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Soviet South-Western Front Operations, June-September 1941

by

James J. Sterrett

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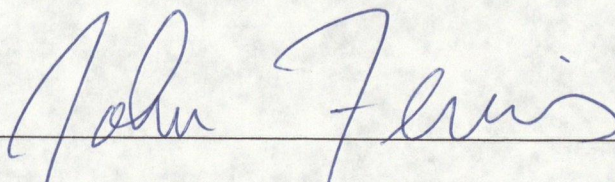
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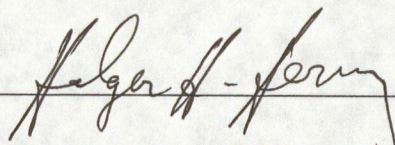
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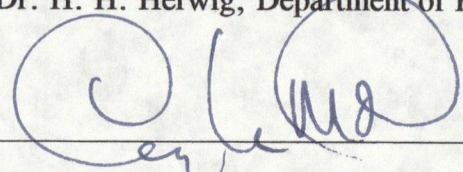
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the operations of the Soviet South-Western Front from June to September of 1941. The Red Army had critical flaws in its communications and logistics structures, but as a result of energetic commanders the South-Western Front was better prepared to meet the Wehrmacht than the other Soviet Fronts. As a result, the South-Western Front was less surprised by the German onslaught. These factors allowed it to mount effective resistance which disrupted Army Group South's operational schedule. The consequent failure of Operation Barbarossa was a major factor in Germany's defeat in the Second World War.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Numerous people assisted in the production of this thesis, and the following are merely among the most important. The Inter-Library Loans staff at the MacKimmie Library was invaluable in tracking down Soviet articles and books, the Foreign Documents staff at the U. S. National Archives steered me through the maze of references to their holdings, leading, in part, to the discovery of the Soviet 1940 Signals Manual used in Chapter I, and the staff of the Map Collection of Cameron Library similarly provided yeoman service finding obscure, properly out-of-date maps. Likewise, Col. David Glantz kindly provided several articles and guidance towards other sources. Dr. John Ferris and Corinne Mahaffey spent much time and ink editing drafts to make the final thesis a better product. Finally, this project would not have been possible without the support of my parents.

James Sterrett

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LIST OF MAPS

Key to Abbreviations Used in Maps

7RD Series:

- 7RD: Situation
- 7RD: Deployment
- 7RD: Wire Net

Meeting Engagement Series:

- Orientation Map
- Evening 25 June
- Evening 26 June
- Evening 27 June
- Evening 28 June
- Evening 29 June
- Evening 30 June

SWF Series:

- Pre-War
- To July 1
- July 1 - 9
- July 9 to August 12
- August and September

Introduction

On June 22, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union, expecting to win the war in six to eight weeks. Instead, it sparked the most intense conflict in human history. War raged on the Eastern Front for nearly four years, killing more than ten people every minute. This campaign was fought without quarter between regimes dedicated to each other's annihilation, and caused twice as many casualties as occurred during the entire First World War. The initial stage of the war was disastrous for the Soviet Union: on June 22, 1941, their army numbered five million men, and within six months it had lost around five million men killed, wounded, and captured. Nonetheless, four years later the Red Army raised the Red flag over the Reichstag. Many things led to this victory, not least the Soviet Union's industrial capacity, manpower reserves, and eventual mastery of military art. However, none of this would have mattered had the initial German onslaught destroyed the Soviet Union. The Soviet ability to survive this period turned the war from a short campaign, which the Germans might hope to win, into a long struggle of attrition in which the Soviet Union held the advantages. One of the reasons why the Soviet Union survived 1941 was the military effort of the South-Western Front in Ukraine. This not only held one of the three German Army Groups at bay; it also allowed the Soviets to concentrate their reinforcements elsewhere. Its resistance intensified divisions within the German command that helped wreck the strategic value of their operational successes. As a result, the Soviets were able to snatch strategic victory - survival - from the jaws of operational defeat.

Any examination of the South-Western Front's operations must begin with a study of the Red Army just before the war, and compare its expectations of the nature of a future war with the state of its preparations for such a conflict. Chapter I

examines the Red Army in the 1930's, its command and logistical systems, and its doctrine for defensive operations both as planned and as actually implemented before the war. These issues are little-known in the West, but fundamental to the events of 1941. Chapter I then compares German planning for the invasion of northern Ukraine with Soviet planning for its defence. Study of these issues was assisted by the release in Soviet journals of important and hitherto classified Soviet documents, which have not been used by Western historians.

Chapter II examines the German advance towards Kiev during the first week of the war and the great Soviet counterattack. These events are often ignored in favor of the more dramatic events to the north, in Belorussia, where forces commanded by Colonel-General Heinz Guderian and Colonel-General Hermann Hoth surprised, overran, and annihilated the Soviet Western Front in a week and a half. Events in Ukraine were less dramatic and less favorable to the Germans. The Soviets slowed Panzer Group I at the border, then launched a massive and abortive counterattack into the German spearhead. Numerous Soviet authors have examined this attack in detail, thereby allowing cross-checks to be made between works written during different Soviet political periods and historians. This study was complemented by a compendium of German, Soviet, and recent Western analytical materials published in The Initial Period of War, an important collection of materials from the 1987 Art of War Symposium.

The third chapter examines, from a larger perspective, the operations of the South-Western Front in July, August, and September. The sources on this period are sparse. Few of the South-Western Front's officers survived the Front's eventual encirclement and even fewer survived long enough to write a memoir. The highest-ranking of these men, I. Kh. Bagramyan, was Chief of the Operations Staff for the

Front. While his memoir rarely criticizes anyone and offers optimistic interpretations of events, it is detailed; moreover, Bagramyan claims to have supplemented his memory with archival material. Bagramyan often provides the only eyewitness account of these events from the Soviet side, and the secondary sources which cover this period, both Western and Soviet, also rely heavily on him. Hence much of Chapter 3 is necessarily dependent on his direct and indirect testimony, but this has been cross-checked as far as possible.

This study of the Red Army rests on an admittedly incomplete base of evidence. The Soviet military archives were impossible for the author to use during the period when research was conducted. Thus, the main sources for the thesis have thus been secondary accounts and memoirs in the Russian language. These have been little used by Western historians both because of linguistic difficulties and, apparently, the assumption that such accounts were largely false. The latter assumption sprang from Western distrust of the Soviets during the Cold War and the often bombastic style used in Soviet works for a general audience, particularly the general grade school histories and propaganda pamphlets. In fact, much of the Soviet material was quite serious history. Indeed, much of it was written for purposes of military education, and was actually far more honest than the material most commonly relied on in the West, the testimony of the German memoirs. While much of this Soviet material had to pass censors, after the death of Stalin there appears to have been relatively little active distortion of events. Instead, the censorship took the form of not mentioning sensitive things: deserters, heavy casualties, German cleverness, Joseph Stalin's interference. The thaw under Nikita Khrushchev produced some quite open materials, and under Leonid Brezhnev the quality of material was reasonable. The best information of all came out under glasnost and after it, often in the Soviet "Journal of Military History".

One of the weaknesses of this dissertation is the paucity of German materials, which stems from the author's linguistic limitations. As a consequence, it relies for the German side on a variety of sources, ranging from the materials in The Initial Period of War, to assorted documents written by German officers after the Second World War and the diary of Colonel General Franz Halder, who was Chief of the General Staff of the German Army High Command. There are serious problems with all of these sources. German officers provided at best partial accounts and sometimes deliberately lied or distorted events. Thus, in July 1945, U.S. Seventh Army interrogators secretly taped a conversation between two leading German commanders, Guderian and Wilhelm von Leeb. Guderian, who had been asked to write a history of the Second World War, wanted to speak to the senior German officer present in order to get permission to do so. Their discussion was illuminating. Both commanders worried about how to present their actions: significantly, Leeb told Guderian that while the Allies were familiar with the general course of operations, "they are not as familiar with our motives. And there is a point where it would be advisable to proceed with caution, so that we will not become the laughing stock of the world...." Of particular concern was their relations with Adolf Hitler - Leeb told Guderian that "you will have to consider your answers a bit carefully when approached on this subject, so that you will say nothing which might embarrass our Fatherland." Guderian responded that he intended to "say neither too much nor too little.... to exercise some control over the impression which our testimony would have on the uninitiated." Leeb also reminded Guderian to emphasize that the German officer had done "nothing but his duty" in the war, and both commanders agreed of National Socialism that "the fundamental principles were fine."¹ This indicates that the testimony of German generals needs to

¹ "Interrogation Records Prepared for War Crimes Proceedings at Nuernberg", RG

be treated with as much caution as is true of Soviet memoirs. Unfortunately, conventional Western views of the war in the east rest on an uncritical assessment of precisely these German accounts.

Particular problems emerge with the Halder Diary. This document is known to have been edited sometime before the end of the war, and thus must be handled with care. However, a forgery must be believable, which means that the general data on operations cannot have been changed too far or else the alterations would be obvious. In any case, the alterations were most likely intended to avoid war crimes prosecution and to prove Halder's prescience rather than to alter the detailed narrative of daily events - which is the material of primary interest to this thesis. Thus, while caution must be exercised with the document, and it must be compared with other sources, it is still a useful source.

The English language sources which proved most useful were the various works of John Erickson and David Glantz. However, all of the works in English, with the single exception of The Initial Period of War, concentrate on the Moscow axis, often to the near-exclusion of the South-Western Front. Even The Initial Period of War describes events in this theater beyond June 30 only in a sporadic fashion. That, incidentally, is usually also true of Soviet accounts. In essence, both Western and Soviet accounts deal with the South-Western Front in general terms, stating little more than that it performed well and eventually was destroyed.

This thesis attempts to rectify this imbalance. In particular, it challenges the received notion that the Soviets in 1941 possessed a completely incompetent army. This concept, shaped by German memoirs, fell on fertile ground in the West during the

238, M 1270, Roll 31, "Other Agency Investigations", frame 974 (rating of Guderian, 18 July, 1945), and 1157-1162 (Leeb and Guderian.)

Cold War. Thus it became conventional wisdom to assert that the Red Army won the war only through the woodenheaded application of simplistic tactics, massive numbers, and a callous disregard for losses. The Red Army certainly had its faults, particularly in 1941, but it also had many strong points. Parts of it, indeed, performed better in 1941 than had the French and British in 1940. By 1945 it was the most effective army on earth. Study of the South-Western Front is essential to understanding the nature of this evolution.

The Red Army's performance in the northern Ukraine provides the best picture of the operational military capability of the Soviet Union at the outbreak of the war, because it was the only Front which was not utterly paralyzed by surprise. The South-Western Front's performance in summer 1941 was better than that of the other Soviet Fronts because its energetic commanders managed to evade some of Stalin's restrictions on mobilization. This, in turn, let them slow the German advance down to a pace the Red Army's command and logistical structures could handle. As a result, the South-Western Front not only avoided destruction, but also held Army Group South on the western side of the Dnepr River until late August. This allowed the Soviet high command to concentrate its reinforcements on the Moscow axis, where the entire Western Front had been destroyed. Furthermore, the continued resistance of the South-Western Front catalyzed dissension in the German command regarding how to exploit their victories on the Moscow axis. The time lost in these dissensions, combined with the Soviet ability to commit their reinforcements to rebuild the shattered Western Front because the South-Western Front still stood, denied the Germans the opportunity to break the Soviet Union in 1941. This cost the Germans the only chance they had of victory on the Eastern Front, thus deciding the course of the Second World War.

Chapter I

Part I

Short History of the Red Army from the early 1930s to 1941.

The 1930s were a time of great change for the Red Army. Some changes, notably as regards modernization and doctrine, were for the better; the purge of the army was distinctly for the worse. Together they produced the Red Army of June 1941. This chapter examines the Red Army's strengths and weaknesses in doctrine and practice, in communications and logistics, and in planning and preparations as they existed at the start of the war. It focuses upon the preparedness of the South-Western Front for defense against the onslaught that the Germans expected Army Group South to unleash.

In 1928-1929 M. N. Tukhachevsky and V. K. Triandafillov began to publish papers on "deep battle". This idea became acceptable in 1929 because of a shift in the domestic political climate and the perception that the Soviets were falling behind militarily. "Deep battle", and its extension, "deep operations", envisaged the coordinated use of air, artillery, armor, and both mechanized and regular infantry, to strike sharp, hard blows against the enemy. These concepts called not only for deep envelopment by mechanized forces, but also for simultaneous attacks by air and artillery strikes throughout the entire depth of the enemy's tactical and operational defense, paralyzing communications networks, destroying command systems, disrupting reserves, suppressing enemy infantry, anti-tank, and artillery fire, and breaching defenses. In the words of a Soviet manual,

If before [during World War I], the attack of the forward edge of the defense was accompanied only by limited destruction of the depths of the defense by

artillery, and that in the main against the defense's artillery, then a modern offensive already thinks only of the destruction of the defense to its full depth. The mission of the deep destruction of the defense is far from limited to counterbattery. It has widened to the necessity of isolating the breakthrough area from the approach of fresh defensive reserves, and the complete paralyzation of command and control. The latter, that is, the paralyzation of the command and control of the defense, is nothing other than the attempt by the attacker to take from the defender the ability to coordinate the strengths of his troops, destroy their cooperation, blast the defender's morale and the effectiveness of defensive counterattacks, and thereby forge more favorable conditions for [a successful assault.]²

Tukhachevsky pursued not only the idea of Blitzkrieg, but also the principles of defense against it. In operational terms, for example, a deep, tough crust of infantry and anti-tank guns (such as the fortified zones under construction along the border during the 1930's), backed up by anti-tank zones, were intended to channel and disrupt a breakthrough, leaving it vulnerable to a mechanized counterattack force. This theory was more advanced than that of any other army of the era, but the ideas were not translated into action. Throughout the 1930s the emphasis in Soviet military thought lay on the offensive, and work on defensive problems was not pursued with as much vigor as work on offensive problems.³

² N. I. Gapich, Sluzhba svyazi b osnovnykh vidakh obshchevoiskovogo boia (SD i SK), (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1940), p. 209.

³ G. Isserson, "Zapiski sovremennika o M. N. Tukhachevskom", Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal (henceforth "VIZ"), 4, 1963, pp. 67, 69; A. Ryzhakov, "K voprosu o stroitelstvo bronetankovykh voisk krasnoi armii v 30-e godi", VIZ, 8, 1968, pp. 105-106; R. A. Savushkin, N. M. Ramanichev, "Razvitie taktiki obshchevoiskovogo boya v period mezhdru grazhdanskoi i Velikoi Otechestvennoi voinami", VIZ, 11, 1985, pp. 21-22; John Erickson, The Soviet High Command, (New York: Macmillan & Co, 1962), chapter XI; Richard Simpkin, John Erickson, Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii, (New York: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1987), chapters 3, 4; David Glantz, Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle, (London: Frank Cass, 1991), chapters 2, 4.

Tukhachevsky, well aware of the military implications of technological progress and interested in exploiting them, inspired the group of officers and designers who led the wave of experimentation of the 1930s. He pushed the development of paratroops, and was particularly fascinated by the possibility of airdropping tanks, into which experiments were conducted. His interest in rocket cannon started a line of development that led directly to the famous "Katyusha" multiple rocket launcher. He wanted a large and effective air force; his interest in tanks sparked a great deal of experimentation in armored vehicle design, leading, among others, to the T-34 series, the best of the early years of the war. Research into field and anti-tank artillery was conducted as well.⁴ Practical military experimentation received less attention than the development of doctrine and weapons. Still, the mechanized and motorized brigades, mechanized divisions and corps, and paratroop brigades formed under Tukhachevsky's direction were tested in the 1935 and 1936 maneuvers. While not entirely successful, these exercises seemed to indicate the shape of things to come - a dynamic Red Army with powerful mechanized forces combined into a fast-moving and hard-hitting force.⁵ At this time, the Red Army led the world in mechanized warfare theory and experimentation.

In 1937, however, the purges hit the military. Tukhachevsky was shot, as was much of the officer corps, including most of its best and brightest members. His ideas became those of an "enemy of the people", no longer mentionable by name. Nonetheless they survived, carried forward by lesser minds without further development, and sometimes with distortions. Political control of the army was

⁴ Isserson, "Zapiski", pp. 67-76; Ryzhakov, "K voprosu", 106-108; Erickson, Soviet High Command, ch. 11.

⁵ Isserson, "Zapiski", pp. 72-77; Ryzhakov, "K voprosu", p. 108; Savushkin, Ramanichev, "Razvitie taktiki", pp. 21-27.

dramatically tightened, and military training often took second place to political indoctrination. Experimentation into tactics largely stopped, and further work on rockets was postponed for several years. Misunderstanding their experiences in Spain, the Soviets disbanded the mechanized corps in August 1939. The dramatic success of those corps against the Japanese Army at Khalkin-Gol was largely ignored. While the development of tanks, aircraft, and artillery continued, the T-34 production program was delayed, and some lines of research moved in new directions; for example, the strategic bomber program was shut down and efforts redirected towards fighters.⁶

The 1939-1940 Finno-Soviet Winter War, the occupation of the Baltic states and eastern Poland, and the German successes in Poland and France with large mechanized forces, changed Stalin's mind on some fundamental military issues. Political control of the army was relaxed; the Chief of Staff, S. K. Timoshenko, was allowed to reorient the training schedule back towards military matters. In the summer of 1940 eight mechanized corps began formation, and another twenty-one were scheduled to be created during 1941. This schedule was highly optimistic given Soviet industrial capabilities; furthermore, the army faced grave problems with its overall expansion as a result of the purges. In 1938 the Red Army had 1.5 million men. By June 1941, it numbered five million with a trained reserve of fourteen million. This massive, rapid expansion would have produced a shortage of trained officers at the best of times; the purges sharply exacerbated the problem.⁷

⁶ Krikunov, V. P., "Kuda dyelis' tanki?", *VIZ*, 11, 1988, p. 28; Ryzhakov, "K voprosu", pp. 108-109; Erickson, *Soviet High Command*, chs. XII - XVI; Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1990), part three.

⁷ Erickson, *Soviet High Command*, ch. XIV - XVI; M. M. Kirian, "Nachalni period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini", *VIZ*, 6, 1988, pp. 13-14; Ryzhakov, "K voprosu", pp. 109-111; David Glantz, "Mobilization and Force Structure: Soviet Mobilization in Peace and War, 1924-1942: A Survey", (*The Journal of Soviet Military Studies*, V. 5,

In 1941 the Red Army was not merely ravaged by the purges and qualitatively weakened by numerical expansion. It was also called upon not to attack, for which it had diligently if not wholly successfully prepared, but to defend, for which it was largely unprepared. Not that Soviet defensive doctrine in itself was bad. A 1940 manual said of the defensive that,

Since the modern offensive sets itself the goal of destroying all depths of the defense with artillery, air power, gas, and tank breakthroughs into the depths of the defense, with a simultaneous infantry attack into the forward area and with a following force of assaulting infantry from the rear of the attacker's formation, the defense must have a deeply echeloned deployment with the goal of separating the tanks from the infantry, and the destruction of the tanks and infantry separately from each other and in detail....

Because of the power of modern arms and the methods of modern offensive actions, a modern defense must be before all else antitank and in the event of its preparation in contact with the enemy it consists of [this specifically outlines a divisional defense]: a) the forward zone, defended by forward zone detachments of various arms⁸; the depth of the forward zone, depending on the location, can be from 12-15 km; b) combat security positions at distances of 1-3 km from the forward edge of the main line of defense; c) the main (primary) line of defense, including the entire depth of the deployment of a division; d) the second line of defense, formed to the rear of the main line of defense. In a standard defense a rifle division occupies a front of 8-12 km (under normal conditions) and a total depth (including its rear) of up to 30-35 km. The area, into which will be deployed the various elements of the defense, equals 240-280 square kilometers....

Breaches into one or another portion of the defense by the enemy should be met by counterattacks from the reserves against the base of the breakthrough, to surround and destroy it...⁹

No. 3, September 1992), pp. 332-348; William R. Trotter, *A Frozen Hell: The Russo-Finnish War of 1939-40*, (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1991), V. Shlykov, "I tanki nashi bystri", *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, 9, 1988, p. 125.

⁸ There were expected to be 1 or 2 of these, perhaps 3; their main mission was to create obstacles and delay the enemy. (Gapich, *Sluzhba svyazi*, p. 222.)

⁹ Gapich, *Sluzhba svyazi*, pp. 209-210.

The defensive, combined with counteroffensive actions or with a subsequent shift to the offensive, especially into the flank of a weakened enemy, can lead to the enemy's complete destruction.¹⁰

A rifle division theoretically containing thirty 45-mm anti-tank guns and a battalion of light tanks (forty-five tanks)¹¹ (the number of anti-tank rifles is unknown) could put "10 [anti-tank] weapons per kilometer of tank-accessible front".¹² In fact, this density assertion seems optimistic, since divisions were expected to hold a front of eight to twelve kilometers, while wartime experience showed that this did not provide the density of fire needed to suppress an armored assault. Nonetheless, on this issue Soviet defensive doctrine was still advanced.

Central to the second echelon was the Shock Group, intended to deliver counterattacks, which included up to 1/3 of the rifle units in a division, as well as tanks and dedicated artillery support. In a corps, the Shock Group might be formed during the course of the battle from elements of the main line, although by preference it would be prepared beforehand.¹³ The defensive system of a corps was similar to that of a rifle division in structure. It would be about twenty-five kilometers wide, having security and forward zones of the same depth as a rifle division's, and a second belt of defenses at a depth of about twenty kilometers. The corps was expected to maintain at least a rifle regiment and a tank group (probably a battalion) in reserve, and had additional, more powerful, artillery.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 209, quoted from [Soviet] Field Regulations, year unspecified (probably 1939 or 1940.)

¹¹ Glantz, Soviet Military Operational Art, p. 94.

¹² V. A. Anfilov, Nachalo Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1962, p. 34.

¹³ Gapich, Sluzhba sviazi, pp. 209-211, 222, 226, 236, 263.

¹⁴ Glantz, Soviet Military Operational Art, pp. 83-84, 94.

An army was expected to hold 80-100 kilometers of front with three corps. It maintained a third line of defenses 40-60 kilometers behind the main line of resistance. Between the second and third lines of defense was supposed to be a line of anti-tank obstacles and killing zones. For counterattacks, the army was to have a reserve of several rifle divisions and a mechanized corps.¹⁵ At every level, the Soviets repeatedly emphasized combined arms, counterattacks, and the need to coordinate the activities of all arms in order to destroy the attacker.¹⁶

In 1939-1940, the Germans fought armies that were prepared neither in theory nor in practice for Blitzkrieg. This was not the case with the Red Army in 1941. Asked in late 1936 how the Red Army would fare in a mobile war with the Germans, Tukhachevsky told a group of younger officers that,

If the Germans meet an enemy, who will stand firmly and himself attack, then things will look very different. The battle will be determined and lengthy; during its course will develop large oscillations of the front to great depth on both sides. In the end the winner will be he, who has greater strength of morale and who at the end of the operation has deep operational reserves.¹⁷

Tukhachevsky was right: the Soviets had formulated the correct doctrinal solution to German assault tactics. Blitzkrieg relied on artillery and close support aircraft to suppress defenses and break up communications nets, thus disorganizing defenses which were then breached by an assault wave consisting of a tank charge backed by infantry. In Soviet planning, tank barriers would channel the armored assault into killing zones covered by anti-tank guns; meanwhile engineering obstacles and suppressive fires would split infantry from armor and deny each the support it needed. Both in theory and in practice, the Soviets relied less on air power than the Germans,

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 82.

¹⁶ Gapich, *Sluzhba sviazi*, pp. 209-211, 222, 226, 236, 263.

¹⁷ Isserson, "Zapiski", p. 77.

preferring artillery instead. This ensured that Soviet units might receive substantial fire support even while the Germans held air superiority. The Germans found the going difficult and bloody against Soviet troops trained and equipped to fight in this style - as, for example, at Kursk in 1943. In 1941, however, levels of equipment and training usually did not permit the Red Army to act on its doctrine.

By destroying the brains of the army, the purges weakened the Red Army precisely at the time when the quality of the German Army surged forward. Since even at best the Red Army had underemphasized defense, after the purges many officers were uncertain how to organize any defence beyond stubborn refusal to give ground and energetic counterattacks. The Red Army was most vulnerable in 1937-1938 while the purges raged, leaving forces half-designed to fight, on the basis of a concept no longer safe to discuss, commanded by officers who were often poorly trained and promoted too swiftly. The purges continued thereafter at a much reduced pace and the Red Army began to recover. It was better prepared for mobile operations than most armies in the world - far less so than the Germans, but more ready than the British, French, and Poles. It had at least thought, planned, and tried to prepare to fight a mechanized mobile war. In 1941, as industrial production and officer training began to catch up with the expansion of the Red Army, its vulnerabilities were rapidly declining. These vulnerabilities were still substantial, however, and examination of two central but usually forgotten elements of the Red Army reveals them clearly.

Part II

Soviet Communications and Supply Systems Before the War

Communications and supply systems are an army's nervous and cardiovascular systems, services that work behind the scenes to allow an army to function. They were also key targets in German Blitzkrieg operations. The events of the summer of 1941 cannot be understood without discussing the structure of the Soviet military communications and supply systems, and considering how ready they were for the demands of war.

Before the war, three organizations ran signals for the Red Army. The People's Commissariat for Communications controlled civilian communications and the construction of military signals equipment and plant in peacetime. All of its civilian communications resources were available to the military in wartime, when the Commissariat was to maintain communications between the General Staff and fronts, military districts, and independent armies. A section of the General Staff was responsible for planning the practical use of signals in wartime, the organization of signals troops, and for the development of new equipment. The Directorate of Communications was responsible for training troops, organizing the manufacture of new equipment, and providing equipment to troops.¹⁸ In some respects this system was haphazard and uncoordinated, but no more so than in most other major armies of

¹⁸ I. T. Peresypkin, Sviaz' v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini, (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), p. 35.

the time. Soviet organization of signals for war was normal for the era; unfortunately, that norm was not suited to mechanized war.¹⁹

As the Soviets had expected, during the war, telegraph handled 90 percent of high level command traffic - that of the General Staff, along with front and army staffs. As with all armies, telegraph was thought more reliable and less subject to enemy interception than radio. In technical and cryptographic terms, the latest Soviet equipment was good; the newest (presumably rotor-encryption) telegraph devices transmitted about 40 words a minute.²⁰

The telegraph wire net, however, was not well suited to war. The civilian network constructed for peacetime purposes was to handle wartime communications. All of the lines were built above ground, almost always along rail lines or roads, which made them easy to find and destroy from the air. Furthermore, the net was constructed radially - all lines from lesser points came in to a central point, which rerouted transmissions to other central nodes.²¹ Thus, traffic between any subordinate stations in a given region or from them to any station in another locality could be conducted only through a single point (usually the region's capital). Such a system is rational in peacetime, so long as the nodes can handle the traffic load. In wartime, however, such

¹⁹ For comparison, see: Dulany Terrett, The United States Army in World War II: The Technical Services: The Signals Corps: The Emergency (to December 1941), (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1956); C. A. Borman, The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War: Divisional Signals, (Wellington, 1954); R. F. H. Nadler, The Royal Corps of Signals: A History of its Antecedent & Development (circa 1800-1955), (London: Royal Signals Institution, 1958).

²⁰ I. T. Peresyppkin, "Sviaz' Generalnogo shtaba.", VIZ, 4, 1971, pp. 19-22; Gapich, Sluzhba sviazi, pp. 16-17, 39-44, 224. Some comparison can be found in the above note.

²¹ Peresyppkin, Sviaz' v Velikoi Otechestvennoi, p. 10-11, 15.

a system has little redundancy and thus is very vulnerable. For example, if the main Moscow-Kiev line goes down, it will take time to replace it through the secondary interconnections of lesser nets; by knocking out one node, one may wreck communications between all corps in an army for hours or even days.

In theory, the highest levels of field command received extensive signals support. Each front (of three or four armies) was supposed to have one independent signals regiment, four line signals Battalions, three telegraph operations companies, eight telegraph line construction companies, five line construction companies, a signals equipment storage depot, and a repair facility. Armies (usually of three corps) theoretically received an independent signals regiment, four telegraph line construction companies, two telegraph operations companies, six line construction companies, a storage depot, and a repair facility.²² In practice, however, these figures were not met.

The Baltic Military District and the Belorussian Special Military Districts each received only about 10 percent of their signals establishment. The Kiev Special Military District received only its independent regiment. Of all HQs in the Soviet military, army and front commands - which would coordinate the largest field formations - received the lowest percentage of their establishment signals strength.²³ Nor were signals units at required strength. As of June 1, 1941, they generally had between 30 percent and 76 percent of their authorized amounts of signals equipment - telegraph sets, telephones, cable, and radios - with the largest shortages being in newer

²² V. Sokolov, "Wartime Organizational Development of Signals Troops", VIZ, 4, 1981 (Translated article provided by Col. David Glantz. Page numbers are from the translation, which is numbered 13-22. The original article was on pages 20-27. No correspondence between these is provided.), p. 13; Peresyphkin, Sviaz' v Velikoi Otechestvennoi, p. 45.

²³ Ibid, p. 45.

types of equipment.²⁴ The cumulative effect of these shortfalls was significant. In June 1941, the Kiev Special Military District staff had 25 percent of its authorized allotment of signals troops, who had on average 50 percent of their intended equipment - leaving the headquarters with about 12-13 percent of its establishment signals equipment. And that level, in turn, was defined by the optimistic assumption that they would face a relatively successful static or offensive campaign in which the civilian telegraph net was fully operational and available.

The headquarters of rifle corps, rifle divisions, and mechanized corps were each to receive a signals battalion, while rifle regiments received a signals company, containing radio, telephone, and "headquarters" (intended to service the regimental headquarters' communications) platoons, and rifle battalions received a signals platoon, containing telephone, messenger (human and canine), and visual signaling sections. In time of war, formations were supposed to receive additional signals troops but not to change the basic organization of their signals units.²⁵ Thus, full mobilization was necessary even for this limited signals establishment to function properly. Moreover, Soviet formations and units were not trained to function in the defensive combat conditions they would face, and were especially weak in radio.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 60.

²⁵ Sokolov, "Wartime Organizational Development", p. 13, Ryzhakov, "K voprosu", p. 111; "Signal Communication in the Red Army: From M/A, Riga, Latvia; Report No. 9350; Date: November 14, 1935", RG 165, Microfilm publication M-1443, roll 18, frames 61-65. These details of Soviet signals organization at the lower levels are based on the shakier ground of United States Military Intelligence reports on the Red Army. They were compiled from Soviet, Estonian, Latvian, and Finnish sources, and seem to be relatively accurate. The material from the Baltic military attachés is from 1938, while the Finnish material, presumably based on Winter War experience, is from the spring of 1940.

Within armored units, regimental, battalion, and company commanders had two-way radios, and platoon commanders had one-way (reception only) radios.²⁶ Inside the platoon, hand signals and flags were used for control. Wartime experience on all fronts demonstrated that two-way communications between all tanks was a great asset. German tanks had this advantage throughout the war, and it accounts for much of their initial superiority over Soviet (and other) armored forces. Moreover, even in the mid-1930s Soviet officers had felt their mechanized corps had insufficient signals resources, yet the new mechanized corps of 1940 were twice as big with the same allotment of signals equipment. Thus, not only tactical but also operational control over mechanized troops in war would be difficult.²⁷

Information regarding the range of radio sets varies. The US military attaché in Riga claimed that division radio sets had a range of 200 km for morse or sixty kilometers for speech, and required ten to fifteen minutes to set up. Regimental radios had ranges of fifty kilometers (morse) and fifteen kilometers (speech), and crystal-based battalion sets had ranges of fifteen and five kilometers. The divisional and regimental stations were truck-borne, and the regimental radio could be operated while the vehicle was in motion.²⁸ Soviet sources state that regimental and battalion radios had ranges of three to four kilometers; in contrast to the Riga Military Attaché's reports, they note the development of a quartz crystal radio set in 1942.²⁹ These sources may be discussing different radio sets. If the Soviet sources are correct,

²⁶ "Signal Equipment of the Red Army: From M/A, Riga, Latvia; Report No. 10241; Date: October 5, 1938", RG 165, M-1443, R 18, Fr 70.

²⁷ Sokolov, "Wartime Organizational Development", p. 13.

²⁸ "Signal Equipment of the Red Army: From M/A, Riga, Latvia; Report No. 10241; Date: October 5, 1938", RG 165, M-1443, R 18, Fr 69.

²⁹ V. P. Zaitsev, E. Ya. Dvoryanov, "Osnovnie napravlenie razvitiya tekhniki svyazi v godi Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini", *VIZ*, 2, 1986, p. 68-69.

however, the radios available to Soviet formations were ill-suited to mobile war because of range limitations and lack of mobility.

The 1940 Signals manual for rifle divisions and corps shows clearly how such formations were expected to organize communications in defense. These systems were to center on a "well dispersed and complete network of telegraph communications" with main, reserve, and second echelon command posts. A reserve of signals personnel and equipment would repair breaks and lay down wires for counterattacks, prevent interception of signals by the enemy while intercepting his signals, and maintain communications with all units even in case of air or artillery bombardment or the loss of areas of the defense.³⁰ In theory this would be possible because redundancy of command posts and communications links, and plenty of equipment, were expected to be the norm.

Unless time permitted the establishment of telegraph lines, reconnaissance and obstacle detachments in the forward zone of defense would communicate by messenger or radio. Units were expected to use short, pre-figured transmissions (under twenty to thirty seconds) when possible, with both locally established and general codes. A fifteen to twenty group message was expected to require six to ten minutes to code, ten minutes to transmit, and another six to ten minutes to decode. Thus, reconnaissance units and obstacle detachments less than about thirty minutes' travel from the main line were expected to use messengers. Detachments received at most one radio and one of the telegraph platoons; these went into the divisional signals reserve when they returned from the forward zone.³¹ None of this could work, however, without trained personnel and plentiful equipment.

³⁰ Gapich, Sluzhba sviazi, pp. 211-215.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 220-223.

Inside the main line of resistance, telephone and telegraph were intended to carry almost all traffic before the battle and as much as possible of it during combat. It was intended that the main, reserve, and second echelon command posts could each contact every unit, while communications would not collapse if any one of the posts were to be destroyed. The manual asserts that a "carefully thought out net" would achieve this objective. It is unclear if this assertion was tested; given the lack of equipment in signals units, and thus the lack of cable, it could not easily have been realized in 1941. Commanders, moreover, were directed to place command posts on a single axis of communications if possible - putting as much as possible of the traffic down either one line or down closely spaced parallel lines - which greatly increased the probability that the enemy would discover the lines and cut communications.³²

Towards the rear of a corps, where less destruction of the telegraph lines was expected, regulations stated that communications could be run down pole lines of civilian construction.³³ This particular assumption proved to be false during the German attack, when the Luftwaffe, assigned the mission of bombing telegraph lines and posts, did so with great effectiveness.³⁴ Thus, either through failures of foresight or insufficient production, the telegraph system lacked redundancy at all levels of command and was exceptionally vulnerable to being cut.

Radio was in no better state. Radio nets were expected to be extensive and dense. The most important nets were for artillery fire control, aviation, operational coordination of arms (this net was given absolute priority of transmission in the manual), and communications between command posts within a division. Only

³² Ibid, pp. 223-233.

³³ Ibid, p. 263.

³⁴ B. B. Lariokhin, I. A. Tret'iak, "Sovershenstvovaniya radiosvazi radiolokatsionnogo obespecheniya boevikh deistvii aviatsii", VIZ, 9, 1986, p. 68.

coordination nets, artillery, armor, and supply units were allowed the unlimited use of radio during combat. Most units were expected to keep their radios working only in "receive" mode. This led to a further problem. In order to preserve security, all units were expected to observe 'radio silence' and rely on telegraph while not engaged. Once engaged, a unit was expected to rely on telegraph/telephone, but were permitted to use radio if necessary; artillery and armored units were permitted to use radio whenever engaged.³⁵ As a result, radio was little practiced, and Soviet officers generally knew little and cared less about it at the outbreak of war.³⁶

A clear picture of how the Soviets expected defensive communications to work is provided by a "concrete example" in the 1940 signals manual. The example follows the 7th Rifle Division of the 5th Rifle Corps through the initial stages of a hypothetical operation in western Belorussia. On June 16, the 5th Corps was ordered out of reserve to meet an enemy experiencing "decisive success" on both flanks of the 4th Army. [See map "7RD: Situation".³⁷] Its Corps units were to establish hasty defensive positions by the 17th, and hold the line for a friendly counteroffensive on the 20th.³⁸ Since the Soviets expected infantry fronts to advance ten to fifteen kilometers per day, and mechanized fronts forty to fifty kilometers per day, the 5th Rifle Corps either was facing an infantry enemy, or was not being given sufficient time to deploy.³⁹

³⁵ Gapich, *Sluzhba sviazi*, pp. 85, 235-237.

³⁶ Lariokhin, Tret'iak, "Sovershenstvovaniya radiosviasi", *VIZ*, 9, 1986, p. 68; M. I. Mel'tyukhov, "22 Iuniya 1941 g.: Tsifri Sviditelstvuyut", *Istoriya SSSR*, 3, 1991, p. 27; Peresyarkin, *Sviaz' v Velikoi Otechestvennoi*, pp. 30-31.

³⁷ Cartographic data taken from U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Map Series N 501, maps NN 35-10 "Kobrin" and NN 35-7 "Lida", edition 4-AMS, May 1958; positional data from Gapich, *Sluzhba sviazi*, pp. 241-260.

³⁸ Gapich, *Sluzhba sviazi*, p. 241.

³⁹ Glantz, *Soviet Military Operational Art*, p. 80.

Two regiments (the 19th and 20th) of the 7th Rifle Division deployed forward, with the divisional tank battalion and the third rifle regiment in reserve. [See map "7RD: Deployment".] The reserve forces were ordered to prepare two possible counterattacks down predetermined routes, and to relieve any unit cut off. The 7th Rifle Division set up one main and three tactical CPs, and organized supply through one area to the rear.⁴⁰

The Corps Chief of Signals ordered the division to organize its telegraph, telephone, and mobile communications between the main corps and division CPs by 9:30 AM of the 17th. Radio nets were to be ready by 6:00 PM on the 17th, with code books, key sets, and frequencies assigned to various formations. Ground-to-air signals procedures were arranged in advance, and schedules of messengers were set up between corps and division.⁴¹

During the night, the Division Chief of Staff passed on his orders to the Division Chief of Signals. The reconnaissance detachments, moving into place overnight, were to file reports every two hours from 8:00 AM. A primary forward control point to handle traffic from the reconnaissance and obstacle detachments was to be set up by a truck-borne line platoon by 5:00 AM on the 17th. It was to establish direct telephone/telegraph communication with the main divisional CP by 7:00 AM of the 17th along a preexisting telegraph line.⁴² [See map "7RD: Wire Net".⁴³]

Line was to be laid from the Divisional HQ to the regimental CPs, between the frontline regiment's CPs, and from the reserve group (21st Regiment and the divisional

⁴⁰ Gapich, *Sluzhba sviazi*, p. 243-244.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 244-245.

⁴² Ibid, p. 248.

⁴³ Also note that positions of some of the CPs on the map have been inferred. (Estimated error = < 1km.)

tank battalion) to the 19th Regiment (because the counterattacks were planned through its sector); the lines to the Corps Main CP were to be ready by 8:00 AM, and that to neighboring divisions by 9:00 AM, of the 17th. Cable communications to the division rear echelon were to be ready by 10:00 AM of the 17th.⁴⁴ All told, in twelve hours the division was expected to plan and lay twenty-eight kilometers of cable (excluding regimental nets, and the forward zone net); three cable links from the main Divisional HQ to external formations, six cable links between Divisional CPs, and seven links to subordinate CPs (some of these links on the same line.)

This expectation reflected pre-war Soviet planning. Since the division had two line construction companies, and one platoon had been assigned to the forward zone, 1 and 2/3 companies were left to complete the wire-laying task. Each company had seventy-two kilometers of wire, fifty-seven men, and one truck.⁴⁵ The Soviets expected that three to four men could lay one to four kilometers of cable per hour. The 7th Rifle Division could fulfill its telegraph laying mission - on paper.

The actual circumstances of the war were far worse than those postulated by the Soviets in their exercises, however, and in the summer of 1941, 7th Rifle Division's goals would have been unrealistic. The division, well below its full complement of men and equipment, with less wire to lay and fewer men to lay it, could not have laid a net of that size at that speed. This, in turn, would force "redundant" backup links to be dropped, thus making the net more vulnerable to enemy action. With only a few shortages parts of the division would have to be dropped from the net. Even in the example, moreover, the net had several weak links and dangerously little redundancy. Divisional Main was a major hub: it and one of the 19th Regiment's CPs provided the

⁴⁴ Gapich, *Sluzhba svyazi*, p. 246-247.

⁴⁵ "Signal Communication in the Finno-Soviet War: From M/A, Helsinki, Finland, April 18, 1940", RG 165, M-1443, R 18, Fr 86.

only links between the Division's right and left regiments, while it and another of 19th Regiment's CPs were the only links to the Division's reserve. The 21st Regiment's Main CP, and the Divisional Second Echelon CP (located with one of the Corps Tac CPs) were both on the same, and only, line back to the Division's rear echelon and its parent Corps. Knocking out any one of these could destroy redundancy in the cable net; more could collapse it completely.

When that happened, commanders were expected to turn to radio. In the example, again, radio communications were a feasible alternative. Since regimental radios had a range of at least three to four kilometers, they could be so placed as to allow complete regimental and divisional communication if wire communications collapsed. If the divisional radio had even half of its listed voice range (thirty kilometers) it still would reach neighboring divisions and the corps HQ. Again, however, the example assumed that all Soviet units were fully equipped and all personnel fully trained. When war broke out, neither was the case. Units had few radio sets and poorly trained operators. Moreover, given Soviet doctrine that radio was only to be used in extreme circumstances, most staffs had little understanding of the possibilities and limitations of radio - a failing of most armies of the day. This put the Soviets at a distinct disadvantage in keeping their decision-making consistent with the speed of battle against a foe, such as the Germans, that understood radio and used it well for swift command and control.

In general, Soviet signals doctrine was sound; given enough equipment, trained operators, and smoothly functioning commands, they were well prepared. Unfortunately, the Soviets did not have enough equipment, their signals operators were not always well trained, and the officer corps was not well enough trained to function smoothly. Hence, it was a major vulnerability in the Red Army.

The Soviet logistical system was in even worse shape. This system had demonstrated such serious shortcomings during the invasion of Poland and the Winter War that it was consequently revamped.⁴⁶ In the process, one good innovation was done away with. As an emergency measure to supplement an overburdened rail system during the Winter War, an automobile/truck route under centralized control was set up to ferry supplies from Moscow to Leningrad. After initial vehicle attrition rates of 20-30 percent per trip, more driver training and a greater supply of spare parts increased the reliability and efficiency of the system. However, control of the automobiles and trucks was decentralized to fronts (military districts in peacetime) and armies in the summer of 1940 by General D. G. Pavlov, and the lessons of the Winter War were largely forgotten.⁴⁷

On June 22, 1941, rear area operations were controlled at the center (Moscow), and at the front (military district), army, corps, and unit level. The military districts were the central elements in peacetime logistics. They held stationary dumps in the rear containing eight to ten units of fire⁴⁸ for their units, ten units of fuel, thirty day's worth of food, and "significant" stocks of other materials. By contrast, the supply dumps of smaller formations usually contained a small amount of material sufficient

⁴⁶ "AKT o priome Narkomata Oboroni Soyuza SSR tov. Timoshenko S. K. ot tov. Voroshilova K. E.", in E. I. Zyuzin, "Gotovil li Stalin preventivnii udar?", VIZ, 1, 1992, p. 13.

⁴⁷ N. Strakhov, "Na voenno-avtomobilnykh dorogakh", VIZ, 3, 1964, p. 64-65.

⁴⁸ "Units of fire" is my translation of the Soviet term "boyovoy komplet" ("BK"), defined as the number of shells (cartridges, etc.) issued to a given weapon, unit, or formation: for example, a T-34's BK would be 77 76mm shells and about 2,500 rounds for the machine guns (ignoring rounds for the crew's personal weapons in this example); the BK for a T-34 platoon of 4 tanks would be 308 76mm shells and 10000 rounds of machine gun ammunition, and so on. (A. M. Plekhov, Slovar' voennykh terminov, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988), p. 32.)

material sufficient only for peacetime and mobilization; rifle divisions, for example, held 1.25 units of fire, and tanks divisions three units. Fuel was generally kept in centralized dumps controlled by the civilian fuel administration.⁴⁹

Dumps were almost always stationed near major railway stations, and thus more easily detected and destroyed in wartime. To make this problem worse, the Soviets had spent little effort to defend their supply links against air attack. Furthermore, most formations had only 20-25 percent of their establishment logistics personnel.

Nor had the Soviets developed an effective framework to distribute supplies. The theory was that only a decentralized structure could handle supply for highly mobile operations: since only front, army, or corps staffs would know what they would need from day to day, they were to set and meet their own requirements. That is, the front, army, and corps staffs were expected not only to handle complex operations, but also to coordinate virtually all of the various supply organizations. Meanwhile, units and formations conducting operations would run out of ammunition and fuel almost immediately unless they received continual resupply. This system was dependent on well trained and efficient staffs working with reliable communications to rear areas able to move materials forward quickly. If any of these conditions were not met, the system would collapse. When war broke out, none of these conditions could be met - and the system swiftly collapsed and had to be entirely replaced.⁵⁰

The Kiev Special Military District received as much or more logistics units than the other five western military districts, receiving the only railroad corps, 6 of 10 railroad brigades, 1 of 2 railroad regiments, 3 of 9 automobile regiments, 1 of 8

⁴⁹ G. P. Pastukhovskii, "Razvertivanie operativnogo tyla v nachalnoi period voini", *VIZ*, 6, 1988, p. 18-19; S. Skryabin, N. Medvedev, "O tyle frontov v nachale Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini", *VIZ*, 4, 1984, p. 34.

⁵⁰ Pastukhovskii, "Razvertivaniye operativnogo tyla", pp. 18-21.

automobile depots, 7 of 24 truck regiments, 19 of 57 artillery ammunition dumps, 1 of 5 artillery reserve parks, 2 of 4 primary fuel dumps, 42 of 138 secondary fuel dumps, 1 of 3 repair shops, and 1 of 3 bakeries.⁵¹ Thus, it was as ready as any of the military districts to make the best of a bad situation. However, the situation was too bad to be salvaged. The supply system had been gravely deficient against foes, such as the Poles and Finns, who had not been able to disrupt the Soviet rear. The Germans had not only the capability but the intention of disrupting the Soviet rear to the greatest possible extent. Poor defenses, poor dump placement, poor planning, and a "muddle through" attitude reminiscent of the French railroad system in 1870 were a recipe for disaster. Given the flaws in its logistics and communications system, the Red Army in 1941 was ill-prepared to survive a deep attack.

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 22.

Part III

Plans, Soviet and German

German planning for Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, began in July 1940. Following months of arguments about the plan the official directive was signed in late January 1941. In it, Army Group South's and Panzer Group I's missions were:

3. Intention.... South of the Pripet Marshes *Army Group "South"*, -*Field Marshall von Rundstedt* - will exploit the swift breakthrough by strong armored forces from the Lublin area in the direction of Kiev, in order to cut the communications across the Dnieper of the enemy in Galizia [sic] and the Western Ukraine. The Dnieper crossings at and below Kiev will be taken, thus ensuring the freedom for the subsequent co-operation of *Army Group "South"* with the German forces operating in northern Russia or for new tasks in south Russia.

Tasks of the Army Groups.... *Army Group "South"* will drive along its left wing - with mobile forces in the lead - towards Kiev, destroy the Russian forces in Galizia and in the West Ukraine while they are still west of the Dnieper, and achieve the early capture of the Dnieper crossings at and below Kiev for the continuation of operations on both sides of the river.

The first task of *Panzer Group I* will be in co-operation with the 17th and 6th Armies to break through the enemy forces near the frontier between Rawa-Ruska and Kowel, to advance via Berdishev-Zhitomir, and to reach the Dnieper as soon as possible at and below Kiev. Then, under the direction of *Army Group Headquarters*, it will continue the attack in a south-easterly direction along the Dnieper in order to prevent a withdrawal of the enemy in the West Ukraine across the Dnieper and to destroy him by an attack from the rear.⁵²

Because of doubts about Romanian reliability and unwillingness to tell them about Barbarossa, the Germans subsequently changed the plan. In particular, they decided not to plan on encircling Soviet forces with Romanian assistance. This change was made over the objections of Rundstedt, who was worried about the consequences

⁵² "OKH Deployment Directive of 31.1.41. Barbarossa", pp. 263-269 in Barry A. Leach, German Strategy Against Russia, 1939-1941, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 263-265.

to his Army Group if Soviet forces to the south of his drive were not pinned down by the activities of allied troops. A hidden flaw in German planning came from the different concepts of operations held by Hitler and the Army. While the Army believed that the principal objective was Moscow, Hitler was equally interested in Leningrad and the Ukrainian mines, mills, and fields. On the basis of a 1940 OKW study by Major-General Gerhard von Lossberg, he believed that progress towards Moscow beyond Smolensk ought to depend on the progress in the Baltics and Ukraine. Unresolved before the war, these differing concepts eventually caused a time-wasting clash of wills between the German Army command and Hitler during the summer of 1941.⁵³ Ultimately, in turn, this allowed events on the South-Western Front to shape the course of the Second World War.

The German intelligence services tried to generate a complete picture of Soviet forces and deployments. Stalin, afraid of provoking the Germans, assisted their work by ordering that German reconnaissance aircraft not be interfered with.⁵⁴ German officers were on occasion able to drive around in Soviet territory at will.⁵⁵ The German intelligence picture of the Soviet border regions was good enough to allow

⁵³ Leach, German Strategy, pp. 162-164; Albert Seaton, The German Army: 1933-1945, (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1982), p.164.

⁵⁴ The overflights were apparently tracked: Colonel-General Voronov, in command of Air Defense from May 1941, looked at the pattern of overflights; the commander of the Baltic Military District, on seeing these tracks, tried to institute a blackout in the areas the Germans found interesting. This blackout was countermanded by Stalin. However, this suggests that had the Soviets been more willing to believe the reports of an upcoming attack, they had the data to make educated guesses about the targets of the upcoming airstrikes. (John Erickson, The Road to Stalingrad, (London: Widenfield & Nicholson, 1983), pp. 82-83; N. N. Voronov, Na sluzhbe voennoi, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963), p. 173.)

⁵⁵ K. K. Rokossovsky, "Soldatskii Dolg", Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal, 3, 1989, p. 54.

careful targeting in the opening days of the war of airfields, railroads, telegraph and telephone lines, and staffs for Luftwaffe raids.

However, the intelligence picture was far from perfect. German signals intelligence was unable to make sense of the Soviet radio net. They were unable to place intercept stations on a broad enough axis to triangulate properly the location of Soviet transmitters. Soviet radio security procedures before the war were tight, and the Germans were often unable to crack their codes.⁵⁶ The Germans were unsure of the location of Soviet mechanized forces and misunderstood their structure. The Germans believed the largest Soviet formations to be motor-mechanized brigades, not division or corps, and underestimated their strength. These errors occurred in part because Soviet mechanized formations had recently been reorganized, and their actual strengths were often far below their establishment strengths. Additionally, the Soviets were probably attempting to deceive the Germans into overestimating Soviet forward rifle forces and underestimating and mislocating Soviet armored forces.⁵⁷ Possibly as a result of a Soviet deception effort, the Germans overestimated the strength of the border fortifications. In fact, the old (pre-1939) border fortifications had been largely stripped of their armaments, and the new ones were not yet complete.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ David Kahn, Hitler's Spies: German Military Intelligence in World War II, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978), p. 451.

⁵⁷ "The Private War Diary of Generaloberst Franz Halder: Chief of the General Staff of the Supreme Command of the German Army, 14 August 1939 to 24 September 1942", (Microfilm: Arlington: University Publications of America), June 21, 1941; David Glantz, ed., The Initial Period of War on the Eastern Front, (London: Frank Cass, 1993), p. 184-187, 248.

⁵⁸ David Glantz, Soviet Military Intelligence in War (Frank Cass: London, 1990), p. 44-45; Rokossovsky, "Soldatskii", p. 53. Rokossovsky's memoirs were originally censored; VIZ later published parts of the original, uncensored, version. The original edition of his memoirs mentions the incomplete state of the new defenses, but not the

Perhaps the most famous German error was the failure to discover the existence of the T-34 tank, which was deployed in frontier regions on June 22 and gave the Germans trouble as soon as they met it in combat.⁵⁹ A less well-known but possibly stranger failure was that of either not noticing, or not informing commanders of, the KV tank. The KV fought in the Winter War, and the Finns captured three in December 1939.⁶⁰ David Kahn states that the Germans knew of the KV, and a German intelligence report from the November 7, 1940 parade in Moscow may refer to the KV (the report discusses the up-gunning of a "Klim Voroshilov" tank from a short to a long 76mm cannon; since this refit occurred to both the KV and the T-26 at that time, however, this report may refer to a T-26 with Voroshilov's name painted on it).⁶¹ General Halder mentions a forty-two to forty-six ton model of Soviet tank with a 100mm gun on 30 March 1941, noting that their numbers were few; on 24 June 1941, he wrote of "the new Russian heavy tanks, reported to be armed with 8 cm guns and, according to another, but untrustworthy, observation from AGp. North, even 15 cm guns."⁶² The forty-five ton KV-1 had a 76mm (~8cm) cannon, while the fifty-three ton KV-2 was armed with a 15cm howitzer, suggesting that the reports Halder was disbelieving probably referred to some model of KV tank. Despite German disbelief, the reports turned out to be largely accurate.

stripping and destruction of the old. Some of the information in the book is also in the articles.

⁵⁹ While the Germans could not easily have discovered this information, the Soviets probably first tested several hundred prototype T-34s in the final stages of Khalkin-Gol (1939; these would probably have appeared in late August). (Kahn, Hitler's Spies, p. 458.)

⁶⁰ Trotter, A Frozen Hell, p. 82.

⁶¹ Kahn, Hitler's Spies, p. 458; "No. 292 b., Berlin, den 21.11.40, Vervollkommung der Schweren Kampfwagen", RG242, microfilm publication T-78, roll 573, frame 883.

⁶² Halder Diary, 30 March, 1941, 24 June, 1941.

The intelligence failures ensured that Army Group South's 27 infantry, 5 panzer, and 4 motorized divisions would meet some unpleasant surprises when they attacked into the neck of land between the Pripet marshes and the Carpathian mountains. The majority of these forces, about two thirds of the infantry and all of the motorized and tank divisions, were committed along the front from Liubachuv to Liuboml, roughly 180 kilometers.⁶³ Between them and their first objectives, Kiev and the Dnepr river crossings, lay several river barriers of lesser importance, most notably the Styr, the Southern Bug, and the Sluch. To the north of the German axis of advance on Kiev lay the Pripet Marshes, impenetrable to vehicles except on roads; to the south, the Carpathians at first limit the width of the front, but as one heads east towards Kiev, they curve away to the south. By the time one is past Rovno and Lutsk, the southern border of the operations area is the southern Ukrainian plain, which Romanian forces with a few German reinforcements were expected to capture.

The road net of the Northern Ukraine was thin by western European standards. Very few roads were asphalted. The better dirt roads were covered with a hard-rolled layer of gravel; both German and Soviet sources agree that they were appallingly dusty when dry and bottomless trenches of gluey mud after a heavy rain - such as occurred every few weeks.⁶⁴ The Soviet rail net, while not dense, was well built, well

⁶³ Map: "Gruppirovka Voisk Storona Na 22 Iuniia 1941 g. i Zamisel Nemetsko-Fashistkovo Komandovaniya"; inclusion in I. A. Gerasimov, et. al, Krasnoznamennii kievskii: Ocherki Istorii Krasnoznamennovo Kievskovo Voenno-Okruga (1919-1988), (Kiev: Politizdat Ukraini, 1989).

⁶⁴ Rudolph Sitzenich, MS# D-103, "132nd Infantry Division, Geo-Military Description of the Western Ukraine, The Russian Soldier", Foreign Military Studies Series, Office of the Chief of Military History, RG 319, NARA Washington (the Foreign Military Studies, all in RG 319 etc., will hereafter be noted as simply FMSS), pp. 2-5; Max Bork, MS# T-7, "Comments on Russian Railroads and Highways", FMSS, pp. 6-7; [no author listed], MS# B-266, "Combat in the East: Experiences of

maintained, and generally well run. It was also built in a broad 5' gauge - forcing the Germans, who used a narrower-gauge system, either to capture vast amounts of Soviet rolling stock and engines, or to convert the rails as they advanced, a laborious procedure.⁶⁵ This, together with the bad roads, created a logistical nightmare for invaders. The Germans faced not only difficult terrain, but a defense that was enough to slow their drive, inflict significant casualties, and throw off the schedule for capturing Kiev and the Dnepr River crossings. This delay, in turn, was fundamental to the crucial strategic decisions Hitler made in August 1941.

This is not to say that the Red Army's defense was perfect. Neither Soviet plans, training, nor preparations were beyond criticism: unrealistic thinking marred planning; deficiencies in material and a lack of trained officers and men crippled preparations; and all of these were compounded by Stalin's refusal to let the army mobilize in a timely fashion.

German Tactical and Logistical Units in Russia", FMSS, pp. 57, 91; Strakhov, "Na voenno-avtomobilnykh dorogakh", p. 68.

The Germans may be exaggerating the condition of the roads. Strakhov curses them less strongly than the German sources do. All - both German and Soviet - agree that in the (in)famed "rasputitsa" (mud season), Soviet roads were mediocre. On the other hand, one of the periods of swiftest German advance on the South-Western Front coincided with a major July rainstorm, and the Germans often credit anything but the Soviet Army for their defeats. (The Soviets, with a bit more justification, tend to try to credit nothing but themselves.) On both sides, judging where truth slides into self-defense is very difficult. The German sources also mention numerous means of avoiding the roads when they were bad - such as constructing corduroy roads, or finding more solid ground. The single best method, apparently, was to have tanks smash down paths through fields of sunflowers; such paths apparently stood up well to the pounding of vehicular traffic.

⁶⁵ Bork, MS# T-7, pp. 2-4; Block, Paul, MS# P-198 Supplement 1, "The Destruction and Repair of Railways in Soviet Russia", FMSS, pp. 9-12.

Soviet commanders generally assumed that the next war would begin with up to two weeks of limited scale engagements in the frontier zone, followed by major clashes once the combatants had mobilized. This assumption persisted despite the evidence of 1939-1940 that Germany had a marked predilection for surprise attacks with a fully mobilized army. It also survived the Soviet General Staff's declaration in the 1940 Operational Dictionary that future wars would begin without warning, with the combatants fighting in whatever state they found themselves in.⁶⁶ The logic behind these views was odd. If neither side had mobilized when a war broke out, then both the "come-as-you-are" and the "no big initial battles" assumptions go together. But if one side intends to provoke a war, it makes little sense to do so while less or no better prepared than the enemy. If one intends to deter attack, the same logic applies. In any case, the German preference was obvious, and it makes sense to fight from as fully mobilized a state as possible.

The Soviets expected Armies to require seven days for mobilization of reserves, and Fronts fifteen; rear area units were to be mobilized later than combat units.⁶⁷ Units in the second echelon of armies or fronts near the border were already near wartime strength. They were expected to need three to four days to reach the border.⁶⁸ Formations along the frontier were intended to

cover the mobilization, concentration, and deployment of the front's troops; firmly holding the defensive works of the fortified regions, not to allow the enemy onto Soviet territory, and to destroy penetrating groups with counterattacks of mechanized corps; not to permit the penetration of

⁶⁶ Pastukhovskii, "Razvertivanie operativnogo tyla", p. 18; V. A. Anfilov, Nachalo Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini (22 Iunya - Seredina Iulya 1941 goda): Voenno-Istoricheskii Ocherk, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1962), p. 32.

⁶⁷ Pastukhovskii, "Razvertivanie operativnogo tyla", p. 19.

⁶⁸ V. V. Platonov, Oni pervymi prinyali udar, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1969), p. 6.

enemy aviation onto Soviet territory; to ensure to safety of objects and works of military and state significance....⁶⁹

Soviet planners expected the fighting to be light in the initial weeks, and some in the higher command overestimated their own capabilities; hence, they officially expected the covering armies to hold the Germans close to the border. Once mobilization was completed and the armies from the interior had arrived, the combined force was expected to shift to the offensive.⁷⁰

In theory, the fronts and armies were expected to have worked out the 1941 Defense Plan by the middle of March.⁷¹ The plans were to include maps, text explanations, schedules of movement of units to the border, air defense plans, engineering and communications organization, tables for coordination with the Air Force, information regarding which border units specific reserve forces were to relieve, and the sites to be guarded by the NKVD. According to the plan, units on the border would have the following densities per kilometer: 3.9 light machine guns, 1.5 medium machine guns, 2.5 guns or mortars, about 50 infantrymen, and 1 37mm AA gun every 10 kilometers.⁷² The basic plan suffered from serious problems. It did not consider the possibility of a surprise attack or the need for a deep defense.⁷³ Yet the German style of war rested on a deep-driving surprise attack, while the peacetime TOE level of

⁶⁹ Quoted in: I. I. Yakoblenko, "O prikritii gosudarstvennoi granitsi nakanune Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini (po opytu Kievskogo Osobogo Voennogo Okruga)", VIZ, 5, 1987, p. 85.

⁷⁰ Yu. G. Perechnev, "O nekotorykh problemakh podgotovki strani i Vooruzhenykh Sil k otrazheniyu fashistskoi agressii", VIZ, 4, 1988, p. 46; N. I. Kazakov, Nad kartoi bylykh srazhenii, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1971), p. 58.

⁷¹ Yakoblenko, "O prikritii", p. 85.

⁷² Ibid, p. 85-86.

⁷³ Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, p. 141. Intended anti-tank densities are not provided.

Red Army units was only 70percent of manpower and 80percent of weaponry.⁷⁴ Optimistic projections of the nature of the upcoming war and about their own capabilities generated incorrect conclusions for preparations. The defense plan was far removed from the doctrine outlined in 1940, lacking density and often having little tactical depth. If a military district was prepared, it would have significant operational depth from deploying part of each army's and front's strength in the deeper portions of its zone of defense and from the troops deploying from the interior to the border. Caught unprepared, however, a district's forces were simply dispersed.

To make matters worse, this plan was often not actually worked out and understood by units. After the war, surviving commanders filled out questionnaires regarding their experiences before the war and during its early days. When asked whether he knew the details of the defense plan, M. A. Purkaev, Chief of Staff of the Kiev Special Military District, claimed that his staff had finished the plan in April and passed it to army staffs in early May. He stated that all units had their orders by June 1. However, the 15th Rifle Corps commander reported having seen the planning documents and agreed that he understood their general outline - but also said that he was not permitted to keep these documents. This would scarcely contribute to the implementation of the plan in detail. Meanwhile, his division commanders reported having only vague notions about the defense plan. A rifle division commander in the 26th Army simultaneously claimed that there was and was not a plan! Clearly Bagramyan, Chief of Operations for the Kiev Special Military District, was wrong to claim that the plans were detailed and extended to the regimental level near the border. Indeed, it is clear that the plan was transmitted below the army staff level in a highly

⁷⁴ Anfilov, Nachalo Velikoi Otechestvennoi, p. 24.

confused fashion.⁷⁵ If all these reports are accurate, front commanders felt that the plan was complete, corps commanders felt it was in process, and division commanders thought it did not exist.

Nor were the armies equipped in the manner that planning assumed they would be. The Red Army was undergoing restructuring, and the theoretical and actual strengths of its formations were not identical. The mechanized corps are a good example of this phenomenon. The Soviets began forming eight mechanized corps (modeled after the German formation, each with two tank and one motorized divisions) in 1940, and another twenty-one in the spring of 1941. Each was intended to consist of 1,031 tanks, of which 420 were to be T-34s and 126 were to be KVs.⁷⁶ Of the eight mechanized corps in the Kiev Special Military District in June 1941, two, the 4th and 8th, had been formed in the fall of 1940, the rest in April 1941.⁷⁷ These mechanized corps were not necessarily as formidable as they might seem. Tank production was sufficient to equip only half of the 29 mechanized corps that were created - on average, each mechanized corps had 53 percent of their establishment tank strength. The older corps were more complete; the newly created 9th, 19th, and 24th Mechanized Corps had between 220 and 295 tanks each. As a whole, the Kiev Special Military District had 4,201 tanks (761 KV and T-34s, 3,440 other tanks), instead of its theoretical 8,248. This still provided a substantial numerical superiority of 5.6:1 against the 750 German tanks under Rundstedt's command. Only the 4th, 8th, 15th, and 19th

⁷⁵ V. P. Krikunov, "Frontoviki otvetili tak!", *VIZ*, 3, 1989, pp. 62-67.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 29; Glantz, *Soviet Military Operational Art*, p. 96; Glantz, "Mobilization and Force Structure", p. 307.

⁷⁷ "DOKLAD Narodnovo Kommissara Oboroni SSSR Leitenant-General Tankovykh Voisk, tovarishch Federenko, 5-ovo Avgusta, 1941 g.", in Krikunov, "Kuda", p. 37; Krikunov, V. P., "'Prostaya Arifmetika' V. V. Shlykova", *VIZ*, 4, 1989, p. 44.

Mechanized Corps had received any of the superb KV and T-34 tanks, which had entered serial production during the last 18 months.⁷⁸

Nor was the Soviet edge simply numerical. Much of the German tank force was obsolescent. Of the 4,247 operating tanks and assault guns in the German army in June 1941, 1,072 were Pz-II, and another 754 were Czech 38(t) tanks, both technically obsolete and declared unfit for frontline use as of January 1942. Of the remainder, 1,440 were Pz-III, 517 Pz-IV, and the rest either assault guns (Stg. III), command, or flamethrower tanks.⁷⁹ Thus, roughly half of Germany's tanks were out of date, and the other half were no better than the average Soviet tank.

The myth of the technical inferiority of most Soviet tanks is persistent in Western and Soviet writings.⁸⁰ Rokossovsky, for example, wrote that the German tanks were "far superior to our outdated T-26 and BT models."⁸¹ In comparison to the most modern tanks, the new Soviet T-34 and KV, Rokossovsky was correct to call them outdated. However, this term implies an unwarranted comparison to the German

⁷⁸ Gurov, "Boyovie deistvii sovyetskykh voisk na Yugo-Zapadnom napravlenii v nachalnom periode voini", *VIZ*, 8, 1988, p. 36; Krikunov, "Kuda", p. 29-30; Rokossovsky, "Soldatskii dolg", p. 62.

⁷⁹ Mueller-Hillebrand, "German Tank-Strength and Loss Statistics", MS# P-059, prepared for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Special Staff U. S. Army, by the Historical Division, European Command [no date]; Appendix 1.

⁸⁰ One of its most common features is the division of Soviet tank strength into "new" (T-34/KV) and "obsolete" (all others). This division is retained here because the qualitative difference is significant: the T-34 and KV outclassed everything the Germans had, while the other Soviet tanks were similar to the Wehrmacht's.

It is unclear if the idea arises largely from Soviet claims of inferiority or from both sides; but both Guderian and Erickson mention it, and only recently has it been challenged by either side. (Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, p. 118; Erickson, *Soviet High Command*, p. 559.)

⁸¹ K. K. Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), p. 22.

tank park, much of which was also quite old. One Soviet historian, Meltiukhov, concluded that the BT-7, the most recent of the "outdated" tanks, roughly equaled the MK.III and MK.IV in potential effectiveness, while the older Soviet tanks were no more out of date than many of the German tanks they faced.⁸² Moreover, the newest Soviet tanks, the KV and T-34, completely outclassed everything the Germans had in the field. Caliber of cannon and centimeters of armor, however, are not the only indicators of a tank's performance in the field. Better training or communications equipment can be of greater significance, and in these crucial areas Soviet crews were markedly inferior to German in 1941-1942.

Most Soviet tank crews were unfamiliar with procedures for operation, maintenance and repair of the tanks, especially the KVs and T-34s. Visiting a KSMD training ground in early 1941, Colonel-General Mikhail Nikolaievich Kirponos was shown a T-34 and was quite impressed. On discovering that a lieutenant was driving the tank, he asked if any NCOs could operate it. None could.⁸³ Such failings crippled not only operation but maintenance. The "exceptionally poor" maintenance abilities of the crews, combined with the inadequacy of peacetime repair facilities, run by "lazy" commanders, created enormous problems. On 22 June 1941, 29percent of the tanks in the Kiev Special Military District required major overhaul and a further 44percent required shop time for lesser repairs.⁸⁴ Estimates of the average life of the engines vary between 4 and 150 hours: all sources agree that such engines were not suited for any prolonged operation.⁸⁵ Because of these problems, Rokossovsky, commanding

⁸² Meltiukhov, "22 June", p. 23.

⁸³ Krikunov, "Kuda", p. 29; "Federenko", in Krikunov, "Kuda", p. 39; Glantz, Initial Period of War, p. 48.

⁸⁴ Krikunov, "Kuda", p. 29; "Federenko", in Krikunov, "Kuda", p. 39. Quotes are from the appropriate sections of the Federenko report.

⁸⁵ Krikunov, "Kuda", p. 29; Erickson, Road to Stalingrad, p. 46.

the 9th Mechanized Corps, was forced to curtail training to ensure that some tanks would be operational in the event of war.⁸⁶ Thus the Red Army possessed a vast tank park, which included some superb designs. Qualitative problems, however, prevented much of the armor from being used with effect. Indeed, more than half of the Soviet armor on the South-Western Front was lost not to the enemy but to inadequate maintenance and repair.

The Soviets, however, did possess one real edge for mechanized warfare: in 1939-1941 Soviet rifle divisions were intended to have thirty 45mm anti-tank guns - a caliber sufficient to threaten seriously the German tanks of the day.⁸⁷ Allowing for production problems, each division probably had at least five to fifteen guns, although frontline infantry divisions of the Kiev Special Military District had an average of 55 guns.⁸⁸ By comparison, British infantry divisions in 1940 had in theory twenty-four (in practice rather fewer) 2-pounder anti-tank guns, which were ineffective weapons except at very close range.⁸⁹ In addition, the Soviets fielded ten motorized anti-tank brigades, each equipped with 120 76mm and 85mm anti-tank guns, several thousand anti-tank mines, and truck transport. The formation of these forces began in May and they were intended to be completely formed by July 1, 1941; by the beginning of the war these units had in fact received their guns, but often little (20 percent) of their transport. The Kiev Special Military District received five of these units, which, when they functioned as intended, proved able to demolish German Panzer attacks or prevent

⁸⁶ Rokossovsky, Duty, p. 11.

⁸⁷ Glantz, Soviet Military Operational Art, p. 94.

⁸⁸ Gurov, "Boyovoe deistviya", p. 33.

⁸⁹ W. E. Duncan, H. F. Ellis, R. H. Banks, Norman Scarle, The Royal Artillery: Commemoration Book 1939-1945, (London: Royal Army Benevolent Fund, 1950), p. 57, 571-572.

them from operating in specific areas.⁹⁰ Indeed, judging from the performance of the 1st Anti-Tank Brigade in the first week of the war, these formations were the most effective anti-armor weapon the Soviets possessed when well-supplied and well-led. The anti-tank power of the Red Army matched that of any other army on earth, and since the Soviets had carefully considered the problem of anti-tank defense, they were more likely to use their guns effectively.

However, most of the bright spots in Soviet preparedness lay in the future. Once the fortified regions had been completed, formations fully outfitted, and training up to par, the Red Army would have been a match for any invader. None of this was true in 1941. Yet, while the problems in these spheres were quite serious, the biggest problem the Red Army faced in 1941 was Stalin. All Soviet plans assumed that the Red Army would receive sufficient warning to bring its front line units to full readiness before a war broke out. This warning was denied them because Stalin chose not to believe numerous intelligence reports that the Germans would attack.

Instead, as war approached, Red Army units were in peacetime deployments, not at full strength, and dispersed into separate training camps for infantry, tanks, and artillery. Stalin's refusal to recognize the situation rippled through the command structure of the Kiev Special Military District as successive levels of commanders tried to mobilize their units. At some point in early June, Kirponos attempted to mobilize and deploy his frontline units. The NKVD, however, caught wind of this. On June 10, Kirponos received a message from the Red Army Chief of Staff, G. K. Zhukov, demanding that if troops had been deployed, as reported by the NKVD, the move had to be countermanded at once. The next day, Zhukov put out a strongly worded order

⁹⁰ Glantz, Initial Period, pp. 21-22; N. E. Medvedev, "Artilleriya RVGK v pervii period voini", VIZ, 11, 1987.

forbidding any provocative acts. However, Kirponos and Purkaev were still worried about a German attack. They were more persistent than the commanders of the other major western military districts: the Belorussian (Western Front), where Pavlov apparently did not take the threat seriously, and the Baltic (North Western Front), where Meretskov, while worried, was timid in evading restrictions, presumably fearing the very real threat of NKVD reprisal if caught. The South-Western Front, using persistence and creative interpretation, wound up better prepared for the German attack, which helped it fare better than its compatriots.⁹¹ Some of its energy in this regard may be due to Zhukov, who commanded the Front from June 1940 to January 1941. Purkaev was his Chief of Staff, though Zhukov's memoirs do not indicate that Purkaev was his protégé. Furthermore, Zhukov brought in two commanders who had distinguished themselves at Khalkin-Gol. One, I. I. Fedyuninskii, commanded a regiment at Khalkin-Gol and the 15th Rifle Corps on June 22. The other, M. I. Potapov, commanded the 5th Army on June 22, had not only arranged the coordination between front line and rear service units in the build-up and planning for the Soviet counteroffensive at Khalkin-Gol, but also commanded the very successful southern wing of that counterattack.

On 13 and 14 June, Purkaev asked Kirponos for permission to mobilize the troops. Kirponos said no, undoubtedly remembering Zhukov's order; however, Purkaev claims that he talked Zhukov into authorizing the movement of troops to the edges, but not into, the Fortified Zones.⁹² Thus, the Kiev Special Military District staff had twice tried to evade the mobilization restrictions, with partial success.

⁹¹ V. P. Krikunov, "Frontoviki otvetili tak!", *VIZ*, 5, 89, pp. 28-29.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 26.

On June 18 the Kiev Special Military District staff forbade 12th Army to fire on German aircraft. On the other hand, at this time it ordered the 8th Mechanized Corps to scout all of the roads leading from its peacetime deployment area to the border, while the 17th Rifle Corps was ordered to move to the border "as if on mobile camps", conducting training, occupying the rearward portions of defenses, working on those defenses, and preparing ammunition for issue to the troops. On June 18, the entire 37th Rifle Corps was ordered to Peremyshl, a city on the border, for training. Similarly, while most artillery units in the Kiev Special Military District were separated from their parent formations at training grounds, 9th Mechanized Corps commander Rokossovsky told the Kiev Special Military District Staff that his gunners could be trained in his Corp's peacetime deployment area. As a result, when the war broke out, the 9th Mechanized Corps had its artillery available without mixups or delays. The extent to which units evaded readiness restrictions varied with the energy and willingness to take risks of the unit's commanders and the attitude of their army commanders. Units in the 5th and 6th Armies seem to have mobilized to the fullest extent possible. Conversely, when the General Staff ordered a division of the 26th Army to deploy, that Army countermanded the order.⁹³

Zhukov and Timoshenko also pressed Stalin to allow deployments to proceed, and on occasion received permission to prepare. On June 19, all of the western military districts were ordered to complete the following tasks. By July 1, all vehicles, airstrips, and aircraft were to be camouflaged: "It is categorically forbidden to place aircraft in line or dense formations." By July 5, every air basing zone within 500 kilometers of the border was to have constructed eight to ten fake airfields with forty to

⁹³ Ibid, p. 27; Rokossovsky, Duty, p. 9.

fifty fake airplanes each. By July 15, all supply dumps, workshops, and vehicle parks were to have been camouflaged.⁹⁴

Unfortunately, these orders came too late. Even with the insistent urging of Timoshenko and Zhukov, the Red Army was given full permission to prepare for war only at 12:30 AM on June 22. Order No. 1 warned of a possible German attack, ordered all units to come to full readiness and occupy defensive positions, but not to call up reserves, and above all, not to respond to provocations. Soviet formations required at least thirteen hours' notice for full preparation⁹⁵, but these orders had not yet reached many units when the German air and artillery bombardment opened at 3:15 AM.⁹⁶ Ready or not, the Red Army was at war.

⁹⁴ V. R. Zhuravlev, A. S. Anufriev, N. M. Emelyanova, "Pervie dni voini v dokumentakh", VIZ, 5, 1989, p. 43.

⁹⁵ Robert Savushkin, "In the Tracks of Tragedy: On the 50th Anniversary of the start of the Great Patriotic War", Journal of Soviet Military Studies, June, 1991 (Vol. 4, #2), p. 218.

⁹⁶ Zhuravlev et al, "Pervie dni voini", p. 43-44; John Erickson, "The Soviet Response to Surprise Attack: Three Directives, 22 June 1941", Soviet Studies, Volume 23, No. 4, April 1972, pp. 522-540.

Chapter II

The Dubno Counterattack

The German onslaught on June 22, 1941 caught Soviet forces by surprise. A thoroughly planned and efficiently executed bombardment devastated the Soviet defenses and war machine while the Wehrmacht, at the height of its power, surged deep across the border. However, despite spectacular successes, the Germans did not achieve the aims of Barbarossa. After the war, German generals tended to blame bad weather and vast distances for their failure. These explanations ignore the real culprit: it was the Red Army which stopped the Germans from marching to the Urals and ultimately threw them back to Berlin.

The best demonstration of the base from which the Red Army began this process is the South-Western Front's resistance to Army Group South during the initial months of the war. This campaign - the massive meeting engagement that developed along the route to Kiev, the 6th and 12th army's attempts to avoid encirclement, and the defense of Kiev and the Dnepr - show the best performance of which the Red Army was capable at the time. This performance was far from perfect, but it was respectable. On the one hand, it shows that the best Soviet commanders of the day overestimated what their forces could achieve: moreover, these forces were incapable of producing the major coordinated counteroffensive upon which Soviet strategy relied. On the other hand, Soviet forces were capable of maintaining a tough defense despite heavy losses, sufficient to derail the German operational schedule.

The initial German bombardment concentrated on Soviet air power, command, communications, and logistics targets - all of which were both vital and vulnerable, and among the weakest links in the Red Army. The Soviet Air Force lost 1,200 aircraft by

noon - 277 at 23 airfields in the South-Western Front alone.⁹⁷ The Luftwaffe also bombed telegraph cables and communications centers, while Brandenburg commandos cut lines, sent false messages, and attempted to assassinate key commanders. Many permanent telegraph lines were destroyed and with them went Soviet radial signals networks. Because of this destruction, combined with Soviet lack of experience in radio, Red Army communications at all levels of command became "frightfully difficult". Compounding the problem, most staffs had not occupied their command posts when war broke out. Even though the Kiev Special Military District staff was an exception to this rule, it did not have reliable communications with anyone until the 24th, and signals problems persisted thereafter.⁹⁸ These problems prevented the swift transmission of orders and information. This reduced the speed with which commanders could react to events and the amount of knowledge available to guide their decisions. That, in turn, crippled coherent responses to the German invasion.

Simultaneously, the Luftwaffe pounded the Soviet rail net. Across the entire front, it destroyed over 100 railway installations in the first two days of the war, and

⁹⁷ Erickson, "Soviet Response to Surprise Attack", p. 541-542; P. T. Kunitskii, "Vosstanovlenie prorrannogo fronta oboroni v 1941 godu", VIZ, 7, 1988, p. 63; V. A. Anfilov, Bessmertnii podvig, (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), p. 168; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, p. 153.

⁹⁸ Erickson, "The Soviet Response to Surprise Attack", p. 532-533; N. I. Gapich, "Nekotorie mysli po voprosam upravleniya i svyazi", VIZ, 7, 1965, p. 48, 53-54; A. Grechko, "25 let tomu nazad", VIZ, 6, 1966, p. 11; Lariokhin, Tret'iak, "Sovershenstvovaniya radiosvyaz", p. 68; I. T. Peresypkin, "Voiska svyazi v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini", VIZ, 4, 1968, p. 36; Peresypkin, Sviaz' v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini, p. 29-31, 76; I. T. Peresypkin, "Sviaz' Generalnogo shtaba", VIZ, 4, 1971, p. 20; Rokossovsky, A Soldier's Duty, p. 11-14; I. I. Fedyuninsky, Podnyatie po trevoze, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1964), p. 14 (assassination attempt by commandos), p. 16-17 (false parachutist alert); I. Kh. Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas' voina, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1971), p. 84, 88-94 (quote from p. 89).

thereafter raided, on average, 33 railway stations per day until December 1941.⁹⁹ This activity, however, also hampered the Germans. A German railway officer complained after the war that the Luftwaffe failed to coordinate its activities with his organization, thus flattening targets which the railway troops wished to capture intact, while failing to prevent the Soviet evacuation of locomotives and equipment. The Soviet railway demolition campaign began within the first few days, and rapidly increased in scope and intensity to become a major hindrance to German railway operations; "The nature and scope of the destruction was such that the restoration of any section to service within a few days was out of the question." The destruction wreaked by the Luftwaffe and the Soviets, combined with the difficulties of converting the rail to German gauge, hampered the German railway supply effort almost from the first day of the war.¹⁰⁰

Nonetheless, the German interdiction campaign also hampered the movement of Soviet troops and supply during the first days of the war. This magnified the effects of the initial loss of command and control, further slowing Soviet reactions to the German assault. Simultaneously, the Soviets faced chaos of their own making. Most Soviet formations expected to receive their motor vehicles from civilian organizations upon mobilization. This system functioned poorly. For example, despite a great deal of effort, Rokossovsky's 9th Mechanized Corps received almost none of its assigned vehicles - so Rokossovsky expropriated the nearly 200 trucks held in the nearby Front

⁹⁹ F. F. Gusarov, L. A. Butakov, "Tekhnicheskoe prikritiye zheleznnykh dorog (po opytu pervogo perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini)", *VIZ*, 4, 1988, p. 51.

¹⁰⁰ "MS # P-198, Supplement 1, The Destruction and Repair of Railways in Soviet Russia", Major General Paul Block, pp. 13-29; he also notes that the standard Soviet train weighed 2,000 tons, while the standard German train on Russian track weighed 850 tons, but ran faster. (p. 10.)

transport reserve.¹⁰¹ The Southern Front (formerly Odessa Military District) faced enormous problems in this sphere. Because no vehicles had registration marks, chaos reigned. Civilians seized vehicles to evacuate and officers requisitioned others for personal use, clogging roads and crippling military transport. It took the Southern Front several weeks to overcome the mess, even when assisted by the man who had run the automotive supply service in the Winter War.¹⁰² The situation in other Fronts was probably worse.

Furthermore, since the notification of war was received haphazardly, peacetime regulations and bureaucracy crippled the acquisition of equipment. Rokossovsky obtained fuel and ammunition for the 9th Mechanized Corps over the resistance of a quartermaster only through "a judicious use of authority, pleading, and duly undersigned receipts".¹⁰³ Yet Rokossovsky was a particularly energetic commander; his Corps required only ten hours to get underway, and he mobilized (at considerable personal risk) on the strength of an unconfirmed order received fifteen minutes before the war began. In theory, Soviet formations needed thirteen hours to mobilize. Second echelon formations with less energetic commanders no doubt took longer, waited for confirmation of orders, and did not move far in the first day.¹⁰⁴ However, some of the South-Western Front's first echelon divisions did mobilize very rapidly, and met the Germans on the border. While the divisions were not in contact with each other, they forced the Germans to deal with organized resistance from the first hours of the

¹⁰¹ Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, p. 10-11; Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas' voina*, p. 135 regarding Rokossovsky's expropriation of the trucks.

¹⁰² Strakhov, "Na voenno-avtomobilnykh dorogakh", *VIZ*, 3, 1964, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰³ Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Savushkin, "In the Tracks of Tragedy", p. 218.

war, slowing the pace of German tactical penetration and consequently hampering their pace at the operational level.

Railroads and highways were interdicted and both communications nets and automotive transport were in chaos. Thus, the Red Army's decentralized supply service, being dependent upon smooth mobilization and effective communications and transport, promptly collapsed. While some supplies did move, many formations did not get the materials they needed when they needed them, and ran out of fuel and ammunition. Operational supply levels varied from poor in the South-Western and Southern Fronts to disastrous in the Western Front. While the transfer of responsibility for transport and supply from Fronts to Armies helped the situation, attempts to coordinate the existing system as a whole failed. Each Front and Army had to requisition supply and delivery independently, and since each devised a different system, the strategic rear was plunged into chaos. The Red Army moved swiftly to correct this problem, however. At the end of July, a centralized organization was set up to handle logistics at and above the army level; this system, with minor revisions, served for the rest of the war.¹⁰⁵ This is an important and early example of a trait that helped turn the war in the Soviet favor: their willingness to recognize the weaknesses in a system, to study it, and to experiment with practical solutions.

Despite all these Soviet failures, the Germans were denied complete success in Ukraine on June 22, 1941. The Kiev Special Military District Staff's alarm about the German build-up apparently percolated down the chain of command with effective results. In particular, the commander of the 87th Rifle Division, stationed precisely on the main axis of the German attack, moved his division into the Vladimir-Volynskii

¹⁰⁵ G. P. Pastukhovskii, "Razvertivannie operativnogo tyla v nachalnoi period voini", *VIZ*, 6, 1988, pp. 20-26; Skryabin, Medvedev, "O tyle frontov", pp. 35-38.

Fortified Region a few days before the war. Ordered back into peacetime deployment on the 20 June, he nonetheless left forward detachments (totaling 1,500 infantrymen plus 3 artillery batteries) inside the Fortified Region. On the outbreak of war, these detachments and a counterattack by the remainder of the 87th enabled the division to deploy into its assigned areas.¹⁰⁶ Its neighboring divisions also occupied their positions. While these divisions were not in contact with each other, by providing organized resistance on Army Group South's cutting edge they slowed and blunted the German drive. Army Group North penetrated 65 kilometers on the first day and Army Group Center 55 kilometers, both on sizable fronts. Army Group South advanced only around 25 kilometers on narrow fronts.¹⁰⁷ Soviet resistance was not wholly successful, as German forces flowed around the frontier forces. The 87th was pocketed on June 23rd; its remnants broke out on the 25th and raided their way east.¹⁰⁸

The organized resistance on the frontier was backed by more along potential German exploitation routes. Moving in behind the 87th Rifle Division on the 22nd was the 1st Anti-Tank Brigade, with orders to cover the deployment of the 22 and 19 Mechanized Corps. It deployed near Voinitsa to block the road from Vladimir-Volynskii to Lutsk. Rolling out of Vladimir-Volynsky on the 23rd, the 14th Panzer ran into elements of the brigade and was immediately stopped.¹⁰⁹ The brigade was eventually outflanked from the south by German infantry, and forced to pull back in the evening. Nonetheless, it retained its integrity and continued to block 14th Panzer's

¹⁰⁶ N. M. Ramanichev, "Vedenie strelkovoi diviziei oboronitel'nogo boya pri otrazhenii hastupleniya prevoskhodyashchikh sil protivnika v nachalnom periode voini", *VIZ*, 7, 1986, pp. 41-45.

¹⁰⁷ Savushkin, "In the Tracks of a Tragedy", p. 223.

¹⁰⁸ Gerasimov, *Krasnoznamennii kievskii*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 162; Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas'*, pp. 105-6, 127, Glantz, *Initial Period of War*, pp. 255-267.

advance, which was the northern of the two routes available to the Germans around the surrounded 87th Rifle Division.

These forces fulfilled their minimum strategic function of covering the deployment of units further to the rear. The decisive actions of these Soviet commanders forced the Germans to fight through Soviet defenses manned by the equivalent of a corps. This, in turn, denied them the chance for deep strategic penetrations into the Soviet rear, and gave the South-Western Front time to mobilize its formations more completely than elsewhere. The Soviet command and control system, moreover, could better handle the slower pace of German operations. As these battles proceeded, delaying the German drive, the Red Army was making decisions that would determine the shape of the battle in Ukraine over the next week.

Stavka (the Soviet High Command) was out of touch with the real situation because of damage to the communications network. Late on the 22nd, it ordered the South-Western Front to launch an immediate concentric attack with all of its forces, some of which were deploying from positions hundreds of kilometers behind the front line, with the objective of capturing Lublin (100 km inside German-occupied Poland) and encircling Army Group South - within 36 hours! At South-Western Front Headquarters, it was obvious that the order was ridiculous.¹¹⁰

South-Western Front headquarters handled this issue according to its standard style of making controversial decisions.¹¹¹ Chief of Operations Bagramyan received

¹¹⁰ Erickson, "The Soviet Response to Surprise Attack", pp. 549-552; Zhukov, G. K., Reminiscences and Reflections, volume 1, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), pp. 285-286; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 113-118.

¹¹¹ Idem. This sequence is called "typical" because a similar sequence of events transpires in every case that Bagramyan records discussions about making plans (albeit with Vashugin absent after his suicide in late June, and Purkaev absent after his transfer to command of 60th Army in late July.) Interestingly, Bagramyan, the Chief of the

Stavka's order, disliked it, and gave it to Chief of Staff Purkaev. After reading it, and showing it to Kirponos, Purkaev suggested a better course of action - in this case, retreat to the old frontier fortifications and preparation for a counterblow from behind them. In hindsight, this was one of the best options available to the South-Western Front. Kirponos, as yet uncertain, called in the Front's political officer, Vashugin, to discuss changing Stavka's order. Vashugin did not like Purkaev's plan. Accusing Purkaev of defeatism, Vashugin declared that orders must be followed to the letter. Purkaev responded to these charges by explaining the impossibility of the order in relentless detail. Chastened, Vashugin nonetheless refused to accept simple retreat. Kirponos listened to the whole exchange, and pointed out the flaws in both points of view: he felt that Stavka's order was out of the question, and told Vashugin so, but also felt that Purkaev's plan was too defensive and bad for morale. He ordered a much more limited series of counterattacks than Stavka's, using five mechanized and three rifle corps to pinch off the German spearhead by attacking it simultaneously on both flanks. This plan was acceptable to both Purkaev and Vashugin, and to Zhukov, who arrived shortly thereafter as Stavka's representative and approved it in Stavka's name.¹¹²

These decisions came from some of the best brains in the Red Army at the time, being made by Zhukov, the best Soviet commander of the war, Kirponos and Purkaev, who turned out to be able officers, at the only functioning Front command of the day. Unfortunately, their plan, while better than Stavka's, was itself flawed. It shows the

Operations Staff for the South-Western Front at the time, does not note any personal involvement in this exchange (or most others, for that matter) other than receiving the order, reading it in disbelief, and taking it to Purkaev. Presumably Bagramyan and his staff were responsible for turning Kirponos' directives into plans, but on this subject he is again strangely silent.

¹¹² Bagramyan, pp. 113-118.

unrealistic optimism of even the best Soviet commanders in the early days of the war - expecting that their forces would maneuver and fight in a well coordinated and fully effective fashion. Several factors prevented the South-Western Front from mounting the coordinated blow as planned. German interdiction slowed the movement of troops in the interior, while the poor road net hindered both sides' mobility.¹¹³ Some of the Soviet corps had long approach marches, multiplied in some cases by confusion of chains of command. In particular, the 8th Mechanized Corps moved back and forth between the 22nd and 26th as contradictory orders came in from South-Western Front and 6th Army. In the process, it drove 500 kilometers - rather further than the average life of its tank's engines.¹¹⁴ The lengthy approach marches combined with the poor levels of maintenance and crew training had a catastrophic effect on Soviet armored strength. 50 percent of the 8th Mechanized Corps' tanks broke down before entering battle (after four days), and few of them were ever recovered.¹¹⁵ This was probably true of all Soviet mechanized formations in June 1941 - as for every armored force on earth early in the war. During the drive on the Channel in 1940, German armor

¹¹³ M. Dorofeyev, "O nekotorykh prichinakh neudachnykh deistvii mekhanizirovannykh korpusov v nachalnom periode Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini", VIZ, 3, 1964, p. 40; Glantz, Initial Period of War, p. 259; Rokossovsky, A Soldier's Duty, p. 15.

¹¹⁴ Dorofeyev, "O nekotorykh prichinakh", p. 40; Krikunov, "Kuda dyelis' tanki?", VIZ, 11, 1988, p. 30; and "Conclusions on the Use and Actions of the 15th MK (From the short report of actions of mechanized formations of the front for the period from 22 June through 1 August 1941; Jan. 28, 1942", in Krikunov, "Kuda dyelis' tanki?", p. 36.

¹¹⁵ "Conclusions on the Use and Actions of the 15th MK", in Krikunov, "Kuda dyelis' tanki?", p. 36.

suffered nearly 50 percent losses to breakdowns, while British armor suffered 75 percent losses to the same cause.¹¹⁶

From June 23 the South-Western Front began counterattacking the German drive. These operations, initially conducted by the 15th and 22nd Mechanized Corps, were uncoordinated, and achieved only limited penetrations and subsequent withdrawals. The first few days of the war had already shown a number of Soviet weaknesses. Coordination between formations was difficult because of the breakdown in communications, which permitted the Germans to deal with Soviet forces piecemeal. Furthermore, as problems with repair and supply began to arise, Soviet units found themselves fighting with insufficient fuel, ammunition, spare parts, and equipment. On the other hand, on the South-Western Front the Soviet mobilization plan had unrolled sufficiently well to provide organized resistance. This let Soviet commanders plan more complex operations, while the Soviet forces pulled off local successes in both offense and defense. Despite the difficulties they faced, the Soviets were still able to attempt to carry out operations to foil the Germans with some measure of success.

Unfortunately, even the best Soviet commanders were often overly optimistic regarding the capabilities of their forces. Kirponos and Zhukov expected the initial counterattacks to deal significant blows to the Germans. Instead, they slowed the Germans slightly, crippled the 22nd Mechanized Corps, and locked the 15th Mechanized Corps into a series of running battles with German armored and infantry forces. Thus the Soviets were unable to use these corps in the main counterblow, although the delays imposed on the Germans may have bought the Soviets the time to assemble the forces for it. Moreover, the main counterattack, launched in the region of

¹¹⁶ Kenneth Macksey, Tank versus Tank: The Illustrated Story of Armored Battlefield Conflict in the Twentieth Century, (Toronto: Totem Books, 1988), p. 74.

Dubno from June 26 - June 30, was plagued by difficulties that helped deny the Soviets success.

By the end of June 25th, the 11th Panzer Division had penetrated to Dubno and was preparing to continue towards Ostrog. Meanwhile, 13th and 14th Panzer had pushed the Soviet 27th Rifle Corps out of Lutsk to the north. [Please refer to the Meeting Engagement map series.]¹¹⁷ Along the southern part of this area, the Soviet 15th Mechanized Corps was fighting German infantry and anti-tank forces and delaying elements of 16th Panzer penetrating towards Kozin and Kremenets on its eastern flank. The Soviet 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps were moving into positions northeast of the Lutsk-Dubno road, where their lead elements were engaging the Germans. Meanwhile, the 8th Mechanized Corps had completed its concentration around Brody, having already lost 400 tanks to mechanical failure. West of Lutsk, the 22nd Mechanized Corps was retreating to join the 27th Rifle Corps after a major battle with 13th Panzer

¹¹⁷ Data for the daily maps primarily drawn from Glantz, Initial Period, pp. 267-286; supporting details from Gerasimov, "Prigranichnoye srazheniie; Otkhod na liniyu ukrepyonnykh raionov" in map pack; Glantz, The Soviet Conduct of Tactical Maneuver, pp. 105-109; A. Vladimirskii, "Nekotorye voprosy provedeniya kontrudarov voiskami Yugo-Zapadnogo fronta 23 Iuniya - 2 Iulya 1941 goda", VIZ, 7, 1981, p. 23; Gurov, "Boyovie deistvii", p. 34; A. I. Evseev, "Opyt osushchestvleniya manevra s tselyu sosredotocheniya usilii protiv udarnoi gruppirovki protivnika v khode oboronitelnoi operatsii fronta", VIZ, 9, 1986, p. 13; Dorofeyev, "O nekotorykh prichinakh", p. 41; Thomas E. Griess, ed., Atlas for the Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean, (Avery Publishing Group, Inc., Wayne, year unlisted), pp. 19-20; John Keegan, ed., The Times Atlas of the Second World War, (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 56-59; MS #D-140, "Advance and Action of an Infantry Regiment From 22 June 1941 to January 1942", FMSS, RG 242. The smaller of the orientation maps is based on Donald W. Treadgold, Twentieth Century Russia, Westview Press, Boulder, 1990, p. 340; the larger is based off Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, "Prigranichnoye srazheniie; Otkhod na liniyu ukrepyonnykh raionov" in map pack.

on the 24th. East of Dubno, the 36th Rifle Corps was moving to block further German advance.¹¹⁸

The main Soviet counterattack began on June 26th. In the northeast the 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps were transferred from Front to 5th Army command in an attempt to enhance their coordination. They struck towards Dubno and the highway between Dubno and Lutsk. Immediately, problems of supply and communications proved to be a combat divider. For lack of transport, the 19th Mechanized Corps' motorized infantry division was unable to join in the attack. Its 43rd Tank Division penetrated to the outskirts of Dubno and the 40th Tank Division engaged the 11th Panzer Division northwest of the town, and took part of the road from Lutsk to Dubno. This initial success, however, was small in scale and had unfortunate consequences. In their attack, the divisions became separated by about ten kilometers and lost communication with each other. The Germans exploited this loss of cohesion with counterattacks by units of 13th Panzer. The 19th Mechanized Corps command, aware of these German operations, tried to hold its ground on the 27th but soon found it necessary to retreat in order to avoid encirclement.¹¹⁹

Rokossovsky's 9th Mechanized Corps, to the right of the 19th Mechanized Corps, attacked on June 26 to cut the Dubno-Lutsk road. It, too, lacked its infantry division - in this case, for a good reason: the 131st Motorized Division, moving swiftly on the trucks Rokossovsky took from Front Reserve, had been committed to the defense of Lutsk two days earlier. Rokossovsky's tank divisions were halted short of

¹¹⁸ Glantz, Initial Period, p. 269, 271; Dorofeyev, "O nekotorykh prichinakh", p. 40; Gurov, "Boyovoye deistviya", p. 38; Rokossovsky, A Soldier's Duty, p. 17.

¹¹⁹ A. Vladimirkii, A, "Nekotore voprosi provedeniya kontrudarov voiskami Yugo-Zapadnogo fronta 23 Iunya - 2 Iulya 1941 goda", VIZ, 7, 1981, p. 25-26; Glantz, Initial Period, pp. 272-278; Gerasimov, pp. 170-171; Anfilov, Bessmertnii podvig, p. 168.

the road by two German infantry divisions and the 13th Panzer Division. The latter counterattacked and largely cleared the road by the end of the 27th, pushing back the 9th Mechanized Corps in the process. On the 28th Rokossovsky learned of the 19th Mechanized's retreat, and, threatened with encirclement from the north as well, began to retreat.¹²⁰

The northern wing of the Soviet counterattack was largely unsuccessful. The 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps rarely had reliable communications with each other, and often had difficulty communicating with their subordinates. Thus, what was intended to be a concentrated attack by six full-strength divisions broke down into three uncoordinated attacks by four understrength divisions. In fact, since these divisions were probably at half establishment strength, the attackers may have been weaker than the defenders. Poor communication resulted in poor coordination, producing gaps that the Germans could exploit; all this prevented the Soviet commanders from understanding the nature of the battle or from meeting German penetrations with agile countermoves. Further hampered by mechanical losses and a critical supply situation, the mechanized corps did not achieve their objectives - the capture of Dubno and the Dubno-Lutsk road. While they came close to entering Dubno and did capture sections of the road, the Germans responded by shifting 13th Panzer's axis southeast in conjunction with available infantry. The infantry helped clear the road and defend Dubno. 13th Panzer, after clearing most of the road, exploited the confusion within the 19th Mechanized Corps and forced it to retreat. As a result of mechanical and combat losses, the 9th and 19th Mechanized had lost around 70 percent of their tanks;

¹²⁰ Vladimirskii, "Nekotorie voprosi", p. 26-27; Glantz, Initial Period, pp. 272-278; Rokossovsky, A Soldier's Duty, p. 17-19; Gerasimov, pp. 170-171; Anfilov, Bessmertnii podvig, p. 168.

German losses were much smaller. While the Soviets had slowed the German attack, they had also weakened their own forces and failed to prevent the simultaneous continuation of the German drive out of Dubno.

The 11th Panzer, entering Dubno and apparently capturing significant stocks of supplies when the attack began, slipped around the left flank of 19th Mechanized and continued to Ostrog. This helped to force that Corps to withdraw. After three days of fierce fighting near Lutsk, the German 14th Panzer and 298th Infantry divisions breached the defenses of the 131st Motorized Division. All this forced the 9th Mechanized Corps to fall back to the Lutsk-Rovno road. This it did with notable success. Assisted by the 1st Anti-Tank Brigade, it ambushed 14th Panzer west of Klevan and caused it to seek a new axis of advance.¹²¹ Although the attack was a failure, the 9th and 19th Mechanized were not yet broken, and they remained a dangerous threat on the left of the Panzer Group's thrust.

The more successful Soviet attack took place on the southern flank against the Berestechko - Dubno axis. The 8th and 15th Mechanized Corps had begun the war among the most powerful of the Soviet mechanized corps, but neither was in good shape by the 26th. Ever since June 23 the 15th Mechanized had been engaged in a running battle against German infantry, anti-tank guns, and the 11th and 16th Panzer Divisions. While the 8th Mechanized Corps had not been in combat, it had been marching since the war began, losing 400 tanks and 50% of its transport to breakdowns by June 26th.¹²² These Corps were combined in a "Front Mobile Group" under the

¹²¹ Vladimirskii, "Nekotorie voprosi", p. 26-27; Glantz, Initial Period, pp. 272-278; Rokossovsky, A Soldier's Duty, p. 18-20; Anfilov, Bessmertnii podvig, p. 168; Bagramyan, p. 119, 149; Gurov, p. 38-39.

¹²² "Conclusions on the Use and Action of the 8th MK", in Krikunov, "Kuda dyelis' tanki", p. 36.

command of Morgunov, the South-Western Front's Chief of Tank Forces; this arrangement functioned poorly because of poor communications and Morgunov's incompetence.¹²³

The 15th Mechanized Corps was intended to cover the attack towards Dubno by the 8th Mechanized Corps, which was concentrated near Brody. As they prepared to do so, the 11th Panzer was entering Dubno and the 16th was en route to Kremenets via Kozin, across the 8th Mechanized's intended line of attack.¹²⁴ The Soviet plan began to collapse as soon as it was put into execution.

The 15th Mechanized Corps' attack on the 26th was largely abortive. German bombers raided the Corps HQ in the morning, seriously wounding Corps commander Karpezo. The HQ was relocated, causing a loss of command control; furthermore, the 15th was already heavily engaged.¹²⁵ The 8th Mechanized attacked the German 16th Panzer and 57th Infantry divisions on the road from Ostrov to Kremenets. According to the report on its actions,

On June 26th, in accordance with Front orders No. 0015 and 0016, the commander of the 8th MC, without concentrating all his forces, lead his Corps into battle piecemeal, without reconnaissance of the enemy, not knowing his dispositions and strength. As a result of this units came upon strong anti-tank defense and swamps and suffered heavy losses, without completing the assigned mission.¹²⁶

¹²³ Vladimirkii, A., p. 25; Anfilov, p. 164. The evidence against Morgunov is partly circumstantial, although he is directly criticized in the report on South-Western Front armored operations to Fedorenko in August 1941 (Krikunov, "Kuda dyelis", p. 37-39) for working only with logistics and doing that poorly.

¹²⁴ Maps in Glantz, *Initial Period*, pp. 273-275; .

¹²⁵ Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas' voina*, p. 138.

¹²⁶ "Conclusions on the Use and Actions of the 8th Mechanized Corps", in Krikunov, "Kuda dyelis' tanki?", p. 36.

Nonetheless, the 8th Mechanized drove the German 57th Infantry Division back about ten kilometers, although this success went unnoticed by the South-Western Front. Indeed, due to persistent communications difficulties with 5th Army, the South-Western Front staff probably only knew of the poorer results of the attacks on the southern wing. This led Kirponos to cancel the counterattack and order a withdrawal to the old (pre-1939) frontier's Fortified Regions. Orders to retreat were sent to the 8th and 15th Mechanized Corps. The 8th began to do so on the evening of the 26th. From the German perspective, events had taken a happy turn: at this time Halder reported that the expected Soviet attack on the south flank had been repulsed, while 16th Panzer had taken an important position near Kremenets.

Stavka, however, rejected Kirponos' decision and ordered that the attack be renewed. While the 15th Mechanized could not comply, the 8th Mechanized formed a mobile group under Brigade Commissar Popel' out of the 34th and elements of the 12th Tank Divisions, which drove back towards Dubno.¹²⁷ Popel' was an able commander who learned from the previous day's errors. Probably assisted by German redeployments taken on the assumption that the Soviets were withdrawing, he led his group behind 11th and 16th Panzer. This disrupted the German rear and for a short time his Mobile Group held portions of Dubno, confusing and worrying the Germans. This was particularly true because the Mobile Group and the 19th Mechanized Corps were separated by only a few kilometers, presenting, in theory, the possibility of cutting off the German 11th and 16th Panzer Divisions. In fact, because of poor communications, neither the Mobile Group nor the 19th Mechanized Corps knew of

¹²⁷ Dorofeyev, "O nekotorykh prichinakh", p. 40; Vladimirskii, "Nekotorie voprosi", p. 25; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, p. 170-171; Anfilov, Bessmertnii podvig, p. 168; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas' voina, p. 140-141; Halder's Diary, entries June 26-27; Glantz, Initial Period, pp. 273-276.

their mutual proximity. In any case, the 19th soon withdrew towards Rovno, while the 16th Panzer and the 75th Infantry Division counterattacked towards Kozin and Dubno. These defeated the Soviet forces attempting to follow the Mobile Group and thereby cut it off, while the 111th Infantry Division held Dubno against Popel's attacks.

By the 28th the Mobile Group was surrounded, while the remainder of the 8th Mechanized, 14th Cavalry Division, and elements of 36th Rifle Corps attempted to break through to join it. 9th Panzer's drive towards their left flank, however, forced the Soviets to retreat on the 29th, leaving the Mobile Group to its fate. It hampered German operations in the area for another week, holding down an infantry and a Panzer division until its remnants were mopped up on July 5th or 6th.¹²⁸

All told, this counterattack had mixed results for the Red Army. Soviet losses were high. By 30 June, few of the South-Western Front's Mechanized Corps had more than 30 percent of their original strength. Of course, over half of these losses were breakdowns, but neither breakdowns nor battle casualties were easily recovered, as the Germans usually held the battlefields. Thus the Soviet armored forces dwindled away steadily and rapidly. Not that numbers were everything: Rokossovsky noted that losses trimmed the 9th Mechanized Corps down to a manageable and battle-tested size. The increase in manageability may have come from the reduction of the force to a size its limited signals assets could keep connected, and Rokossovsky implies that combat

¹²⁸ Glantz, *Initial Period*, pp. 276-288; Dorofeyev, "O nekotorykh prichinakh", p. 40-42; Gurov, "Boyovoye deistviya", pp. 37-39; "Conclusions on the use and actions of the 15th MC" and "Conclusions on the use and actions of the 8th MC", in Krikunov, "Kuda dyelis'", pp. 35-36; Krikunov, "Kuda dyelis'", p. 30-31; Vladimirskii, *VIZ*, 7, 1981, pp. 25-27; Zhukov, *Vol. I*, pp. 287-288; Gerasimov, *Krasnoznamennii kievskii*, 171-175; Anfilov, *Nachalo*, pp. 166-171; Bagramyan, pp. 138-141, 149, 151, 156-158; Halder's Diary, entries 26 June - July 1; Gen. Karl W. Thilo, "A Perspective from the Army High Command (OKH)", in Glantz, *Initial Period*, p. 301.

effectiveness actually rose because the soldiers remaining knew their jobs. Presumably a similar process of weeding out occurred in other Soviet formations as well.¹²⁹

These losses bought time and German casualties. By June 30th, Army Group South was falling behind schedule: Halder wrote that the spearhead had been "not inconsiderably delayed", and that "Army Group South will need some vigorous prodding to get into action."¹³⁰ On June 27 the German 6th Army committed its last reserves to the fighting. At that time the Germans began to consider altering their original plan to concentrate less on capturing Kiev and the Dnepr crossings, and more on encircling the Lvov group of Soviet forces (6th, 12th, and 26th Armies) and clearing the Soviet 5th Army from the Pripet Marshes, whence it threatened the flank of Panzer Group 1. The Germans also took significant losses, as reported on several occasions; Halder noted on June 26th that Army Group South was "Advancing slowly, unfortunately with considerable losses.... It will be the overriding task of OKH to maintain a steady supply of reinforcements [to Army Group South]."¹³¹ On July 13, he reported that German tank forces on the Eastern Front had lost about 50 percent of their strength. If this percentage holds true for Army Group South, it is roughly consistent with Soviet claims of German tanks destroyed on the South-Western Front combined with probable German breakdowns.¹³² Thus the Soviet forces had seriously

¹²⁹ Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas'*, pp. 154, 156; Gerasimov, *Krasnoznamennii kievskii*, p. 183; Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, p. 21; Dorofeyev, "O nekotorykh prichinakh", p. 43; Glantz, *Initial Period*, p. 282, 288.

¹³⁰ Halder's Diary, entries June 29 and July 1.

¹³¹ Ibid, entry June 26.

¹³² Ibid, entry July 13; This contradicts post-war German analyses of losses, which probably exclude repairable tanks and are thus optimistic. (Major General Mueller-Hillebrand, MS# P-059, "German Tank Strength and Loss Statistics", Foreign Military Studies Series, Office of the Chief of Military History, RG 319, NARA Washington, p. 15 and appendices I, II, III.)

battered German armor. However, because they usually held the battlefields, the Germans could repair many of their losses, while the Soviets could not - this was an important factor, as the Germans steadily gained the upper hand in armor.

The fighting around Lutsk and Dubno shows the nature of Soviet capabilities and weaknesses during the initial weeks of the war. The collapse of their communications net, combined with inadequate training, crippled Soviet responses and prevented operational coordination. These difficulties virtually destroyed Soviet coordination above Corps level. Internal communications with corps was often poor, causing divisions to act too independently, as with 19th Mechanized's tank divisions as they drove towards Dubno. Those divisions, furthermore, suffered from supply and maintenance problems, and the lower level of Soviet tactical training and flexibility. While Soviet numerical strength was greater, it was negated because breakdowns of equipment and communications prevented decisive concentrations. Since Soviet formations often operated in the dark regarding their neighbors, the Germans could deal with them one by one - and often with pieces of them, as demonstrated in the Soviet counterattacks near Dubno.

On the sectors of the front not threatened by Panzer Group I, the first week had been somewhat more promising. The German 17th Army, exploiting the gap between the Peremyshl' and Rava-Russkaya Fortified Regions, had pushed the Soviets back. Soviet forces were still in good order, but 6th Army's front became dangerously long, stretched between Lvov in the south and Ostrog to the northeast. In late June, 9th Panzer drove into this tempting line. The breach it caused in 6th Army forced the Soviets to evacuate Lvov on June 30th, and also to abandon their attempts to rescue Popel's Mobile Group. Nonetheless, the 5th, 6th, 26th, and 12th Armies were

conducting orderly withdrawals across the front and maintaining themselves as fighting forces.

By any normal standard, the Soviets on the South-Western Front were experiencing a devastating defeat. However, in comparison to other efforts to halt the Wehrmacht, the South-Western Front was doing quite well. In earlier German campaigns of the Second World War, the Wehrmacht had secured decisive victories during its first ten days of attack. During the first ten days on the South-Western Front, conversely, the German Panzer spearhead was slowed and bloodied to a greater degree than ever before. This was no mean accomplishment. Moreover, the South-Western Front was not yet broken, unlike previous German enemies and unlike the North-Western and Western Fronts - one broken and the other destroyed. Whatever its shortcomings, the South-Western Front was able to slow the pace of German operations. This, combined with its large numerical strength, better organization, and the energy of its command at numerous levels enabled it to avoid disaster. This avoidance was significant. Given the short-war expectations upon which German war machine depended, extended survival of the Red Army as a fighting force was an initial step to a Soviet victory. The South-Western Front remained a coherent force which continued to present problems to Army Group South over the next months.

Chapter III

Defense of Kiev and the Dnepr

Although bled by the fighting of the first week of the war, the South-Western Front remained a coherent fighting force. It had already provided the toughest resistance the Germans had yet met anywhere in Europe. The quality of that resistance continued to rise until the South-Western Front was encircled by Panzer Groups I and II in mid September. The South-Western Front was assisted by the increasing dispersal of Army Group South, the defensive barrier of the Dnepr River, and by the delay the South-Western Front's own active operations imposed on German progress. Even in its death, the South-Western Front served the Soviet Union well. Its long stand prevented Army Group South from fulfilling its assigned missions of capturing the economically valuable Ukraine, of destroying west of the Dnepr all Soviet forces in Ukraine, and of assisting in the achievement of subsequent German objectives. It thereby drew forces away from Moscow and onto itself, thus changing the course of the Second World War.

In order to achieve these results, the South-Western Front had to overcome many serious problems. Grave defects persisted everywhere in logistics and communications, while some of its forces had been savaged. By June 30, the mechanized corps had lost 2,648 (63 percent) of their 4,201 tanks to mechanical failures and combat, and 3,464 (82.5 percent) as of July 9. The numerical balance in armor between Army Group South and the South-Western Front continued to shift steadily further against the Soviets, as did the balance of men. On June 22, 863,000 Soviet combat soldiers confronted 730,000 German on the South-Western Front. The Germans had sustained 92,000 casualties across the Eastern Front by July 13 to combat

and at least that many to disease. On the conservative estimate that Army Group South's losses comprised 1/3 of these figures, it would have lost around 60,000 men wounded and killed, or around 8 percent of its initial manpower. By a very rough estimate, the South-Western Front had lost at least 60,000 men by July 1; if it continued to suffer this rate of attrition, it would have suffered approximately 150,000 dead and wounded by July 10, or 17 percent of its initial strength. Certainly, the three rifle corps which had been most heavily engaged against Panzer Group I, the 27th, 31st, and 36th, were at 30 percent to 40 percent of their original strength and were being pulled out of line for refitting.¹³³

Meanwhile, the destruction of the Western Front and the weakness of the North-Western Front led Stavka to starve the South-Western Front of reinforcements and to seize forces from it. For example, when the 11th Panzer began its breakthrough to Ostrog, it entered a deep defensive position: the 16th Army (newly arrived from the Caucasus) near Shepetovka covered the Ostrog-Kiev axis while the 19th Army defended Kiev. Within three days, however, this position was wrecked not by the Germans but Stavka. Precisely as the Germans began to break through, the 16th Army was ordered to the Western Front. Thus, at Ostrog the Germans faced a scratch force composed of those elements of 16th Army (about 33 percent: a corps, including some of its mechanized forces¹³⁴) which the South-Western Front prevented from moving

¹³³ Glantz, Initial Period, 28-37; Gurov, "Boyovoye deistviya", p. 36, Halder's Diary, entries 6 July, 17 July; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, p. 175, 178-179, 183, maps; Anfilov, Nachalo, p. 175; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 142, 147-148, 166, 172, 178, 200. This estimate is mine, based on the assumption that the three rifle corps mentioned had around 9,000 men in each division, or 81,000 men total, of which 65% is 52,650 men.

¹³⁴ More precisely, 46% of the army as measured by train-loads. (A. A. Lobachev, Trudnimi dorogami, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1961), pp. 131-138.)

north as ordered. This force, named the "Lukin Group", after the 16th Army's commander who remained behind to lead it, held the Germans for nearly a week. Midway through that battle, the entire 19th Army was redeployed from Kiev to the Western Front. This temporarily left no second echelon of Soviet forces between the Lukin Group and Kiev. Purkaev was immediately sent to organize the defense of Kiev from the fortification garrison, militia units, and Air Assault brigades stationed there. Under such circumstances, the surprising fact is not that the Germans broke through but that the South-Western Front did not collapse.¹³⁵

While the South-Western Front did receive reinforcements, usually taken from the Southern Front, these did not replace its own losses. Its combat casualties were not light: the 27th, 31st, and 36th Rifle Corps were mauled, and the 37th, 6th, and 8th probably suffered badly as well. Combat losses had struck the equivalent of at least five rifle and three mechanized corps from its order of battle. In addition, the Front lost two Armies (at least four rifle corps and one mechanized corps) and eleven artillery regiments to the Western Front by July 7. These losses were made good to some extent by the call-up of reservists, and by the movement of corps from rear to front (although the 31st and 36th Rifle Corps, for example, were initially second echelon forces, and yet by the end of June had already been mauled). In a further attempt to replace the losses, in the first half of July Stavka sent the 7th Rifle Corps and two rifle divisions from the Southern Front, soon followed by the 64th Rifle Corps from the Caucasus.¹³⁶ However, the Soviet forces facing the main German effort - the mechanized corps, the 6th, 27th, 31st, and 36th Rifle Corps, and the Lukin Group -

¹³⁵ Gerasimov, *Krasnoznamennii kievskii*, p. 175, 178-179, 183, maps; Anfilov, *Nachalo*, p. 175; Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas'*, pp. 142, 147-148, 166, 172, 178, 200.

¹³⁶ Lobachev, *Trudnimi*, 131-138.

suffered very high losses, with increasingly worse force to space ratios as the front had lengthened from its initial 860 kilometers to 1,400 by the end of June¹³⁷.

This danger was multiplied by the problems with armored and anti-tank forces. The Front's armor was usually, and correctly, committed to oppose Panzer Group I. One would expect the South-Western Front's Anti-Tank Brigades to have done the same. However, this was not always the case. The 1st Anti-Tank Brigade engaged Panzer Group I from the second day of the war, and quite effectively, although it was destroyed within the first few weeks.¹³⁸ The 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Anti-Tank Brigades, conversely, finished formation after the war began and appear to have been committed to face the German 17th Army. The causes for this deployment are uncertain, but none of the likely ones offer much credit to the South-Western Front's command. First, the 12th Army, weak in anti-tank strength, may have required help against the 9th Panzer Division, which was adding punch to the 17th Army's drive. This would have been a proper use of the anti-tank forces, but an inefficient one. As the next week would prove, far more anti-tank forces were needed against Panzer Group I. Secondly, and even less efficiently, these brigades may not have been used as anti-tank forces at all, but as artillery. Given the critical shortages in armor-piercing ammunition, they might have been seen to be most useful as heavy anti-personnel support units, while the 6th and 12th Armies' forces may have seemed so weak that the anti-tank forces were used as stopgaps. Third, it is possible, although quite unlikely, that due to a shortage of equipment, these anti-tank brigades were in fact glorified infantry formations. Finally, these four brigades might have mobilized and been

¹³⁷ Anfilov, *Nachalo*, p. 174.

¹³⁸ The 1st Anti-Tank Brigade simply drops off of maps and accounts after the Dubno counterattack; its actual fate is unclear, and the lack of mention is not necessarily indicative of destruction.

deployed to their position in the prewar defensive plan and then simply not redeployed to more useful positions. Whatever the case, these units would best have been concentrated against Panzer Group I, since using direct fire and high explosive shells they could stop any German tank of 1941 and destroy any soft-skinned vehicle.

In any case, with its armored forces evaporating from combat and breakdowns, its tank and anti-tank forces using armor-piercing ammunition as fast as it was delivered, the front lengthening and their manpower bleeding away, the Soviet situation on the front line was becoming critical. These problems were compounded by communications and supply difficulties.

The Soviet logistical system was in chaos. In June 1941 there were 340 supply dumps in the western military districts. By mid-July the Germans had overrun 200 of them. This, in part, explains why Soviet forces suffered from a chronic lack of supply. Soviet authors usually blame the deficit on lack of transport, claiming that the remaining dumps contained large quantities of supplies which could not be moved forward. This was true enough, but there was another difficulty. Disorganization and poor communications worsened the problem. On June 30, the commander of the Soviet Rear Area Administration, Khrulev, reported to Zhukov that he had no idea what was required by the army, or what was going on at the front.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, the South-Western Front complained that:

staffs of divisions, corps, and armies are not devoting enough attention to questions of rear area organization, and absolutely badly run the rear. They are not maintaining constant communications with lower and rearward headquarters, they do not have exact figures on the amounts of material goods at front line

¹³⁹ Pastukhovskii, "Razvertivanie operativnogo tyla ", pp. 19, 24-25; Kunitskii, "Vosstanovlenie proryvannogo fronta ", p. 60.

units, rear area units, or dumps; a count of the outlay of material, losses of people and horses is not performed.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, when the evacuation of the major dump at Shepetovka began in mid-July, General Lukin found it contained 250 unused trucks, which presumably sat idle because word had not been passed that they existed. General Lukin immediately put them to good use evacuating the dump.¹⁴¹ The central theme in these complaints is the lack, not of material, but of communications and organization. This most critical of weaknesses compounded the problem of transportation shortage by preventing efficient use of the available transport. Yet, despite these difficulties, supply did continue to flow in the South-Western Front, although in quantities insufficient to allow full combat effectiveness. This relative success occurred because the front line approached the second echelon of supply dumps in the Korosten-Shepetovka-Zhitomir-Vinnitsa region and the Soviets slowly began to organize their logistics better. Meanwhile, communications probably were in grand disorder at the operational and tactical level, though this cannot be documented. However, communications seem to have been relatively good above the army level, as evidenced by the increasing coordination attempted and executed by these formations. Moreover, after the end of June there are steadily fewer references to a complete lack of communication with the South-Western Front's neighbors, subordinates, and superiors in Bagramyan's memoirs.

The mere fact that the South-Western Front had not collapsed during the first week of the war, and that its communications and logistical systems were able to support operations, had major consequences. The South-Western Front remained able to maintain operational coherence under considerable pressure. On June 30 Stavka

¹⁴⁰ Pastukhovskii, "Razvertivanie operativnogo tyla", p. 24.

¹⁴¹ Lobachev, Trudnimi, p. 133.

ordered the South-Western Front to withdraw by July 9 to the fortifications along the pre-1939 border - a move that would shorten the South-Western Front's frontage from 1,400 to 900 kilometers.¹⁴² South-Western Front headquarters had long awaited such an order; Bagramyan notes that "only some special certainty in the indisputability of orders had kept him [Kirponos] from requesting permission to do so."¹⁴³ While such an action was necessary, few military operations are more difficult than withdrawal in the face of a determined and mobile foe.

Purkaev had drawn up a plan for the eventuality. Through a careful regrouping of forces, he planned for some Soviet formations to hold off the Germans while others occupied the fortified regions and prepared them for defense. Kirponos felt that Purkaev's strategy was elegant but impractical. It required too much time for regrouping in place - time which the Germans would use to surround and defeat Soviet formations in detail and simultaneously beat them to the fortified regions.¹⁴⁴

Recognizing the need for a swifter retreat and the danger of weakening the front line, Kirponos preferred a phased withdrawal by a continuous front back to the old border. In this variant, an offensive previously planned by 5th Army would cover the northern part of the withdrawal, while the 4th, 8th, and 15th Mechanized Corps would move out of line and form a reserve to be located behind the Fortified Regions at the old border. Kirponos' plan required Soviet units alternately to hold the Germans and to break contact at the proper moments, and then to occupy the fortified regions sufficiently far ahead of the arrival of German forces to defend them. Arguably, this was the only real option available because it allowed the Soviets to retreat while

¹⁴² Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', p. 165-166; Glantz, Initial Period, p. 282; Anfilov, p. 174.

¹⁴³ Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', p. 166.

¹⁴⁴ Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', p. 168.

maintaining a strong front. It required skill on the part of Soviet forces, but by avoiding the weakening of the front line the Soviets reduced the probability that the Germans might break through and then wreak havoc on surprised formations in the rear. In fact, the plan worked on the Front's flanks, where German pressure was relatively light. In the center, however, including the left of 5th Army and all of 6th and 26th Army's fronts, the situation was already critical, and there the withdrawal was much more difficult.¹⁴⁵

The Soviets hoped that the fortification line would enable them to stop the Germans. However, the first of the two lines of fortifications was not complete, and only the Korosten, Novograd-Volynskii, and Letichev Fortified Regions of the rear line were properly prepared for action.¹⁴⁶ Soviet forces did occupy the fortified lines ahead of the Germans, and here they held the Germans for several days. However, Panzer Group I, the hammer of Army Group South, smashed at Soviet resistance along the Rovno-Zhitomir axis. Counterattacks from the 5th and 6th Armies slowed the progress of the northern and southern wings of this German drive, but nonetheless the 13th and 11th Panzer broke through the middle. On July 7 the 11th Panzer turned south and promptly stalled against stiff resistance at Berdichev. The 13th, however, reached Zhitomir on the 9th and drove towards Kiev. Late on July 10, it reached the Irpen River, at the edge of the Kiev Fortified Region. On Hitler's orders the 13th did not press the attack further, as he had just decided that armor was not to be risked against Kiev. Hitler justified this action on the grounds that the city was 35 percent Jewish and thus the losses would not be worthwhile. German commanders recall the

¹⁴⁵ Fedyuninskii, *Podnatye*, pp. 28-33; Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas'*, pp. 166-170; Gurov, "Boyovoye deistviya", p. 40; Anfilov, *Nachalo*, p. 174-175.

¹⁴⁶ Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas'*, pp. 166-170; Gurov, "Boyovoye deistviya", p. 40; Anfilov, *Nachalo*, p. 174-175.

order with frustration, as they thought, possibly knowing of 19th Army's departure, that Kiev was lightly defended. In fact, they were wrong. The defense was in the final stages of a crash reorganization after the loss of 19th Army and would almost certainly have held the 13th.

It is equally possible, however, that the halt was an indirect product of the ferocious - if costly - resistance of the South-Western Front. In effect, at this point Army Group South was divided into two sections: 13th Panzer at Kiev, while strung out behind it to the line of the breakthrough were armored and motorized divisions, moving forward or warding off counterattacks; behind the point of the rupture, German infantry divisions were struggling to both move forward and mop up Soviet units evading eastwards. The German armored spearheads, well ahead of the infantry divisions, may have seemed insufficient to assault Kiev. In turn, this may have precipitated the German decision to turn Panzer Group I southeast to clear the west bank of the Dnepr without taking Kiev and the Dnepr crossings.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, German infantry was lagging so far behind the Panzers largely because the Soviet 5th and 6th Armies launched a series of attacks intended to slow German progress toward Kiev as 13th Panzer and the mechanized units behind it drove towards Kiev. [Please refer to map series "SWF."¹⁴⁸] 5th Army put great effort into

¹⁴⁷ Thilo, in Glantz, Initial Period, p. 302; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 166-193; Anfilov, Nachalo, pp. 174-182; Lobachev, Trudnimi, pp. 131-138; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, 175, 181-197, maps; Halder's Diary, entries 9-10 July.

¹⁴⁸ Primary cartographic data for maps up to August 12 from Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, maps "Prigranichnoye srazheniye" and "Boi na podstupakh k Kievu" in map pack; primary cartographic data for final map from Debenham, Frank, ed., Reader's Digest Great World Atlas, (Montreal: Reader's Digest, c. 1975), p. 80; Gerasimov also provided primary positional data for maps up to August 12; also used: Keegan, Times Atlas of the Second World War, pp. 56-59; Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, pp. 161, 167; A. Yeremenko, The Arduous Beginning, p. 216; Griess,

these attacks, which sometimes achieved significant success. An attack launched on July 9 with the remnants of the 9th, 19th, and 22nd Mechanized Corps tied down much of the German 6th Army. This and other attacks by various formations of 5th Army kept the German supply route to Kiev interdicted until July 16. Meanwhile, counterattacks by the 16th Mechanized Corps and remnants of the 4th and 15th Mechanized Corps of the Soviet 6th Army held and battered the 11th Panzer at Berdichev from the 7th through the 11th of July. This action pinned the 11th Panzer for four days, but it also burned out the armored forces of the southern half of the South-Western Front. The attacks from 5th Army also largely destroyed those in the northern half, the 9th, 19th, and 22nd Mechanized Corps, although remnants of the 9th and 19th - totaling perhaps 50-100 tanks - remained active with the 5th Army until early August.¹⁴⁹

By the end of its first week, Kirponos' withdrawal had worked overall, albeit with some luck and much expense. The South-Western Front managed to maintain its integrity, and, in the process, to fall back to a stronger defensive position which it held, at worst, for several days. Meanwhile, the Germans had been precluded from achieving decisive success. While 13th Panzer did break through to Kiev, and 11th Panzer to Berdichev, the counterattacks from 5th Army and 6th Army prevented the Germans from exploiting the breakthrough - and this breakthrough might not have occurred in the first place had 16th Army not been pulled away. By mid-July, the South-Western Front had pulled off a withdrawal which was surprisingly effective

Atlas for the Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean, maps 19, 20; Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennaya Voini Sovyetskovo Soyuzu, vol. 2, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1965), pp. 104-105.

¹⁴⁹ Halder's Diary, entries July 6-16; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 183-190; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, pp. 183-184, 196-198, map pack; Anfilov, Nachalo, pp. 175-184.

when compared to the operations of its peers or given the difficulties of the situation and the operation in question. The northern half of the Front, Kiev and 5th Army, was in good position for extended defense. However, Soviet armor had virtually vanished while the bulk of its anti-tank forces - four out of its five anti-tank brigades - were with the eastern part of 6th, 12th, and 26th Armies. (The 1st Anti-Tank Brigade had been with 5th Army.) Meanwhile, these Armies were in a tenuous position because 6th Army's northern flank, the link between those three armies and the defenses at Kiev, was very weakly held. While the situation was not yet irreparable, the confluence of German and Soviet decisions soon left these armies in dire straits.

Precisely at this moment, as Army Group South's breakthrough began but had not been exploited, the German command began to change its priorities. Differences were emerging between Hitler and his generals as the initial plan for Barbarossa began to break down - not least because of the South-Western Front's resistance. While OKH ordered Panzer Group I to drive on Kiev on July 4, on July 10 Hitler ordered that armor not be used against Kiev. Instead, he directed that the primary goal was the destruction of Soviet forces west of the Dnepr. Despite some resistance from his generals, the change was made. This confusion in the midst of a major operation reflected growing uncertainty at the level of strategy. On the other hand, the drive south did do major damage to the South-Western Front, eventually destroying the 6th and 12th Armies and taking much of the Front's anti-tank assets with them. Indeed, as of mid July the South-Western Front had essentially lost its mechanized forces. Its only effective weapons against German armor were the Dnepr and field artillery - admittedly, both effective resources - while armored losses left the 11th and 16th Panzer Divisions at around 40 percent strength in later July (the 9th, 13th, and 14th

were better off, probably at around 70-80 percent), and all of Panzer Group I at 50-60 percent strength by the end of August.¹⁵⁰

German planning had entered a state of increasing flux after late June, when Halder first began to worry about the disposition of Army Group South. Soviet resistance, particularly from 5th Army, was sufficiently fierce to give the Germans second thoughts. By July 7 Halder was speculating in his diary about the possibility of attempting to encircle the South-Western Front on the eastern side of the Dnepr by having Panzer Group II move south from Army Group Center to assist Army Group South, although it was not seen as a possible necessity for another few days. Moreover, the South-Western Front's resistance helped precipitate a debate of great consequence in the German high command. While the German Army command preferred a direct drive on Moscow, Hitler had been convinced by his planning staff (von Lossberg of OKW) that progress beyond Smolensk should be based upon the progress in the Baltics and Ukraine. Smolensk fell on July 16, and the armor used against the Smolensk pocket was free for other missions by very early August. However, not for three weeks was Army Group Center again embarked towards clear objectives, heading north to Leningrad and south against Kiev.¹⁵¹ While the South-Western Front's resistance was not solely responsible for the changes in German planning, its resistance did force the disputes between the German Army and Hitler over objectives into the open, thereby precipitating alterations and wasted time.

¹⁵⁰ Halder's Diary, entries, July 20, 23, August 24, 28.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, June 29, July 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, August 13, 20; Thilo in Glantz, Initial Period, p. 301-302; Guderian in Glantz, Initial Period, p. 309-312; Anfilov, p. 176; R. H. S. Stolfi, Hitler's Panzers East: World War II Reinterpreted, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 74-75, 118; Seaton, The German Army, pp. 164, 177; Warlimont, pp. 138-142, 181-190; MS# C-067a, "Decisions Affecting the Campaign in Russia (1941/1942)", FMSS, RG 242.

On July 10, the South-Western Front was aware of neither the increasing dissension in Germany nor the decision to send Panzer Group I away from instead of directly at Kiev. This led to a major Soviet miscalculation and the one serious error made by Kirponos in the campaign. On July 4, as Panzer Group I began to assault the "Lukin Group", Zhukov warned that the 6th, 26th, and 12th Armies might be encircled by a German drive towards Ternopol. During a planning conference on July 11th, however, Kirponos and Purkaev believed that Panzer Group I would concentrate against Kiev - not unnaturally, as that had in fact been the German plan until the day before, while the withdrawal of 19th Army had caused them to focus their energies on that area for a week. Nonetheless, they took Zhukov's warning seriously. Kirponos and Purkaev knew of the gap between 6th Army's right flank and the Kiev defenses. They were disturbed by the fact that Stavka's redeployments left this gap covered only by reformed border guards and scattered rifle units. Indeed, in early July, when the threat to Kiev was more distant, Kirponos and Purkaev had shifted several divisions to a similar sector from Kiev so to cover the danger of a German drive towards Ternopol.¹⁵²

Nonetheless, on July 11 they did not correctly assess the danger facing them, certainly because they thought that a strike at Kiev was the most obvious and dangerous option open to the Germans, possibly because they underestimated the depth to which the Germans would strike to achieve their encirclements. They did not take the obvious precaution against a drive from 1st Panzer Group behind the 6th, 26th, and 12th Armies: to order them to retreat. Had they correctly appreciated the danger, they could have taken effective steps against it, by ordering the armies under threat to retreat with all speed, assisted by formations near the Dnepr. Since they misunderstood

¹⁵² Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 168, 175, 179, 196-201.

German intentions, however, Kirponos and Purkaev took actions which played into German hands. They thought the main drive was aimed at Kiev; hence they tried to use the 6th Army to threaten the German flank, which in turn exposed all of these Soviet forces to the real German aim. Kirponos ordered the 6th and 12th Armies to stand their ground, and the 26th Army command to take over all the various forces between them along the Dnepr to Kiev. These forces were an assortment of unorganized formations without defensive plans or prepared positions: a newly-arrived rifle corps (the 64th) and battered front-line units pulled into reserve. It was hoped that the 6th Rifle Corps, one of the battered formations, would help to hold the 6th Army - Kiev gap. Beyond this, the infantry of the 4th, 8th, and 15th Mechanized Corps were available - Stavka pulled their armor components out for refitting, thus removing an expected source of support for this sector and further worsening the situation.¹⁵³

Above all, Kirponos wanted the 5th Army from the north and the 6th Army from the south to attack Panzer Group I's flanks. The nominal intent was to close the gap between 5th and 6th Armies and encircle Panzer Group I - the actual one was to slow German penetration and draw German forces away from Kiev. When no attack materialized against Kiev, the Soviets could easily have credited that to their counterattacks in which 6th Army had played a role. In part, this was true - but it temporarily blinded the South-Western Front to the German turn south-east. They did not recognize that change in direction until July 15th - five days after it had begun.¹⁵⁴

During this confusion, the Germans penetrated the weak screen between 6th Army and 26th Army and moved behind 6th and 12th Armies. The latter already had been falling back under pressure, but slowly - too slowly. Kirponos' delay in

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp. 196-201, 219.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 200-201, 226.

recognizing and reacting to the danger of encirclement gave the Germans a critical advantage. Moreover, because of Stalin's notorious opposition to withdraw, it was not for three days - until July 18 - that Kirponos dared to request permission for the 6th and 12th Armies to retreat. This permission was granted, but too late. The new defensive line which these formations were ordered to establish was already partly in German hands, and these formations were also increasingly beyond the South-Western Front's logistical and signals reach. On July 25, the 6th and 12th Armies were transferred to the Southern Front's command, because communications and supply from the South-Western Front were becoming virtually impossible. The order to withdrawal from the German trap as rapidly as possible remained.¹⁵⁵

In support of this withdrawal, 26th Army attempted "active operations" - offensives intended to keep the Germans off balance and draw their forces away from areas under threat. This enjoyed little direct success - casualties were heavy and German lines were not breached. However, Halder noted that from July 17 to July 22 the 26th Army did hamper Panzer Group I's southward drive and thus it fulfilled its mission. Little information seems to have survived the multiple encirclements that awaited the 6th and 12th Army personnel; their activities are unclear. They ran with some success for a time, avoiding destruction until the first week of August. Nonetheless, the Southern Front commander, General Tyulenev, was infuriated. He felt that the 6th and 12th Armies had moved quite slowly, and could have escaped encirclement entirely. There is some support for his view from German sources: through the end of July, Halder recorded uncertainty about trapping these forces, although his optimism grew through early August as the Uman pocket formed.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 229; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, map pack; Anfilov, Nachalo, p. 182.

Furthermore, both Halder and Soviet sources agree that numerous units of the 6th and 12th Armies escaped the pocket, moving south and east to join the Southern Front.

Nonetheless, this disaster cost the South-Western Front 40-50 percent of the formations under its command on July 10. By this time, moreover, the nature of the Front's duties had changed. On June 22 it had held a front of over 800 kilometers, although most of this was lightly defended as it faced the Carpathians. Army Group South had assaulted through 350 kilometers of front. At the end of July, the South-Western Front, excluding the 6th and 12th Armies, held around 600 kilometers of front, covering Kiev and the Dnepr river line. While the ratio of forces to space was worse than a month before, operations were no longer mobile. Instead, they were beginning to be positional as its forces held the Dnepr and the Kiev defenses. This slowed the pace of operations, and helped the South-Western Front to continue its defense.¹⁵⁶

Throughout the first month and a half of the war, to the north, 5th Army succeeded in drawing attention to itself through "active operations" intended to reduce pressure on Kiev. It cut the German supply line from Zhitomir to Kiev shortly after 13th Panzer reached Kiev, and Halder regularly mentioned 5th Army thereafter. On July 12 and 13, he noted that it might only be dealt with if Army Group South crossed the Dnepr, which in turn could require assistance from Army Group Center. The German 6th Army soon was forced to drive towards Korosten so to push the Soviet 5th Army further away from its supply lines to Kiev. On July 18, Halder noted that the Soviet force near Korosten "still absorbs large forces.... This pins down greater

¹⁵⁶ Halder's Diary, entries July 17-22, 6 August; Erickson, Road to Stalingrad, p. 203; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 247-248; D. F. Grigorovich, Kiev: Gorod-Geroi, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1962), p. 26; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, p. 217.

strength on the northern front than is desirable". The 5th Army remained a thorn in the German flank until events to the north compelled the Soviets to withdraw in later August.¹⁵⁷

In late July, German forces pursued three objectives: to force 26th Army away from the southern approaches to Kiev, to prevent that formation from hindering Panzer Group 1, and to capture one of the Dnepr crossings. The Germans succeeded in the first and second objectives, but failed to capture a crossing point. In early August, they then launched a major assault on Kiev. By this stage, however, the defenses of that city were ready for them. Contrary to German assumptions, Kiev was well defended by three infantry divisions and an elite air assault brigade (two further such brigades would eventually be committed to the defense) backed by at least 29,000 militiamen, all in three lines of well-prepared fortifications. The Irpen River, which covered the northern and western faces of the defense and across which the 13th Panzer would have attacked in early July, hampered tank movements. While it was moderately shallow and none too broad, it was crossed by only two bridges and a swamp extended 800 to 1,000 meters on either of its banks. The assault was launched against the southern face of the defense on 1 August. It penetrated two lines of defense before bogging down in counterattacks spearheaded by the Air Assault brigades. On August 8, a 26th Army offensive near Boguslav gained twenty-five kilometers against the weaker German forces screening the Dnepr south of Kiev. Army Group South, fearing that this attack might cut off the southern wing of 6th Army, and noting the exhaustion of 6th Army's troops, called off the assault on Kiev on August 10. Instead, it redirected some of Panzer Group I's forces in a counteroffensive move to block the 26th Army and regain

¹⁵⁷ Halder's Diary, entries July 12, 13, 15, 18, 20, August 8-10, 19; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 167, 184, 188, 189, 230, 233, 236-240; Anfilov, Nachalo, p. 178.

the ground lost. The Soviet forces at Kiev then retook the defensive lines they had lost, and held out until the encirclement of the South-Western Front in late September despite constant pressure.¹⁵⁸

In the process, the 5th Army and the forces at Kiev (eventually organized into 37th Army) dealt significant losses to the Germans. In later July the German 6th Army needed more hospital trains than any other German army. After the assault on Kiev, moreover, Halder wrote that Army Group South "urgently" needed replacements. On August 26th, he noted, 6th Army had suffered a "remarkable break in morale and drive" as a result of "high casualties and unremitting strain" and limited successes.¹⁵⁹

The Soviets, too, were taking heavy losses. These stemmed in part from their policy of repeatedly counterattacking the Germans in order to contest the initiative. This policy generated the massive counterattack at Dubno, the long series of attacks by 5th Army against Panzer Group I and the German 6th Army, the 26th Army's various attacks to slow the southward drive by Panzer Group I as well as to relieve pressure on Kiev, the September counterattack by 38th Army at Cherkassi, and, lastly, the 6th Army's attacks in early July against Panzer Group I. These costly attacks rarely gained significant ground, nor did they ever completely halt German operations. Indeed, sometimes they led to catastrophic losses. For example, the 6th Army's attacks on

¹⁵⁸ Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, p. 194; Halder's Diary, entries August 8, 10; Grigorovich, Kiev, pp. 20-37; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', p. 214; MS #D-255, Oskar Bluemm, "Advance of a Russian Cavalry Corps Into the Rear of III Panzer Corps and Defense Against the Attack", FMSS, RG 242; Gerasimov claims 35K in militia.

¹⁵⁹ Halder's Diary, entries July 27, August 19, 26; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, pp. 220-222, 224, 226, 230-234; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 292-298, 304-306, 318, 323-324, 333, 343-345, 347, 365-366.

Panzer Group I in mid July slowed the Germans only slightly and left the 6th Army vulnerable to encirclement.

However, these Soviet operations usually did hamper German operations. While the 6th Army's attacks on Panzer Group I in mid July brought few results, the 5th Army's attacks did interdict the German supply route to Kiev. Had the Germans tried to act on their initial intention to storm Kiev, this attack would have prevented them from doing so before the defense was organized. 5th Army's continued attacks sucked in forces from the German 6th Army. This increasingly affected Halder's decisions:

July 12: I explain... that Guderian might have to swing southward, to encircle the new enemy appearing on his southern wing, perhaps even to push on down to the Kiev area, in order finally to encircle and defeat the Red Fifth Army which keeps on popping up in the south.

The recurrent threat to the northern flank from the direction of Korosten [e.g. 5th Army] has prompted the decision to push this enemy away in a northward direction, away from the advance and supply route Zvyagel-Zhitomir [Discusses what elements of PzG I to send] This decision must be approved despite the consequent temporary disruption of the Armd. Gp. [PzG I]¹⁶⁰

July 13: Report to Fuehrer: e) Group Korosten (about 4 divs.): ... This group as well as the one at Gomel [to 5th Army's north] can be cut off only in the course of the development of our movements, that is, with AGp. South also across the Dniepr, and Armd. Gp. 2 cooperating from the north. For the present we must confine ourselves to containing it.¹⁶¹

July 18: AGp. South's operation is becoming increasingly shapeless. The front against Korosten still absorbs large forces. The appearance of new, strong enemy forces attacking from the north near Kiev [2 rifle divisions from the Southern Front], compels us to move Inf.Divs. to that sector, to relieve and replace Armor (III Corps). This pins down greater strength on the northern front

¹⁶⁰ Halder's Diary, entry 12 July, 1941.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, entry 13 July, 1941.

than is desirable. The turning wing of Armd. Gp. 1, too, does not seem to get started on its southward drive.¹⁶²

Army Group Center had taken Smolensk on July 16. On July 22, however, Hitler told Field Marshall Fedor von Bock that any further advance towards Moscow would not be allowed. After a further month of argument over the next German move the Soviet 5th Army still figured in Hitler's calculations. On August 21, Hitler ordered that the prerequisites for renewed operations against the Soviet center were to surround Leningrad, link up with the Finns, and destroy the 5th Army. Thus, the 5th Army's resistance had lodged itself firmly in Hitler's mind. In so doing, it influenced German decision-making at the highest level and helped to cost the Germans a month of movement toward Moscow.

Similarly, on a smaller scale, 26th Army's drive of late July against Panzer Group I slowed it enough to make the Germans question whether they could capture any significant forces in the Uman pocket. Later, the 26th Army's drive at Boguslav helped end the assault on Kiev. Even though the Dubno counterattack failed, it, too, slowed the German drive. Above all, in an entirely unintended fashion, the South-Western Front conducted an active operation which drew German forces away from the Moscow axis.

Whatever their consequences, all of these operations cost the Soviets dearly in casualties. Nonetheless, they were worthwhile for two fundamental reasons. Poor communications and supply made the Soviet forces more clumsy than the German, which in turn magnified the advantages that the Germans acquired from possession of the initiative. The Soviets could create a level playing field only by reducing the pace of German operations. Moreover, the Germans were more dangerous the more free

¹⁶² Ibid, entry 18 July, 1941.

they were to concentrate their strength, especially their armored and mechanized forces, for offensive operations. "Active operations" directly reduced this danger by forcing the Germans to dissipate their strength in defensive actions. Its energetic commanders and its ability to slow German operations allowed the South-Western Front to avoid disaster during the initial weeks of the war, and to stall Army Group South's progress beyond the Dnepr for six weeks from late July to early September. Again, in an unintended fashion, its continued resistance served the Soviet Union well by drawing German generals into time-consuming debate and German armies away from Moscow.

Nonetheless, the South-Western Front could not maintain these operations indefinitely without reinforcement. Furthermore, the increasing threat of a strike southwards by Army Group Center was clear to the Soviets. It was not just losses which forced the 5th Army and its neighbor, the 27th Rifle Corps, to withdraw beyond the Dnepr over August 22nd through 25th: it was also the threat of Guderian's Panzer Group to the north. The 5th Army succeeded in withdrawing as planned, but not the 27th Rifle Corps. As planned by the South-Western Front, the 27th Rifle Corps began to withdraw three days after 5th Army so as to cover the latter's retreat. This compromised 27th Rifle Corps' ability to surprise the Germans as 5th Army had done. Soviet commentators imply, nonetheless, that disaster could have been avoided had the 27th's withdrawal not been badly organized. In particular, the commander, General Artemenko, moved his left-flank division to cover his right flank during the withdrawal. While this strange reorganization was in progress, the 11th Panzer and the 111th Infantry Division sped through the gap and seized the only Dnepr bridge north of Kiev in the South-Western Front's sector, at Okuninovo. This tactical disaster, however, did not spread into an operational one. Rapidly using its few reserves, the

South-Western Front produced a scratch force which contained the bridgehead and prevented the Germans from capturing the bridge across the Desna at Oster. The 27th Rifle Corps, meanwhile, was able to withdraw into the defenses of Kiev.¹⁶³

The South-Western Front was not always so fortunate. Bagramyan relates the manner in which, during September, Panzer Group I broke across the Dnepr to meet Guderian plunging south. Through August, the elements of Panzer Group I had been dispersed in operations to clear the Dnepr bend: some units moved south to help isolate Odessa, others pushed the Soviet Southern Front back over the Dnepr. This was done with occasional hard fighting. However, the Germans seem to have been seeking an easy crossing point as they passed along the South-Western Front's stretch of the Dnepr, as evidenced by their tendency to simply bypass the resistance at these points and drive deeper: Panzer Group I was ordered, on August 1, to take the Cherkassi and Kremenchug bridges, but there were no major attempts to do so until the end of the month. Eventually, Panzer Group I engaged in a stiff fight for Dnepropetrovsk during the last week of August. Then, despite having gained a small bridgehead there, it suddenly moved back west to exploit a bridgehead made by the 17th Army at Kremenchug.¹⁶⁴

The Soviet 38th Army guarded the Dnepr from Cherkassi to Perevolochna, a front of about 200 kilometers, with seven divisions, a force of perhaps 40,000 soldiers. The Germans gained a breakout at Kremenchug by outwitting General Feklenko, the

¹⁶³ Gerasimov, *Krasnoznamennii kievskii*, p. 220; Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas'*, p. 293-294; MS# D-279, Gen Lt. Helmut Luz, 12 June 1947: "The 11th Panzer Division in the Fighting for the Dnepr Bridge near Gornostaypol, 23 to 29 August 1941", FMSS, RG 319.

¹⁶⁴ Halder's Diary, entries August 5 - September 8; MS # D-292, Paul Wagner, "Engagements Fought by the 16th Panzer Division Along the Lower Bug River in August 1941: Pervomaisk, Wosnessensk, Nikolaev", FMSS, RG 292.

army commander. First, they launched a decoy assault to the north of Cherkassi which drew in the Soviet reserve division. They then struck to the south, a bit north of Kremenchug, where a single rifle division held fifty-four kilometers of riverfront. There the Germans crossed the Dnepr. Immediately, Marshal S. M. Budyonny, commanding the South-Western Strategic Direction (a short-lived command level between the South-Western Front and Stavka) insisted that Feklenko counterattack this bridgehead. Meanwhile, the Soviets captured an officer of the 9th Panzer Division's reconnaissance battalion at the bridgehead north of Kremenchug. They assumed that if this unit lay at this bridgehead, so too must the main German effort. Thus, while most of 38th Army concentrated for a counterattack on this German bridgehead, Panzer Group I cracked weak defenses just south of Kremenchug and crossed the Dnepr on September 12. It promptly headed north to join Panzer Group II and encircle the South-Western Front.¹⁶⁵

Both this counterattack at Kremenchug, and 6th Army's attacks in mid July failed because they rested on erroneous assessments of German intentions. The Soviets were rarely surprised by German operations in such a fashion, although they were often caught short tactically. These two mistakes in predicting German operations, however, had large consequences: the loss of 6th and 12th Armies, and the breakthrough of Army Group South to link up with the southward drive of Guderian's forces.

That Panzer Group II drove south was the great triumph of the South-Western Front and the proximate cause of its annihilation. Yet this drive did not surprise the Soviets. On July 29, Zhukov warned Stalin that unless Kiev were evacuated,

¹⁶⁵ Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas'*, pp. 309-316. The strength estimate is my best guess. Each rifle division nominally contained 14,000 men; they almost assuredly contained significantly fewer. My guess is based on 7,000 men per rifle division and 4,00 in the cavalry division - about 50 percent of paper strength.

Guderian's forces would encircle the South-Western Front. For his pains, Zhukov was demoted from Chief of Staff to commander of the Reserve Front, and replaced by Marshal B. M. Shaposhnikov. Even so, Soviet operational deployments were shaped by the danger posed by Guderian's forces. On August 16, the South-Western Front asked for and soon received permission to pull 5th Army and 27th Rifle Corps behind the Dnepr. The aim was to shorten the lines by 150 kilometers and to meet the danger from the north. At the same time, the Soviets began to form a strong group in the Konotop-Bryansk area, under Yeremenko, to stop Guderian's forces wherever they should move. Simultaneously, the South-Western Front was ordered to form a new army, the 40th, from its almost non-existent reserves and divisions taken from the 26th Army. The 40th Army was to hold the northern flank between the 21st Army and Yeremenko's main forces (for the ten days up to September 6th, the 21st Army, between the 5th and 40th, was under Yeremenko's command). Unfortunately, all of the forces sent to 40th Army had been badly bled, and by early September the 21st Army's rifle forces were at 8 percent strength. Furthermore, the Soviet armies facing Guderian were poorly coordinated, providing gaps which the Germans profitably exploited. Yeremenko's forces were too weak to contain Guderian, although their counteroffensive did slow his forces somewhat between 29 August and 2 September.¹⁶⁶

Its battles with Yeremenko over, Guderian's Panzer Group surged into 40th Army. The South-Western Front had been denied reinforcements to deal with this thrust. Indeed, on September 4 it had been forced to fight for permission to move two more of its own divisions from the 26th and 37th Armies sectors to 40th Army.

¹⁶⁶ Zhukov, Reminiscences, Vol. I., p. 376-380; Yeremenko, Arduous Beginning, pp. 216-227; Guderian, Panzer Leader, pp. 164-165; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 292-307; Erickson, Road to Stalingrad, pp. 197-206, 210.

Moreover, precisely as Army Group Center cut down from the north, the German 6th Army launched another and final effort against 5th Army. The Soviets were soon in trouble; by September 7, the 6th Army broke out of the Okuninovo bridgehead while the German 2nd Army, to the north, headed for the Desna river line behind the 5th Army. Although Stavka authorized 5th Army's withdrawal to the Desna on the 9th, the order came too late. 2nd Army already held the crossings, effectively encircling the remnants of the 5th Army. It was essentially destroyed, although elements managed to break out on the 11th. These remnants and parts of the 37th Army held the German 6th Army north of Kiev for a time, temporarily staving off disaster.¹⁶⁷

On September 11, Kirponos learned that Guderian had reached Romny, cutting off the northern supply route for the South-Western Front. He requested permission for a general withdrawal to the river Psel, about 250 kilometers east of Kiev and beyond the line of the German drives. When Stavka refused his request, Kirponos asked Budyonny, an old friend of Stalin, to try. Budyonny, unable to convince Shaposhnikov on the telephone, fired off a strongly worded telegram warning of encirclement. He requested permission to withdraw at least the Kiev garrison in order to place its resources elsewhere. That evening, Stalin personally forbade the withdrawal. He permitted five or six rifle divisions to form defensive positions behind the Psel - if the South-Western Front held its current front line and if it also formed a grouping to destroy Panzer Group II, in conjunction with Yeremenko's forces. If all of these missions were fulfilled, the forces in Kiev could withdraw to the east bank of the Dnepr. Stalin concluded, "Cease, finally, looking for lines to retreat to, and begin to

¹⁶⁷ Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp. 303-324; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, pp. 227; Erickson, Road to Stalingrad, pp. 206-207; Guderian, Panzer Leader, pp. 164-170; Halder's Diary, entries August 31, September 4, 5, 7, 8, 10; Yeremenko, Arduous Beginning, pp. 226-227.

seek lines for resistance." The entire staff understood this veiled threat: the July execution of the Western Front's initial commander, Colonel General D. G. Pavlov, had provided a signal example of the perils of displeasing Stalin. Kirponos asked for more forces, claiming that this was all he had requested. Stalin dismissed the claim and the request, and signed off with, "Do not retreat from Kiev and do not blow the bridges without explicit permission from Stavka." Budyonny was relieved of command of the South-Western Direction on the 12th and replaced by Timoshenko.¹⁶⁸

In all probability, the South-Western Front could not have fully extricated itself even if it had been allowed to withdraw on the 11th. In any case, Stalin's categorical orders of that date sealed its fate. It is probable that the preparation of a defense line to the rear had been considered earlier than the 11th (the surviving eyewitness, Bagramyan, cannot comment on this, having been at Cherkassi and Kremenchug until the 12th), and not requested both because of the lack of forces to form it and because of Stalin's opposition to retreats.

By the 12th, when Panzer Group I broke out from Kremenchug, only the 26th and 37th Armies were still holding their lines. The 40th Army had been shattered and reduced to 5,000 fighting men. On the 15th, Panzer Groups I and II linked up near Lokhvitsa, encircling all of the South-Western Front except parts of the 40th and 38th Armies. Under the circumstances, an attempt to withdraw was unavoidable, but the way in which the Soviets addressed the issue illustrates the flaws in the highest level of their command structure. Three days were wasted in reaching the only possible conclusion, during which the noose around the South-Western Front tightened. First, Bagramyan flew to meet Timoshenko on the 16th, bearing Kirponos' suggestions for

¹⁶⁸ Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas'*, pp. 324- 331; Erickson, *Road to Stalingrad*, pp. 207-208; Gerasimov, *Krasnoznamennii kievskii*, pp. 228-229.

operations. Timoshenko, on his own initiative, ordered a withdrawal, and on the 17th Bagramyan flew back to Kiev to relay the order to Kirponos. This order was verbal to insure that nothing could fall into German hands if Bagramyan's plane were shot down. Kirponos, however, insisted that Stavka confirm the order in writing - to ensure that Stalin had officially authorized the decision and thereby protect himself from prosecution. Early on the 18th, Stavka granted permission to pull all forces back to the east bank of the Dnepr. Since only the forces in Kiev were still on the west bank, the withdrawal Stavka had permitted was irrelevant. The Front was encircled by German forces 200 kilometers to the east of Kiev. The South-Western Front's staff chose to interpret Stavka's orders as permission for a complete withdrawal. Optimistic plans were made for breakouts by the remnants of various armies. Although the Soviets claim that nearly 150,000 escaped, the vast majority of the Front's forces were killed or captured: more than 650,000 men according to German claims (most, presumably, in rear area formations). Kiev was held until the 37th Army retreated out of it on the 19, blowing the Dnepr bridges as it left. By September 26, the South-Western Front's forces had been mopped up. Kirponos led the South-Western Front and 5th Army staff columns east. Dividing his column in an attempt to break out, he sent an unwitting Bagramyan on a suicide mission with a small group, to decoy the Germans and allow Kirponos' group to escape. Ironically, Bagramyan and his group met little resistance

and returned to friendly lines, while Kirponos and most of his staff column were surrounded and killed in a small woods not far from Lokhvitsa on September 20.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Erickson, Road to Stalingrad, pp. 208-210; Bagramyan, Tak nachinalas', pp.300-end; Gerasimov, Krasnoznamennii kievskii, pp. 229-234; Halder's Diary, entries September 13, 15, 16, 19; Guderian, Panzer Leader, pp. 171-173. Bagramyan learned of the nature of his mission after the war from 5th Army commander General Potapov, who was badly wounded and captured at Lokhvitsa.

Conclusion

The experience of the South-Western Front demonstrates several things about the nature of the Red Army in 1941 and of the entire Soviet-German War. The South-Western Front provided the stiffest resistance of any Soviet Front in the initial weeks of the war. Its performance provides the best indication of the true quality of the Red Army at the time. Despite the condition of surprise, that quality was not poor. When its performance is compared to that of the Soviet Western Front and of the Anglo-French armies in 1940, the importance of communications, preparedness, and surprise in German successes become clear.

The South-Western Front was far from completely prepared for war, but this lack of preparation was mitigated by the series of attempts it had made to mobilize. One of the most important turned out to be the 87th Rifle Division's deployment of men and artillery into the Vladimir-Volynskii Fortified Region. This placed organized Soviet resistance on the main axis of Army Group South's assault from the first minutes of the war. As a result, German penetrations on 22 June were held to twenty-five kilometers. By contrast, on the Western Front, the Germans achieved complete tactical surprise along their main avenues of attack and gained fifty-five kilometers. Because of the rate of penetration and the lower state of alertness in the Western Front, this tactical surprise was converted into operational surprise: the collapse of the tactical defense on the border allowed the Germans to catch second echelon formations before they could prepare for combat, thus wrecking their effectiveness, continuing the vicious cycle. Within a week and a half, all of the forces in the Western Front of June 22, 1941, had been encircled and destroyed; however, the claim was to have stalled the Germans barely long enough for Stavka to rush entirely new armies into position

near Smolensk to present a new defensive line. Notably, despite these desperate circumstances, this line held better than had the original Western Front.

By contrast, the slower rate of penetration on the South-Western Front gave second echelon formations time to prepare to meet the Germans. The Front's communications and logistic systems also had more time to recover from the initial hammer blows by the Luftwaffe, and thus its commanders could move with the situation better than was true of their counterparts in Belorussia. Indeed, the South-Western Front avoided any form of operational surprise until July 10, when it was caught by the southward shift in the German axis of attack. The German failure consistently to gain the advantage of surprise is one of the major factors which allowed the South-Western Front to survive until September.

There were other factors as well. The South-Western Front had great staying power simply by virtue of its size. It could absorb large losses while retaining effectiveness. The Kiev Fortified Region and the Dnepr, moreover, were powerful defensive positions which the Soviets held for some time. However, their significance must not be overstated: not until mid to late August did the 5th and 26th Armies completely withdraw beyond the Dnepr. They had survived up to that point largely because they were not the primary targets of German efforts. Furthermore, the Dnepr hampered the Soviets as much as it helped them. Granted, they often could guard long stretches of the river with light forces because the Germans could not effectively cross there, but this was not an unmixed blessing. The Germans could do the same thing, lightly guarding those crossing points they did not wish to assault and concentrating forces where they desired to attack. When they did cross, the Soviets could not concentrate enough forces to throw them back, although they were able to contain the Okuninovo and Kremenchug bridgeheads for several weeks. Nonetheless, the Dnepr

and Kiev Fortified Region did increase the South-Western Front's lifespan by allowing it to hold a long front with fewer forces than would have been needed had these barriers not existed. Above all, it hampered the German ability to play their strongest suit: their mechanized forces could not be used to full effect again until the Dnepr had been crossed.

The South-Western Front provided the stiffest resistance the Germans had yet met anywhere - indeed, it provided one of the best performances against the Wehrmacht made by any army until the autumn of 1942. Not only had the other Soviet groupings of 1941 crumpled under German armored blows, but so too had the Anglo-French armies in 1940. Comparison between their performance and that of the South-Western Front is appropriate and illuminating.

Like the Soviets, both the British and the French had better equipment than the Germans, were caught by surprise, and suffered from communications and logistical problems. The South-Western Front was less well prepared for combat than the French and British, who at least knew a war was on. The absolute strength of both attacker and defender was smaller in France (4,200 Soviet tanks vs 700 German tanks on the South-Western Front, 3,000 Anglo-French tanks vs 2,500 German tanks in France), but within a few days of the outbreak of the war this difference vanished due to breakdowns. The South-Western Front was not only better equipped than the British and French with anti-tank guns, but because of the experimentation in mechanized warfare under Tukhachevsky, and the lesser focus on carefully prepared operations, Soviet commanders as a whole were psychologically better prepared for mobile warfare than their French and British counterparts. After making the allowances, however, two points are clear. The distance between the German-Belgian frontier at the Ardennes and the Channel roughly equals that from the 1941 Russo-German border to Kiev. The

Germans took just over a week to reach the Channel, but eighteen days - two and a half times as long - to reach Kiev at all, and still longer to control the corridor to it. Furthermore, this blow did not break the South-Western Front, whereas it decided the battle of France.

The French and British reacted poorly to the unexpected direction and energy of the German drive, and within two weeks lost the campaign. Despite their superiority in numbers, their counterattacks were few and feeble, failing to land a blow which caused the Germans more than incidental discomfort. Popel's drive into Dubno, merely one part of a Soviet counterattack, puts the Arras and Abbeville counterattacks to shame in both scale and effect. Again, the French logistics system failed more completely than that of the South-Western Front: none of the latter's armored divisions failed to engage for lack of fuel - as did happen to the French. Finally, with one German blow the Anglo-French command system collapsed at the highest level, as did the morale of its soldiers. Conversely, the South-Western Front responded to the German drive in a coherent and effective fashion. Throughout the German drive on Kiev, it continually engaged the Germans, forcing them to react, not only at the tactical, but also the operational level. Contrary to common views, at least one part of the June 1941 Red Army, the South-Western Front, performed better against the Germans than the French and British armies in 1940. Not that the South-Western Front performed a military miracle - simply that, given the handicaps created by Stavka's decisions, it performed respectably well.

That performance, in turn, offers the best picture we possess of the real quality of the Red Army of 1941. In mobile war, the Germans held great advantages. Their superior communications, experience, and training permitted better coordination, which often allowed them to smash Soviet counterattacks piecemeal, as with the 9th and 19th

Mechanized Corps north of Dubno. Soviet armored formations were simply not the equals of the German formations, because of inexperienced commanders, tactical weaknesses, and a poor supporting infrastructure. These problems were most crippling at the tactical level, and less so, albeit still serious, at higher levels. Soviet anti-tank forces were skilled and effective tactically, although the Soviet commanders may not have fully appreciated how to use them.

However, Soviet forces often literally matched the quality of their German equivalents when fighting in prepared positions, such as the Kiev Fortified Region and those held by the 26th and 5th Armies. This was the case because they had time to prepare their own communications nets and thus reduce the scope of that particular German advantage, while their characteristics were better suited to the slower-paced engagements that resulted from such fighting. Operationally, moreover, the Soviets were on a more equal footing with the Germans than is commonly realized. While coordination between corps and armies was far from perfect, it steadily improved over the course of the campaign as the Soviet communications network recovered from the initial shock. In general, given time to prepare, Soviet forces could meet German forces on fairly equal terms.

However, none of these lessons had been learned when the South-Western Front shot its offensive bolt at Dubno. Here, the South-Western Front was crippled by two critical problems not of its own making: a surprise attack and chaotic organization. Under these circumstances, it then faced a third and equally costly problem - the prewar Soviet approach of planning for defense by means of immediate, complex, and all-out counterattack. This exposed every Soviet weakness to every German strength, and cost the Red Army heavily in both armored and infantry strength. Indeed, as a result the South-Western Front lost most of its mechanized forces. While its armored

strength would in any case have been seriously reduced by breakdowns, a carefully-organized, albeit still all-out, counterattack into the German spearheads as they penetrated the Fortified Regions on the 1939 border might have been much more effective than the Dubno counterattack. In contrast to the hurried and piecemeal nature of the Dubno attack, the mechanized corps would have had time to prepare their plans because the Fortified Regions would have slowed the rate of German movement. This is, of course, speculation, but it does rest on some basis of fact. The counterattacks launched by the much weakened mechanized corps against the German forces breaking through the Fortified Regions in the days after July 10 did considerably slow the northern and southern sections of the German breakthrough. Even accounting for breakdowns, which might have been fewer given the shorter and slower approach march needed, Soviet armor could easily have been more than two or three times stronger numerically in the alternative considered here.

The need for preparation points to the major flaw in Soviet operations: insufficient flexibility, particularly tactical flexibility, because of inadequate training, inexperienced commanders, and major flaws in communications and logistical systems. It is hard to imagine any force functioning better under the handicaps they faced in the summer of 1941, and the Soviets steadily learned and improved. Yet these weaknesses should not be overstated, for if they are, the fact of Soviet survival in 1941 becomes inexplicable. While the logistical system failed to provide abundant supply, the South-Western Front usually provided enough fuel, food, and ammunition to let its units fight and move - a triumph more, perhaps, of determination than organization. Again, as the first day's confusion wore off, communications problems affected South-Western Front operations less and less.

Nor were Soviet commanders so uniformly poor as is often thought. Kirponos and his subordinates understood fairly well what they needed to accomplish in a mobile war. They grasped the nature of the relation between time and space involved in mechanized operations, although they were not always able to carry out their aims because of shortcomings in their forces. They did not recognize these shortcomings at first, but the operations attempted on their own initiative became steadily more realistic as time progressed, and as Kirponos and his commanders became better acquainted with the actual capabilities of their forces. The same cannot be said, in 1941, of Stalin. Not only were his orders unrealistic - witness both the counterattack ordered into Poland on June 22 and the insignificant withdrawal from Kiev ordered on September 18 - but the fear resulting from the purges, of which Pavlov's execution was a part, crippled the willingness of competent officers to take correct decisions. This was certainly true of Kirponos - it was intrinsic to all of his weaker decisions. Even Zhukov was not entirely safe, although he did avoid execution when he recommended withdrawal from Kiev on July 29.

Discussion of these Soviet strengths and weaknesses shows that even in 1941, the German Army had no marked operational advantage over the Red Army. This, in turn, demonstrates the critical importance of surprise as a factor in the initial German victories. That dramatically exacerbated the problems of Soviet, Polish, and Anglo-French forces in 1939-1941, both at the tactical and operational levels. In fact, one can plausibly argue that had the South-Western Front been allowed to mobilize fully, Army Group South would have found it costly and hard even to penetrate the frontier areas, and might never have reached Kiev. The crucial importance of surprise also points to the greatest cause for the catastrophic Soviet losses in the summer of 1941: Stalin's refusal to mobilize. This denied the frontier forces the time they needed to halt the

Germans. In turn, Soviet forces deeper in the interior lost the time they needed to prepare, enhancing German advantages in flexibility and reducing the ability of the Soviet second echelon to launch effective counterattacks. In this respect the South-Western Front had an advantage over all its counterparts, as its higher level of alertness allowed it to slow German operations from the outbreak of the war. The South-Western Front's preparedness reduced the impact of German surprise.

By reducing the impact of surprise, the South-Western Front helped to destroy the chance for German success in Barbarossa. Its mere ability to hold on tied down German forces, and reduced the scale of the reinforcement problem confronting the Soviet Union. In particular, the Western Front needed to be completely rebuilt. Had the South-Western Front been shattered in the same manner, the Soviets could have faced far greater problems in the first months of the war, as the reinforcements which were sent to reconstruct the Western Front would have had to have been spread out to cover the South-Western Front's axis as well. As a result, the defense on both axes would have been much weaker. Arguably, in fact, only if the South-Western Front had collapsed as the Western Front did could the Germans have won the war against the Soviet Union. Instead, the South-Western Front held Ukraine, tied down Army Group South, and even so sent two armies to help the Western Front defend Smolensk.

Moreover, the South-Western Front still held Ukraine when Smolensk fell, thereby creating the conditions for the battle within the German command regarding how to exploit Germany's victories on the battlefield. In this, the South-Western Front acted as a catalyst: a necessary, but not of itself a sufficient, source for this debate. Without its internal divisions, the German command could not have been so influenced by the South-Western Front's resistance. Without the resistance the internal dissensions might have remained invisible. The South-Western Front brought them

into the open, creating a pause in German operations and then drawing German forces away from Moscow. The immediate consequence of drawing Panzer Group II south was the South-Western Front's destruction. However, this sacrifice was not pointless, for it helped the Soviet Union win the war.

How it did so is a complex issue, best approached by considering whether the Germans could have won their war with the Soviet Union at all, and specifically through a drive on Moscow in September 1941. Some, such as Richard Stolfi in Hitler's Panzers East¹⁷⁰, argue that had the Germans done so, instead of driving south to encircle the South-Western Front, they could have seized Moscow and thus would have won the war. This case is dubious. Moscow was a city of great psychological, transport, and economic importance to the Soviets, but its fall was unlikely to have destroyed the Soviet Union. The case to the contrary must be proven, not simply assumed. The frightful sacrifices the Soviet regime extracted from its people even in 1941 indicates that it had the resilience to continue to fight, from beyond the Urals if need be. In the final analysis, Moscow was but one city of a very large state, and did not have the decisive importance to the Soviet Union that Paris did to France. Overall, the prospects of a German victory in the war as it began seem slim - vastly slimmer, of course, had the Red Army been permitted to prepare. Furthermore, all the German advantages lay in a quick war: the longer the war lasted, the more Soviet advantages in manpower, production, and growing expertise would tip the balance in the Soviet favor.

This is where the true importance of Moscow lay. If the Germans could seize it, or at least cripple its capabilities as a transport hub, production center, and

¹⁷⁰ Stolfi, R.H.S., Hitler's Panzers East: World War II Reinterpreted, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

manpower base, they could reduce the Soviet advantages. On the other hand, any attempt to do so would involve costs and risks. This was particularly true so long as the South-Western Front threatened the German flank.

Indeed, a direct assault on Moscow in 1941 might have created the German nightmare of 1942 and later. A Stalingrad or Leningrad-style defense to the death might well have held the Germans at the city until winter, whereupon Soviet pinning assaults could have produced a killing encirclement of the German forces at Moscow - the cream of the German Army. Siberian forces, comprising over a million trained soldiers, would have been available under any circumstances. Had the Germans driven east but not south, Yeremenko's command, perhaps supported by elements of South-Western Front, could also have attacked the southern flank of Army Group Center - and, indeed, was formed for the express purpose of opposing Guderian wherever he might move. As it was, the Soviet counterattacks almost broke the German Army in December 1941; they might have succeeded against an even more overextended target.

In arguing that the Germans could have seized Moscow, Stolfi commits several errors. He asserts that the city would have surrendered quickly. This is dubious. He extrapolates German advances on the basis of their performance against the Western Front in the initial week of the war. This is misleading. A better, and rather less encouraging, source of comparison would be the advance on Kiev or the fighting in Leningrad or Stalingrad. He also underestimates logistical difficulties which would have crippled an offensive to and beyond Moscow. He ignores Soviet sources, relying entirely on German accounts regarding Soviet dispositions - and thereby grossly underestimates them. In particular, he literally ignores the existence of Yeremenko's forces on the south-eastern flank of Army Group Center in mid-August, and the depletion of the latter's ammunition stocks as a result of defending against the Soviet

counteroffensive at Yelnaya. Stolfi also entirely discounts the possibility that the Soviets could take any independent or inconvenient actions, such as a flank blow by elements of the South-Western Front in combination with Yeremenko's forces. In light of the Soviet actions on the South-Western Front and in December 1941 - not to mention the rest of the war - no one should make such an assumption. In short, it is unlikely that the Germans could have seized or even encircled Moscow. It is less likely still that they could have retained Moscow had they taken it, and possible that they would have lost the war in 1941 had they tried to do so without first eliminating the danger posed to their flank by the South-Western Front.

However, the real issue is not whether driving straight on Moscow would have won the war, but whether it would have improved Germany's relative position. That the Germans could have reached Moscow had they not turned south is probable - but in order to reach it and stay there without risking disaster, they needed security for their southern flank. Whether they seized the city or simply sat in the environs of Moscow, reducing its transport and industrial operations through fire, this would not have won the war for Germany. It could simply have slowed Soviet recovery, and this effect might not have been significant unless the Don Basin had also been seized. This, in turn, would have been very difficult to do had Panzer Group II not gone south. Of course, in all likelihood Panzer Group I would have crossed the Dnepr on its own steam during the early autumn of 1941 and captured at least some of this rich area, especially had a drive on Moscow prevented significant reinforcements from reaching the South-Western Front. Nonetheless, whether one thinks in terms of weakening the Red Army, of improving the defensive position of the Wehrmacht for the Soviet counteroffensive which was sure to come, or of slowing the Soviet recovery, the best German option was to drive south rather than east.

This leads to a complex conclusion. The South-Western Front's resistance drew the Germans south and it also made going south the correct decision for the Germans. At the same time it made that decision expensive: the time the Germans spent deciding to go south, and then in doing so, doomed their chances to take or disrupt Moscow in 1941. The resistance of the South-Western Front ensured that Barbarossa would decline into a classic German military enterprise: a series of spectacular operations rendered pointless by the lack of a strategy.

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Key to Abbreviations Used in Maps:

(-): indicates only part of the formation is present; if not applied to all parts of a formation, usually applied to largest portion present on map

A: Army

AA: Anti-Aircraft

AGC: Army Group Center

AGS: Army Group South

ATB: Anti-Tank Brigade

FD: Forward Detachment (strong lead group of some Soviet formations)

ID: Infantry Division

MC: Mechanized Corps

MD: Motorized Division

MG: Mobile Group

Pz: Panzer Division

PzG: Panzer Group

RC: Rifle Corps

RD: Rifle Division

Rgt: Regiment

SF: Southern Front

SWF: South-Western Front

TD: Tank Division

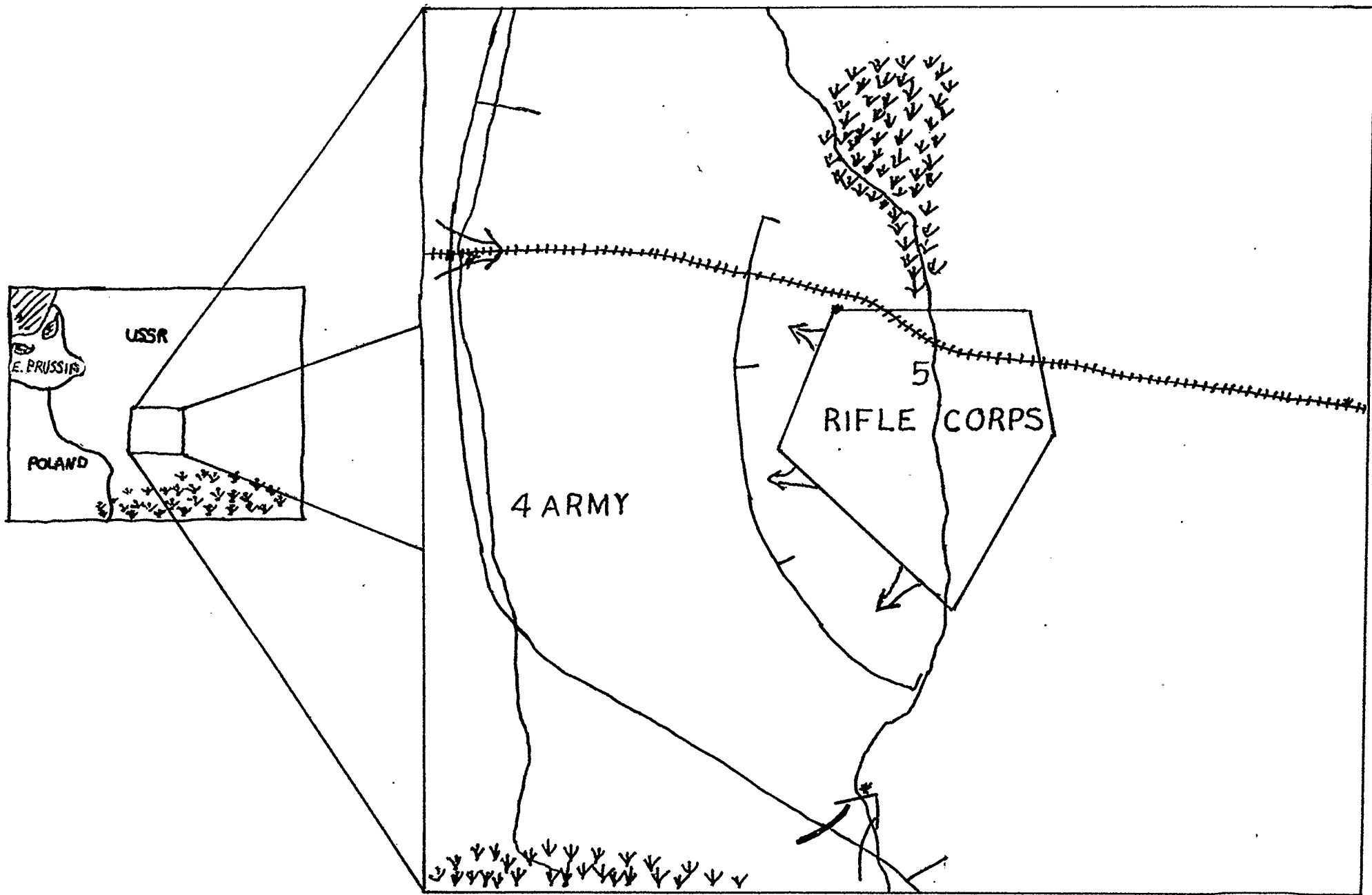
WF: Western Front

Arrows:

- indicate movement

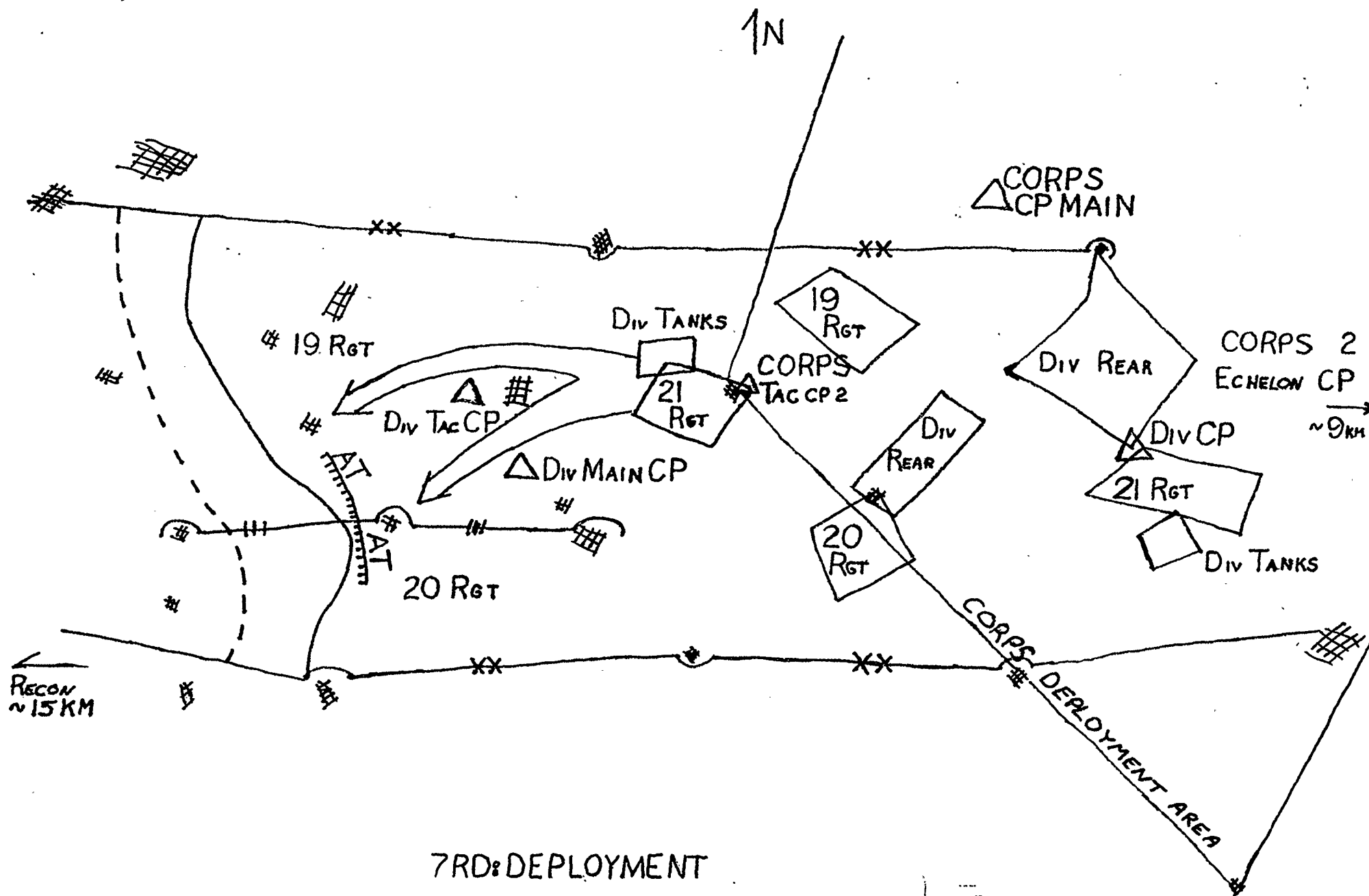
- arrows which end in an short 180 turn indicate failed attacks

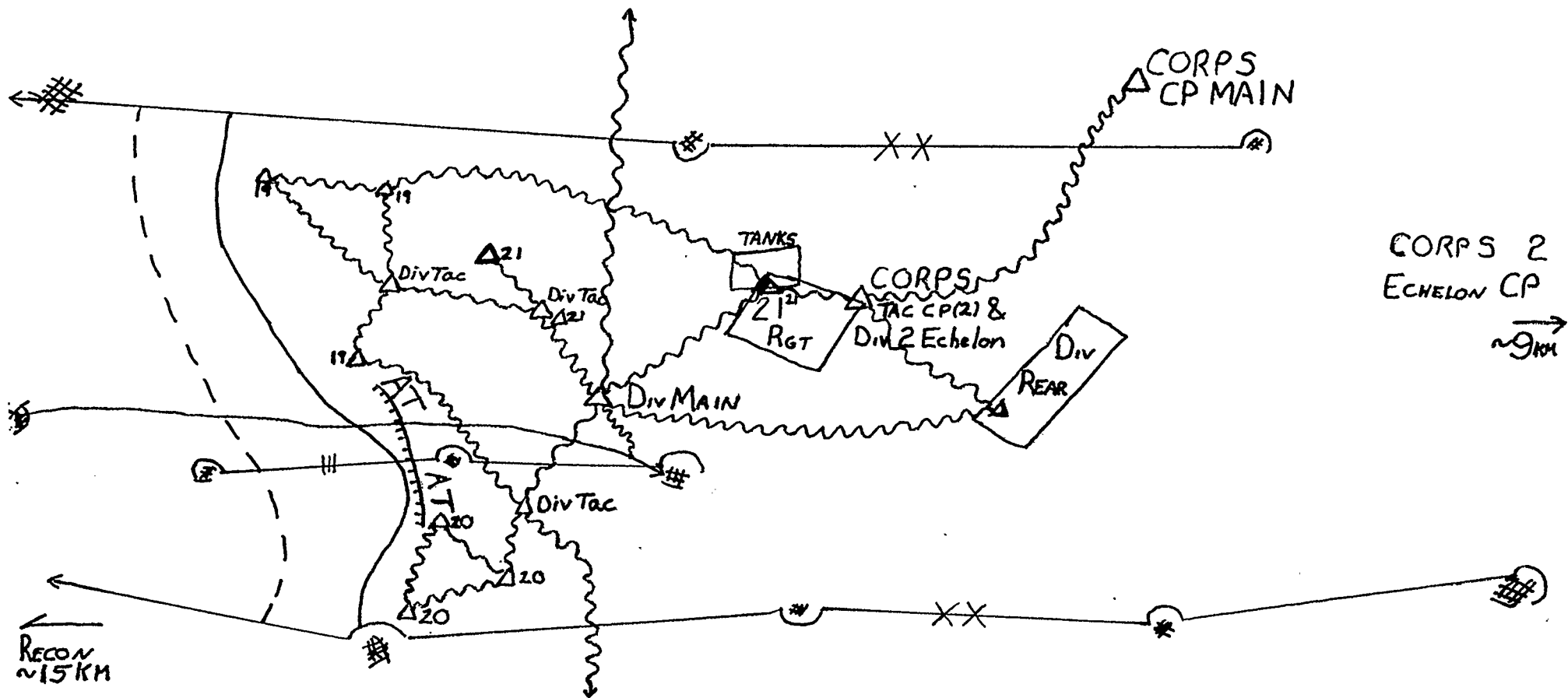
Lines with dashes on one side indicate Soviet pre-war fortifications.



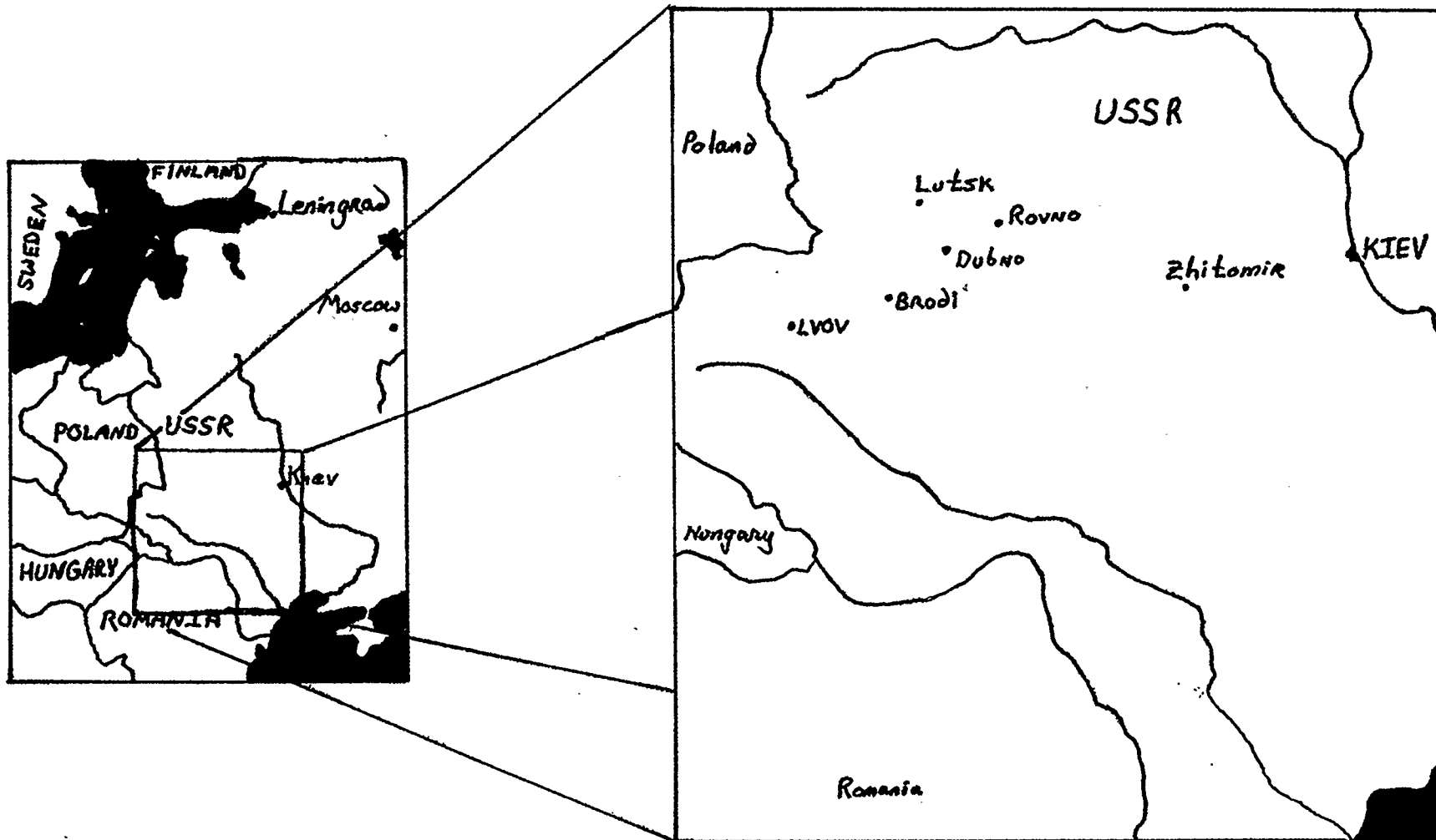
7RD: SITUATION

0 5 10 15 20 25 40 KM





MEETING ENGAGEMENT: ORIENTATION MAP



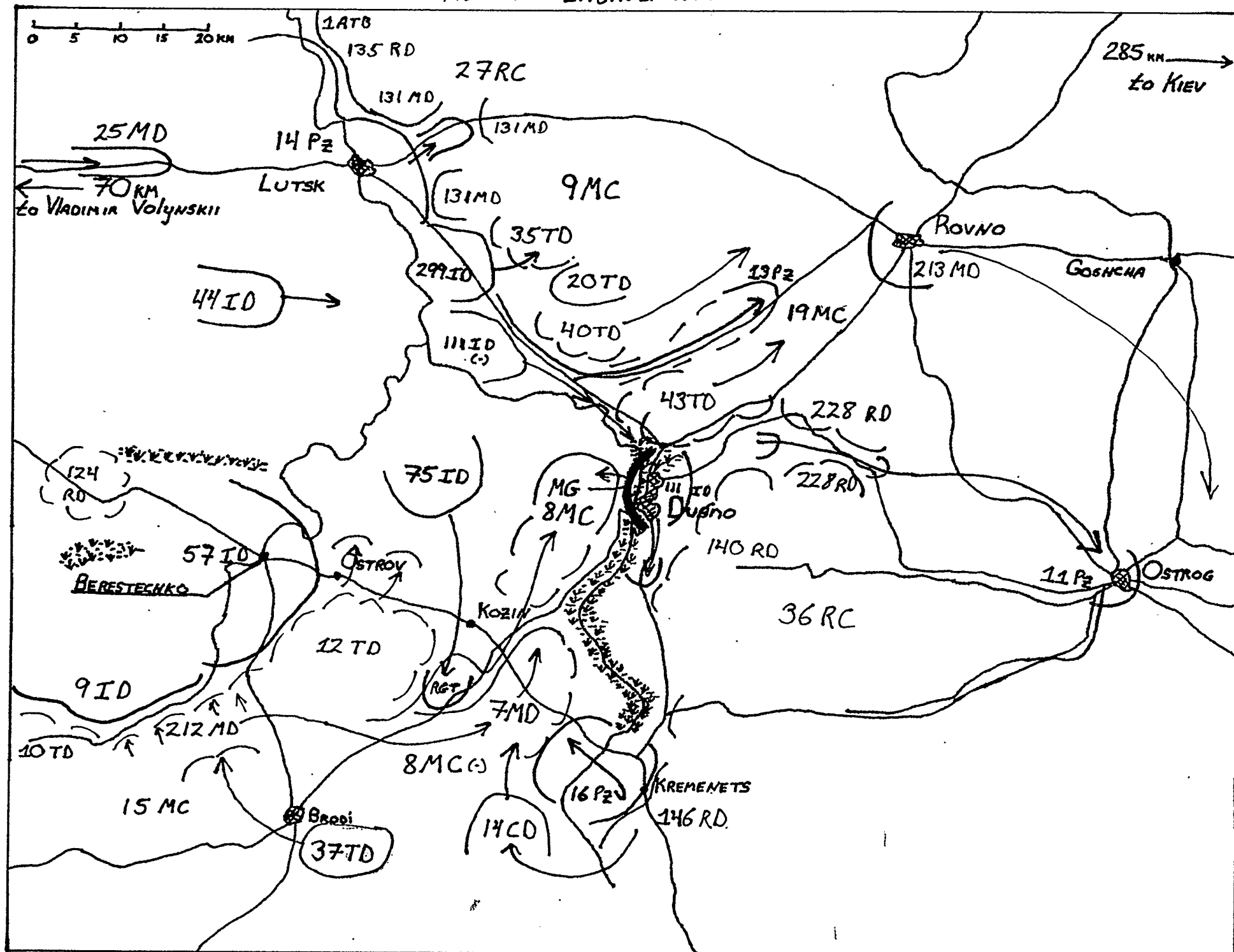
A hand-drawn map of Western Ukraine, showing military units and movements. The map includes a scale bar at the top left (0 to 20 km) and a direction indicator at the top right (285 km to Kiev). Key locations marked include Lutsk, Rovno, Ostrog, Dubno, Kremenets, Brodi, and Berestechno. Military units and formations are labeled with numbers and abbreviations, such as 1ATB, 135RD, 27RC, 9MC, 35TD, 20TD, 40TD, 43TD, 19MC, 213MD, 215MD, 19TD, 14Pz, 13Pz, 131MD, 299ID, 111ID, 75ID, 57ID(-), 16Pz, 57ID, 10TD, 15MC, 37TD, 212MD, 12TD, 8MC, 34TD, 11Pz, 11Pz, 14CD, 24CD, 36RC, 228RD, 140RD, 146RD, 70KM to Vladimir Volynskii (135RD), and 285 km to Kiev. Arrows indicate movement directions, and various symbols (circles, squares, rectangles) represent different types of units or locations.

EVENING 25 JUNE

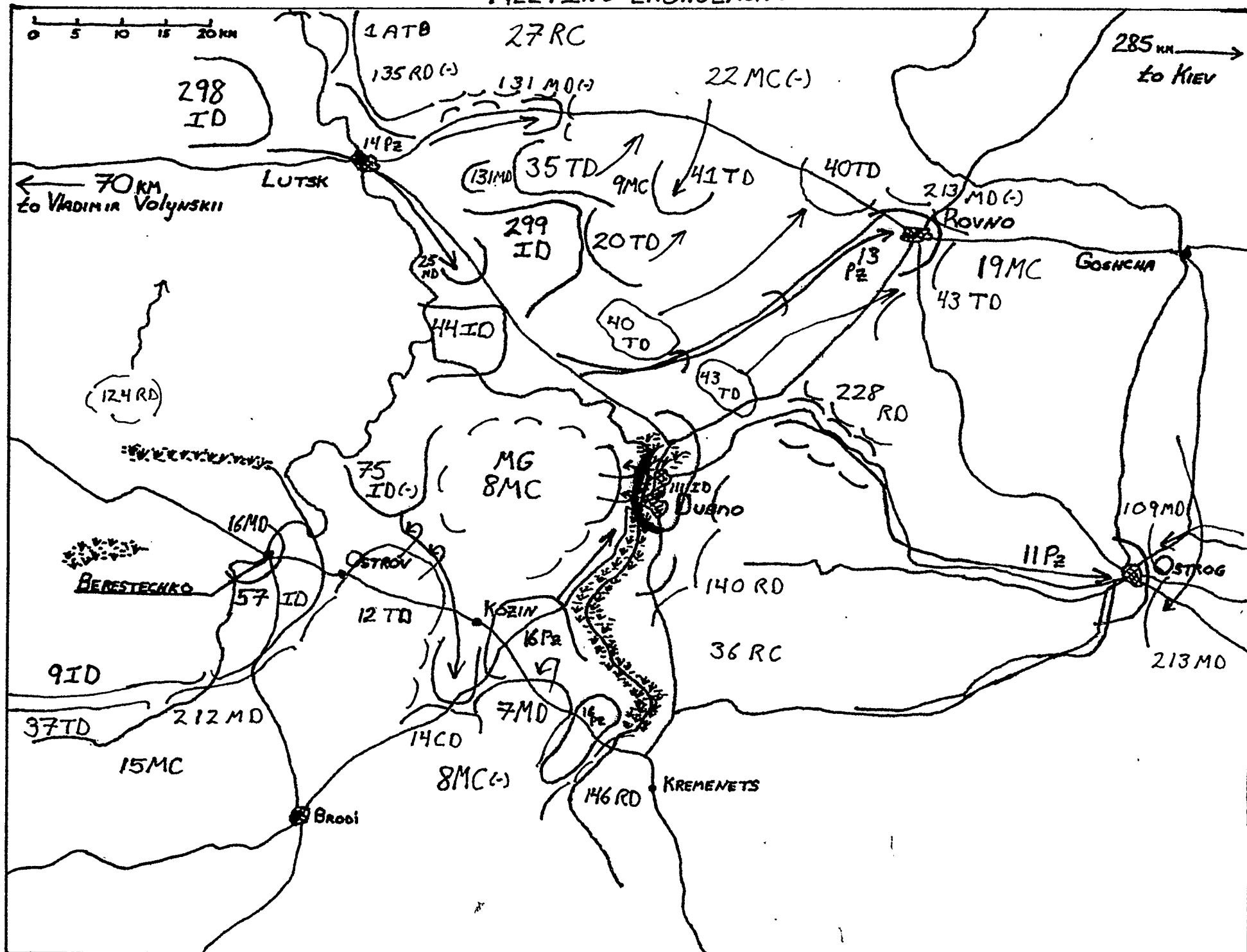
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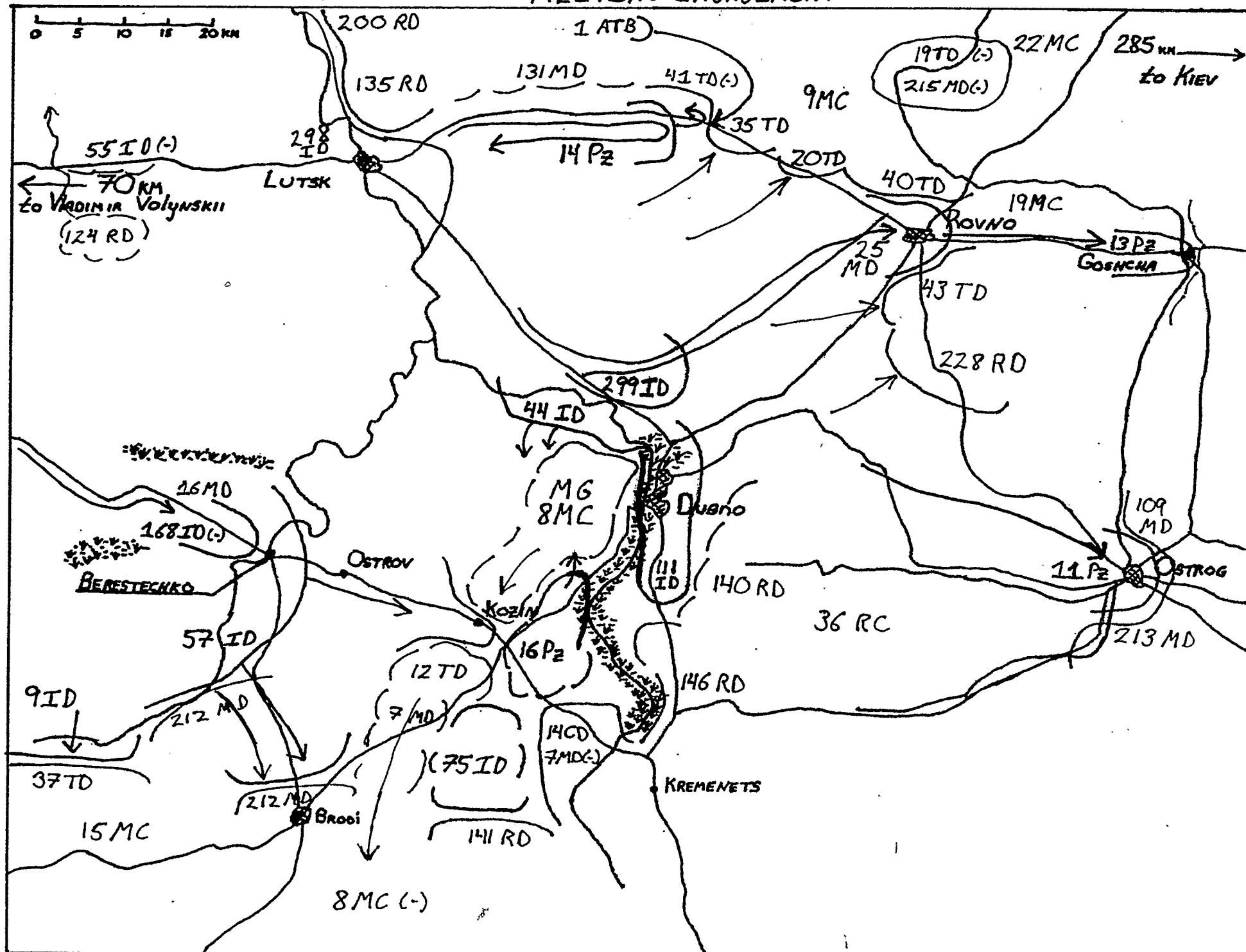
EVENING 26 JUNE

EVENING 27 JUNE



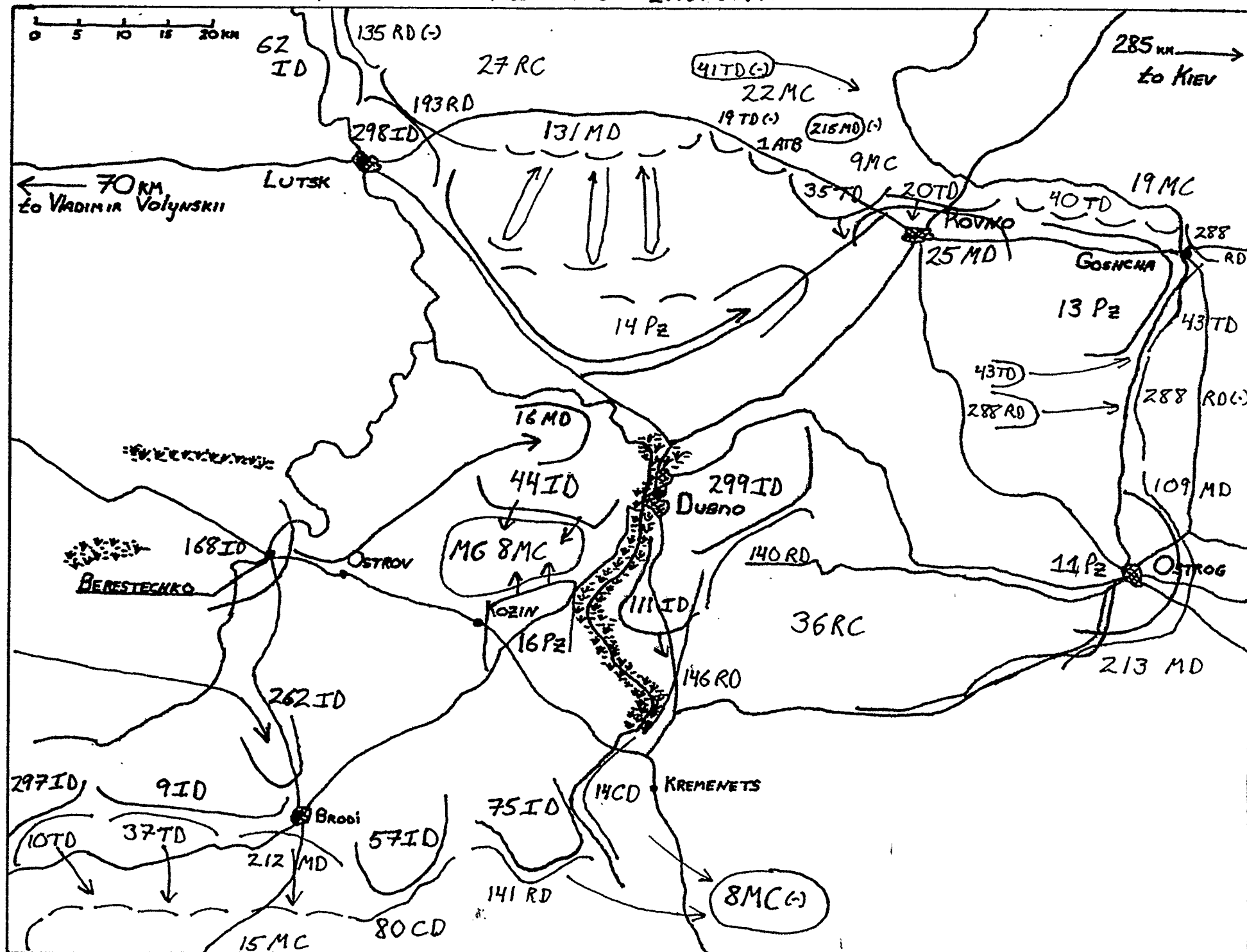
EVENING 28 JUNE



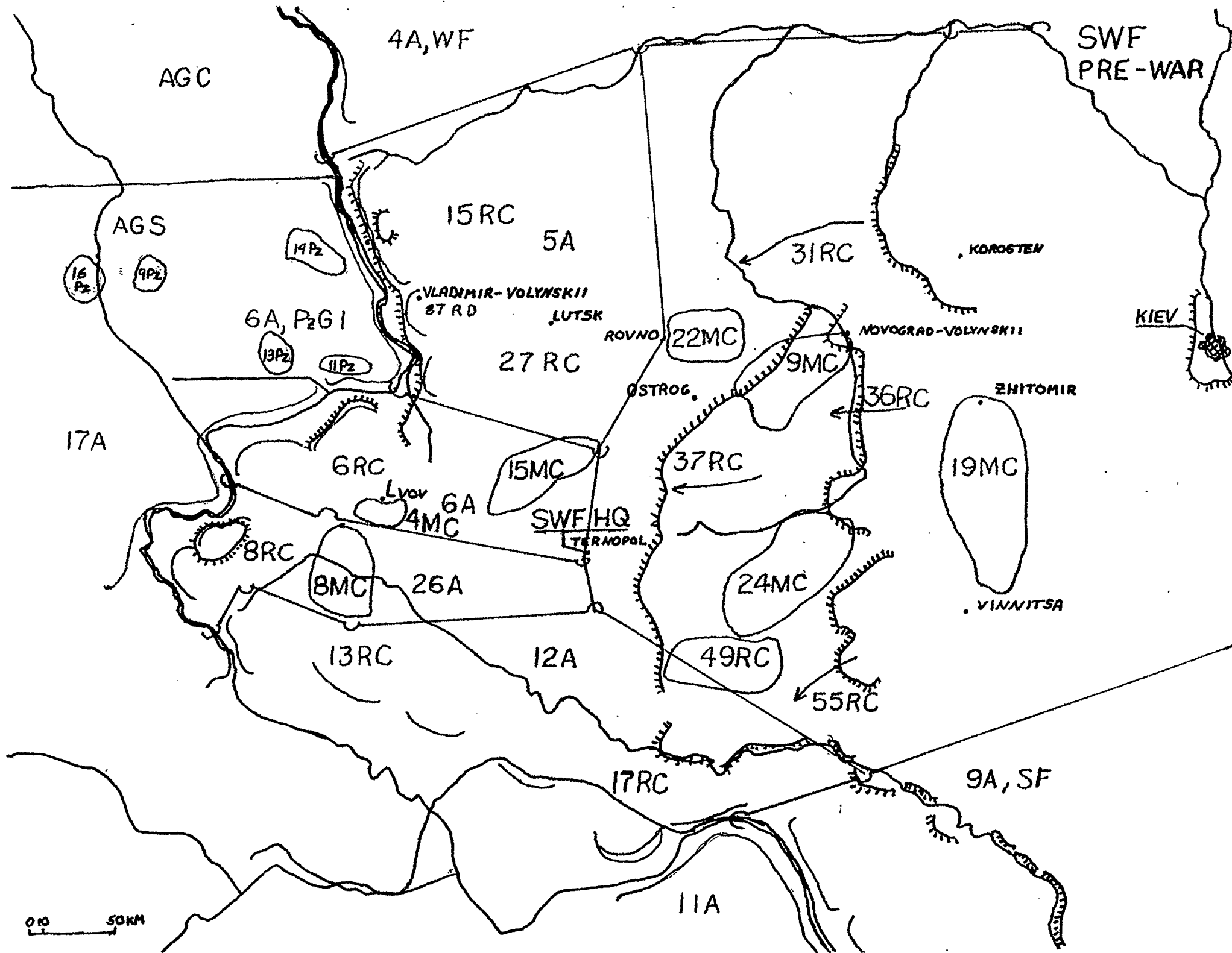


EVENING 29 JUNE

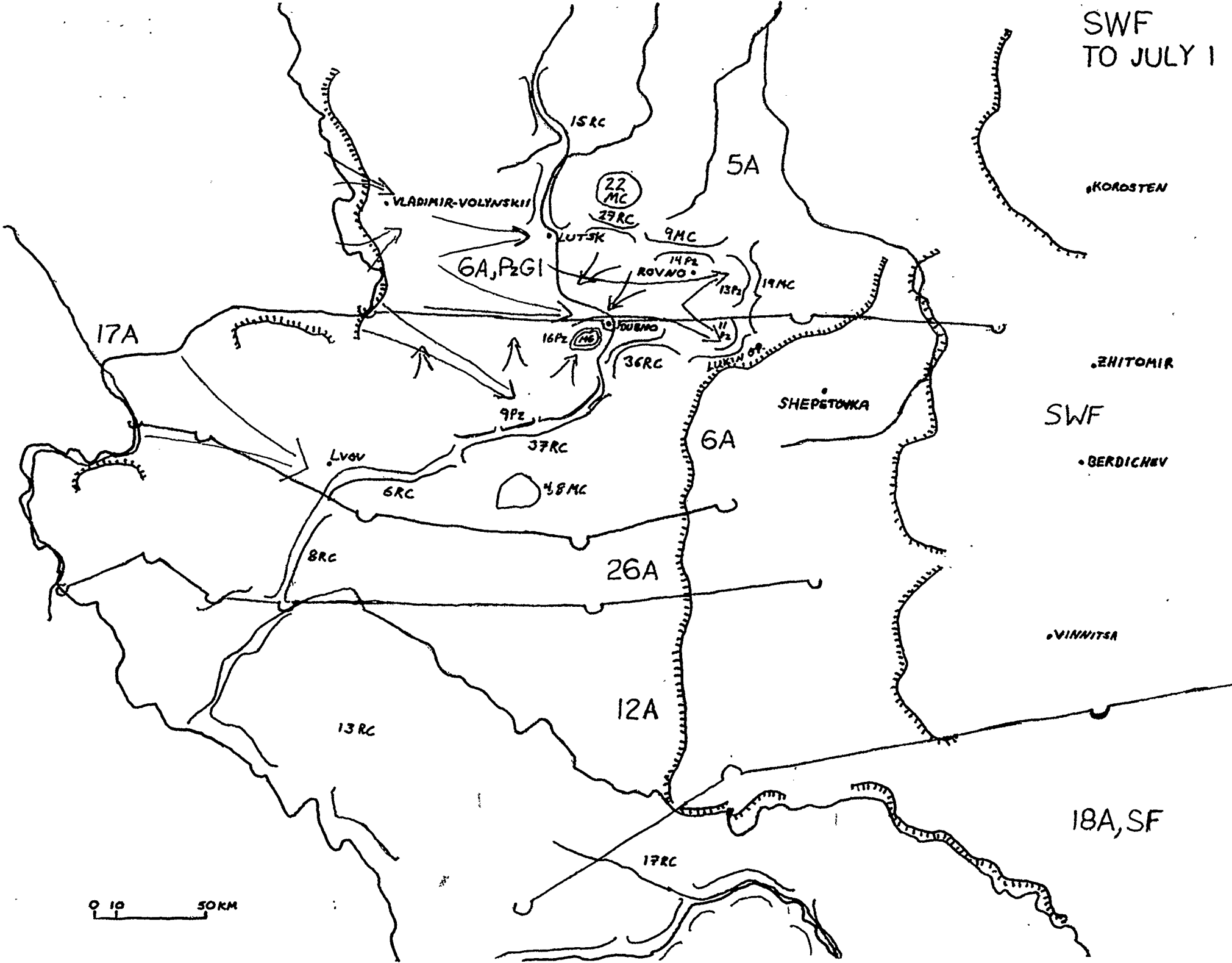
MEETING ENGAGEMENT



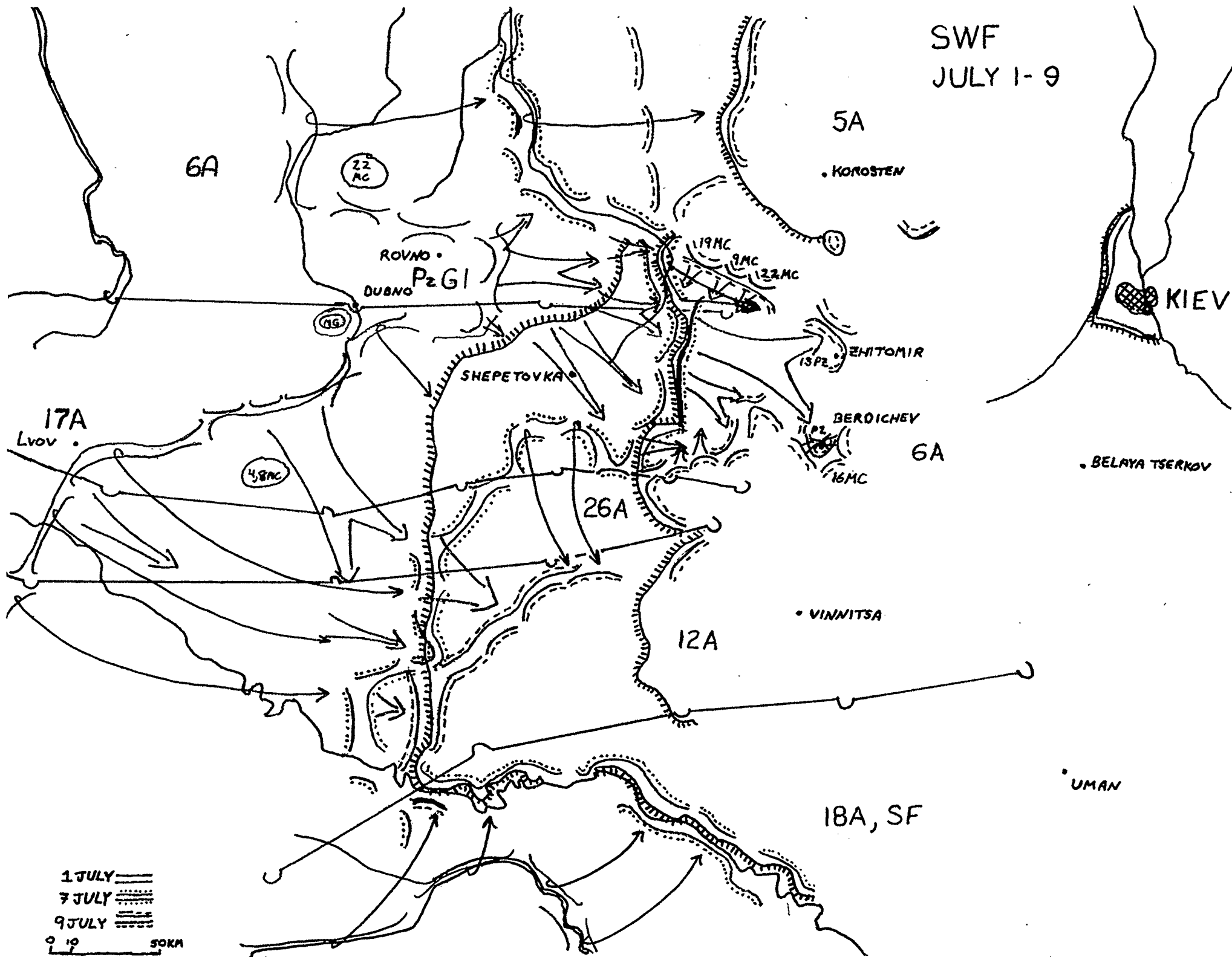
EVENING 30 JUNE



SWF
TO JULY 1



SWF
JULY 1-9



50KM

✓SWF

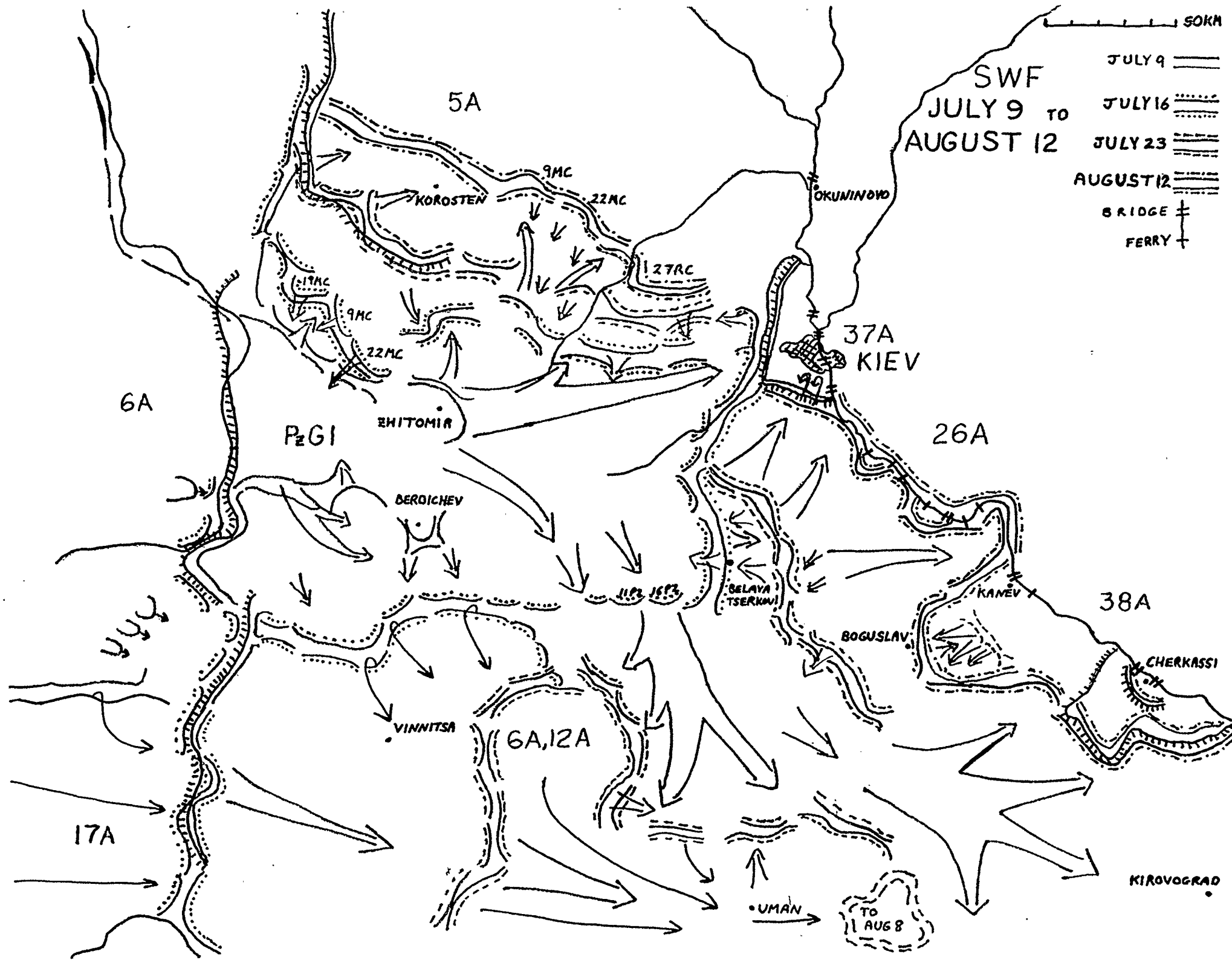
JULY 9 TO

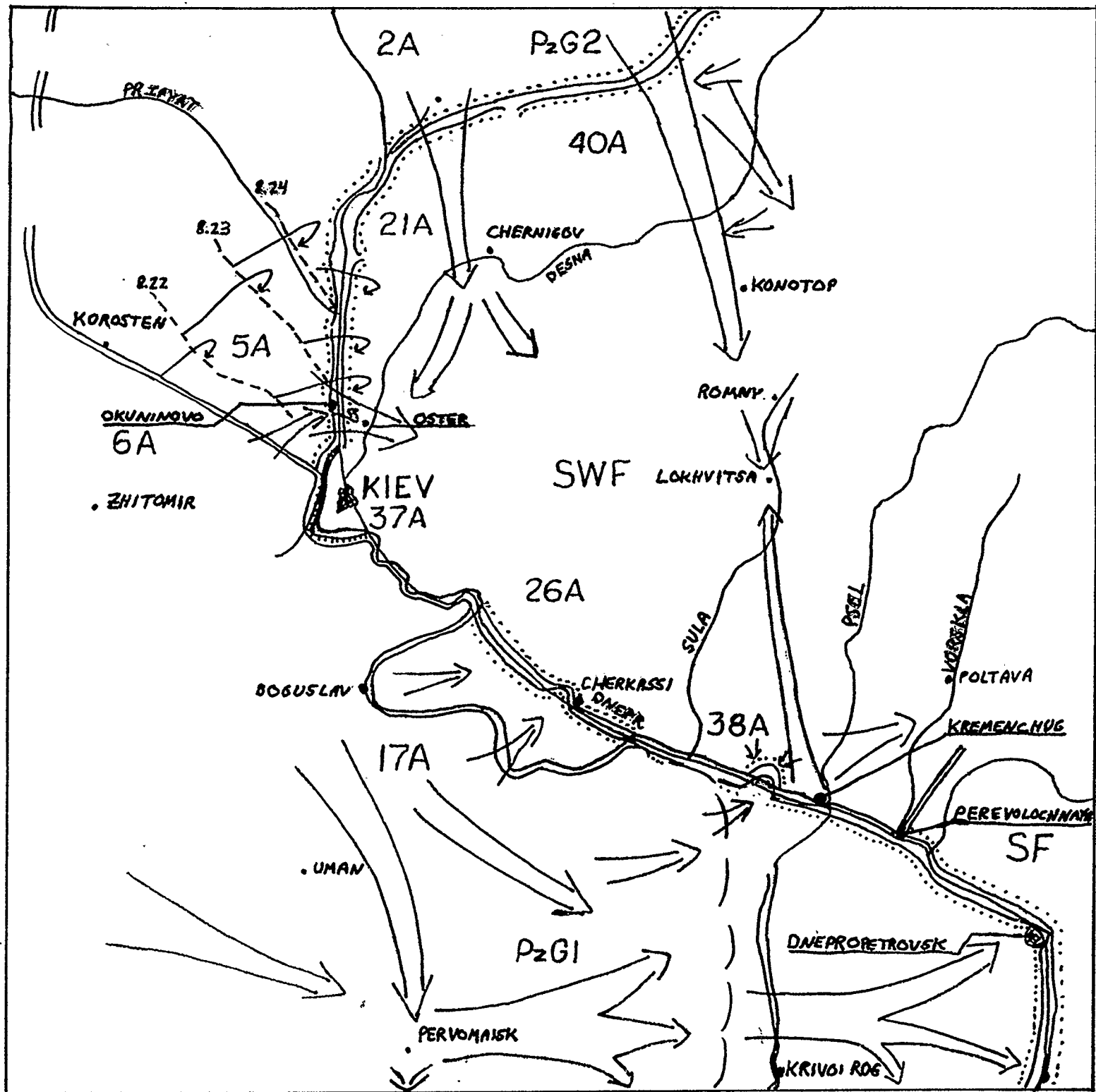
AUGUST 12

AUGUST 12

BRIDGE ±

FERRY +





SWF
AUGUST AND
SEPTEMBER
AUGUST 12
AUGUST 25