on Kharkov. Directly east of Kharkov Malinovsky's 57th Army stood ready to advance on Merefa to cut Kharkov's communications with the south.

Operation Rumyantsev began at 0500 on August 3rd. For the next three hours 6,000 Soviet guns and mortars fired on the German positions.⁸⁶ Following the massive artillery preparation and air strikes, the assault units of the 5th and 6th Guards Armies attacked. By 1100 the infantry had

penetrated the first German defense zone, and the 1st and 5th Guards Tank Armies rolled forward. The Steppe Front encountered stiff resistance at Belgorod. In response to the Soviet onslaught, von Manstein called for reinforcements. To shore up the crumbling wall north of Kharkov, four Panzer divisions were recalled from Izyum area south of Kharkov.

Within a couple of days the Soviet offensive began to gain momentum. Vatutin's Voronezh Front advanced twenty kilometers the first day and had advanced a hundred kilometers by the 8th.⁸⁷ To exploit this success Zhukov ordered the 40th and 27th Armies to join the offensive. This widened the breakthrough area and threatened several German units with encirclement. Konev cleared Belgorod on the 5th. Free to advance on Kharkov, Konev then moved south. In three days a 40 kilometer gap had been opened between the two German armies.⁸⁸ On August 7th armored forces liberated Bogodukov, 112 kilometers from their starting positions. The gap between the 4th Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf grew to 50 kilometers on the 8th.⁸⁹ As Konev neared Kharkov he ordered the 53rd and 5th Guards Tank Armies against the city from the northwest while the 69th and 7th Guards Armies attacked from the northeast. The 57th Army advanced on Kharkov from the southeast. STAVKA ordered Vatutin to cut the communication lines running from Kharkov to Poltava, Krasnograd, and Lozowaya. On the August 11th unit of

Katukov's 1st Tank Army severed the Kharkov to Poltava rail line. The German units in Kharkov were nearly encircled.

As the Voronezh Front advanced and pushed the 4th Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf apart, its flanks became more vulnerable. By August 11th German armor in the Akhtyrka area threatened the right flank of 1st Tank and 6th Guards Army while the Panzer divisions coming from the south put pressure on their left flank. The German forces counterattacked toward Bogodukov to reopen the Kharkov-Poltava rail line. After two days of fighting the Germans failed to reach Bogodukov although the rail line was recaptured.

While the Voronezh Front wrestled with the German armor, Konev's forces moved closer to Kharkov. By August 19th the 53rd Army had fought his way through the dense woods west and northwest of the city. The heavy fighting reduced the 5th Guards Tank Army to 150 tanks.⁹⁰ As the 57th Army approached from the south and the 69th Army moved in from the northwest, the German units in Kharkov began evacuating the city. During the night of August 22nd Konev launched a surprise night assault to clear out the remaining Germans. At noon on August 23rd Operation Rumyantsev officially ended. The loss of Kharkov and its important transportation and rail facilities weakened the German supply system and provided the Soviets with a base for future operations.

As the Kharkov operation gained momentum, the South and Southwestern Fronts went into action. Malinovsky's Southwestern Front launched an offensive across the Donets on the 13th of August. Malinovsky's primary goal was to cover Konev's left flank while advancing southwest into the Donbas region. Tolbukhin's South Front attacked on the 18th of August. Proceeded by a massive artillery bombardment, Tolbukhin's men assaulted the German positions on the Mius. By the end of the month the Mius line broke and the Germans were forced to retreat to the Kalmius River.

In contrast to Operation Kutuzov, the use of Soviet units improved drastically in the course of Operation Rumyantsev. The operations of the 1st and 5th Guards Tank Armies were very successful. Zhukov's efforts to improve the coordination and effectiveness of the armor, air, and artillery forces contributed to the Soviet success at Kharkov. The offensive eliminated the few remaining Army Group South reserves and further depleted the already thin ranks of the German line units.

The Battle of Kursk with its defensive and counteroffensive stages lasted fifty days. During that period the German offensive threat was eliminated and the German assault groupings destroyed. Operation Kutuzov

eliminated the Orel salient and Soviet forces advanced 150 kilometers to the west. Operation Rumyantsev crippled the enemy forces south of Kursk and liberated Kharkov. During the Rumyantsev Operation Soviet forces advanced 140 kilometers on a 500 kilometer front.⁹¹ According to Soviet sources, the German army suffered a half million casualties, lost 1,500 armored vehicles, and more than 3,700 aircraft during the battle.⁹² The Battle of Kursk opened the way to the Dnieper River by eliminating German manpower and material; and more importantly it destroyed the myth of German invincibility during the summer campaign season. The Soviet army emerged from Kursk confident of its abilities, confident of victory.

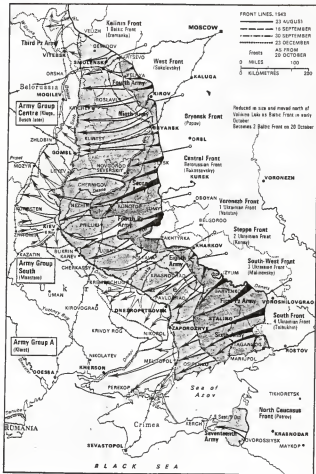
CHAPTER VI

PHASE TWO: DRIVE TO THE DNIEPER

The Soviet High Command finalized its plans for the Dnieper Offensive in mid-August. On August 12th the Front commanders received their orders. The West and Bryansk Fronts were to liberate Bryansk and Smolensk and then push on to the upper reaches of the Dnieper. Rokossovsky's Central Front was to attack westward reaching a line Rylsk to Glukhov to Novgorod Severskiy by September 3rd. Vatutin and the Voronezh Front were to advance on Kremenchug via Poltava where his units were to cross the Dnieper and establish bridgeheads. The Steppe Front was to advance on Krasnograd and then establish bridgeheads over the Dnieper in the Dnepropetrovsk area. The Southwest and South Fronts were to liberate the Donbas Region and advance to the lower Dnieper, trapping the Axis forces in the Crimea. In conjunction with the Soviet advance, special partisan groups were to harass the Germans, cut communications, and hinder the movement of reserves to the Eastern Ukraine.⁹³

Supplies became a major consideration. During the Battle of Kursk the Central and Voronezh Fronts had expended huge amounts of equipment, fuel, and ammunition. The offensive operations of the other Fronts expended large

MAP IV



Drive To The Dnieper, 23 August - 23 December, 1943

Source: Atlas Of The Second World War, p. 206.

amounts of supplies as well. By mid-August keeping the large number of units in the field was becoming a problem. The stockpiles built up in May and June were depleted. In July and August the Soviet forces had received 26,619,000 shells and mines. During the same period, they had used 42,105,000.⁹⁴ The supply dumps were nearing empty, and the Soviet transportation system was pushed to the limit trying to move supplies to the front. As the army advanced into liberated territory, the German destruction of the railroads hampered the supply effort further. The weakened condition of the tank armies presented the Front commanders with another problem. The strongest tank army on the 25th of August was the 2nd Tank Army with 265 tanks. The 1st Tank Army had 162 and the 5th Guards had 153 tanks.⁹⁵ The tank armies and corps were in desperate need of refit. Despite these difficulties the Soviet forces continued the offensive.

THE SOUTHWEST AND SOUTH FRONTS

The front commanders implemented their orders as soon as possible. On August 13th the Southwest Front attacked across the Donets south of Izyum. The German 1st Panzer Army succeeded in repelling the Soviet forces but did so at high cost. By August 23rd the German corps south of Izyum had a combat strength of only 5,800 men and was unable to hold a continuous line.⁹⁶ During the night of September 2nd General Malinovsky sent the 3rd Guards Army across the Donets and

prepared a final assault on the German positions. However before he could implement his plan, the High Command ordered him to transfer two corps and five divisions to STAVKA reserve.⁹⁷ The transfers forced Malinovsky to delay his attack.

Meanwhile Tolbukhin's South Front attacked on August 18th. Tolbukhin assaulted the German positions on the Mius River southeast of Golodayevka. Supported by several thousand guns and mortars, units of the 5th Shock Army breached the heavily fortified German positions. Tolbukhin managed to deceive the Germans by rebuilding the assault units in the line rather than bringing up new fresh units for the attack. German intelligence failed to detect the buildup and took the lack of new units on the South Front as a sign that an offensive was not likely in the near future. The intensity of the attack combined with the element of surprise contributed to Tolbukhin's success. By the end of the 18th the 5th Shock Army had achieved a breakthrough 6 kilometers deep and 2 kilometers wide.⁹⁸

During the night and the following day the Soviet forces spread out north and south of the breakthrough area. General Hollidt, the commander of the German 6th Army, decided not to seal off the expanding breakthrough because he lacked sufficient troops to hold an extended front. He opted to close the 3 kilometer gap in his lines, thereby trapping the

Soviet forces which had advanced through the gap. On the night of August 20th using the weak 13th Panzer Division Hollidt attacked. The 13th Panzer, a mere Kampfgruppe, almost succeeded in its mission; but the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps halted its advance, turned a hundred and eighty degrees, and saved the Soviet position. Attacking on the morning of the 21st the 4th Mechanized Corps pushed the Germans back and by nightfall had expanded the breakthrough to a width of 13 kilometers. The 13th Panzer division tried once more on August 23rd. Two mechanized corps halted the German drive 5 kilometers short of its destination. The Germans were unable to contain the Soviet breakthrough. The Soviet bridgehead compromised the entire German line along the Mius River.⁹⁹

On August 27th the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps turned south from the breakthrough area and headed for the Sea of Azov. The Soviet units were now behind the German XXIX Corps which held the right flank of the 6th Army. Against a force of 130,000 Soviet frontline troops supported by 160-170 tanks, the 6th Army had 35,000 frontline troops and 7 tanks.¹⁰⁰ To ease the pressure on the 29th Corps, von Manstein sent reinforcements to 6th Army. These consisted of two weak divisions, one Panzer and one Infantry. Hollidt organized the two divisions into a Corps. The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps reached the coast west of Taganrog on August

29th. Encircled by Soviet forces the German 29th Corps prepared to breakout. With the aid of the 13th Panzer Division the 29th Corps, nearly 9,000 men and a few assault guns strong, succeeded in breaking out.¹⁰¹ On the 30th Tolbukhin's forces, assisted by the Azov Flotilla commanded by Rear-Admiral Gorshkov, liberated Taganrog. Field Marshal von Manstein authorized the withdrawal of the 6th Army and right flank of the 1st Panzer Army to the Kalmius river.

On the morning of September 6th Malinovsky renewed his assault on the right flank of the 1st Panzer Army. The German withdrawal from the Mius had forced the right flank of 1st Panzer Army to pull back also. Under the weight of nine infantry divisions and the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps the German line collapsed quickly.¹⁰² The XXIII Tanks corps moved in to exploit the breakthrough. In conjunction with the I Guards Mechanized Corps the two corps rolled westward. The breakthrough by Malinovsky's units undermined the entire Kalmius line, and the Germans were forced to begin another retreat. By September 8th the XXIII Tank and I Guards Mechanized Corps were a 160 kilometers behind the German lines near Pavlovgrad and Sinelnikovo, a mere 50 kilometers from the Dnieper.¹⁰³

Following the collapse of the Mius River line, Tolbukhin's forces had pursued the Germans to the Kalmius River. Reinforced with thirteen infantry divisions, the XI

and XX Tank Corps, and the V Guards Cavalry Corps, Tolbukhin continued to advance.¹⁰⁴ On September 8th the 5th Shock Army liberated Stalino, the capital of the Donbas. Mariupol fell on September 10th.

Faced with the deteriorating position of Army Group South, Field Marshal von Manstein requested permission for AGS to retreat to the WOTAN position (Dnieper). On September 8th Hitler gave authorization for the 1st Panzer and 6th Armies to retreat. The two armies were to take up positions between Melitopol and Zaporozhe on the Molochnaya River.¹⁰⁵

On September 12th the right flank of the 1st Panzer Army finally regained contact with the left flank of 6th Army. Unfortunately for Malinovsky his 23rd Tank Corps and 1st Guards Mechanized Corps were west of the reformed German line. During the night of the 12th Malinovsky ordered the two corps to reverse course and head east for friendly lines. For the next two days they tried to breakout. Finally, on the night of the 14th the remnants of the two corps slipped through a hole in the German lines and reached safety. With the elimination of the Soviet spearhead, the German 6th Army and the 1st Panzer Army began a more organized retreat to the Dnieper. Both the Southwest and South Fronts pursued the retreating Germans. During the week September 25th to 30th, the right flank of the Southwest front crossed the Dnieper river on the march south of Dnepropetrovsk while the left

flank reached the German line east of Zaporozhe. The 6th Army of the Southwest Front established two bridgeheads on the west bank of the Dnieper. To the south Tolbukhin's South Front reached the new German positions along the Molochnaya river by the end of September. The Southwest and South Fronts then prepared for the next phase of the operation, the battle for the bridgeheads.

THE CENTRAL AND BRYANSK FRONTS

The Central and Bryansk Fronts, delayed by supply problems, began their offensive on August 26th. Rokossovsky aimed his offensive at the right flank of the German 9th Army and at the center of the German 2nd Army near Sevsk. The 65th Army met fierce resistance in the 9th Army sector and progress slowed to a crawl. Rokossovsky put the 2nd Tank Army into the attack with the 65th Army. A German counterattack with three divisions, two infantry and a Panzer, on August 29th stopped the 65th and 2nd Tank Army. To the south the 60th Army and the 9th Tank Corps achieved a breakthrough, liberated Sevsk, and headed west. While the 2nd Tank Army bogged down in the German defenses, the 60th Army made rapid progress which threatened to cut the German 2nd Army in two. Rokossovsky decided to shift his main emphasis from north to south. He redeployed the 13th Army and 2nd Tank Army. By August 30th the penetration in the Sevsk sector was a hundred kilometers wide and seventy

kilometers deep.¹⁰⁶ The Soviet breakthrough threatened the southern flank of AGC and the northern flank of AGS.

The situation deteriorated further on the 1st and 2nd of September when the German 13th Corps was driven south of the Seim river separating it from the 2nd Army and opening a 30 kilometer gap between Army Group Center and Army Group South. On the 6th Rokossovsky's units liberated Konotop, a hundred and sixty kilometers from the Soviet starting positions. By the 8th the depth of the advance reached 180 kilometers.¹⁰⁷ The Central Front pushed ever closer to the Dnieper. On September 9th, the 60th Army liberated Bakhmach, an important railroad junction. Soviet troops crossed the Desna south of Novgorod-Severski and established a number of bridgeheads on the 11th. On the 15th the 60th and 13th Armies and the 7th Guards Mechanized Corps liberated Nezhin.

Unlike the Central Front, the Bryansk Front had a difficult time gaining momentum. The German defenses, anchored on the city of Bryansk, were tough. On September 2nd Glushkovo and Sumy fell to Soviet forces. A Cavalry Corps attacking south of Kirov broke through the German lines, captured Zhukovka, and cut the Bryansk-Roslavl railroad on the 9th. On the 15th Soviet forces liberated Dyatkovо north of Kiev. The capture of the two cities threatened Bryansk from the north. While Units of the 63rd Army liberated Trubchevsk and crossed the Desna, the 11th

Guards Army liberated Bryansk. Stavka ordered Popov's Bryansk Front to reach the Sozh river by the 2nd of October and then to hit the flank of Army Group Center.

On September 15th, after more than a week of delay, Hitler finally authorized a full scale retreat. The remainder of AGS began withdrawing to the WOTAN position (southern half of East Wall) while AGC began retreating to the PANTHER position (northern half of East Wall). His permission only legitimized the German situation. Along the entire German front from Nevel to the Black Sea, the German army was in retreat. The German soldiers, seeking the safety of the west bank, hurried westward with the Soviet forces close behind.

As the advance rolled westward, Rokossovsky prepared a plan to destroy the northern flank of Army Group South. He hoped to send the 60th Army south to link up with the 38th Army of the Voronezh Front thereby trapping thirteen German divisions. Zhukov, placing greater emphasis on reaching the Dnieper, vetoed the plan.¹⁰⁸ The main Soviet concern was to get to the Dnieper and across before the Germans could do anything to stop them. On September 19th units of Rokossovsky's right flank reached the Dnieper in the Chernobyl area. By the end of the month, they established a 25 kilometers deep bridgehead along both banks of the Pripet up to Chernobyl.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile on the 19th and 20th Rokossovsky continued the assault across the Desna on both sides of Chernigov. The German 2nd Army could not hold and began advancing north toward the important rail junction of Gomel. On the 21st the left flank of the Central Front liberated Chernigov and reached the Dnieper. The 13th Army began crossing the Dnieper on the 22nd. By the end of the month the entire Central Front had reached the Dnieper and was fighting its way across. During the period, September 22nd-29th, the 13th, 60th, and 61st established seven separate bridgeheads across the Dnieper.

THE VORONEZH AND STEPPE FRONTS

Whereas the Central Front had a week to regroup after the Orel offensive, the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts moved directly from the Rumyantsev Operation into the Dnieper offensive. Kharkov fell on August 23rd, and the two fronts pushed on toward the Dnieper. Through the end of August and into the mid-September, the German 8th Army (formally Army Detachment Kempf) and 4th Panzer Army fought desperately to stop the Soviets from breaking through. While the Germans had received few replacements and reinforcements since Kursk, the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts received major reinforcements. The Voronezh Front received Rybalko's 3rd Guards Tank, Koroteev's 52nd, and P.A. Belov's 61st Army. The Steppe Front received P.M. Kozlov's 37th Army, and the 5th Guards and 46th Armies from the Voronezh Front.¹¹⁰

The Voronezh Front attacked on a broad front. By September 14th the Soviet forces had split the 4th Panzer Army into three pieces. A drive by the 38th and 40th Armies against the left flank of 4th Panzer Army split the German line, while on the right flank attacks by the 27th and 47th Armies broke through between the Psel and Vorskla river. The advances of the Central Front threatened to encircle the left flank of 4th Panzer Army. Since the collapse of the 4th Panzer Army jeopardized the entire German line to the south and there were no reinforcements available, the German units began withdrawing following Hitler's authorization of a full scale retreat.

As the German 4th Panzer and 8th Armies withdrew to the Dnieper, the Soviets pursued at full speed. The campaign developed into a race for the Dnieper. The Germans had to move to the available river crossings, get across, and then fan out to cover the entire right bank of the river. The Soviet forces had to force the river off the march before the Germans could dig in on the far bank. The Voronezh Front concentrated on the Rzhishev - Kanev area while the Steppe Front pushed toward the Kremenchug - Dneprodzerzhinsk area.¹¹¹ On September 20th the 3rd Guards Tank Army was committed in the 40th Army sector and in three days marched 280-320 kilometers.¹¹² During the night of the 22nd elements of the 3rd Guards Tank and the 40th Armies reached the

Dnieper in the Vel-Bukrin area and began crossing on all available means. By the 24th the Bukrin bridgehead was 16 kilometers wide.¹¹³ On the 23rd units of the Steppe Front liberated Poltava, the last major obstacle before the Dnieper. The 37th and 7th Guards Armies reached the Dnieper in the Dneprovokamenka - Domotkan area on the 24th and 25th of September respectively.

On September 26th Vatutin launched a daring airborne assault to expand and secure the Bukrin bridgehead. The plan called for the three airborne brigades to drop into the Bukrin bridgehead with the mission of blocking German forces then converging on the bridgehead. While the paratroopers were engaging the Germans, the Soviet troops in the bridgehead were to expand and consolidate their gains. The assault force, the 1st, 3rd, and 5th brigades, totaled ten thousand men.¹¹⁴ On the night of the 26th the 3rd and 5th brigades were to drop with the 1st brigade following on the second or third night. From the very beginning of the operation things began to go wrong. There was a shortage of aircraft and fuel. The planes arrived late and could not carry as many men as planned. The troops of the 3rd brigade were dropped but enemy flak forced the aircraft up and as a result the paratroopers were scattered all over the countryside. The 5th brigade had even less success. A shortage of planes and refueling facilities led to the

dispatching of single planes as they were refueled. The few men dropped, around a thousand, were widely dispersed. The operation was cancelled for lack of fuel before the remainder of the brigade could be dropped. Only 4575 out of 6600 men were dropped during the night.¹¹⁵ Those that did make it in had the misfortune to land in the midst of three German divisions and were separated from their radios during the drop. Over the next several days the paratroopers slowly grouped together. By the end of the month there were 43 independent groups operating behind the German lines.¹¹⁶

While the paratroopers fought for their lives, the armies of the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts forced their way to the Dnieper. The 5th Guards and 53rd Armies cleared Kremenchug of Germans on September 29th. After the fall of Kremenchug the Zaporozhe bridgehead remained the only German territory east of the Dnieper between Kiev and Zaporozhe. By the end of the month the 3rd Guards Tank, 38th, 40th, 47th and 52nd Armies of the Voronezh Front had established nine bridgeheads across the Dnieper. The three armies of the Steppe Front, the 37th, 7th Guards, and 57th established another five bridgeheads in their sector. Many of the bridgeheads were small but the Soviet troops continued to fight their way across. Despite fierce resistance the German troops were unable to dislodge the Soviet forces.

THE WEST AND KALININ FRONTS

While the drive to the Dnieper raged in the south, the Soviet forces on the Kalinin and West Fronts continued their attacks as well. After failing to break through to Roslavl and Smolensk during mid-August Yeremenko and Sokolovsky prepared for a second round. On August 22nd STAVKA approved a new plan which called for an attack on Yelnya rather than Roslavl. Trubnikov's 10th Guards and Krylov's 21st Army would spearhead the attack. On the Kalinin Front Yeremenko brought up reserves and renewed his thrust for Smolensk. The 10th Guards and 21st Armies attacked the junction of the 4th and 9th German Armies on the 28th. The German line broke at the hinge and on August 31st Yelnya fell. Soviet troops were across the northern Dnieper. Dorogobuzh fell on September 1st. The Germans fell back on a formidable defense line built to protect Smolensk. Sokolovsky halted his attack to consolidate his gains and to regroup for the next assault.

Yeremenko and Sokolovsky renewed the offensive toward Smolensk on September 15th for the third and last time. The right flank of the West Front was to cooperate with the Kalinin Front to advance through Yartsevo. The center was to head straight for Smolensk while the left flank advanced on Roslavl and the Desna River. Yartsevo fell on the 16th. The German defenders were overwhelmed and forced to retreat. The Kalinin Front broke through the 3rd Panzer Army's right flank

and liberated Demidov. This move further threatened the flank of the German defensive positions. On September 25th Smolensk fell to Soviet forces. By the first of October the German forces had been driven back to a line running north-south through Propoyak and Rudnya to Usvyaty. All that stood between the Soviets and the Dnieper was a small German bridgehead. Sokolovsky and Yerezenko began preparing for the next phase of the operation.

THE PARTISAN FRONT

The partisans were particularly active during the drive to the Dnieper phase of the Soviet campaign. The partisans increased their activity in the behind the German 4th Army and in the area of the 4th Panzer and 2nd Armies. Their main mission included the destruction of enemy rail and communications facilities and the gathering of intelligence. After a lull early in September, the units need resupplied with explosives, demolition activity increased behind AGC. On the night of September 18th-19th 3,250 demolition charges were set. This raid was followed by another on the night of September 25th-26th when 4,240 charges were laid. Over half of the attacks were successful. Twelve hundred and fifty six raids produced 4,257 breaks in AGC's rail network. The partisans destroyed or damaged 109 locomotives and 600 railway cars in the month of September in the AGC area alone.¹¹⁷ As the Soviet army pushed westward the mission of

the partisans changed. They assisted the army in anyway possible. In the area of Kazarovichi, 12 kilometers north of Lutezh, partisans saved 300 fishing boats for Soviet troops.¹¹⁸ Although they caused considerable damage, the German effort to supply their troops and execute withdrawals was not seriously hampered. The partisan effort did divert German troops to anti-partisan duty, thereby preventing them from serving in the frontline.

CHAPTER VII

PHASE THREE: THE BATTLE FOR THE BRIDGEHEADS

By the end of September the Soviet army had reached the German defenses along the Molochnaya River, seized numerous bridgeheads along the Dnieper, and in the north had liberated Smolensk. The Germans held a bridgehead on the left bank of the Dnieper from Vitebsk to Mogilev in the north and a small bridgehead around Zaporozhe in the south.

The Soviet forces regrouped during the first week of October. In recognition of the new military situation the High command reorganized and renamed the military Fronts. The Kalinin Front became the First Baltic Front. The West Front remained the same. The Bryansk and Central Fronts became the Belorussian Front. The Voronezh, Steppe, Southwest, and Southern became the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Ukrainian Fronts respectively.¹¹⁹ With their objective, bridgeheads across the Dnieper, in sight the High Command quickly formulated a plan of attack.

The First Baltic, West, and Belorussian Fronts were to destroy the German bridgehead east of the Dnieper in the Vitebsk - Mogilev - Gomel area. To break the tough German defenses, STAVKA intended to outflank the German positions. To accomplish this, the First Baltic Front was to attack in

the Nevel area, while the Belorussian Front attacked in the Gomel area. The West Front was to maintain pressure on the center of the German bridgehead. To the south the 1st Ukrainian Front was to attack in the direction of Kiev liberating the city and expanding the Bridgeheads in their sector. The Second and Third Ukrainian Fronts were to attack southwest in the direction of Kirovograd and Krivoi Rog. They were to destroy the German bridgehead at Zaporozhe and to enlarge the Soviet bridgeheads on the right bank. The Fourth Ukrainian Front was to break the German Molochnaya River line and liberate the lower reaches of the Dnieper River. Its primary mission was the capture of Perekop and the entrapment of the Axis units in the Crimea.¹²⁰

THE FOURTH UKRAINIAN FRONT

General Tolbukhin's Fourth Ukrainian Front renewed his offensive against the German 6th Army on October 9th.¹²¹ The 2nd Guards, 5th Shock and 44th Armies attacked north of Melitopol in the direction of Mikhaylov. The 28th Army attacked south of Melitopol while the 51st Army waited in reserve ready to exploit a breakthrough. After heavy fighting the 28th Army reached the outskirts of Melitopol and crossed the Molochnaya establishing a bridgehead. Tolbukhin altered his operational plan and transferred the 51st Army and 19th Tank Corps south. The 51st Army fought for two weeks to capture Melitopol. The city fell on October 23rd.

The next day the 19th Tank Corps blasted through the last German defenses and headed west. The 6th Army began retreating once more. By November 5th Tolbukhin's forces controlled the lower reaches of the Dnieper and had cut off the Axis forces in the Crimea. The only German forces east of the Dnieper were in bridgeheads around Kherson and Nikopol. The Nikopol bridgehead represented a major obstacle because of its heavy fortifications. Hitler was determined to maintain control of the vital nickel mines in the area.¹²²

THE SECOND AND THIRD UKRAINIAN FRONTS

On the Second and Third Ukrainian Fronts Konev and Malinovsky expanded the bridgeheads on the west bank. They intended to drive west toward Krivoi Rog to threaten the German forces in the Zaporozhe and Dnepropetrovsk area with encirclement. The 5th Guards and 37th Armies were to provide the breakthrough and while the 5th Guards Tank Army stood ready to exploit. In conjunction with Konev's attack Malinovsky's troops were to liberate Zaporozhe and eliminate the German bridgehead on the east bank of the Dnieper.

On October 10th the 3rd Guards and 8th Guards Armies assaulted the heavily fortified positions at Zaporozhe. Even though the attack was proceeded by a massive artillery barrage the attack failed. The Germans held, but the costs were high. General von Mackensen, the German commander

reported that he would have to retreat because he could no longer man a continuous line.¹²³ On October 13th Malinovsky launched a night assault against Zaporozhe with the 8th Guards Army, 1st Guards Mechanized Corps, and the 23rd Tank Corps. The 12th Army attacked north of the city while the 3rd Guards hit to the south. The attack unhinged the German defenders and they withdrew from the city after blowing city's dam and railway bridges. On the 14th the remaining Germans in the Zaporozhe bridgehead were eliminated. Konev and Malinovsky launched their drive on Krivoi Rog the next day. The 5th Guards Tank Army entered the battle in the afternoon, and the advance gained momentum. The main problem facing the attacking units was the terrible conditions of the roads. By the 23rd Soviet units were on the outskirts of Krivoi Rog.

While Konev's troops moved forward Malinovsky took advantage of the situation to eliminate the enemy units in the Dnepropetrovsk area. He hoped to trap the Germans in Dnepropetrovsk with a double envelopment, the 46th Army from the north and the 8th Guards from the south. The attack began on the 23rd and on the 25th Dnepropetrovsk fell to Soviet troops, but not before the Germans destroyed the Dneprodzerzhinsk Hydroelectric dam. On Konev's Front the advance continued as the 18th Tank Corps entered Krivoi Rog on the 24th. Unfortunately for the tank corps its infantry

support, the 37th Army, was stopped by a German counter attack. On evening the 18th Tank Corps had to retreat for lack of fuel and ammunition.¹²⁴ By the end of October Konev and Malinovsky had joined their original bridgeheads into a single position over 150 kilometers wide and up to a 100 kilometers deep.

His drive toward Krivoi Rog blunted Konev switched the main emphasis of his attack to the Cherkassy area. On November 13th the 52nd Army broke through the German 8th Army defenses and threatened Cherkassy with encirclement. Konev sent the 5th Guards Tank Army and the 53rd Army north along the west bank of the Dnieper. The Germans 8th Army, unable to stop Konev's forces, gave ground slowly. The 1st Panzer Army and 6th Army were under pressure to the south and could not spare any units. On the 14th of November Konev renewed his attack on Krivoi Rog, but the autumn mud had arrived with full force and the attack bogged down. Mobility did not return to the battlefield until mid-December when the ground finally froze. By the end of December Konev and Malinovsky had a large bridgehead from Cherkassy in the north to Zaporozhe in the south, a distance of over three hundred kilometers.¹²⁵ Soviet forces were firmly established on the west bank.

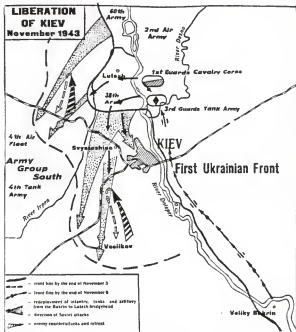
THE FIRST UKRAINIAN FRONT

In the meantime Vatutin on the First Ukrainian Front

expanded the bridgeheads around Kiev. Ordered to liberate Kiev, his plan called for an attack from the Bukrin bend supported by a secondary strike from the Lutezh bridgehead north of Kiev. The 40th, 27th, and 3rd Guards Tank Armies were to break through the German defenses in the Bukrin Bend and proceed northwest bypassing Kiev to the south. The secondary attack by the 38th Army and 5th Guards Tank Corps would head south bypassing Kiev to the Northwest. The attack, executed on October 12th, failed to break the German positions in the Bukrin area. To the north the 38th Army expanded its bridgehead and came within artillery range of Kiev. From the 21st to 23rd of October the 40th and 27th Armies tried to breakout again but failed. On October 24th STAVKA accepted an October 18th proposal to shift the main avenue of attack from the Bukrin area to the Lutezh bridgehead.¹²⁶

Vatutin planned to break out of the Lutezh bridgehead by massing the 38th, 60th, 3rd Guards Tank Armies, the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and the 7th Breakthrough Artillery Corps. The breakthrough frontage was six kilometers which made it possible to mass 320 guns and mortars per kilometer of attack frontage.¹²⁷ On the main avenue of attack the assault forces were to have a 3 to 1 advantage in infantry, 4.5 to 1 in artillery and 9 to 1 in tanks.¹²⁸ After the artillery barrage the 38th Army was to breach the

MAP VI



The Liberation of Kiev, November 1943

Source: Soviet Military Review, No. 9 (September 1966), p. 42.

German defenses while the 3rd Guards Tank Army and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps waited to exploit the breakthrough. To cover the main breakout secondary attacks were planned. The 60th Army would attack north from the Lutezh bridgehead and the 40th and 27th Armies would attack from the Bukrin bridgehead two days before the main attack. After breaking out the assault forces were to destroy the 4th Panzer Army and liberate Kiev. Then the First Ukrainian Front was to roll west toward Zhitomir and Korosten.¹²⁹ The plan was relatively simple but required a great deal of skill to implement.

The most difficult task facing Vatutin was the movement of the 3rd Guards Tank Army, VII Breakthrough Artillery Corps, XXIII Rifle Corps and numerous other support units from the Bukrin Bend area to the Lutezh bridgehead. Front Deputy commander Colonel-General A. Grechko was in charge of the move. The task of moving the units was monstrous. In seven days the troops had to move anywhere from one hundred and thirty to two hundred kilometers and had to make three river crossings, the Dnieper twice and Desna once. The column of the 7th Artillery Corps extended seventy kilometers. To move all the guns, the unit's transports made several trips.¹³⁰ In addition to the several hundred tanks, hundreds of guns, and thousands of men moved into the bridgehead, thousands of tons of supplies were also moved.

Elaborate measure were taken to conceal the movement. The troops were moved only at night and during the heavy mist of early morning and evening. Radio traffic in the Bukrin Bend was maintained at the normal level. Camouflage was used at both bridgeheads. In the Bukrin Bend, dummy tanks and artillery were constructed and in the Lutezh bridgehead the arriving troops were carefully dispersed and the equipment hidden. The entire move was completed before the end of October.¹³¹

On November 1st the 40th and 27th Armies began their attack on the German defenses in the Bukrin Bend. After a forty minute artillery barrage the infantry went forward, throwing itself at the German defense.¹³² To the North Vatutin finalized his attack preparations. While his units attacked to the south, reconnaissance units began probing the defenses around the Lutezh bridgehead. The German defense consisted of fortified positions connected by trenches, wire obstacles, and minefields.¹³³

On November 3rd the 38th Army attacked. Following in the wake of an intense artillery and air bombardment the 38th Army made surprisingly good progress. By the end of the day Soviet Units had advanced seven to twelve kilometers and were nearly through the German defense Zone.¹³⁴ The Germans, considering Vatutin's strike just another attempt to expand the bridgehead, reacted rather slowly. The 20th

Panzer Grenadier and two reserve Panzer divisions were ordered north, and airstrikes were ordered against the attacking Soviet columns. The Soviet troops continued to advance on November 4th. The roads were nearly impassable because of the autumn mud, but the 3rd Guards Tank Army was committed during the afternoon.

The situation on the German front did not appear serious until late on November 4th when the 3rd Guards Tank Army launched a surprise night attack. The Germans broke and ran. By the morning of the 5th Soviet armored forces had cut the Kiev-Zhitomir railroad and were advancing southward. The 1st Guards Cavalry was headed west toward Zhitomir. Late on the 5th, units of the 38th Army reached the outskirts of Kiev. The German situation deteriorated rapidly as the Soviet breakthrough grew. In Kiev the German defenders and support personnel began retreating as the threat of encirclement increased. On November 6th units of the 38th Army liberated Kiev. The Soviet forces fanned out to expand the bridgehead. The 3rd Guards Tank and 38th Armies went south and southwest. The 60th and 13th Armies advanced north and northwest.

Desperate to contain the breakthrough, von Manstein launched heavy counter attacks on November 8th against Tripole and Fastov. The counterattacks stopped the southward advance of 38th Army. To the west the advance continued. On

the 12th the 3rd Guards Tank Army liberated Zhitomir, on the 17th the 60th Army took Korosten, on the 18th the 13th Army took Ovruch to the northwest. By mid-November the Kiev bridgehead extended from Chernobyl to the north of Kiev to Chernyakhov, Zhitomir, Fastov and then to Tripole on the Dnieper south of Kiev. The bridgehead was over five hundred kilometers wide and one hundred and fifty kilometers deep.¹³⁵

The loss of Zhitomir, Korosten, and Fastov hindered German rail movement between AGC and AGS. To counter the Soviet advances, to reopen the vital rail lines, and to eliminate the Soviet bridgehead, von Manstein launched a counterattack with fifteen divisions including seven Panzer and Panzergrenadier divisions.¹³⁶ The German counterattack recaptured Zhitomir on the 19th, Korosten on the 24th and pushed the Soviet forces to the east. Determined not to lose their hard won gains, STAVKA ordered Vatutin to halt his offensive on the center and left flank. The 13th and 60th Armies on the right continued to advance. The Germans attempted to advance up the Kiev highway but were unsuccessful. On November 25th von Manstein halted the German counterattack because of the worsening weather. On November 28th the 1st Guards Army crossed the Dnieper and took up positions between the 38th and 60th Armies. In mid-December the ground froze sufficiently to hold tanks and the Germans renewed their counter-offensive against the Kiev

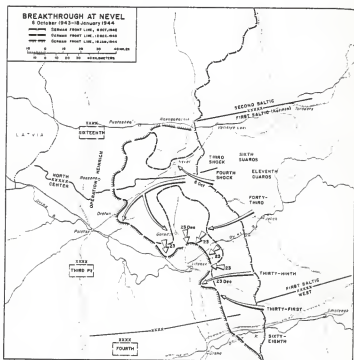
bridgehead. The German attacks continued until December 21st with limited success. The Soviet Bridgehead at Kiev held off the German attacks. Vatutin succeeded in his mission. He established a secure bridgehead across the Dnieper, liberated Kiev, and destroyed a large part of the 4th Panzer Army.

THE FIRST BALTIC, WEST, AND BELORUSSIAN FRONTS

To the north the First Baltic, West, and Belorussian Fronts continued the offensive in October. Rokossovsky attacked on the axis Zhlobin-Dobruisk-Minsk. Sokolovsky's West Front tried to liberate Orsha and advance on Mogilev while Yeremenko's First Baltic Front moved on Vitebsk. The objective of the three thrusts was to eliminate the German bridgehead east of the Dnieper. The German salient extended from Loyev in the south to east of Orsha and measured 300 kilometers in length and at its widest point was 60 kilometers deep.¹³⁷

The First Baltic Front attacked on October 6th. The 43rd and 39th Armies launched a secondary attack while the 3rd and 4th Shock Armies attacked Nevel. The German line crumbled and Nevel fell on the first day of the attack. Von Kluge reacted quickly but lacked the necessary forces to dislodge the Soviet troops from Nevel. After a disastrous attack on October 8th, the German troops paused to await reinforcements. Fortunately for von Kluge, Yeremenko chose to slow his offensive while he reassessed the situation. The

MAP VII



The Nevel Operation

Source: Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East, p. 198.

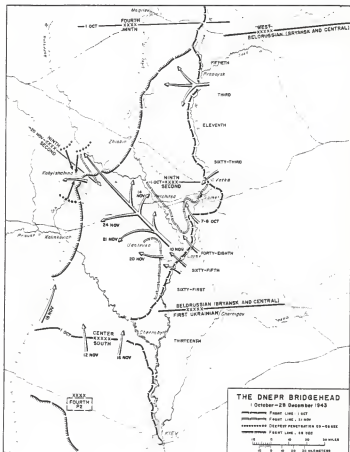
Germans used the break to shore up the breakthrough. On October 15th Yeremenko attacked northeast and achieved only minor results. Following five days of reconnaissance in force Yeremenko launched a major assault southwest of Nevel. The 3rd and 4th Shock Armies created a 16 kilometer gap in enemy positions and fanned out behind the German lines.¹³⁸ The 3rd Shock Army turned north behind the German 16th Army and the 4th Shock Army turned southwest behind the 3rd Panzer Army. The two shock armies were reinforced by the 6th and 11th Guards Armies. Throughout November the Germans attempted to seal the breakthrough and contain the Soviet forces but were unsuccessful. By November 23rd the 4th Shock Army was only 5 kilometers from Gorodok, an important rail and road junction.¹³⁹ The drive was finally halted by the weather during the last week of November. An unseasonal thaw turned the battlefield into mud and brought both sides to a halt.

The ground finally refroze during the second week of December and the Soviet forces renewed their drive on Vitebsk. The 11th Guards Army assaulted the 3rd Panzer Army on December 13th. Attacked from three sides, two divisions of the 3rd Panzer Army were quickly surrounded and only managed to breakout three days later with their light equipment. On December 23rd the 4th Shock, 11th Guards, 39th, and 43rd Armies attacked the German positions around Vitebsk, but the German line held.

While Yeremenko dealt with the northern flank of Army Group Center, Rokossovsky attacked to the south. Throughout the first week of October the German 4th Panzer and 2nd Army attempted to eliminate the Soviet bridgehead at the mouth of the Pripet River. German forces captured Chernobyl but were unable to dislodge the Soviet forces from their 50 kilometer wide and 8 kilometer deep bridgehead.¹⁴⁰

While the German forces were engaged in the south Rokossovsky attacked north and south of Gomel to destroy the German bridgehead east of the Sozh River. The attack began October 7th and failed to make any major gains. On October 15th Rokossovsky launched his major offensive against a 30 kilometer section of the German line south of Gomel.¹⁴¹ With the German forces engaged north and south of the breakthrough area the attacking units succeeded in breaking through. The Germans sent a Panzer division to seal off the breakthrough but were only moderately successful. The Soviet force was halted but not pushed back. Rokossovsky halted the operation on the 22nd and began consolidating his new 100 kilometer wide and 8 kilometer deep bridgehead.¹⁴² The next day the 63rd Army renewed its attack north of Gomel. On the 28th Rokossovsky renewed his attack from the Loyev bridgehead south of Gomel. The German 2nd and 9th Armies, stretched to the limit, managed to hold once again. On October 31st Rokossovsky halted the Loyev offensive once more.

MAP VIII



The Gomel Operation

Source: Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East, p. 190.

Rokossovsky tried for the third time on November 10th to breakout from the Loyev bridgehead. The German line held on the first day but finally gave way on the 11th. The German 2nd Army, under attack from the First Ukrainian Front in the south, could not move reserves to the center. On November 13th Soviet units were west of Retchitsa. The Germans launched a last gasp attack to close the gap in their lines but failed. Rokossovsky's units fanned out and headed west. On November 23rd the rail line from Kalinkovichi to Zhlobin was cut. To the north Rokossovsky's 50th Army attacked Propoyk on the 22nd threatening to breakthrough the northern flank of the German 9th Army. Gomel fell on November 26th. As on the First Baltic Front the thaw during the last week of November stopped the Soviet advance and gave the Germans time to regroup and attempt the formation of a new line. By the end of November the German 2nd Army was in position east of the Pripet and by December 5th the 9th Army had fallen back and straightened its line.

The Soviet forces continued the attack in mid-December when mobility returned to the battlefield. Soviet units moved west of Kobylshchina. Reinforced with a new Panzer division sent from Italy the Germans launched a counterattack. On the 20th the 2nd and 9th Army linked up at Kobylshchina and pushed the Soviets east of the city. After four more days of combat the German units cleared the railway

north of the city but were unable to dislodge the Soviets from the Ipa River. On December 26th the Germans called off the attack.

While Yeremenko and Rokossovsky hit both flanks of Army Group Center, Sokolovsky's West Front attacked the center. The German 4th Army, dug in in front of Orsha, held very formidable positions. Aided by large swamps and many minor rivers, the Germans took advantage of the favorable terrain and repelled each Soviet assault in turn.¹⁴³ In two and half months, from October to the middle of December, Sokolovsky launched four unsuccessful assaults on the Orsha sector. Although unsuccessful the attacks did tie down German units which were needed on the flanks of Army Group Center.

CHAPTER VIII

ANALYSIS

The campaign in the summer and autumn of 1943 demonstrated the growing capabilities and skill of the Soviet military. Through sound operational planning, organization, and proper execution the military achieved a victory of unprecedented scale. In 1943 the Soviet offensive doctrine, established in the 1936 Field Regulations, became reality. The five month campaign consisted of a series of successive operations along a 2,000 kilometer front. In these operations the Soviet forces emphasized, deep operations, the penetration of enemy positions through their entire tactical depth. The attacking Soviet forces advanced 300-600 kilometers along the entire front.¹⁴⁴ Finally the use of combined-arms formations made it all possible. These new armies gave the Soviet forces the necessary power and speed to break through the enemy positions and achieve deep operations.

The Soviet High Command and Front organizations demonstrated their growing skill from the very beginning of the 1943 campaign. When faced with the choice of launching a preemptive attack or going over to the strategic defense, the High Command made an sound decision. After examining the

available intelligence data, such as information from the Lucy spy ring, the High Command recognized the dangers of a preemptive strike and decided to dig in, concentrate their forces, and await the expected German offensive. The High Command tailored their plans to fit the reality of the time. A preemptive strike, such as the one launched in the spring of 1942, would have given the Germans an important if not decisive advantage. The Germans based their defense on mobility, and maneuver on the battlefield. Soviet mechanized units still lacked the experience and skill to defeat the Germans in a meeting engagement on open ground. The adoption of a deliberate defensive posture gave the Soviets a distinct advantage. Soviet infantrymen were at their best when dug in while the German units, preferring maneuver, disliked taking fortified positions by direct assault.

After absorbing the German offensive effort, the High Command decided to return to the offensive with the ultimate objective of liberating the eastern Ukraine and establishing bridgeheads on the west bank of the Dnieper. The decision to assume a deliberate defense followed by offensive operations demonstrated their growing confidence in their own abilities and equipment. The summer campaign brought to light many strengths and weaknesses of the armed forces. The strengths led to victory, efforts were quickly made to correct the weaknesses.

During the Battle of Kursk, the Soviet forces achieved two major goals. First, they stopped the German offensive short of its objective. Second, the German reserves so carefully built up during the spring of 1943 were destroyed. The Soviet forces were able to stop the Germans by negating the enemy's advantage, maneuverability. By constructing some of the most formidable defenses ever seen, concentrating all available forces, and carefully coordinating the units involved, the High Command was able to deal with the German forces. Although von Manstein argues that victory was within his grasp when Hitler cancelled Operation Citadel, his claim has little basis. The Soviet forces facing von Manstein were depleted following the Battle at Prokhorovka, but so were the Germans. Whereas von Manstein had very few reserves, mainly the 24th Panzer Corps, the Soviets had the 27th and 53rd Armies in position north of Prokhorovka.¹⁴⁵ The German formations violated their own armored doctrine at Kursk and paid dearly for the attempt. They gave up mobility. Rather than fight a battle of maneuver, the German mechanized forces tried to break through fixed positions. During the defensive phase of the Kursk battle the Soviet forces succeeded in maximizing their strengths and the Germans' weaknesses.

The Soviet performance during Operation Kutuzov was far from perfect. The operation is significant for several reasons. First, the breakthrough operation conducted by the

11th Guards Army typified the Soviet method of breaching enemy defensive lines. Proceeded by intense reconnaissance activity, the main attack began with a massive artillery barrage and air assault. As the barrage lifted the infantry and tanks moved forward. Supported by artillery and aircraft through the first defense zone the 11th Guards Army quickly broke through the entire depth of the German position. After the 11th Guards Army achieved the breakthrough the West Front's lack of mechanized forces limited the Soviet gains. The most serious problem encountered during the Orel operation was the failure of the tank armies to achieve the desired results. The 3rd Guards Tank Army attempted to fight a meeting engagement with a Panzer formation southeast of Orel and suffered very heavy losses. When the 4th Tank Army assaulted the German fortifications around Bolkhov it failed miserably. The failure of the two tank armies pointed out the need for combined-arms forces. The failure to properly utilize the tank forces led to reform and more emphasis on armor doctrine. Despite the failures of Soviet armor, Operation Kutuzov succeeded and the Germans were pushed westward.

The Soviet performance record improved with Operation Rumyantsev. Marshal Zhukov improved the coordination of artillery and airpower. He worked with the commanders of the armored formations and emphasized their proper utilization.

The breakthrough forces, equipped with large numbers of tanks, quickly opened a hole in the German line south of Kursk. The 1st and 5th Guards Tank Armies performed much better than their counterparts to the north. The tank armies did not attempt to deal with German fortifications. Once the breakthrough forces had penetrated through the first German defense zone, the tank armies rolled forward. Once through, the mechanized forces quickly split the 4th Panzer Army into several pieces and defeated several German counterattacks. For Operation Rumyantsev Zhukov stressed speed, concentration, surprise and timing.¹⁴⁶

The drive to the Dnieper demonstrated the skill of the Soviet leadership even further. By concentrating their forces at strategic points they were able to break open the entire front. The Germans, their reserves committed or destroyed during the Battle of Kursk, were unable to defend the entire front and lacked the necessary mobile units to establish an effective mobile defense. The German forces suffered heavy losses in their attempt to reach the safety of the Dnieper. The Soviet doctrine of successive operations put pressure on the German line in many areas which forced the Germans to be everywhere at once. As the Soviet forces reached the Dnieper they crossed on the march and established twenty-three bridgeheads by the end of September. To reach the Dnieper the Soviet army staged successive operations in

which breakthrough forces penetrated through the entire tactical depth of the German positions. This allowed the second echelon, the mobile formations, to penetrate through the operational depth of the German formations.

During the drive to the Dnieper the armored forces were pulled out of the line, refitted and rested. Not until mid-September did they return. The 3rd Guards Tank Army quickly reached the Dnieper and became one of the first units to gain a foothold on the west bank of the river. The High Command quickly made efforts to solidify the bridgehead in the Bukrin area. To block German forces moving toward the bridgehead airborne units were used. This use of airborne forces was another example of the PU-36 Field regulations put into practice. Even though the operation failed, it does demonstrate the High Command's desire to use all available forces to implement their offensive doctrine.

During the Battle of the Bridgeheads the Soviet forces continued to surprise the Germans. After repeated attempts to break out of the Bukrin bridgehead the High Command authorized a daring move to shift the axis of the attack. Under cover of darkness the 3rd Guards Tank Army and other support units pulled out of the Bukrin area and moved north to the Lutezh bridgehead. The move, a major organizational feat, was accomplished without detection. On November 3rd the forces in Lutezh bridgehead attacked and quickly achieved

a major breakthrough. By using a daring night assault the Soviet tanks were able to reach open ground and fan out behind the German lines. The Soviet forces liberated Kiev and established a large bridgehead around Kiev. Breakthrough tactics combined with armored exploitation succeeded in breaking the German lines.

The Soviet military succeeded during the summer and autumn of 1943 for several reasons. First, their organization, molded by two years of war, fit their capabilities and doctrine. Second, the production of war materials reached a level which enabled the massing of artillery, tanks, and aircraft. The concentration of offensive weapons was key to the Soviet offensive doctrine. Third, the officers and men of the Soviet army were becoming professional soldiers, not just fighters. Although the Germans had overcome the numerically superior Soviet forces in 1941 by outsmarting them, they were unable to do so in 1943. In 1943 everything came together for the Soviet military. The combined-arms forces, adhering to the basic principles of operational art, made it possible to implement the offensive doctrine developed during the 1930's. This doctrine emphasized successive operations and deep operations.

CONCLUSION

The Soviet summer - autumn campaign of 1943 was a major victory, a victory which marked a permanent change of initiative on the Eastern Front. More importantly it was a classic example of Soviet operational thinking. At Kursk the Soviets defeated the elite of the German Panzer forces. After stopping the German offensive, the Soviet combined-arms forces began offensive operations and liberated Orel and Kharkov. The drive to the Dnieper commenced and the Germans were driven behind the river. After fierce fighting the Soviet bridgeheads were expanded and the German "East Wall" fell. The German position in the Western Ukraine became precarious.

The armed forces of the Soviet Union defeated a skillful and resourceful German Army. They defeated talented men such as von Manstein, Hoth, and Kempf. They defeated the Germans with breakthrough and exploitation tactics based on a system of echeloning and cooperation between combat arms. The coordinated effort of infantry, armor, artillery, and airpower concentrated at a decisive point repeatedly broke the German lines. The second echelon, mechanized units, moved forward and widened the breach. The resulting breakthrough allowed the entire front to push forward. The

exploiting units advanced in an attempt to capture subsequent enemy lines off the march. The Soviet offensive consisted of a series of leapfrog maneuvers, breakthrough and exploitation.

The idea that the Soviet Army was only able to defeat the German forces by sheer weight of numbers overlooks several important points. First, the upper level Soviet officers, such as Zhukov, Konev, Vasilevsky, Tolbukhin and Yeremenko, were competent and by 1943 they had experience. The majority of these men were graduates of the Frunze Military Academy. Most graduated in the mid-1930's at the very time the Soviet offensive doctrine was being formulated. The growth of an experienced Soviet officer corps equipped with a doctrine for using the growing inventory of equipment threatened the German Army more than any number of tanks ever would. Second, the Soviet Army had developed a sophisticated doctrine emphasizing breakthrough tactics, exploitation and deep operations.

When studying the Soviet military, whether its military thought or its present organization, it is important not to neglect the Soviet past. The Soviet military goes to great lengths to learn from its historical experience. The majority of articles in the Soviet Military History Journal carry headings such as "Soviet Military Art in the Great Patriotic War," and "Lessons of the Great Patriotic War". If

western scholars and military personnel are to gain an understanding of the Soviet way of war they must take a fresh look at the Soviet World War II experience. A new look is required because most studies of the war on the Eastern Front are distorted, colored by western concepts of warfare. It is easy to use a German scale when measuring the military skill of the Soviet Army in World War II, but the results are far from accurate. When analyzing Soviet military operations, they should be judged against Soviet standards of success and failure.

The Battle of Kursk and the drive to the Dnieper reveals that, contrary to a popular misconception, the Soviet Army in World War II was more than the proverbial "steamroller". The Soviet military defeated the Germans with skilled commanders, good equipment, a sound operational doctrine, and an aggressive attitude toward war. The Soviet forces developed a sophisticated approach to war. The Soviets molded their armed forces to fit the terrain, traditions, and capabilities of the Soviet Union. Soviet historians have been drawing lessons from their World War II experience for years. Western historians would do well to follow suit.

ENDNOTES

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⁸ The works of Georgi K. Zhukov Zhukov's Greatest Battles: A. M. Vasilevskiy, "Marshal Vasilevskiy on Leadership During War Years": S. M. Shtemenko, The Soviet General Staff at War, 1941-1945 and the Front commanders such as I. S. Konev and K. K. Rokossovsky provide a good feel for the Soviet view of the 1943 summer - autumn campaign.

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¹³ Shtemenko, p. 149.

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¹⁵ Zhukov, p. 217.

¹⁶ Colonel T. N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, Great Battles on the Eastern Front (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1982), p. 79.

¹⁷ Colonel A. Zvenzlovsky, "A Crushing Blow," Soviet Military Review, No. 6 (1973), p. 2.

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²² M. N. Kozhevnikov, The Command and Staff of the Soviet Army Air Force in the Great Patriotic War. U.S. Air Force Soviet Military Thought Series, no. 17. (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1983), p. 119.

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²⁴ The Ministry of Defense of the USSR, The Soviet Air Force, p. 168.

²⁵ Albert Seaton, The Fall of Fortress Europe, 1943-1945 (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1981), p. 64.

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²⁷ Myron Smith Jr., The Soviet Army: A Guide to Sources in English (Santa Barbara, CA.: ABC-Clio, Inc., 1982), p. 475-522.: All biographical information on Soviet officers named in Chapter II came from this source.

²⁸ U.S.S.R. Ministry of Defense, Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny Sovetskogo Soyuza, 1941-1945 (Moscow: Ministry of Defense, 1961), p. 249. The Order of Battle for the different Fronts was derived from this source.

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60 The new vehicles, unlike the older models, were designed to destroy the Soviet T-34 and KV Heavy Tank:

Zaloga, Soviet Tanks and Combat Vehicles of World War II
Chamberlain, Encyclopedia of German Tanks of World War Two

Tanks	Max. Armor (mm)	Armament
Mark II	30	20mm L/55
III	50	50mm L/60
IV	50	75mm L/24 or L/48
V (Panther)	110	75mm L/70
VI (Tiger)	110	88mm L/56
T-34	70	76.2mm L/42.5
KV	120	76.2mm L/42.5

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DRIVE TO THE DNIEPER:
THE SOVIET 1943 SUMMER CAMPAIGN

by

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ABSTRACT

The study of warfare on the Eastern Front during World War Two has for the most part suffered from two major weaknesses. First, most works rely on German sources and interpretations of the Russo-German experience. Second, the effect of this reliance has led to a distorted view of Soviet military accomplishments. The German emphasis on tactics as a means to implement strategy masks the most important aspect of Soviet military operations during the war, Operational thinking. The Soviet recognition of operational art as an intermediate level between strategy and tactics represents a major advance in military thinking.

Soviet operational art emphasized mobility, concentration, and surprise. The successful application of these principles enabled the Soviet military to implement its doctrine of successive thrusts, deep operations, and combined-arms warfare. The "offensive" typified the Soviet way of war. Skilled commanders, good equipment, a sound operational doctrine, and a military tradition that stressed aggressiveness made the Soviet "offensive" possible.

This study examines Soviet military operations in the latter half of 1943. The Battle of Kursk and the drive to the Dnieper are good examples of Soviet operational planning

and practice. After halting the German assault forces at Kursk with a deliberately defensive posture the Soviet forces launched a series of counterattacks. The initial Soviet operations culminated in the liberation of Orel and Kharkov. The drive to the Dnieper commenced and the German forces were driven behind the river. The Soviet forces advanced along a 2,000 kilometer front, penetrating the German defenses to a depth of 300 to 600 kilometers. During the Battle for the Bridgeheads Kiev was liberated and a firm foothold gained on the west bank of the Dnieper River. Through the use of successive thrusts, deep operations, and combined arms formations the Soviet forces defeated the German forces.

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