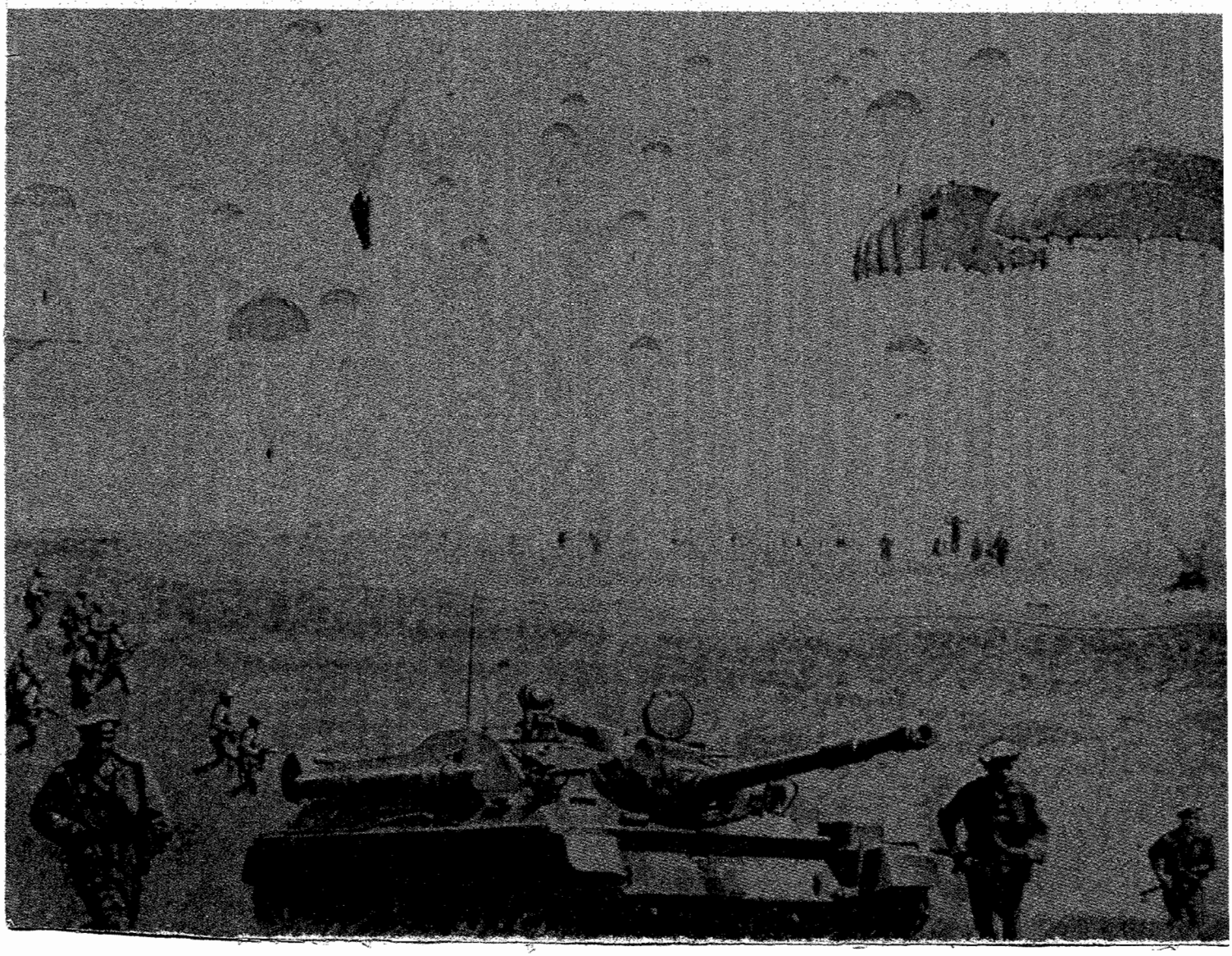
COMBAT STUDIES INSTITUTE

Research Survey No. 4

The Soviet Airborne Experience

by Lieutenant Colonel David M. Glantz

November 1984



FOREWORD

Deep battle, a major element in both U.S. and Soviet doctrine, is a tenet that emphasizes destroying, suppressing, or disorganizing enemy forces not only at the line of contact, but throughout the depth of the battlefield. Airborne forces are a primary instrument to accomplish this type of operation. While the exploits of German, British, and American paratroops since 1940 are well known to most professional soldiers, the equivalent experience of the Soviet Union has been largely ignored—except in the Soviet Union. There, the Red Army's airborne operations have become the focus of many recent studies by military theorists.

Lieutenant Colonel David M. Glantz has done much to remedy this gap in our historical literature. *The Soviet Airborne Experience* examines the experiences of the Red Army in World War II and traces Soviet airborne theory and practice both before and since the Great Patriotic War of 1941—45. Airborne warfare emerges as an essential part of the high-speed offensive operations planned by Soviet commanders.

Because Lieutenant Colonel Glantz examines airborne operations within the larger context of Soviet unconventional warfare, the implications of this study reach beyond one specialized form of maneuver. This study, in demonstrating the ability of Russian airborne and partisan forces to survive and fight behind German lines for months at a time, provides us with an instructive example of how Soviet special operations troops probably plan to operate in future wars. *The Soviet Airborne Experience* is an important reference for anyone concerned with planning and conducting operations.



DAVE R. PALMER
Major General, USA
Deputy Commandant

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Cover photo from *Soviet Military Review,* No. 10, 1971.



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November 1984

U.S. Army
Command and General
Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-6900

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Glantz, David M.
The Soviet airborne experience.

(Research survey / Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ; no. 4)
"November 1984."
Bibliography: p.
1. Soviet Union. Armiia—Parachute troops—History.
2. Soviet Union. Armiia—Airborne troops—History.
3. World War, 1939-1945—Aerial operations, Russian.
I. U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Combat Studies Institute. II. Title. III. Series: Research survey (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Combat Studies Institute) ; no. 4.
UD485.S65G53 1985 356'.166'0947 84-28536

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402

CONTENTS

Maps v
Tables vii
Abbreviations ix
Symbols xi

Chapter
1. THE PREWAR EXPERIENCE 1

Genesis of the Airborne Concept 1
Early Experimentation 4
Formation of an Airborne Force 8
On the Eve of War 18

2. EVOLUTION OF AIRBORNE FORCES DURING WORLD WAR II 25

Initial Airborne Involvement 25
Organization and Employment 28

3. OPERATIONAL EMPLOYMENT: VYAZ'MA, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1942 37

Strategic Context 37
Operational Planning 44
8th Airborne Brigade Assault 48
8th Airborne Brigade Operations 53
Conclusions 56

4. OPERATIONAL EMPLOYMENT: VYAZ'MA, FEBRUARY-JUNE 1942 59

Operational Planning 59
4th Airborne Corps Assault 63
February Offensive 65
March Offensive 67
April Offensive 73
Encirclement and Breakout, 1 May-23 June 1942 .. 79
Conclusions 85

5. OPERATIONAL EMPLOYMENT: ON THE DNEPR, SEPTEMBER 1943 91

Operational Planning 91
Airborne Assault 99
5th Airborne Brigade Operations 102
Conclusions 109

6. TACTICAL EMPLOYMENT..... 113

General..... 113
Teryaeva Sloboda, December 1941..... 114
Medyn, January 1942..... 115
Zhelan'ye, January 1942..... 121
Rzhev, February 1942..... 126
Kerch-Feodosiya, December 1941-
January 1942..... 128
Diversionary Operations..... 131

7. THE POSTWAR YEARS..... 135

The Intellectual Context..... 135
The Stalinist Years: 1946-53..... 137
The Nuclear Era: 1953-68..... 143
Contemporary Airborne Operations..... 148

8. CONCLUSIONS..... 159

Notes..... 163
Bibliography..... 197

MAPS

1. Belorussian Maneuvers, 14 September 1935..... 12
2. Use of Airborne Forces on the Offensive, 1936..... 15
3. Area of Operations, Soviet Winter Offensive, January-May 1942..... 213
4. Situation Facing the Western Front, 25 January 1942, and Concept of the Airborne Operation..... 43
5. Vyaz'ma-Dorogobuzh Area..... 214
6. 4th Airborne Corps Plan of Operations, 25 January 1942..... 215
7. 8th Airborne Brigade and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps Operations, 27 January-8 February 1942..... 216
8. 8th Airborne Brigade and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps Operations, 8-17 February 1942..... 217
9. 8th Airborne Brigade and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps Operations, 17-28 February 1942..... 218
10. 8th Airborne Brigade and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps Operations, 28 February-24 March 1942..... 219
11. Western Front Positions, 15 February 1942, and the Plan of 4th Airborne Corps..... 60
12. Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov Area..... 220
13. 4th Airborne Corps Plan of Operations, 16 February 1942..... 221
14. 4th Airborne Corps Operations, 17 February-1 March 1942..... 222
15. 4th Airborne Corps Operations, 1-20 March 1942.... 223
16. German 137th Infantry Division Defensive Area..... 69
17. 4th Airborne Corps Operations, 20 March-11 April 1942..... 224
18. Territory Occupied by Belov's Forces, March-May 1942..... 74
19. 4th Airborne Corps and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps Operations, 11-24 April 1942..... 225
20. 4th Airborne Corps and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps Operations, 26 April-30 May 1942..... 226
21. Breakout to 10th Army, 1-11 June 1942..... 227
22. Breakout to 10th Army, 11-23 June 1942..... 228
23. Voronezh Front Advance to the Dnepr, September 1943..... 92
24. Kanev-Bukrin Area..... 229
25. Dnepr Airborne Operation Plan, 20 September 1943.. 230
26. Dnepr Airborne Operation Revised Plan, 23 September 1943..... 231
27. Dnepr Airborne Operation, 24 September-13 October 1943..... 232
28. 5th Airborne Brigade Operations, November 1943.... 106
29. Medyn Area..... 116
30. Medyn Airborne Operation Plan, 3 January 1942..... 118

31. Medyn Operation, 3-20 January 1942..... 119
32. Zhelan'ye Airborne Operation, 20 January 1942..... 233
33. Zhelan'ye Airborne Operation, 27 January 1942..... 234
34. Zhelan'ye Airborne Operation,
29 January-1 February 1942..... 235
35. Rzhev Operation, February 1942..... 127
36. Kerch-Feodosiya Operation,
December 1941-January 1942..... 130

TABLES

1. Airborne Brigades, 1936 16
2 Airborne Regiments, 1936 16
3. Airborne Forces, 1939 17
4. Airborne Brigade, 1940 21
5. Airborne Corps, 1941 22
6. Airborne Corps Dispositions, June 1941 26
7. Airborne Brigade, 1941 29
8. Soviet Airborne Operations in the Moscow Region, 1941-42 30
9. Conversion of Airborne Units, Summer 1942 31
10. Separate Airborne Army, 1944 34

ABBREVIATIONS

A	Army
AA	Antiaircraft detachment
Abn	Airborne
AC	Airborne corps (Soviet)
AC	Army corps (German)
AG	Army group
AR	Airborne regiment (Soviet)
AR	Artillery regiment (German)
Arty	Artillery
ATGM	Antitank guided missile
Bde	Brigade
Bn	Battalion
Cav	Cavalry
CC	Cavalry corps
CD	Cavalry division
Cmd	Command
Co	Company
Detach	Detachment
Div	Division
Flak	Antiaircraft detachment
GA	Guards army
GCC	Guards cavalry corps
GCD	Guards cavalry division
Gds	Guards
GMB	Guards mechanized brigade
GMRD	Guards motorized rifle division
Gp	Group
GRD	Guards rifle division
Gren	Grenadier
GTA	Guards tank army
GTB	Guards tank brigade
GTC	Guards tank corps
HQ	Headquarters
I Bde	Infantry brigade
ID	Infantry division
Inf	Infantry
IR	Infantry regiment
Jgd	reconnaissance unit

MC.....Mechanized corps (Soviet)
MC.....Motorized corps (German)
MD.....Military district
MD.....Motorized division (German)
Mech.....Mechanized
Mot.....Motorized

MRB.....Motorized rifle brigade
MRD.....Motorized rifle division

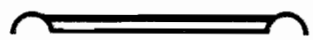
Part.....Partisan
Ptn.....Platoon
Pz.....Panzer

RB.....Rifle brigade
RC.....Rifle corps
RD.....Rifle division
Recon.....Reconnaissance
Regt.....Regiment
Res.....Reserve
RR.....Rifle regiment

TA.....Tank army
TB.....Tank brigade
TC.....Tank corps
Tk.....Tank

SYMBOLS

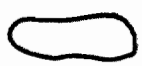
Soviet


Front boundary


Army boundary

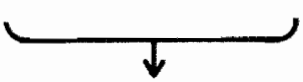

Corps boundary

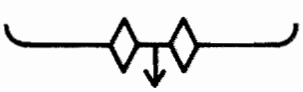

Division/brigade boundary

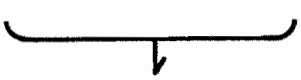

Infantry unit assembly area


Tank/mechanized unit assembly area


Cavalry unit assembly area

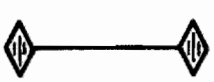

Infantry unit deployed or moving


Tank/mechanized unit deployed or moving

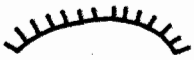

Cavalry unit deployed or moving


Self-propelled artillery unit deployed or moving


Tanks in firing positions


Self-propelled guns in firing position

German


Field fortifications, defensive positions

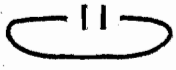

Fortified zones, permanent


Section position

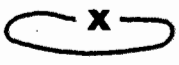

Squad position

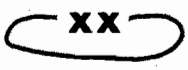

Platoon position


Company position


Battalion position


Regiment position


Brigade position


Division position

Contiguous positions

Fluid (fragmented) positions


Screened area (limited defenses)


Regimental boundary


Divisional boundary


Corps boundary


Army boundary

CHAPTER 1

THE PREWAR EXPERIENCE

Genesis of the Airborne Concept

The genesis of Soviet airborne military doctrine occurred during the decade of the 1920s, a period characterized by intense intellectual ferment in Soviet military affairs. That ferment ultimately converged with the movement toward industrialization and the adoption of modern technology to produce, in the early 1930s, a renaissance of military thought within the Soviet Union. A generation of military leaders and thinkers, conditioned by a revolutionary philosophy and participation in the Russian Civil War and Allied intervention and eager to elevate the Soviet Union into a competitive military position with the rest of Europe, gave shape and focus to that renaissance. They were imaginative men, infused with ideological zeal, encouraged by their political leaders to experiment, and willing to learn from the experiences of military leaders abroad. Their efforts produced a sophisticated military doctrine, advanced for its time, and an elaborate, if not unique, military force structure to implement that doctrine.

It is one of the major ironies of history that the work of these men--the Tukhachevskys, the Triandafilovs, the Issersons, and a host of others--would be eclipsed and almost forgotten. Their efforts for the Soviet Union earned for them only sudden death in the brutal purges of the late 1930s. The formidable armed force they had built and the sophisticated thought that had governed use of that force decayed. The brain of the army dulled, and imagination and initiative failed. The military embarrassments of 1939-40 and the debacle of 1941 blinded the world to the true accomplishments of Soviet military science in the 1930s, and an appreciation of those accomplishments never really returned. The military leaders of 1943-45 resurrected the concepts of their illustrious predecessors and competently employed them to achieve victory over Europe's most vaunted military machine. Yet the memories of the Soviets' poor performance in 1941 never faded and have since colored Western attitudes toward Soviet military art. Thus, it is appropriate to recall the realities of Soviet military development unblemished by the images of 1941. One of those realities was Soviet experimentation with airborne forces in the 1930s.

Soviet receptivity to the idea of air assault was but a part of greater Soviet interest in experimentation with new military ideas to restore offensive dominance to the battlefield. World War I had seen the offensive fall victim to static defensive war. In positional warfare, the firepower of modern weaponry stymied the offense and exacted an excruciating toll in human lives. Those wedded to the idea of the dominance of the infantry--the ultimate elevation of men to preeminence on the battlefield--saw the infantry slaughtered in the ultimate humiliation of man's power to influence battle. Infantry, the collective personification of man, dug antlike into the ground, overpowered by impersonal firepower and the crushing weight of explosives and steel.

New weapons--the tank, the airplane--emerged during wartime, but most military theorists saw these weapons as demeaning to the infantry and as an adjunct to the existing technological dominance of fire. Yet there were those who experienced war in a different context. For three years after 1918 in the vast expanse of Russia, regiments, brigades, divisions, and armies engaged in a seesaw civil war--a chaotic confrontation over vast territories, a war in which the zeal of man and his ability to act counted more than human numbers on the battlefield. Shorn of advanced weaponry, the separate armies joined a struggle in which imaginative maneuver paid dividends, in which rudimentary operational and tactical techniques could once again be tested without prohibitive loss of life. It was a different sort of struggle, one that conditioned many of its participants to be receptive to new ideas of warfare. The credibility of the offense emerged supreme, and to that new faith in the offense was added the imperative of an ideology that inherently embraced the offensive.

The Red Army (RKKA*) as it emerged from the civil war was crude by Western standards. Large, ill-equipped, and relatively unschooled in military art, the Red Army was simultaneously the shield of the Soviet state and the lance of revolutionary socialism. Although the ardor for international revolution waned in the face of harsh economic and political realities and the army shrank in the immediate postwar years to provide manpower for factories and fields, the revolutionary foundation of the army remained. The writings of Mikhail Frunze enunciated the uniqueness of the Red Army. The attitudes and

---

*Raboche-Krest'yanskaya Krasnaya Armiya (Workers and Peasants Red Army).

actions of the leading commanders and theorists better characterized the reality of the army. Theoretical debates within the army over the nature of war and the role of man and modern weaponry began in the twenties. At first, these debates expressed mere hopes, kept so by the reality of Soviet industrial and technological backwardness. But as that industrial development began to accelerate, goaded by Stalin's ruthless "Socialism in One Country," and as technological proficiency rose, either generated from within or imported from abroad, abstract hopes turned into concrete policies and programs. These new doctrines sought to combine the offensive potential of new weapons with the ideological zeal and faith in the offensive which was born of revolution and civil war experience. Thus, while the victors of World War I sought to make new weapons the slave of the defense and guarantee the status quo, those defeated--Germany and the U.S.S.R.--turned to the new weaponry as a means to overturn the status quo. In this sense, it is not surprising that German and Soviet military thought evolved in so similar a manner during the interwar years.

The shape of future Soviet military thought began to take form in the late 1920s. Frunze's postulation of a proletarian military doctrine reflecting the classless nature of the Socialist state gave focus to that thought. Soviet officers began to ponder the implications of Frunze's "Unified Military Doctrine," a doctrine that dictated dedication to maneuver, aktivnost (activity), and the offensive in the real world of battle. These new principles rejected the concepts of defensive, static, positional warfare so dominant in Western European and American military thought.[1]

Although Frunze died in 1925, other thinkers expanded his theories, deriving first an intellectual basis in doctrine and then specific methods and techniques to translate that doctrine into practice. The Field Regulation (USTAV*) of 1929 reflected this mixture of theory and experiment. It established the objective of conducting deep battle (glubokyi boi) to secure victory at the tactical depth of the enemy defense by using combined arms forces, specifically infantry, armor, artillery, and aviation, acting in concert.[2] Deep battle, however, remained an abstract objective that could be realized only when technology and industry provided the modern armaments necessary for its execution. The 1929 regulation was a

---

*Ustavlenie (regulation). Russians routinely refer to regulations as USTAVs.

declaration of intent, an intent that would begin to be realized in the early 1930s as the first Five Year Plan ground out the heavy implements of war.

Among those implements of war were tanks and aircraft, each symbolizing an aspect of potential deep battle. The tank offered prospects for decisive penetration, envelopment, and the exploitation of offensive tactical success to effect greater operational success, the latter dimension conspicuously absent in the positional warfare of World War I. Aircraft also added a new dimension to the battlefield. Besides the potentially devastating effects of aerial firepower, aircraft offered prospects for vertical envelopment, a third dimension of offensive maneuver. Vertical envelopment, of potential value even in isolation, would supplement the offensive action of mechanized forces and further guarantee the success of deep battle. Thus, the emerging doctrinal fixation on deep battle gave impetus to experimentation with airborne forces, experimentation that began in earnest in the late twenties.

Early Experimentation

Experimentation with airborne forces went hand in glove with doctrinal research. Although many theorists examined the uses of airborne forces, in particular the problems and the missions, M. N. Tukhachevsky played the leading role. As commander of the Leningrad Military District, he conducted trial exercises and prepared a study on the "Action of Airborne Units in Offensive Operations." As a result of his critiques of exercises conducted in 1929 and 1930, he proposed to the Revoensovet (Revolutionary Military Soviet) a sample aviation motorized division TOE (table of organization and equipment) for use as an operational-strategic landing force.[3] Supplementing Tukhachevsky's work, A. N. Lapchinsky, chief of staff of the Red Army's air force (VVS*) and N. P. Ivanov wrote an article investigating such precise airborne problems as time and place of landing, order of landing, mutual operations with aviation and land forces, calculation of required forces, and landing times for airborne units of battalion to regimental size.[4] These theoretical discussions paralleled practical exercises in both countryside and classroom. Simultaneously, other agencies worked in developing all types of airborne equipment as evidenced by the first domestic production of parachutes in April 1930.

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*Voenno-Vozdushnyi sil'.

Active experimentation grew in scope when, on 2 August 1930, a major test occurred near Voronezh in the Moscow Military District.[5] To test landing techniques rather than tactics, three R-1 aircraft dropped two detachments of twelve parachutists armed with machine guns and rifles; their mission was to perform a diversionary mission in the enemy rear. The detachment commanders, L. G. Minov and Ya. D. Moshkovsky, would play a leading role in future airborne experimentation. The Voronezh test drop, from heights of 500 and 300 meters, focused on solutions of such technical problems as preventing dispersal of dropped personnel, determining visibility on the part of airborne troops, and calculating the time necessary for those troops to reform and become combat capable. The exercise was repeated at the same location in September 1930 when ANT-9 aircraft dropped an eleven-man detachment under Moshkovsky's command.[6] While the military district commander, A. J. Kork, looked on, the detachment successfully seized documents from an "enemy" division headquarters. The success of these experiments was noted in a decree of the Revoensovet on the results of combat training. The decree mandated conduct of additional airborne exercises in 1931, to emphasize both technical and tactical aspects of an air assault.[7] From 1933 on, virtually all Soviet field exercises included airborne operations.

Early experimentation in various military districts gave rise to the formation of an experimental aviation motorized landing detachment in Tukhachevsky's Leningrad Military District in March 1931. This detachment consisted of a rifle company; sapper, communications, and light vehicle platoons; a heavy bomber aviation squadron; and a corps aviation detachment. Ya. D. Lukin commanded the 164 men, under the staff responsibility of D. N. Nikishev. The unit had two 76-mm guns, two T-27 tankettes, four grenade launchers, three light machine guns, four heavy machine guns, fourteen hand machine guns, and a variety of light vehicles. Twelve TB-1 bombers and ten R-5 light aircraft provided aviation support. Tukhachevsky charged the detachment to conduct airborne operations to achieve tactical aims; specifically, a parachute echelon would seize airfields and landing strips in the enemy rear to secure an area for landing the main force.[8] At first, the unit tested organizational concepts and equipment for airlanding but did not address the issue of airdrop. In June 1931, Tukhachevsky ordered the creation of an experimental non-TOE parachute detachment in the 1st Aviation Brigade to test the airdrop dimension of airborne operations.[9] This new unit became the parachute echelon of the combined airborne force and, with forty-six volunteers under Minov, practiced airdrops in exercises at Krasnoye Selo and Krasnogvardeisk, outside

Leningrad, and at Mogilevka, in the Ukraine, during August and September 1931. At Mogilevka, I. E. Yakir, the Kiev Military District commander, supervised the drop of Minov's twenty-nine men from several ANT-9 aircraft.[10]

On 14 December 1931, I. P. Belov, Tukhachevsky's successor as the Leningrad Military District commander, reported on the airborne exercises to the Revoensovet. Belov lauded the success of airborne troops in working with ground and naval forces in the enemy's rear areas. In particular, the exercises accented the paratroopers' ability to capitalize on their inherent element of surprise. Belov echoed Tukhachevsky's earlier call to create TOE airborne divisions based on existing detachments. Specifically, Belov argued that an airborne division consist of a motor landing brigade, an aviation brigade, a parachute detachment, and essential support units.[11]

Though positive in general, air force assessments of the more than 550 airborne exercises pointed out several noticeable shortcomings in the use of airborne forces. All the drops had taken place in summer, and few had occurred at night. Drops were small-scale and usually resulted in considerable dispersion of forces. The air force command criticized the haphazard study of foreign parachute equipment and urged accelerated work on Soviet domestic chutes.[12]

On 5 January 1932, on the basis of these and other reports, the Revoensovet issued its own report, "Concerning the Aviation Motorized Detachments of the Leningrad Military District." That report mandated the creation of four aviation motorized detachments, one each in the Moscow, Leningrad, Belorussian, and Ukrainian military districts, and the establishment of a squadron of TB-1 bombers to transport the airborne troops. The Leningrad detachment at Detskoye Selo, designated the 3d Motorized Airborne Landing Detachment, was formed from two existing aviation landing units. Commanded by M. V. Boytsov, the detachment had 144 men organized into three machine gun companies and three aviation squadrons, supported by an aviation park (aviation support units). These units would deploy on a functional basis as a parachute battalion of two companies and a landing group of one company and one artillery battery. The detachment had six 76-mm guns, eighteen light machine guns, 144 automatic pistols, and light vehicles. For transportation, the aviation squadrons contained six ANT-9, six R-5, three TB-1, and three U-2 aircraft.[13] The grandiose plans of the Revoensovet to create four of these detachments failed, probably because of shortages of

equipment and trained personnel. Only the Leningrad detachment was complete, although the Ukrainian Military District formed a thirty-man parachute platoon. No units appeared in other districts. Consequently, exercises involving the Leningrad detachment would be the focus for further experimentation.[14]

The conceptual framework for use of airborne forces became more elaborate in February 1932 when a Red Army order, "Temporary Regulation on the Organization of Deep Battle," recognized that the 1929 hope of being able to conduct such battle was becoming a reality. Although the basic regulation emphasized the role of mechanized forces in the success of deep battle, the Red Army discussed the utility of airborne forces in a companion draft document, "Regulation on the Operational-Tactical Employment of Aviation Motorized Landing Detachments." The new regulation declared that aviation motorized detachments were "army operational-tactical units that coordinated closely with ground forces." When mobilized, the detachments would perform diversionary missions, such as destroying enemy rail and road bridges, ammunition warehouses, fuel dumps, and aircraft at forward airfields. They would also support ground offensive operations by destroying enemy lines of communication, supply depots, headquarters, and other important objectives in the enemy rear areas. In addition, they would block withdrawal or reinforcement by enemy forces. During defensive operations, the detachments would perform similar functions by striking enemy command and control facilities, disrupting enemy troop movements, and securing airfields in the enemy rear area.[15]

Having articulated the concept of airborne operations, the Red Army addressed the issues of training and equipment development. The Red Army Training Directorate issued a series of directives that outlined training requirements for airborne units and subdivided that training into four categories: parachute, glider, airlanding, and combined operations. Training in each category occurred in close coordination with aviation units. In April 1932, the "Regulations Concerning the Special Design Bureau (OKB) of the VVS, RKKA" addressed equipment requirements and entrusted the OKB with planning and developing air assault equipment, in particular gliders and parachute platforms for transporting guns and vehicles, and modifying the TB-1 bomber to transport airborne troops.[16] By November 1932, the OKB had worked out specific equipment requirements for the aviation motorized detachments, including modifications to the TB-1 and TB-3 bombers.

While the Red Army issued its specific regulations, exercise experience and theoretical writings continued to refine practices and concepts of airborne force use. An exercise of the Leningrad 3d Motorized Airborne Landing Detachment on 29 September 1932 at Krasnogvardeisk, conducted under the watchful eyes of the Revoensovet chairman, K. E. Voroshilov, included a full cycle of airborne activities. Drop, attack, and withdrawal were all rated successful.[17] A 17 November 1932 Revoensovet order assessing the year's exercises noted that problems of airborne assault still existed but again emphasized the importance of the unit.

Two important contributions to airborne theory appeared in 1932, fueling the movement toward fielding larger and more numerous airborne units. Tukhachevsky published an article investigating the "New Question of War" and articulating the role and missions of airborne forces. He stressed the operational and tactical missions of such forces by stating that "air assault forces must operate between deployed enemy corps, army, and front reserves, arresting the action of the forces throughout the operational depth of the defense."[18] The chief of airborne forces of the Red Army air force staff, E. I. Tatarchenko, seconded the views of Tukhachevsky with an article in War and Revolution titled "Technical, Organizational, and Operational Questions of Airborne Forces." Tatarchenko argued for creation of separate, uniquely armed airborne forces to operate in close coordination with aviation units in attacks on enemy rear areas. He stressed the necessity for simultaneous airdrop over larger areas to reduce dispersion of the airborne force and to reduce drop time. He also proposed a time-phased employment of the assault: a small group would prepare the landing sight, an advanced guard would secure a larger landing area, and a main force would follow to conduct the major phase of the operation.[19] Thus, the February regulations and the theoretical articles of 1932 paved the way for more concrete measures for the development of an airborne force.

Formation of an Airborne Force

The growing sophistication of airborne doctrine and the development of new equipment forced attention on the need to create larger airborne units. An 11 December 1932 Revoensovet order directly responded to the need, creating an airborne brigade from the existing detachment in the Leningrad Military District.[20] The new brigade would train an airborne cadre and establish operational norms

for all Soviet airborne units. In addition, by 1 March 1933, aviation landing detachments would be created in the Belorussian, Ukrainian, Moscow, and Volga military districts, and non-TOE aviation assault battalions would be set up in rifle corps and cadre rifle divisions throughout the Soviet Union. To implement the Revoensovet order, a directive of the Commissariat of Military and Naval Affairs transformed the Leningrad Military District's 3d Motorized Airborne Landing Detachment into the 3d Airborne Brigade (Special Purpose), commanded by Boytsov. Unlike the earlier detachment, the new brigade was a combined arms unit organized with both peacetime and wartime TOEs. It had a parachute detachment (battalion size), a motorized/mechanized detachment (battalion size), an artillery battalion, and an air group comprised of two squadrons of TB-3 modified bombers and one squadron of R-5 aircraft. Initially, four such special purpose airborne detachments (1st through 4th) were formed in the Volga, Belorussian, Ukrainian, and Moscow military districts, each with peacetime and wartime TOEs. Throughout 1933, the Revoensovet created twenty-nine additional non-TOE special purpose airborne battalions in the rifle corps and cadre rifle divisions of other military districts so that, by year's end, the twenty-nine existing airborne battalions totaled more than 8,000 men. By 1 January 1934, the force structure included one airborne brigade, four aviation motorized detachments, twenty-nine separate airborne battalions, and several company- and platoon-size elements totaling 10,000 men.[21] To train airborne cadres, the Revoensovet, in March 1933, initiated a special airborne course that focused on the precise techniques required by parachute, landing, and combined operations.[22] While the units organized, staff responsibilities governing their use emerged. The Red Army staff was responsible for training and overall use of airborne forces. In wartime, the Red Army air force would deliver units to combat, but, once in combat, airborne units would be under the operational control of the fronts and armies. The 1933 airborne organization remained unchanged until 1936.

Civilian organizations helped provide the manpower for Soviet airborne units. Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) and Osoaviakhim (Society for the Promotion of Defense and the Furthering of Aviation and of the Chemical Industry of the U.S.S.R.) sponsored sport parachuting, which became popular in the Soviet Union of the 1930s and created a large pool of trained youth parachutists.[23]

Meanwhile, theoretical work on airborne force employment continued, punctuated by increasingly elaborate airborne exercises. On 15 June 1933, the Red Army

assistant chief of staff, S. A. Mezhenikov, issued the "Temporary Instructions on the Combat Use of Aviation Landing Units."[24] This regulation, broader than its 1932 predecessor, categorized airborne assaults as either operational (conducted by a regiment or brigade against objectives in the operational depth of the defense) or tactical (carried out by one to two companies or a battalion against objectives in its tactical depth). The regulations also defined the specific functions of each command level in an airborne operation. Combined arms headquarters staffs, the chief of the air group, and the airborne commander were jointly to work out employment plans after conducting a systematic reconnaissance and a careful assessment of force requirements and objectives. Then, the commander of the airborne operation would fully coordinate the actions of the aviation and airborne units and also ensure that airborne force plans were coordinated with the plans of the ground force commander in whose sector the airborne force operated. The aviation unit commander was in command from the time airborne forces loaded on the aircraft to the time of their descent or landing. The regulation required that airborne forces engage in bold maneuvers to capitalize on the element of surprise and to effect speedy employment and rapid concentration of forces. Because airborne units were equipped with only light weapons, the regulation emphasized the decisive importance of using the forces in mass.

In consonance with the new instructions, exercises involving airborne forces intensified. In September 1933, at Luga in the Leningrad Military District, the 3d Airborne Brigade conducted a tactical exercise under Tukhachevsky's supervision. Operating in poor weather conditions (strong winds and low clouds), the paratroopers dropped in a heavily defended enemy rear area to block enemy withdrawal and movement of reserves. The surprise drop, conducted after the lifting of a friendly artillery barrage, succeeded in driving off the enemy, occupying the objective, and repulsing enemy reserves. Tukhachevsky was pleased with the results.[25] In September the following year, near Minsk in the Belorussian Military District, a multiple airborne assault supported a ground force offensive exercise. On 7 September, a 129-man force dropped to secure a section of highway west of Minsk and a key crossing over the Svisloch River where, in coordination with an advancing motorized regiment, it blocked enemy withdrawal routes from the city. On 9 September near Trostyanets, northeast of Minsk, a second operational assault by 603 men, in close coordination with an advancing mechanized brigade, blocked movement of enemy reserves into the city. The two airborne operations

emphasized coordination between ground and airborne units operating in the enemy rear.[26]

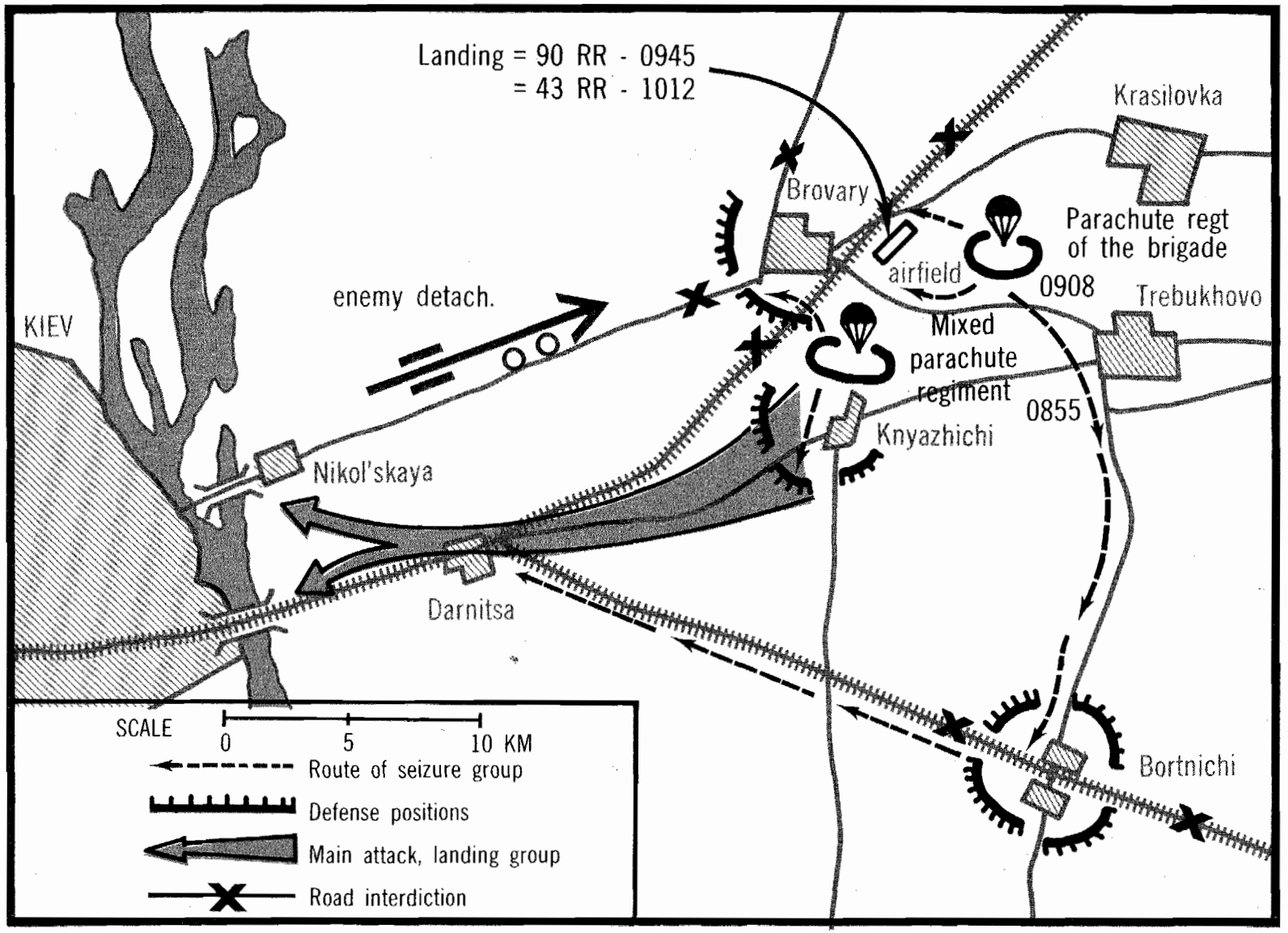
Capitalizing on the success of the 1934 maneuvers, more extensive airborne activity occurred in the 1935 maneuvers. Held in the Kiev Military District, under the supervision of Army Commander First Rank I. E. Yakir and the watchful eyes of such luminaries as Voroshilov, Budenny, Gamarnik, Tukhachevsky, and Egorov, the exercise tested techniques for conducting deep battle.* The scenario involved the penetration of a strong defense by a rifle corps reinforced by a tank battalion and RGK (High Command reserve) artillery (see map 1, p. 12). A cavalry corps and a mechanized corps developed that penetration. A large airborne assault supported their efforts to encircle and destroy the enemy. The airborne force of two parachute regiments (1,188 men) and two rifle regiments (1,765 men), under control of a rifle division, had to land at Brovary (northeast of Kiev), secure a landing area and crossings over the Dnepr River, block the approach of enemy reserves from the east, and cooperate with cavalry and rifle corps units attacking Kiev from the west. More than 1,000 troops of the parachute echelon, flying in from bases 280 kilometers away, participated in a simultaneous drop and secured the landing area. Troops of the main force rifle regiments followed and, together with the parachute echelon, accomplished their assigned mission.[27]

Western attaches viewed the drop with interest. The British attache, Maj. Gen. (later Field Marshal) A. P. Wavell reported:

> We were taken to see a force of about 1,500 men dropped by parachute; they were supposed to represent a "Blue" force dropped to occupy the passages of a river and so delay the advance of the "Red" Infantry corps which was being brought up for the counteroffensive. This parachute descent, though its tactical value may be doubtful, was a most spectacular performance. We were told that there were no casualties and we certainly saw none; in fact the parachutists we saw in action after the landings were in remarkably good trim and mostly moving at the

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*I. E. Yakir, Kiev Military District commander; K. E. Voroshilov, people's commissar of defense; S. M. Budenny, inspector of Cavalry Forces; Ya. B. Gamarnik, deputy commissar of defense; M. N. Tukhachevsky, deputy commissar of defense; A. I. Egorov, chief of the General Staff.



Map 1. Belorussian Maneuvers, 14 September 1935

> double. They are, of course, a specially picked force and had had some months training. It apparently took some time to collect the force after the first descent began landing; about one and a half hours after the first descent began a part of the force was still being collected, though the greater part had already been in action for some time. The personal equipment seemed to consist of a rifle or a light automatic with a small supply of ammunition. The less experienced parachutists, we were told, landed without rifles, their rifles being parachuted separately. No mechanical vehicles were landed by plane as was done at Kiev in 1933.[28]

In the fall of 1936, yet another large exercise in Belorussia validated the results of summer exercises. I. P. Uborevich, the military district commander, supervised the exercise along with Voroshilov, Tukhachevsky, and Budenny. Combined mechanized, rifle, cavalry, aviation, and airborne forces practiced deep operations and surmounting water obstacles. A combined air assault began with a landing of the 47th Special Purpose Aviation Brigade; follow-on tanks, artillery, and heavy equipment landed thereafter. From the airborne perspective, maneuver controllers gave a favorable evaluation to key aspects of the operation, namely, preparations for the assault and control of the battle after landing.[29] During 1936 and 1937, larger exercises followed in the Moscow, Belorussian, and Leningrad military districts. The Moscow exercise of September 1936 involved a joint airdrop of a mixed parachute regiment, four non-TOE battalions of the Moscow Military District, and a reserve parachute detachment. To add to the exercise's uniqueness, the Soviets flew the 84th Rifle Division to the airfield already secured by the more than 5,000 airborne troops. Other exercises focused on the questions of unit organization and tactical employment after landing.[30]

The 1934-37 exercises verified both the utility of airborne forces and the doctrinal concepts for their use. As expected, the exercises surfaced many problem areas that future practice would have to address, such as tactics for operating in the enemy rear area, waging battle while encircled, and escaping from encirclement. Only superior tactics and timely employment of such forces could compensate for the inherent weakness of light infantry weaponry. Exercises conducted before 1938 did not exploit the possibilities of close cooperation between airborne troops and diversionary forces, and most of the

operations extended to only a limited depth in the enemy defense. Equipment problems still hindered airborne operations, and a larger more versatile fleet of aircraft was essential for larger, airborne groups to conduct deeper operations. The Soviet theorists directly confronted such problems in a 1937 report, "The Course of Preparing Parachute Landing Forces."[31]

While the Soviets validated their airborne techniques in these and other exercises, theoretical work continued. Exercises and maneuvers, in turn, permitted more complete expression of the theory of deep battle. In March 1935, the Red Army had issued its "Instructions on Deep Battle," which gave the concept clearer meaning:

> Deep battle is battle involving massive use of new mobile and shock means for a simultaneous attack on the enemy to the entire depth of his combat formation with the aim of fully encircling and destroying him. . . . The new means and tactics of deep battle increase the importance of surprise.[32]

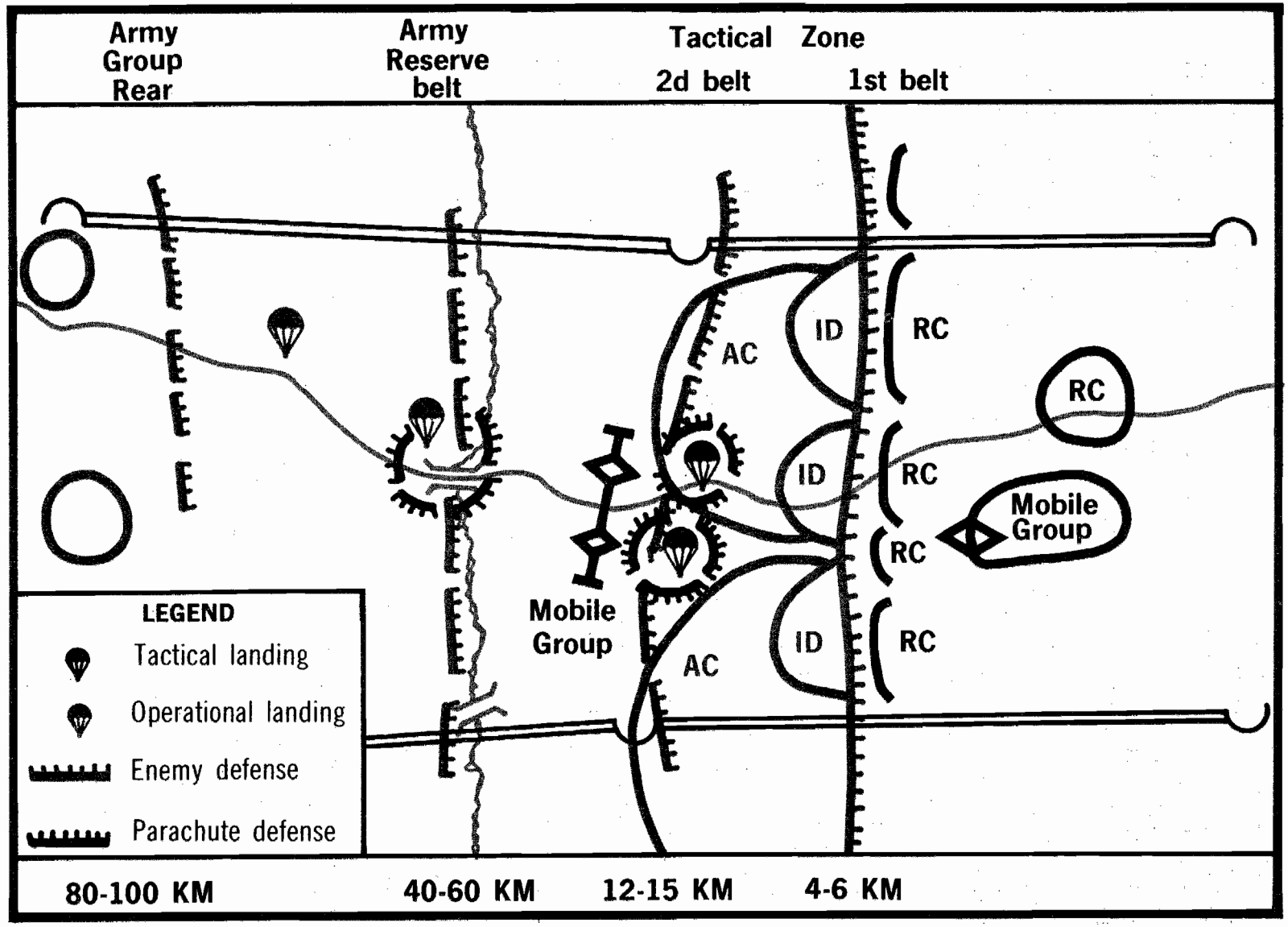
One of the new means was the infant airborne force.

The 1936 Field Regulation was the epitome of Soviet pre-World War II doctrinal development (see map 2, p. 15). It elaborated the brief description of deep battle provided in the 1935 "instructions" and defined deep battle as

> the simultaneous assault on enemy defenses by aviation and artillery to the depth of the defense, penetration of the tactical zone of the defense by attacking units with wide use of tank forces, and violent development of tactical success into operational success with the aim of complete encirclement and destruction of the enemy. The main role is performed by the infantry, and in its interests are organized the mutual support of all types of forces.[33]

Article 7 of the Field Regulation specifically outlined the role of airborne forces:

> Parachute landing units are the effective means . . . disorganizing the command and rear services structure of the enemy. In coordination with forces attacking along the front, parachute landing units can go a long way toward producing a complete rout of the enemy on a given axis.[34]



Map 2. Use of Airborne Forces on the Offensive, 1936

Thus, while success in deep battle relied primarily on mechanized and tank forces, the airborne arm played a considerable supporting role.

With airborne forces accepted as a participant in deep battle, the airborne force structure continued to become more sophisticated and to grow in size. In 1936, two new airborne brigades (aviation landing and special purpose) were organized on the basis of existing TOE and non-TOE units in the Belorussian and Kiev military districts, thus raising the number of brigades to three (see table 1). To augment airborne forces in the increasingly dangerous climate of the Far East, the Revoensovet created three airborne regiments from existing smaller units (see table 2). As part of the 1936 force expansion, one separate special purpose battalion was formed in each of the Moscow, Volga, and Trans-Baikal military districts, and three non-TOE parachute regiments of 1,660 men each were organized in the Moscow Military District.[35]

Table 1. Airborne Brigades, 1936

Unit	Commander	Location
3d Abn Bde	I. S. Kokhansky	Leningrad MD
13th Abn Bde	A. O. Indzer	Kiev MD
47th Abn Bde	A. F. Levashev	Belorussian MD

Source: Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 35.

Table 2. Airborne Regiments, 1936

Unit	Commander	Location
1st Abn Regt	M. I. Denisenko	Far East
2d Abn Regt	I. I. Zatevakhin	Far East
5th Abn Regt	N. E. Tarasov	Far East

Source: Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 35.

As the overall Soviet force structure expanded significantly in the late 1930s, so did the airborne structure. In 1938, existing aviation landing units were transformed into six airborne brigades of 3,000 men each. A year later, three new special aviation landing regiments were created in the Moscow Military District. These 1938-39 units were organized on a uniform TOE (see table 3).[36]

Table 3. Airborne Forces, 1939

Unit	Commander	Location
201st Abn Bde	Col. I. S. Bezugly	Leningrad MD
202d Abn Bde	Maj. M. I. Denisenko	Far East
204th Abn Bde	Maj. I. I. Gudarevich	Kiev MD
211th Abn Bde	Maj. V. A. Glazunov	Kiev MD
212th Abn Bde	Maj. I. I. Zatevakhin	Far East (later Odessa MD)
214th Abn Bde	Col. A. F. Levashev	Belorussian MD
1st Rostov Regt		
2d Gorokhovets Regt		
3d Voronezh Regt		

Source: Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 36.

Little information exists about the precise impact of the military purges of the late thirties on the airborne forces. It is reasonable to assume that the execution of the leading theorists of deep battle and the generation of military leaders who created the concept and form of airborne and mechanized warfare crippled further improvement of doctrine and imaginative work in perfecting airborne tactics. Airborne units, however, continued to expand in size and number, and doctrine for their use reflected the pattern established in the Field Regulation of 1936. As late as January 1941, Lt. Gen. A. Yeremenko described a controversial military council meeting in Moscow during which the air force commander, Lt. Gen. Pavel Rychagov, discussed the use of airborne forces.[37] At the same meeting, however, the debate over the use of mechanized forces to effect deep battle reflected the shift of the pendulum away from the dynamic views of Tukhachevsky and toward the views of the less imaginative or the views of those for whom the Spanish Civil War experience had raised doubts about prospects for wartime success using large mechanized forces. The partial eclipse of men who advocated the creation of a force envisioned by the earlier planners of deep battle had to affect adversely further improvement of airborne doctrine and refinement of airborne techniques. The airborne forces grew, and the Field Regulations of 1940 and 1941 parroted the ideas of the 1936 Field Regulation, but the vigor of thought and performance waned. Only future years of struggle would revive that vigor.

The Soviets were pioneers in the development of airborne forces during the interwar years. Although other nations gave thought to such forces, only the Germans came close to matching Soviet achievements in the field. Italy conducted early experiments in the late 1920s and, in 1928, formed a company of trained parachutists before its interest waned. The British took note of Soviet experiences in the 1933 and 1936 maneuvers, but concern over the light nature of airborne forces and an absence of lift aircraft thwarted British development of airborne units. In essence, the primarily defensive concerns of Great Britain argued against the development of an offensive airborne force. French experimentation was limited to the creation in 1938 of two airborne companies, but even this small force was disbanded after war began. Similarly, no serious airborne experimentation occurred in the United States before 1940.[38] Only the use of a German airborne force on Crete in May 1941 prompted Great Britain and the United States to create their own airborne units.

The Germans, however, more concerned with offensive theory, accepted the potential value of airborne units and, in the 1930s, began building an airborne force. Airborne forces, in German eyes, "offered great possibilities for surprise attack, which was something that was occupying the minds of the German Army planners, and it looked to be a suitable way of speeding up the armored thrust of the Blitzkrieg."[39] Formation of a German airborne force began in secret in 1938. Maj. Gen. Kurt Studant formed the first airborne division (7th Air Division), which consisted of a mixture of parachute battalions and airlanding battalions with integrated air units. Yet, by 1940, the German airborne force was still limited to a single division.

Thus, the Soviets and Germans alike accepted the validity of airborne concepts. Although both nations formed airborne units, the scale was far greater in the Soviet Union. The ensuing war would test the effectiveness of that large force.

On the Eve of War

Even during the crisis-ridden years of 1938-41, the Red Army continued to grow and played a role in the prewar incidents that would forecast the coming of more difficult times. The airborne force grew apace with the army and gained combat experience in those crises. When tension rose in the Soviet Far East between the Soviet Union and Japan and finally erupted in the major battle at

Khalkhin-Gol in July and August 1939,* Soviet airborne forces were sucked into the conflict. Dispatched from the Far East into eastern Mongolia, Col. I. I. Zatevakhin's 212th Airborne Brigade, participating in a ground role as part of Army Group Commander G. K. Zhukov's force earned fame in the assaults on Mount Fui that smashed the Japanese right flank.[40] During the Soviet-Finnish War in the winter of 1939-40, which began with a series of Soviet failures, airborne forces again participated as infantry, performing diversionary missions while operating with motorized rifle forces. The 201st Airborne Brigade operated with the 15th Army, and the 204th Airborne Brigade was in 15th Army reserve until committed to combat in the final stages of the conflict.

The first use of airborne forces in their proper role occurred during the Soviet occupation of Rumanian Bessarabia in June 1940. The Bessarabian operation called for rapid advance by tank and cavalry units, followed by rifle units to seize and annex the territory from a recalcitrant Rumanian government. Airborne forces had the missions of capturing important positions to cut the lines of withdrawal of Rumanian forces and of waiting for the arrival of advancing Soviet mobile forces. Moreover, airborne forces would prevent retreating Rumanian forces from destroying property and supplies and would secure the key cities of Bolgrad and Izmail. The planned operation commenced with a ground force advance on 28 June. While ground operations proceeded, the 201st, 204th, and 214th Airborne brigades, under control of the air force commander, moved by rail to airfields 350 kilometers from their drop zone. There they joined the four heavy bomber regiments (comprising 170 TB-3 aircraft) that would convey them to their drop areas. On 29 June, the 204th Airborne Brigade dropped twelve kilometers north of Bolgrad, advanced to the city, and occupied it that evening. The following day, the 1st Battalion, 204th Airborne Brigade, secured the city of Kagul at the mouth of the Danube River. That same day, the 201st Airborne Brigade received orders to airland at Izmail and secure both that city and the vital road network passing through it. Because an air reconnaissance had confirmed the inadequacy of the airfields to accommodate so large a force, the brigade instead landed by parachute in the Izmail area. By the evening of 30 June, against no opposition, the brigade

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*See Edward J. Drea, Nomonhan: Japanese-Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939, Leavenworth Papers no. 2 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, January 1981).

occupied the city.[41] The Bessarabian operation was unopposed and, in reality, was a more realistic repeat of the many exercises Soviet airborne forces had engaged in during the previous years.

In the wake of Soviet military confrontations during 1939 and 1940 and in light of the generally poor performance of the Red Army, in particular in Finland, a major reappraisal began. The program was overseen by S. K. Timoshenko, the new commissar of defense, and it directly affected airborne forces because new regulations had appeared and the airborne corps had undergone a major expansion. Regulations published in 1940 and 1941 redefined and enlarged the role of airborne forces in offensive operations. Article 28 of the 1941 Field Regulation specified the role of airborne forces:

> Air assault forces are an instrument of higher command. They are used to decide those missions in the enemy rear area which within a specified period cannot be satisfied by other types of forces, but the decision of which can have a serious impact on the outcome of the entire operation (battle). Air assault forces must be used as a surprise for the enemy, in large masses, independent or in coordination with land, air and sea forces. . . .[42]

Additional instructions and regulations governing all aspects of the wartime use of airborne forces appeared. Taken together, these documents accorded the airborne forces a list of specific missions: disruption of army command and control and supply functions; destruction of communications routes; interruption of enemy troop, arms, and supply movements; capture and destruction of airfields and bases; seizure of coastal areas in support of naval landings; reinforcment of troops in encirclement and of mobile units operating in the enemy rear; and fighting against enemy airborne landings in one's own rear area, among others. The Soviet High Command invoked its regulations to call upon Soviet airborne forces to perform these types of missions within the next two years. In December 1940, Timoshenko amplified the place of airborne forces in the operational scheme, emphasizing that:

> . . . the experience of the World War II in the west showed that the high tempo and success of an operational offensive were secured by massive use of tanks, aviation, and artillery in cooperation with motorized forces and airborne forces. The development of a tactical penetration into an operational-strategic one was made possible by

introduction of mobile forces into the penetration and by operations of airborne forces.[43]

As dark clouds of war descended over Europe, the Soviet Union heeded Timoshenko's words and rushed to put its forces on a wartime footing. Large and cumbersome mechanized units reappeared (at least on paper), and airborne forces underwent massive expansion. In the first step toward expansion in November 1940, Timoshenko approved a new airborne brigade TOE. This brigade organization contained parachute, glider, and airlanded groups, as well as a brigade school to teach airborne techniques. The refurbished brigades numbered 3,000 personnel and had sixty-seven motorcycles; fifty-four bicycles; and improved artillery, antitank, and antiaircraft capabilities (see table 4).[44]

Table 4. Airborne Brigade, 1940

Strength--3,000 men
11 tanks
4 guns (over 50-mm)

Subunits--Parachute Group
2 parachute battalions (546 men each)
3 parachute rifle companies (141 men each)
3 rifle platoons (38 men each)
1 mortar platoon (50-mm mortars)
1 control squad (12 men)
1 signal platoon
1 reconnaissance platoon (37 men)
1 sapper demolition platoon
1 combat rations and supply platoon
1 medical squad
1 motorcycle-bicycle reconnaissance company
1 signal company

Glider Group--same as parachute group

Airlanded Group--same as parachute group plus:
1 mortar company (9x82-mm)
1 air defense company (12x heavy antiaircraft machine guns)
1 tank company (11xT40 or T38)
1 artillery battalion
1 artillery battery (4x45-mm)
1 artillery battery (4x76-mm)

Source: Lisov, Desantniki 37-38.

Although the airborne brigades were strengthened by TOE, the total number of brigades remained six--three in the Far East and three in the European U.S.S.R.[45] Further expansion of the airborne force occurred in March and April 1941, when five airborne corps were established from the cadre of the existing 201st, 204th, 211th, 212th, and 214th Airborne brigades. Each airborne corps had about 10,000 men and a significant number of supporting weapons. The corps had three airborne brigades, a separate tank battalion, and control and logistical support elements (see table 5).[46] The new corps (1st through 5th) were positioned in the Pre-Baltic Special (5th), Western Special (4th), Kiev Special (1st), Kharkov (2d), and Odessa (3d) military districts.[47] All were at full personnel strength by June 1941; however, equipment stocks were incomplete, especially critical tanks and radios.

Table 5. Airborne Corps, 1941

Strength--10,419 men
50 tanks
18 guns (over 50-mm)
18 mortars

Subunits--3 airborne brigades

- 4 parachute battalions (458 men each)
  - 3 parachute rifle companies (24 flamethrowers)
  - brigade artillery (6x76-mm, 12x45-mm, 6x82-mm)
  - 1 reconnaissance company (113 bicycles)
  - 1 antiaircraft machine gun company (6-mm, 12-mm, 7-mm)
  - 1 signal company (4 PO-2 radios) (never formed)
- 1 separate tank battalion (50xT-37) (later reduced to 32)
  - 3 tank companies
  - 1 long-range reconnaissance platoon (4-RSB)
- 1 control aircraft flight
- 1 mobile equipment platoon (15 motorcycles)

Source: Lisov, Desantniki, 38-39.

To further increase the stature of airborne forces and make them more responsive to the High Command, the Ministry of Defense, in June 1941, established a special airborne (VDV*) administration, thus taking airborne forces away from the control of the Red Army air force.[48] On the eve of war, the Soviet airborne force appeared formidable: five airborne corps, one airborne brigade, and smaller airborne units with a growing administrative staff totaling about 100,000 men. The Field Regulations expressed well-developed theory, and numerous exercises tested it. Thus, guidance existed for the operations of this force. Yet, in spite of the numbers and doctrine, severe shortages of the following equipment required by TOE hindered prospective employment of the force: tanks heavy enough to withstand modern antitank and artillery fire; vehicles; radios for command and control; aircraft to transport the units, particularly, aircraft modified for carrying paratroopers. Work to build new aircraft progressed, but total war would intervene before it was completed.[49]

Beyond the equipment shortages loomed the question of leadership, especially at the higher levels. The purges had eliminated from the High Command those men with the potential vision and ability to articulate deep operations involving close coordination among mechanized, airborne, and major ground forces. Yet, while lamenting the loss of the generation of Tukhachevsky, one must ask whether even those personalities could have coped with all the problems associated with command and control of the immense force structure the Soviet Union had built. The size of the units and the absence of modern command and control equipment would have severely tested the capacities of even gifted men, just as it did the commanders of 1941. The least one can say is that the new military leaders, by virtue of their inherent abilities, limited experience, and the political climate, had less chance to adjust to the realities of war than their purged predecessors might have enjoyed. This situation condemned the airborne force to bitter struggles and a long, harsh education on the battlefield.

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*Vozdushno desantnye voiska (airborne forces).

CHAPTER 2

EVOLUTION OF AIRBORNE FORCES DURING WORLD WAR II

Initial Airborne Involvement

War struck the Soviet Union suddenly, like a breaking storm of unexpected severity. Many saw the storm clouds, in particular the military leaders who commanded divisions, corps, and armies on the western border, as well as those in the higher commands who remained attuned to the military situation in Europe. While they recognized the ominous storm warnings, the political leadership denied the portents to the very moment the storm broke. Paralyzed by an inability to act, the military were the first to pay the price for the blindness of their political leaders.[1]

The incompetence of the political leadership was not the only burden the military had to shoulder on the eve of war. The new Soviet military force structure still existed largely on paper only. Large units existed in name and number, but manpower strength and, most notably, equipment production lagged. Doctrine for the use of the elaborate force existed, but it had not been tested. Also, the military leadership, still suffering from the stifling effects of the purges, had not matured sufficiently to perform capably in new command positions. Rearmament programs were incomplete, a problem compounded by the obsolete equipment. Furthermore, the wholesale expansion of the military exacerbated the twin defects of incompetent leadership and equipment shortages. Deployment problems added to the dilemma of the Soviet military. Acquisition of new lands in the west (the Baltic States, Eastern Poland, and Bessarabia) and political insistence that these lands be defended forced the military to abandon fortified border positions prepared before 1939 and to move westward to occupy new, as yet largely unfortified, positions. New fortification construction programs were incomplete, as was the construction of new logistical and communication systems leading west from the Soviet Union's former borders. Adding to these problems was the political injunction not to mass large Soviet troop concentrations on the border to avoid unduly provoking Nazi Germany. Soviet forces thus deployed in dispersed order deep behind the still unfinished border fortifications. Lacking equipment, suffering from weak leadership, and enjoined from prudent

readiness preparations, they would soon face the onslaught of Europe's most well-trained army, blooded in war and intent on utterly destroying its unwary Soviet opponent.

A microcosm of the Soviet force structure, airborne forces suffered similar basic problems. Principal among these was the lack of experience at higher command levels. Few senior commanders were capable of conducting strategic operations requiring the integration of airborne forces into the complex overall combat scheme of deep battle. Airborne forces also suffered from the general equipment deficiencies of the Red Army and the deployment problems of other forces. Elite and well trained, airborne units did, however, manage to avoid some of the problems that plagued other Soviet units. Airborne unit commanders generally led well in combat, and many of the original airborne leaders rose to prominence in later war years.[2] The nature of airborne units, as well as their prewar deployments, resulted in their immediate commitment to combat in 1941 as ground infantry units. On several occasions, airborne units were ordered to join special formations designed to block German advances in critical sectors. Only after six months of war would airborne units begin to perform, on a large scale, those special tasks for which they had been formed.

In June 1941, four airborne corps were positioned in the four western border military districts, and a fifth corps was close by in the Kharkov Military District (see table 6).[3]

Table 6. Airborne Corps Dispositions, June 1941

Military District	Airborne Corps	Airborne Brigades
Pre-Baltic Special	5th	9th, 10th, 201st
Western Special	4th	7th, 8th, 214th
Kiev Special	1st	1st, 204th, 211th
Kharkov	2d	2d, 3d, 4th
Odessa	3d	5th, 6th, 212th

Source: Kostylev, "Stanovlenie," 82.

When the German attack swept across the border on 22 June 1941, airborne forces, although only partially prepared for combat, had to be thrown into the fray. The brigades deployed forward as motorized rifle units to support crumbling Soviet units on the border and to block

deep penetrations of advancing German panzer units. The surprise of the German offensive and the Soviet command's general paralysis during the first few weeks of war prevented a concerted Soviet counteroffensive using Soviet airborne units. Consequently, airborne units went into combat in piecemeal fashion as reinforcements in critical areas. Few had the opportunity to conduct airborne missions they had trained for.

The first airborne units to see combat were those of the 5th Airborne Corps in the Pre-Baltic Military District. In the midst of field maneuvers when the Germans attacked, the airborne troops, under Gen. I. S. Bezugly, cooperated first with the 21st Mechanized Corps and then with the 27th Army in unsuccessful attempts to halt the slashing German armor advances. After suffering heavy casualties south of Daugavpils, the corps, on High Command orders, moved from the Northwestern Front (formerly Pre-Baltic Military District) to the Moscow Military District on 15 August.[4] Maj. Gen. A. S. Zhadov's 4th Airborne Corps of the Western Special Military District fought a bitter six-day defensive action, attempting to hold German Army Group Center at the Berezina River. After the Germans had forced the river, 4th Airborne joined the 13th Army to defend the approaches to Smolensk. The 214th Airborne Brigade, 4th Airborne Corps, under Col. A. F. Levashev, took part in the defense of Minsk and fought for two months in the first great German encirclement of Soviet forces. Few men of the brigade survived.[5]

Farther south, in the Kiev Special Military District (Southwestern Front), Maj. Gen. M. A. Usenko's 1st Airborne Corps also fought defensive battles alongside the Soviet 5th and 6th armies as German Army Group South battered its way toward Kiev. Reinforced by 2d and 3d Airborne corps, the 1st also participated in the futile defense of Kiev. Both the 1st and 2d Airborne corps were caught in the German encirclement of Kiev in August-September 1941 and suffered such grievous losses that both units were disestablished (only to be re-created later). The 3d Airborne Corps, also encircled at Konotop, fought its way out. In November, it was reorganized into the 87th Rifle Division under Col. A. I. Rodimtsev (former commander of 5th Airborne Brigade).[6] The 87th Rifle Division, later redesignated 13th Guards Rifle Division, achieved lasting fame at Stalingrad and elsewhere. In summary, during the opening months of war, actual airborne operations were limited to occasional diversionary airdrops, as elite Soviet airborne troops fought as infantrymen.

Organization and Employment

After the tragic border battles, only the 4th and 5th Airborne corps in the Moscow region remained relatively intact. In August and September 1941, the High Command reorganized the airborne forces and redefined the guidelines for their future employment. A 4 September order of the People's Commissariat of Defense created the higher level Administration of the Command of Airborne Forces to replace the older lower level airborne force administration. The order also withdrew all airborne forces from front command and subordinated them to the new administration, now commanded by Maj. Gen. V. A. Glazunov. Henceforth, airborne units would be used only with specific Stavka* approval to perform the following missions:[7]

- Cooperate with ground forces in encircling and destroying large enemy groups.

- Disorganize enemy command and control and rear area logistics facilities.

- Secure and hold important terrain, crossings, and points in the enemy rear.

- Secure and destroy enemy airfields.

- Secure landings of naval infantry and river crossings.

To bolster the depleted airborne force structure, a new airborne brigade TOE strengthened the parachute battalion (see table 7), and five new airborne corps (6th through 10th) were organized using this new brigade TOE. The Soviets reorganized or reinforced the older corps (1st through 5th) with personnel and equipment and created five new maneuver airborne brigades. By June 1942, creation of these new units was completed. The new administration also established schools and courses to train cadre for these units.[8] The Stavka formed nine separate aviation transport squadrons and five separate aviation detachments to perform the critical function of transporting airborne units. During 1942, these units combined to form two separate aviation-glider regiments and two aviation transport regiments equipped with U-2, R-5, TB-1, TB-3, and PS-84 aircraft.[9] Because of heavy losses of aircraft early in the war, the lack of sufficient aircraft posed a serious problem for the airborne forces.

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*Supreme headquarters--in essence, Stalin.

Table 7. Airborne Brigade, 1941

4 parachute battalions (678 men each)
3 parachute companies
1 mortar company
1 sapper demolition platoon
1 machine gun platoon
1 flamethrower platoon
1 signal platoon

Source: Lisov, Desantniki, 39.

Because of these reorganization measures, the Soviet airborne force numbered about 200,000 personnel by the end of 1941. While the formation of the new airborne force was underway, the first concerted large-scale use of those forces occurred (see table 8). During the Soviet counteroffensive at Moscow in December 1941 and January 1942, the Stavka marshaled all available forces in an attempt to drive German Army Group Center away from Moscow and destroy the German army group. While committing the bulk of its rifle forces in an offensive against the Germans, the Stavka marshaled its scarce mobile forces in an attempt to convert tactical successes into operational success and even strategic victory. Into the boiling cauldron of battle around Moscow, the Stavka threw mobile groups consisting of ski battalions, cavalry divisions and corps, its few precious tank brigades, and its airborne forces, as well. In addition to the role played by airborne forces in conducting minor tactical and diversionary operations on main army attack axes, ultimately an entire airborne corps dropped into German Army Group Center's rear near Vyaz'ma to aid in the encirclement and destruction of that enemy army group (see chaps. 3 and 4). At this stage of the war, the limited mobility and staying power of Soviet forces thwarted Stavka's ambitious plans, and airborne forces ultimately had to fight a four-month battle of encirclement before breaking free of the German rear and rejoining Soviet main forces. While major airborne operations went on near Moscow, a smaller tactical drop occurred at Kerch in the Crimea.

After the extensive airborne activity during the winter campaign of 1941-42, airborne forces underwent another major reorganization the following summer. Responding to events in southern Russia, where German troops had opened a major offensive that would culminate in the Stalingrad battles, the ten airborne corps, as part of the Stavka strategic reserves, deployed southward. Furthermore, the Stavka converted all ten airborne corps

Table 8. Soviet Airborne Operations in the Moscow Region, 1941-42

Date	Location	Airborne Force
14-15 Dec 41	Teryaeva Sloboda	One Bn, 214th Abn Bde, 4th Abn Corps*
2-4 Jan 42	Medyn	One Bn, 201st Abn Bde, 5th Abn Corps One Bn, 250th Rifle Regt*
18-22 Jan 42	Zhelan'ye	1st and 2d Bns, 201st Abn Bde, 5th Abn Corps 250th Abn Regt
27-31 Jan 42	Ozerechnya-Tabory	8th Abn Bde, 4th Abn Corps**
13-23 Feb 42	Velikopol'ye-Zhelan'ye	One Bn, 8th Abn Bde, 4th Abn Corps 9th and 214th Abn Bdes, 4th Abn Corps***
16-17 Feb 42	Rzhev	4th Bn, 204th Abn Bde, 1st Abn Corps*
16-18 Apr 42	Svintsovo	4th Bn, 23d Abn Bde, 10th Abn Corps***
29-30 May 42	10 km south of Dorogobuzh	23d Abn Bde, 10th Abn Corps 211th Abn Bde, 1st Abn Corps***

*See chap 6.
**See chap 3.
***See chap 4.

into guards rifle divisions to bolster Soviet forces in the south. Nine of these divisions participated in the battles around Stalingrad, and one took part in the defense of the northern Caucasus region. In addition, five maneuver airborne brigades and one airborne regiment, all at full TOE strength, reinforced Soviet defensive efforts in the Caucasus as rifle units (see table 9).[10]

Table 9. Conversion of Airborne Units, Summer 1942

Old Airborne Designation	New Designation	Commander
Gds Abn Corps	Gds Rifle Div	
1st	37th	Maj. Gen. V. G. Zholydev
2d	32d	Col. M. F. Tikhonov
3d	33d	Col. A. I. Utvenko
4th	38th	Col. A. A. Onufriev
5th	39th	Maj. Gen S. S. Gur'ev
6th	40th	Maj. Gen. A. I. Pastrevich
7th	34th	Maj. Gen. I. I. Gubarevich
8th	35th	Maj. Gen. V. A. Glazkov
9th	36th	Col. M. I. Denisenko
10th	41st	Col. N. P. Ivanov
Abn Bde	Rifle Bde	
1st	5th	
2d	6th	Names of commanders are not available
3d	7th	
4th	8th	
5th	9th	
4th Res Abn Regt	10th Rifle Bde	

Source: Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 146-79.

Former airborne units achieved considerable distinction in the bitter fighting of fall 1942, vindicating Stalin's decision to use airborne units in a ground role. Maj. Gen. V. G. Zholydev's 37th Guards Rifle Division fought tenaciously in defense of the Barricady and Tractor factories at Stalingrad and suffered 90-percent casualties while exacting a heavy toll on the

Germans.[11] Maj. Gen. S. S. Gur'ev's 39th Guards Rifle Division participated in the equally tenacious defense of the Red October plant. Likewise, Maj. Gen. A. I. Rodimtsev's 13th Guards Rifle Division won lasting fame in the street fighting for control of downtown Stalingrad.[12]

Although it had committed virtually all airborne forces to ground fighting in southern Russia, the Stavka still foresaw the necessity of conducting actual airborne operations later during the war. To have a force capable of fulfilling airborne missions, the Stavka created eight new airborne corps (1st, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th) in the fall of 1942. Beginning in December 1942, these corps became ten guards airborne divisions (two formed from the 1st Airborne Corps and the three existing separate maneuver airborne brigades). The new guards airborne divisions trained in airborne techniques, and all personnel jumped three to ten times during training. Training stressed rear area operations, mutual cooperation with front ground and air forces, antitank warfare, ground defensive techniques, and use of initiative.[13] In February 1943, as Soviet forces attempted to exploit German defeats in the winter battles of 1942-43, the Stavka dispatched all of these airborne divisions to the Northwestern Front where they fought at Staraya Russa and Demyansk as part of 1st Shock Army, 68th Army, and the Khozin Group. By April and May 1943, in response to prospects for renewed German offensive action in the Kursk region, the airborne divisions had redeployed southward. Seven divisions (2d, 3d, 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th, and 9th) had moved to reinforce the Central Front by the end of May, and the remaining three (1st, 10th, and 7th) joined the 37th and 52d armies at Kharkov in August.[14] During the Kursk battles, airborne forces participated in heavy fighting, in particular the 4th Guards Airborne Division, which defended successfully against German 9th Army panzer forces at Ponyri, and the 9th Guards Airborne Division, which participated in the Soviet armored victory over German 4th Panzer Army at Prokhorovka.

After the defeat of German forces at Kursk, the bulk of the airborne divisions joined in the pursuit of German forces to the Dnepr River. Even as ten guards airborne divisions fought at the front, new airborne brigades formed in the rear areas. In April and May 1943, twenty brigades formed and trained for future airborne operations. Most of these brigades had become six new guards airborne divisions (11th through 16th) by September 1943.[15] The Stavka, however, earmarked three of these airborne brigades for use in an airborne operation to cross the Dnepr River.

As Soviet forces approached the new German defensive line on the Dnepr, the problem of securing bridgeheads for offensive operations across the river was paramount. Advanced elements of Soviet forces seized a number of small bridgeheads, but only light infantry formations were able to cross into these footholds. Larger bridgeheads free from German interdiction were necessary to build bridges across the Dnepr and to introduce heavy armored forces needed to continue the offensive. To gain a larger bridgehead, the Stavka ordered three airborne brigades to conduct a major airborne operation across the Dnepr River near Velikeyi Bukrin. This second, and last, operational use of airborne forces failed because of inadequate preparations, poor reconnaissance, clumsy coordination of forces, and many of the same reasons that had caused the Vyaz'ma operation to fail (see chap. 5). The Soviets would conduct no further large-scale airborne operations. Instead, airborne forces continued to fight in a ground combat role.

After the failure of the Dnepr operation, the original ten guards airborne divisions participated in campaigns on the left and right banks of the Ukraine, in particular as part of 5th Army at Kirovograd, at Korsun-Shevchenkovskii, and in the advance to the Dnestr River. In January 1944, the newer guards airborne divisions became rifle divisions within 37th Guards Rifle Corps, 7th Army, and fought to liberate Karelia.[16] In the summer and fall of 1944, seven guards airborne divisions, fighting as infantry and as part of 4th Guards Army, joined in the rout of German and Rumanian forces at Yassy-Kishinev and marched with Soviet forces into Hungary.

Attempts to revive large airborne units began in late summer 1944. In August, the Stavka formed the 37th, 38th, and 39th Guards Airborne corps. By October, the newly formed corps had combined into a separate airborne army under Maj. Gen. I. I. Zatevakhin (see table 10).[17] However, because of the growing need for well-trained ground units, the new army did not endure long as an airborne unit. In December, the Stavka reorganized the separate airborne army into the 9th Guards Army of Col. Gen. V. V. Glagolev, and all divisions were renumbered as guards rifle divisions. As testimony to the elite nature of airborne-trained units, the Stavka held the 9th Guards Army out of defensive actions, using it only for exploitation during offensives.[18] Other airborne divisions, separately or in groups, participated as elements of frontal ground forces in the remaining campaigns of the war. Throughout the rest of the war, airborne operations were limited to low-level tactical or

minor diversionary operations, usually conducted by airlanded ground force units. Of note were the numerous airlandings that occurred after the collapse of Japanese resistance in Manchuria in August 1945.*

Table 10. Separate Airborne Army, 1944

Separate Airborne Army, Maj. Gen. I. I. Zatevakhin

37th Guards Airborne Corps, Lt. Gen. P. V. Mironov
13th Guards Airborne Division
98th Guards Airborne Division
99th Guards Airborne Division

38th Guards Airborne Corps, Lt. Gen. A. I. Utvenko
11th Guards Airborne Division
12th Guards Airborne Division
16th Guards Airborne Division

39th Guards Airborne Corps, Lt. Gen. M. F. Tikhonov
8th Guards Airborne Division
14th Guards Airborne Division
100th Guards Airborne Division

Source: Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 238.

Although the bulk of the airborne force structure consisted of guards airborne divisions organized and fighting as guards rifle divisions, the Stavka continued to recognize the need for specialized airborne units. Consequently, it continued to organize separate airborne brigades similar to those of 1941 with 3,345 men, six 76-mm guns, eight 45-mm antitank guns, twenty-eight 37-mm antiaircraft guns, twenty-four antiaircraft machine guns, thirty-six heavy machine guns, and eighty-one antitank rifles.[19] At war's end, the guards airborne divisions and separate airborne brigades that had not been demobilized would provide the nucleus of the Soviet postwar airborne force.

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*See Lt. Col. David M. Glantz, August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria, Leavenworth Papers no. 7, and August Storm: Soviet Tactical and Operational Combat in Manchuria, 1945, Leavenworth Papers no. 8 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, February 1983 and June 1983, respectively).

Thus, from 1942 on, wartime realities demanded that airborne forces be used repeatedly as infantry in ground fighting along the front. Earlier airborne operations on a grand scale had failed because of the light infantry nature of those forces, the paucity of aviation available to deliver units into battle, the absence of technology required to guarantee accurate delivery, and the inability of the light units to compete with the firepower of German formations. In 1944, transport aircraft capable of carrying the heavy equipment an airborne unit would require to survive and to fulfill its mission were still in short supply. Manpower shortage ruled out heavy expenditures of personnel on airborne operations whose chances of success the Soviets rated as only marginal. Thus, strategic and operational use of airborne forces faded into memory. The Soviets still used occasional tactical assaults, particularly diversionary drops, because those types of airborne missions had proved successful earlier in the war (see chap. 6).

In spite of the diminished use of large-scale airdrops, Soviet military theory still recognized the value of such airborne operations under the proper circumstances. Declarations on the theoretical use of airborne forces changed remarkably little from the missions outlined in regulations of the mid-thirties. The Field Regulation of 1944 echoed the Field Regulation of 1936 by declaring in Article 34, "Airborne troops are means at the disposal of the High Command. They are characterized by a high degree of mobility, powerful automatic armament, ability to appear quickly and suddenly and to conduct battle in the rear of the enemy."[20] The regulation detailed the following airborne missions:

- Cooperate behind enemy lines with ground troops, jointly with partisan detachments, to encircle and utterly defeat the enemy and to combat approaching enemy reserves.

- Seize important enemy rear lines (boundaries) and crossings that protect enemy troops.

- Seize and destroy enemy air bases.

- Break up enemy rear command and control establishments.

- Protect seaborne troop landings by seizing coastal regions.

Having articulated the precise missions of airborne forces, the regulations added the important caveat that "successful employment of airborne troops requires careful

preparation and effective cooperation with aviation, partisan detachments, and mobile troops."[21] The combat experiences of Vyaz'ma in the winter of 1941-42 and of the Dnepr in 1943 were thus carefully woven into the new regulations. The regulations also pointed out that success in a frontal attack could be achieved, in part, by "decisive actions in the rear of the enemy with airborne actions." Paragraph 200 of the Field Regulation of 1944 reiterated the airborne missions it had already listed and amplified what airborne forces could accomplish in a general offensive; paragraph 416, on pursuit operations, tasked airlandings to "seize the defiles, crossings, road centers, and commanding heights and hold them until the approach of mobile units."[22] Although airborne operations from 1944 to the war's end would be of extremely limited scope, the 1944 regulation captured the essence of war experiences and passed their legacy into the postwar years when peace and a restored economy would provide airborne forces the means to fulfill the missions for which they were most suited at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

CHAPTER 3

OPERATIONAL EMPLOYMENT: VYAZ'MA, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1942

Strategic Context

The Soviets conducted two operational level airborne operations during the Great Patriotic War. The first and largest in scale and aim occurred during the Soviet winter offensive of January-February 1942. It was designed to push German Army Group Center away from Moscow and, if possible, to destroy it. The first phase of the Soviet Moscow counteroffensive began on 5 December (see map 3, p. 213). After a month of severe fighting in bitterly cold weather, Soviet forces drove German troops from the northern and southern approaches to Moscow, freeing Klin and Kalinin in the north and Tula and Kaluga in the south and threatening the flanks of German Army Group Center. During this first phase, the Soviets used a tactical airborne operation west of Klin to facilitate the successful ground advance by dropping an airborne battalion in the German rear area near Teryaeva Sloboda (see chap. 6). By late December, with Soviet forces approaching Rzhev, Volokolamsk, Mozhaisk, Medyn, Yukhnov, and Kirov, the momentum of the Soviet offensive had ebbed.

Despite the loss of momentum, the Soviet offensive had inflicted materiel and psychological damage on German forces. German personnel and equipment losses were heavy, and Soviet forces threatened to break through the thinning German lines in three distinct sectors of Army Group Center. South of Kaluga, the Soviet 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, 50th Army, and 10th Army tore a major gap between German 2d Panzer Army and 4th Army. The 12th, 13th, and 43d Army corps of German 4th Army withdrew westward toward Yukhnov in heavy snow and bitter cold and under intense Soviet pressure. The Soviets threatened to encircle the 43d Army Corps from both flanks. The 4th Army rear service units and ad hoc lines of communication units pieced together loose defenses east and southeast of Yukhnov, and depleted units of 4th Army's 40th Panzer Corps (19th and 10th Motorized* divisions) attempted to plug the yawning gap between Yukhnov and Sukhinichi.[1]

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*Panzer grenadier.

At Maloyaroslavets, north of Kaluga, the Soviet 33d and 5th armies pressured 4th Panzer Army and 4th Army's left flank. By early January, Soviet forces had breached 4th Army's defenses on a fifteen-kilometer front between Maloyaroslavets and Borovsk. The Soviet thrust separated 4th Army's left flank unit, the 20th Army Corps, from its parent unit, and 20th Army Corps was unable to repair the breach.[2]

Meanwhile, farther north, Col. Gen. I. S. Konev's Kalinin Front posed the third serious threat to Army Group Center. Konev's assault forced German 9th Army to withdraw fifty kilometers from Kalinin toward Rzhev and showed no evidence of weakening.

Col. Gen. Franz Halder, chief of staff of the German army, recorded growing German desperation in his diary. Noting that 29 December was "a very bad day," Halder also wrote:

> . . . in AGp. [Army Group] Center, however, the enemy's superiority on the fronts of Second Army and Second Panzer Army is beginning to tell. We did succeed in sealing the penetrations, but the situation on the overextended front, at which the enemy keeps hammering with ever new concentrations, is very difficult in view of the state of exhaustion of our troops. . . .[3]

For Halder, 30 December was "again a hard day" and 31 December was "an arduous one," with Soviet forces pressuring 43d Army Corps of 4th Army in the Yukhnov sector and 4th Panzer Army in the Maloyaroslavets area. On 2 January, a "day of vehement fighting," Halder noted, "In Fourth and Ninth Armies . . . the situation is taking a critical turn. The breakthrough north of Maloyaroslavets has split the front and we cannot at the moment see any way of restoring it again."[4]

The Soviet 33d Army breakthrough between Maloyaroslavets and Borovsk, 50th Army's penetration south of Yukhnov, and the Kalinin Front's thrust on German 9th Army's left flank were major threats to the coherence of German Army Group Center's defenses. Because of this crisis, Adolf Hitler became involved in operational and tactical decisions by insisting that German forces maintain their positions or counterattack. This insistence inexorably led to the German decision to stand fast in a hedgehog defense throughout the winter and spring of 1942.[5] Hitler's orders forced German commanders to improvise measures to restore a coherent defense. The 4th Army's 43d Army Corps conducted a

tenacious, though harrowing, withdrawal toward Yukhnov, while 40th Motorized Corps struggled to erect barriers to block the advance of Soviet 50th Army and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps southwest of Yukhnov. Cut off from 4th Army and attached to 4th Panzer Army, 20th Army Corps failed in separate attempts to repair the breached German defenses west of Maloyaroslavets. The German counterattacks, however, combined with the harsh weather and tenuous Soviet supply system to slow the momentum of the Soviet advance. The German situation remained critical, but not disastrous.

To restore momentum and to deliver the coup de grace against the reeling German forces, Stalin and the Stavka marshaled the remaining strength of the Soviet forces in a final, desperate attempt to encircle German Army Group Center with a close and wide envelopment. The Kalinin and Western fronts would press German forces westward from Moscow, while the left wing of the Western Front and right wing of the Kalinin Front would attack from south and north to meet at Vyaz'ma and encircle the bulk of German Army Group Center. Together with these attacks, the reinforced Northwestern Front, on the right of the Kalinin Front, would strike southward to seize Smolensk, deep in German Army Group Center's rear. By capitalizing on German losses at Moscow and the German distaste for winter battle, Soviet forces would achieve operational and, perhaps, strategic victory. Memories of Russia's destruction of Charles XII's Swedish army at Poltava more than two centuries before and Napoleon's army more than one century earlier mesmerized Soviet leaders. Yet, in those two earlier epochs, Russian armies had not been so seriously defeated as they were in the disastrous months after June 1941, when only the greatest of sacrifices had saved Moscow. Now, with scarcely any rest, those ragged survivors of the opening months of the campaign again would be called on to conduct deep, sustained operations against the foe that had already wrought such terrible havoc on them.

For his January offensive, Stalin massed his understrength rifle divisions, rifle brigades, and tank brigades on a broad front to strike against the entire German line. On main directions,* he assembled his dwindling mobile assets, a handful of tank brigades, cavalry corps and divisions, and ski battalions, which, with rifle division support, would form the shock groups

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*Napravlenie means direction--axis in English.

and mobile groups for converting tactical success into operational victory. Already weakened by the battles on the close approaches to Moscow, these groups of men, tanks, and horses would carry the burden of leading the advance into the depths of the German defenses. The deep snow, subzero temperature, and fierce German resistance would test the mettle of these units. Their staying power would dictate success or failure of the offensive.

Rifle forces of the Soviet fronts had the task of attacking German forces and making initial penetrations through German lines. To guarantee successful encirclement of German forces, mobile groups would advance into these penetrations, racing to sow confusion in the German rear and to seize key objectives before the Germans could recover from the initial breakthroughs. As required, airborne forces would go into combat either to assist rifle forces in making the initial penetrations or to reinforce the mobile groups once they had advanced deep behind German lines. With mobile forces successfully committed to the German rear, rifle forces would follow to isolate German units and destroy them piecemeal. To these ends, in the midst of one of the harshest winters in Moscow's history, Stalin ordered the unleashing of his forces.

Stavka orders issued on 7 January 1942 outlined the missions of those units participating in the general offensive on the western direction.[6] The overall objective was to encircle and then to destroy German Army Group Center. Soviet armies of the Kalinin Front's right wing, namely, 39th and 29th armies, would attack from northwest of Rzhev toward Sychevka and Vyaz'ma against the right flank of German 9th Army. The 11th Cavalry Corps would lead the Kalinin Front advance. The 10th, 50th, 49th, and 43d armies (from south to north) of the Western Front's left wing would attack toward Yukhnov and Vyaz'ma, led by a mobile group consisting of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps. The attack would strike German 4th Army and the junction between 4th Army and 2d Panzer Army to the south. The remaining armies of the Western Front (from south to north--33d, 5th, 16th, and 20th armies), with 2d Guards Cavalry Corps as a mobile group, would attack westward toward Sychevka, Gzhatsk, and Vyaz'ma. The 33d Army thrust would strike the junction of 4th Panzer Army and 4th Army. The 30th Army, 31st Army, and 1st Shock Army of the Kalinin Front's left wing would pressure the German 9th Army between Rzhev and Volokolamsk. Several tactical airborne drops in the rear of German forces on Soviet main attack axes would assist the Soviet advances. The Stavka planned a large operational airborne drop in the region southwest of Vyaz'ma, deep in the rear of

German 4th Panzer Army and 4th Army to complete the overall Vyaz'ma encirclement. Precise objectives and timing of the airborne drop would depend on the progress of the main offensive.

On 8 January, the Soviet offensive began in the Kalinin Front's sector and, during the next few days, extended to other sectors. On the eighth, the 39th Army of the Kalinin Front smashed through German 9th Army defensive positions west of Rzhev and advanced fifty kilometers south toward Vyaz'ma. The 29th Army and 11th Cavalry Corps rushed to exploit the penetration. The 11th Cavalry Corps raced 110 kilometers to the western outskirts of Vyaz'ma, thus threatening the rear of German 9th Army. The right wing of the Western Front joined the 10 January assault, with 20th Army, 1st Shock Army, and 16th Army pushing German 9th Army units westward through Shakhovskaya toward Gzhatsk. The same day, 5th Army and 33d Army of the Western Front joined the attack and threatened German 4th Panzer Army units at Mozhaisk and Vereya. Simultaneously with the advance of other Western Front armies, the 43d, 49th, 50th, and 10th armies (from north to south) penetrated German 4th Army positions east of Yukhnov and Mosal'sk, moved on toward the critical Moscow-Warsaw highway near Yukhnov, and drove toward Kirov, thus encircling German forces at Sukhinichi. German 4th Army, with its north and south flanks turned, withdrew toward Medyn. A forty-kilometer gap formed between 4th Army and 2d Panzer Army on 4th Army's right flank. The 1st Guards Cavalry Corps entered the gap to exploit across the Moscow-Warsaw highway to south of Vyaz'ma.

During the initial phases of the new offensive, the Soviets launched two tactical airborne assaults to assist the advances of ground forces. On 3 and 4 January, to assist the advance of 43d and 49th armies, battalion-size airborne assaults secured objectives in German 4th Army's rear area at Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo, near Myatlevo, and in the Gusevo area north of Medyn. Both airborne forces eventually joined forces with advancing Soviet armies. A second airborne assault occurred on 18 January in the Zhelan'ye area west of Yukhnov, where a regimental-size force dropped to assist 1st Guards Cavalry Corps in crossing the Moscow-Warsaw highway southwest of Yukhnov. This assault was successful, and airborne troops linked up with 1st Guards Cavalry forces, with whom they would continue to operate.

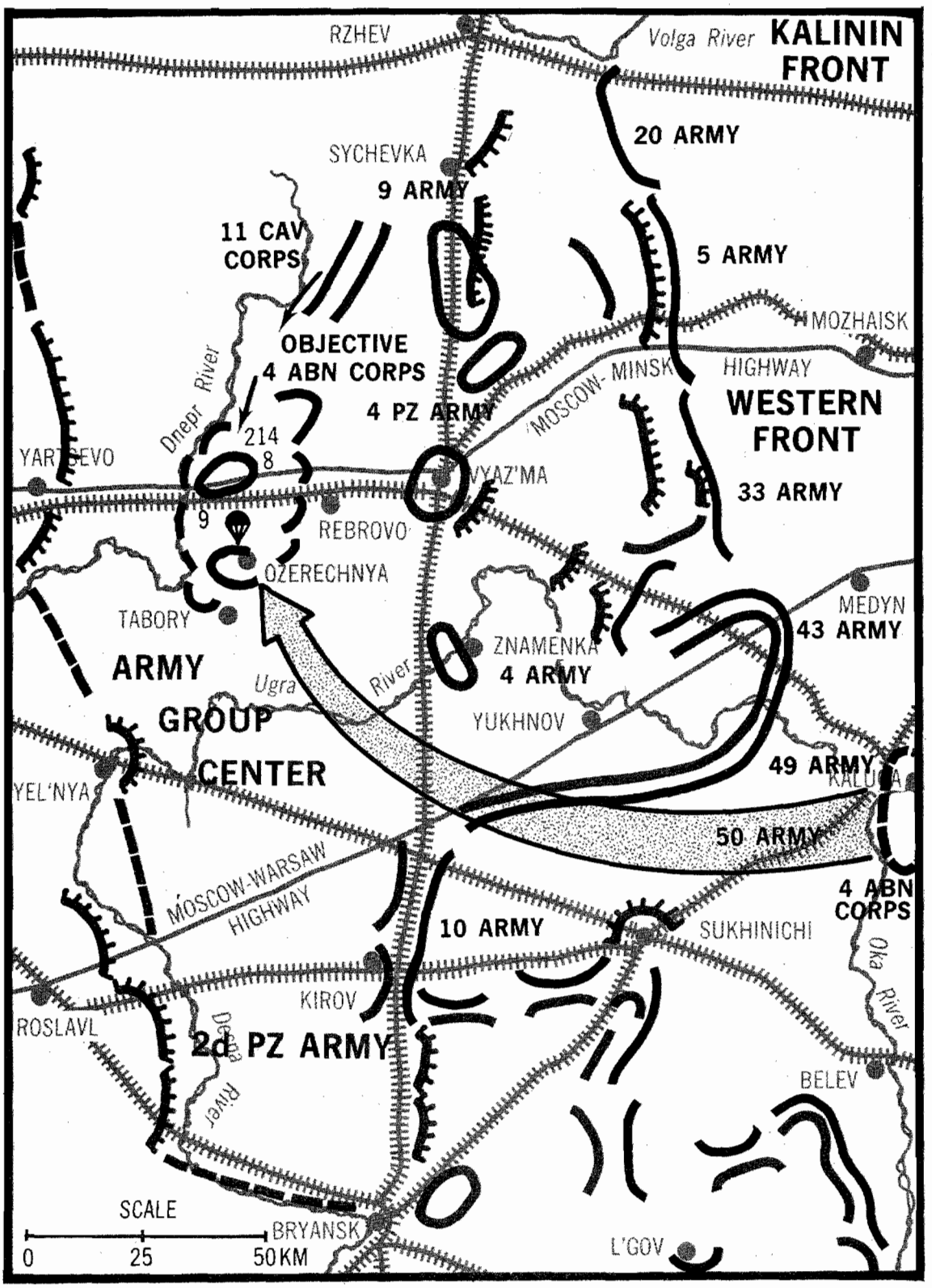
Despite initial successes, the advance had slowed by late January. Soviet units were tired and nearly out of stock. Although mobile forces had penetrated into the

German rear on at least three axes, they lacked the strength to secure their objectives. Compounding these difficulties, German counterattacks had delayed the advance of main frontal forces and cut off communication between these mobile forces and main front units. Originally threatened by strategic and operational encirclements, now the Germans threatened to encircle the exploiting Soviet mobile units. Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky, then a member of the Stavka, described the situation:

> At the beginning of 1942, having correctly assessed front conditions as favorable for a continuation of the offensive, the High Command inadequately took into account real Red Army capabilities. As a result, the nine armies at the disposal of the Stavka were almost evenly divided among all strategic directions. In the course of the winter offensive, Soviet forces expended all reserves created with such difficulty in the fall and the beginning of winter. Assigned missions could not be achieved.[7]

Vasilevsky referred to the deteriorating situation of late January (see map 4, p. 43). By then, the Germans had halted the main Soviet advance and launched violent counterattacks against forward Soviet positions. The Kalinin Front offensive ground to a halt short of Rzhev, Sychevka, and Vyaz'ma. Renewed German counterattacks southwest of Rzhev threatened the overextended front's shock group of 29th and 39th armies. Northwest of Vyaz'ma, 11th Cavalry Corps (18th, 24th, and 82d Cavalry divisions and 2d Guards Motorized Rifle Division) harassed German forces but was unable to cut permanently the Smolensk, Vyaz'ma, and Moscow highway. Armies of the Western Front's right and center took Mozhaisk and approached, but could not seize, Gzhatsk. Lead elements of Lt. Gen. M. G. Yefremov's 33d Army penetrated between German 4th Panzer Army and 4th Army defenses north of Yukhnov and moved forward toward Vyaz'ma. The left wing of the Western Front swept south and west of Yukhnov against German 4th Army but failed to take the city. Maj. Gen. P. A. Belov's 1st Guards Cavalry Corps advanced on Mosal'sk. To complicate matters further, the Germans, though encircled at Sukhinichi, stoutly resisted and soon mounted a relief effort that threatened the Western Front's left flank.

On 19 January, German 9th, 4th Panzer, and 4th armies occupied positions running from north of Rzhev, east of Zubsov and Gzhatsk, to east and south of Yukhnov. The 4th Panzer Army's 9th, 7th, and 20th Army corps defended from



Map 4. Situation Facing the Western Front, 25 January 1942, and Concept of the Airborne Operation

northeast of Gzhatsk to twenty-five kilometers north of Medyn. The 4th Army's 12th, 13th, 57th, and 43d Army corps defended along the Shanya River west of Medyn in a semicircle east, southeast, and south of Yukhnov.[8] The 20th Army Corps right flank divisions (167th and 255th Infantry divisions) and the 57th Army Corps left flank divisions (98th and 52d Infantry divisions) tried in vain to close the twenty-kilometer breach in German defenses north of Medyn (a breach occupied by Soviet 33d Army).[9] Southwest of Yukhnov, scattered 40th Motorized Corps units and rear service units of 43d Army Corps tried to halt the Soviet 50th Army advance toward the critical Moscow-Warsaw highway and the Vyaz'ma-Bryansk rail line. German control of the major Rollbahn, as well as the Moscow-Minsk Rollbahn (from Vyaz'ma to Smolensk), was critical for the reinforcement and resupply of German Army Group Center forces.* Hence, cutting the Rollbahnen became a primary Soviet objective.

In the face of these developments, the Stavka issued new orders. It believed a large airborne operation in the Vyaz'ma area would reinforce advancing Soviet mobile forces, destroy the cohesion of German 4th Panzer and 4th armies, and enable Soviet forces to take that city. Simultaneously, the main Soviet fronts would resume offensive operations to support the advancing mobile groups. The Stavka gave priority to 33d and 43d armies attacking toward Vya'zma from the east and to 50th Army attacking with 1st Guards Cavalry Corps toward the Moscow-Warsaw highway and Vyaz'ma from the southeast.

Operational Planning

On 15 January 1942, the Stavka made the decision to insert Maj. Gen. A. F. Levashev's 4th Airborne Corps into the area southwest of Vyaz'ma (see map 5, p. 214). It was a bold decision because it involved a series of night parachute drops conducted in the harshest of winter conditions with temperatures well below zero. The 10,000-man 4th Airborne Corps (8th, 9th, and 214th Airborne brigades) was then based near Moscow. This corps was one of the most experienced--surviving--airborne units, and its commander, General Levashev, had previously operated for a long period in the enemy rear. Also, its

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*Rollbahnen were roads designated as main axes of motorized transportation. The Germans prohibited all animal transport and marching columns from using these roads.

214th Brigade had spent three months encircled in Belorussia. The projected airborne assaults would take off from three airfields near Kaluga (Grabtsevo, Zhashkovo, and Rzhavets), some thirty to forty kilometers behind the front.[10]

The staff of the airborne forces, in close coordination with the air force, planned the operation with particular emphasis on operational objectives, unit missions, force composition, aviation and combat support, and logistical considerations. Unfortunately, they paid little attention to the conduct of ground operations, specifically to a coordinated linkup with front forces.

Participating agencies shared responsibilities for the operation. The commander of airborne forces, Maj. Gen. V. A. Glazunov, supervised preparation of the airborne force. The air force commander handled the timing of the drop, while the Western Front commander, General of the Army G. K. Zhukov, had operational control of the forces after landing. The air force commander had overall control of the operation from his Moscow headquarters, although he established a forward command post at Kaluga.[11]

On 17 January, General Glazunov assigned specific missions to General Levashev of 4th Airborne Corps.[12] The 4th Corps would cooperate with the Kalinin and Western fronts to encircle and destroy German Army Group Center. The main corps force would land southwest of Vyaz'ma to cut German communications between Vyaz'ma and Smolensk, while a secondary force would interdict the withdrawal of German units from Vyaz'ma to the west (see map 6, p. 215). To confuse the Germans about the precise location of the main drop, the plan authorized several auxiliary reconnaissance-diversionary landings spread over wide areas of the German rear.

Only fragmented German forces were in the area west and southwest of Vyaz'ma. These forces sought shelter from the snow and bitter cold in villages along the Moscow-Minsk and Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov roads. Garrisons of up to battalion size defended populated points along the major communications routes. Smaller units defended supply and maintenance installations in villages up to twenty kilometers off the highways. By mid-January, 11th Panzer Division had general responsibility for security of the Rollbahn west of Vyaz'ma beyond the Dnepr River crossing. Although still committed to action farther east, 3d Motorized Division had units patrolling the highways east and south of Vyaz'ma. In late January, the 309th Infantry Regiment (208th Infantry Division)

garrisoned the Rollbahn west of Vyaz'ma, and, after 30 January, 5th Panzer Division units moved into Vyaz'ma and the region southwest of the city. These scattered forces would be the first to face the Soviet airborne assault.[13]

The Soviet airborne landing was scheduled to begin with a daylight drop of a battalion-size forward detachment. It would secure landing sites by the end of the first day for the corps's main force. The main drop would occur during darkness to minimize the risk of enemy attack. Originally, the operation was to begin on 21 January, but slow movement of the corps into the staging area had forced a postponement of the drop until 26-27 January. The corps moved to Kaluga over rail lines cut by the Germans, who had also destroyed the main bridge over the Oka River. Consequently, corps units had to ford the river, carrying their supplies with them. This entire movement to Kaluga had been poorly planned and was executed with almost complete disregard for secrecy or concealment. Supplies were left uncamouflaged, and personnel wore conspicuous new winter uniforms (other troops had not yet been issued them). Moreover, because winter weather had driven command posts into villages and towns, corps command posts were in populated areas recently evacuated by the Germans, who must certainly have left behind agents to report on Soviet movements.[14] Similar problems occurred in attempts to concentrate aircraft at the airfields. With this inauspicious beginning, 4th Airborne Corps paratroopers slowly arrived at their staging areas.

On 24 January, General Zhukov dispatched the following cryptic warning order to General Levashev: "To comrade Levashev--Mission: 26-27 January, land corps and occupy positions in accordance with the map. Objective: Cut off withdrawal of the enemy to the west. Zhukov 24 January 1942 1300H." The order was posted on a 1:100,000 map indicating corps areas and summarizing airborne force objectives.[15]

Having received his mission, General Levashev reviewed the situation and, at 1800 on 26 January, issued orders to the corps. The corps main force would land southwest of Vyaz'ma near Ozerechnya, Kurdyumovo, and Komovo. After landing, the corps would advance into the forested area west of Vyaz'ma; secure the villages of Yamkovo, Mosolovo, Pleshkovo, and Azarovo; cut German communications routes; and prevent both German withdrawal from and reinforcement of Vyaz'ma. Seven smaller groups of twenty to thirty airborne troops would conduct reconnaissance-diversionary operations near the landing sites. They would establish contact with the 11th Cavalry Corps and Maj. N. L.

Soldatov's airborne regiment, committed on 18 January in the Zhelan'ye area (see chap. 6).[16]

Levashev's order defined specific missions for his corps's units.[17] Lt. Col. A. A. Onufriev's 8th Airborne Brigade, preceded by a forward detachment, would land near Ozerechnya to secure a line from Rebrovo through Gradino to Berezniki and to block German movement along the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk and Vyaz'ma-Dorogobuzh roads. Col. I. I. Kuryshev's 9th Airborne Brigade would land near Goryainovo and secure a line from Goryainovo through Ivaniki to Popovo to prevent the approach of German reinforcements from the west. Lt. Col. N. Ye. Kolobovnikov's 214th Airborne Brigade, reinforced by the separate tank and artillery battalions of the corps, would land and assemble in the Vysotskoye, Pleshkovo, and Uvarovo areas and act as the corps reserve, prepared either to counterattack against German units should they penetrate airborne defensive lines or to reinforce the defense of the 8th and 9th Airborne brigades. Corresponding to missions assigned by General Zhukov, General Levashev's major consideration in decision making was to secure the designated objective by surprise and to hold it for two to three days until 33d Army and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps linked up with the airborne forces.

After receiving Levashev's orders, commanders worked at assembling the airborne corps and supporting aircraft. Planning designated the concentration of forty PS-84 and twenty-five TB-3 aircraft to conduct the lift. Although insufficient for rapid movement of all airborne forces into the drop area, severe shortages in military transport aviation had dictated using so few aircraft. In fact, when the tardy concentration of aircraft was complete, only thirty-nine PS-84 and twenty-two TB-3 aircraft were available. Similar deficiencies plagued fighter cover for the operation. Originally, thirty fighters were expected to cover the concentration areas, and one fighter regiment (seventy-two fighters) would protect landing sites. Only nineteen fighters, however, were available to protect the operation.[18] Given these aircraft shortages, the plan necessitated that each aircraft crew make two to three sorties a night to complete the movement in three or four days. Planners ignored the weather, potential aircraft combat losses, and the possibility of aircraft mechanical failures. In addition, the operation faced adverse aerial conditions because German aviation was especially active in the sector and was familiar with the Kaluga airfields, having recently flown from them.

Airborne units established liaison at the aviation commanders' command posts at each airfield and at the

Western Front and air force headquarters to coordinate aviation support. Within the airborne force, commanders created signal operation instructions and special radio nets connecting brigades to the corps. No communications links, however, existed between the airborne force and combat aviation units. Transport aviation did coordinate well with the airborne forces throughout the planning phases.

The estimate of the situation did not, however, provide data on an important consideration, namely, information concerning enemy strength in the drop area. There simply was no reliable information on such German forces. Neither partisan units (which proliferated in the area) nor Major Soldatov's paratroopers were close enough to Vyaz'ma to provide such intelligence. Soviet reconnaissance flights also failed to detect German units. Front headquarters optimistically reported a wholesale enemy withdrawal from the area when, in fact, none had occurred. On the contrary, considerable numbers of German troops were near the drop area.

8th Airborne Brigade Assault

From 24 to 27 January, the overall situation on the Western Front seemed favorable for the airborne operation. The 11th Cavalry Corps of the Kalinin Front remained just northwest of Vyaz'ma. The leading elements of 33d Army approached Vyaz'ma from the east, and Belov's 1st Guards Cavalry Corps mounted persistent attempts to cross the Moscow-Warsaw highway southwest of Yukhnov.

Thus, at 0400 on 27 January, General Zhukov sent the following message to 4th Airborne Corps at Kaluga: "Tell Levashev that the horse cavalry of Sokolov [11th Cavalry Corps] Group has moved into the area that I marked on the map. Therefore, the situation is eased for Levashev. Think over the techniques of communications and give the men instructions so that there are no misunderstandings."[19] Levashev responded and ordered the 8th Airborne Brigade into action (see map 7, p. 216). A forward detachment consisting of the 2d Parachute Battalion under Capt. M. Ya. Karnaukhov was ordered to land at Ozerechnya and, by organizing all-round defenses, prepare the area for further landings of the brigade. Karnaukhov's battalion left the Zhashkovo airfield at 1430 on 27 January. Because of poor pilot orientation over the drop area, the aircraft dropped the paratroopers at high altitude far south of the planned drop zone. The paratroopers landed scattered over an area of twenty to twenty-five kilometers radius around the village of Tabory

about twenty kilometers south of Ozerechnya. The battalion commander landed with the first contingent. At 1600, while the 2d Battalion jumped around Tabory, other aircraft dropped seven diversionary groups, plus units to establish contact with the 11th Cavalry Corps and Soldatov's group, at various locations in the German rear.

The German command was almost immediately aware of the airborne drop. The 4th Panzer Army received two reports. The first was that Soviet troops with machine guns and grenade launchers were along the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk highway near Yakushkino. The second, from 11th Panzer Division, was that, between 1600 and 1700 (after dusk) on 27 January, twenty transport aircraft had dropped about 400 paratroopers near Mitino station, west of Izdeshkovo (probably Group Aksenov). Subsequent reports spoke of Soviet attacks on an 11th Panzer Division battalion and a 309th Infantry Regiment battalion at Izyakovo and at several other points along the Rollbahn. Other reports said the airborne forces at Mitino had withdrawn south of the Rollbahn. The 4th Panzer Army alerted all units in the region to the new danger.[20]

Meanwhile, Soviet airborne commanders continued the painstakingly slow assembly of their scattered forces. The 2d Battalion's reassembly around Tabory took considerable time. Of the original 648 men dropped, only 318 had assembled by evening. The next morning, the total had risen to 476 men, but virtually all the unit's supplies had been lost in the snow-covered fields and forests.[21] Karnaukhov faced an immediate dilemma. Unable to establish contact with either 4th Airborne Corps or the other brigade commanders and able to contact 8th Airborne Brigade headquarters only long enough to report "landed all right" before communications failed, the commander could not notify headquarters of his new location. Nor could he make a drop zone visible from the air without confusing the main force, which expected him to be at Ozerechnya. Consequently, on the morning of 28 January, Captain Karnaukhov moved part of his force to Tabory and established a landing zone equipped with signals, in case other units of the 8th Airborne Brigade followed his battalion's course. With his main force, he moved to Ozerechnya to establish the prescribed landing strip. Karnaukhov arrived at Ozerechnya on the evening of the twenty-eighth only to find it occupied by a small German force. He reconnoitered the German positions, and, during the night, the small Soviet force attacked the garrison. On the third attack, the Soviets took the village while inflicting heavy casualties on the small garrison, a company-size rear service unit. During the remainder of the night, Karnaukhov's men prepared a

landing zone, established defenses, and scouted German approach routes into the area.

Meanwhile, at Kaluga, the commander of airborne forces, without information from the forward detachment, ordered the 8th Airborne Brigade main force to begin its assault on the night of 27-28 January. During the night, two flights dropped Maj. A. G. Kobets's 3d Battalion, along with heavy equipment, ammunition, and supplies. As on the previous day, the drop was inaccurate, with half the units landing in the Tabory area and the other half around Ozerechnya. The 3d Battalion could not establish communications with corps until late on the twenty-eighth.

Unfortunate events in the rear further complicated the complex situation at the front. Throughout 28 January, German aircraft, probably aware of the Soviet airborne operations, bombed the airfield at Zhashkovo. When the Soviets switched to Grabtsevo and Rzhavets airfields, German bombers followed suit. Ineffective Soviet air defenses at all three locations allowed German pilots to destroy seven precious TB-3 bombers, one fighter, and several fuel dumps.[22] Ultimately, because of German air attacks, flights from all three airfields ceased.

To clarify the confused situation, General Levashev, on 28 January, sent his assistant chief of reconnaissance, Sr. Lt. A. P. Aksenov, in a PO-2 light aircraft to find the 2d Battalion's landing area and to determine its condition. Two attempts to find the battalion failed. On the second attempt, however, the aircraft, short of fuel, landed at Vorontsovo, twelve kilometers southwest of Alferovo. At Vorontsovo, Lieutenant Aksenov discovered small groups of Soviet troops, but not the airborne headquarters. Having reported to corps, he gathered 213 men and successfully attacked and destroyed the small German garrison at Vorontsovo. On 1 February, using captured German fuel, Aksenov flew to 8th Airborne Brigade headquarters at Androsovo. His detachment remained in the area south of Izdeshkovo to harass German garrisons in the area.

Despite dwindling air transport, the landing of 8th Airborne Brigade continued. On the night of 28-29 January, aircraft dropped 500 skis, ammunition, and supplies at Ozerechnya. But of the original aircraft, only ten PS-84s and two TB-3s remained serviceable.[23] The Stavka ordered additional aircraft to continue the operation, and, by 2000 on 29 January, 540 more men had been airdropped. On the evening of 29-30 January,

however, German aircraft again bombed the Kaluga airfields. On 30 January, the Germans hit both Zhashkovo and Rzhavets.

Bad weather (snow with temperatures of -40°C) and enemy aircraft activity had limited the total drop on 30 January to a mere 120 men. The following day, 215 men jumped, including the 8th Brigade commander, Lt. Col. A. A. Onufriev. He also brought desperately needed arms and ammunition.[24] While parachute drops continued, at 0530 on 29 January, the 4th Airborne Corps commander ordered the aviation group to reconnoiter landing areas systematically to find his subordinate units. Only on 31 January did a clear picture of airborne dispositions begin to emerge.

After having landed, Onufriev moved westward to Captain Karnaukhov's position. Assisted by a platoon sent out by the 2d Battalion, the two forces merged on 31 January. Onufriev reported to both General Levashev and General Zhukov that the Germans held the nearby road junction of Yermolino-Bessonovo, perhaps in infantry battalion strength supported by tanks and armored cars. Smaller German units occupied the villages of Alferovo, Boromaya, and Yermolina; the German garrison at Izdeshkovo (units of 11th Panzer Division and 4th Panzer Army rear service units) numbered about 400 men. Out of radio contact, Onufriev's own brigade was dispersed in the Ozerechnya, Androsovo, and Komovo areas.

While Lieutenant Colonel Onufriev operated with the 2d Battalion, Major Kobets's 3d Battalion sought to accomplish its mission.[25] Onufriev's battalion had been scattered over a large area on the night of 27-28 January, and Major Kobets had landed near Androsovo. Rather than wait for his forces to assemble, Kobets, with a detachment of 131 men, moved on his objectives, the rail line and road west of Vyaz'ma. After several days of fighting, Kobets's detachment cut German communications between Alferovo and Rebrovo and then slipped away from German infantry reinforced by armored trains sent to destroy the pesky Soviet unit. The 3d Battalion occupied defensive positions on the southern edge of the forest north of Yeskovo and repelled a German force dispatched from Alferovo. The next day, the 3d Battalion took Yeskovo, destroyed the garrison, and cut the rail line. At first light on 7 February, the Germans again attacked from Rebrovo but were repulsed. Subsequent heavy German attacks finally drove Kobets's detachment into the forests west of Yeskovo, where it continued to harass German communications and forced the Germans to provide heavy

escorts of tanks and armored cars to protect their convoys and ensure their safe arrival. The Germans burned all villages in the area to deny food and shelter to the Soviets. In mid-February, after repeated unsuccessful attempts to reach 8th Airborne Brigade, the 3d Battalion finally broke out of the German encirclement south via Ugra station and met units of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and 8th Airborne Brigade. The 3d Battalion's twenty-one-day raid, during which Major Kobets was wounded three times, had considerable diversionary value. It had cut the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk road and forced German 4th Panzer Army to commit valuable forces to reopen the army's lines of communication.

Major Kobets's battalion and other Soviet airborne and cavalry units cut the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk Rollbahn repeatedly after 27 January, causing the German higher command considerable concern. On 31 January, Halder noted:

> In Center, . . . the situation remains tight. More heavy fighting on the supply road to Yukhnov. The enemy is moving new forces westward through the gap between Fourth Army and Fourth Panzer Army. The attack to seal the gap has been postponed to 3 Feb. . . . Enemy air landings continue. Highway and railroad lines between Smolensk-Vyaz'ma still not cleared. Condition of troops in Fourth Army is serious! Supply difficulties.[26]

Two days later, Halder revealed his impressions of the expanding battle:

> The enemy elements that infiltrated behind our front are now being attacked by Fifth Armored [Panzer] Division. The scenes in this battle behind the front are absolutely grotesque and testify to the degree to which this war has degenerated into a sort of slugging bout that has no resemblance whatever to any form of warfare we have known.[27]

The 4th Panzer Army records confirm that the Rollbahn west of Vyaz'ma was closed continuously for three days after 28 January.[28]

Meanwhile, despite the uncertain situation, landing operations continued. Throughout 31 January, another 389 men dropped into the area. Flights finally halted on 1 February, for the overall military situation indicated the hopelessness of continuing the effort. For six days, from 27 January through 1 February, 2,081 of the 3,062 men of

8th Airborne Brigade landed along with 120 automatic pistols, 72 antitank rifles, 20 82-mm mortars, and 30 light mortars. Of those men, only 1,320 ultimately managed to join Lieutenant Colonel Onufriev's main force. In addition, seventy-six men of the 214th Airborne Brigade landed to establish communications with 11th Cavalry Corps north of the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk road and to conduct diversionary operations.[29] With these few lightly equipped units, the 8th Airborne Brigade now had to cope with a new operational situation.

As the drops proceeded, conditions on the Western Front were changing. The 11th Cavalry Corps failed to cut the Smolensk-Vyaz'ma highway, and German forces drove the cavalry units northwest of Vyaz'ma. Lead elements of the 33d Army pushed into the area immediately east of Vyaz'ma, but German counterattacks threatened to cut these units off from the remainder of the 33d Army. Farther south, Belov's 1st Guards Cavalry Corps forced its way across the Moscow-Warsaw highway southwest of Yukhnov and joined Major Soldatov's airborne force, only to find that the Germans had slammed the trapdoor shut, cutting off Belov's retreat and separating him from his two rifle divisions and his artillery, which remained south of the road.[30] With his own light cavalry force of the 1st Guards and 2d Guards Cavalry divisions, 57th and 75th Light Cavalry divisions, and Major Soldatov's airborne force, Belov faced heavily armed German forces at Vyaz'ma. In these circumstances and under incessant German air attacks, further drops of 4th Airborne Corps ceased. The remaining airborne forces moved by rail from Kaluga to assembly areas at Lyubertsy and Vnukovo.

8th Airborne Brigade Operations

Without reinforcements, Onufriev's 8th Airborne Brigade operated with the 746 men who had assembled by 1300 on 1 February. For seven days, his units attacked the small German garrisons south of Vyaz'ma, spreading chaos in the German rear, but never seriously threatening any critical German installation.

All Soviet units in the Vyaz'ma area were in an equally uncomfortable situation. In reduced strength, 8th Airborne Brigade harassed German garrisons and dodged the blows of German 5th and 11th Panzer divisions. Moving up from the south, 1st Guards Cavalry Corps encountered heavy German opposition near Tesnikovo, Maloshino, and Kapustino while, in the cavalry's rear, a strong German garrison held out at Semlevo.[31] On 4 February, the Western Front commander ordered Belov to attack Vyaz'ma from the south,

in coordination with 33d Army, east of Vyaz'ma, and 11th Cavalry Corps, fifteen kilometers west of Vyaz'ma on the Moscow-Minsk highway. The Germans repelled all of Belov's attacks and inflicted heavy casualties on the cavalry units. Only the village of Zubovo fell into Soviet hands on 6 February.

Also on 6 February, German 5th Army Corps received from 4th Panzer Army the missions of coordinating the defense of the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk Rollbahn and of maintaining contact with 4th Army along the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov road.[32] To this end, 5th Army Corps deployed the 5th Panzer, 106th Infantry, and 11th Panzer divisions north and south of the railroad and highway running west from Vyaz'ma toward Smolensk. In addition, elements of 5th Panzer Division cooperated with the 3d Motorized Division in operations south and southeast of Vyaz'ma against the Soviet 33d Army that was bottled up there. Each of the German divisions fought against the enemy simultaneously in two directions. The 11th Panzer and 106th Infantry divisions faced both north and south of the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk road. The 5th Panzer Division engaged Soviet paratroopers southwest of Vyaz'ma and 33d Army units southeast of Vyaz'ma. Only by task organizing their units into several battalion-size Kampfgruppen (battle groups) could the German divisions successfully parry the numerous, often uncoordinated and haphazard, Soviet attacks.[33]

As German defenses jelled, Belov received a new order on 7 February:

> Advance to the east with all forces of the 8th Brigade and take Gredyakino, interdict the Vyaz'ma-Izdeshkovo rail line and prevent the movement of enemy trains. Enter into communications with the 75th Cavalry Division advancing east of Gredyakino and with Sokolov [11th Cavalry Corps] about which I wrote you previously.[34]

The 1,320 men of 8th Airborne Brigade at Izborovo were now subordinated to General Belov's corps, and he ordered them to attack east, secure Gredyakino, and cut the rail line from Vyaz'ma to Izdeshkovo in coordination with 11th Cavalry Corps (see map 8, p. 217). The 8th Airborne Brigade would penetrate enemy defenses from Dyaglevo to Savino and attack along the road from Vyaz'ma to Dorogobuzh to secure Gredyakino. Initially, on 8 February, the brigade had some success and captured Savino, Semenovskoye, and Gvozdikovo. The following day,

the brigade pushed on to take Dyaglevo and Marmonovo, where they claimed to destroy the headquarters of 5th Panzer Division, which was actually a battalion of the 106th Infantry Division. But this success was short lived because German reinforcements counterattacked Dyaglevo from Pesochnya and Staroye Polyanovo. Although repulsed, the attacks cost the 8th Brigade another 140 casualties.[35]

At first light on the eleventh, elements of the German 106th Infantry and 11th Panzer divisions attacked south from Semlevo station and southwest from Vyaz'ma in force, driving the 8th Brigade from Dyaglevo and severing brigade contact with 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and Kobets's 3d Battalion. Although the 41st Cavalry Division had joined the 8th Brigade, Dyaglevo could not be retaken. By 13 January, the 106th Infantry Division had reoccupied Marmonovo. On the fifteenth, Dyaglevo fell, and Soviet units withdrew into the forests between Dyaglevo and Semlevo.[36] Belov ceased his attacks on Selivano, Stogovo, and Zabnovo in support of the 329th Rifle Division of 33d Army and the 250th Airborne Regiment and instead assisted the 8th Airborne Brigade in its attack on Semlevo. The brigade commander notified front headquarters of his problems, and front ordered the brigade to join Belov in his bypass of Pesochnya to take Semlevo.[37] Once Semlevo had fallen, the two units could combine with 11th Cavalry Corps in an attack on Vyaz'ma from the west. Such plans, however, were not grounded in reality.

Deep snow delayed the attack by 1st Guards Cavalry Division and 114th Ski Battalion on Semlevo. The 75th Light Cavalry Division reinforced the attack and gained a foothold in Semlevo, but no more. The 8th Airborne Brigade joined Belov at Semlevo just as major German infantry and armor units counterattacked on 15 February. The concentric German attack now included elements of the 106th Infantry, 11th Panzer, and 5th Panzer divisions. Now down to forty-nine tanks, the 5th Panzer Division advanced through heavy snow from Stogovo toward Semlevo. The 106th Infantry Division, with fourteen or fifteen tanks and artillery, moved southward from Semlevo, while a battalion of 11th Panzer Division advanced on Belomir to the west of 106th Infantry Division.[38] The German counterattacks forced Belov's units to withdraw westward to strike the rail line in a less well defended German sector (see map 8, p. 217). Belov left the 250th Airborne Regiment and 329th Rifle Division in the area southeast of Vyaz'ma to continue harassing German forces. All attempts to link up with 11th Cavalry Corps were in vain.

For more than a month, 8th Airborne Brigade operated with 1st Guards Cavalry Corps behind German lines, first attacking the rail line west of Vyaz'ma and then, on 7 March, swinging southeast in an attempt to relieve the encircled 329th Rifle Division and 250th Airborne Regiment that was surrounded by German forces east of Debrevo and Knyazhnoe at Perekhody (see map 9, p. 218). From 7 to 13 March, Soviet attacks failed to break the German encirclement, although Major Soldatov did mamage to penetrate the German cordon with seventy-five ski troopers (see map 10, p. 219). By 14 March, 250 to 300 men from the 329th Rifle Division finally broke out to join Belov, but no more.[39]

The 8th Airborne Brigade continued to operate with 1st Guards Cavalry Corps west of the rail line from Vyaz'ma to Ugra station until 6 April. The next day, the brigade rejoined its parent 4th Airborne Corps, then fighting in the German rear on the Yukhnov axis. Smaller groups of the 8th Airborne Brigade, including the original seven diversionary groups, continued operations in a wide area southwest of Vyaz'ma. Elements of 3d Battalion and partisans operated near Dorogobuzh until they rejoined their brigade on 8 March. A 1st Battalion group was active in the Yurkino area. A large group supplemented by partisans near Dorogobuzh attacked and captured the town on the night of 13-14 February. A 1st Guards Cavalry Corps regiment reinforced these units, which for several months held Dorogobuzh as a major base for partisan operations.

Conclusions

For more than one month in German rear areas, 8th Airborne Brigade conducted a running fight with enemy units around Vyaz'ma. What had begun as a major airborne operation to assist in the destruction of German Army Group Center quickly degenerated into a series of tactical drops with tactical consequences. Ultimately, airborne units sought to destroy small German installations, disrupt German supply routes, and avoid their own destruction. The initial drop failed for a variety of reasons, including poor reconnaissance, inadequate equipment and transportation, faulty initial coordination with ground forces, and chaotic delivery techniques. Because the drop lacked security, both ground and air forces suffered heavy losses.

It was evident early that planning had been correct in outline, but weak in detail. Initial bottlenecks in the availability of transport aircraft forced the corps to

issue fragmentary orders on the eve of each drop. The failure of disoriented aircrews to drop their cargoes of men and equipment in the correct zones disrupted planned deployment of forces forward and hindered staff officers in keeping track of force deployment. Piecemeal delivery only compounded dispersion and resulted in "penny packet" employment of the force after landing. On the ground, troops fought as well as could have been expected, but their numbers and armament were simply not sufficient for the task, a deficiency planners should have foreseen. As a result, the full drop of 4th Airborne Corps aborted, and 8th Airborne Brigade, along with the units it was supposed to cooperate with (1st Guards Cavalry Corps and 33d Army), was, by the middle of February, surrounded and fighting for survival. So, the Stavka committed a new and larger airborne force to reinforce them in their struggle.

CHAPTER 4

OPERATIONAL EMPLOYMENT: VYAZ'MA, FEBRUARY-JUNE 1942

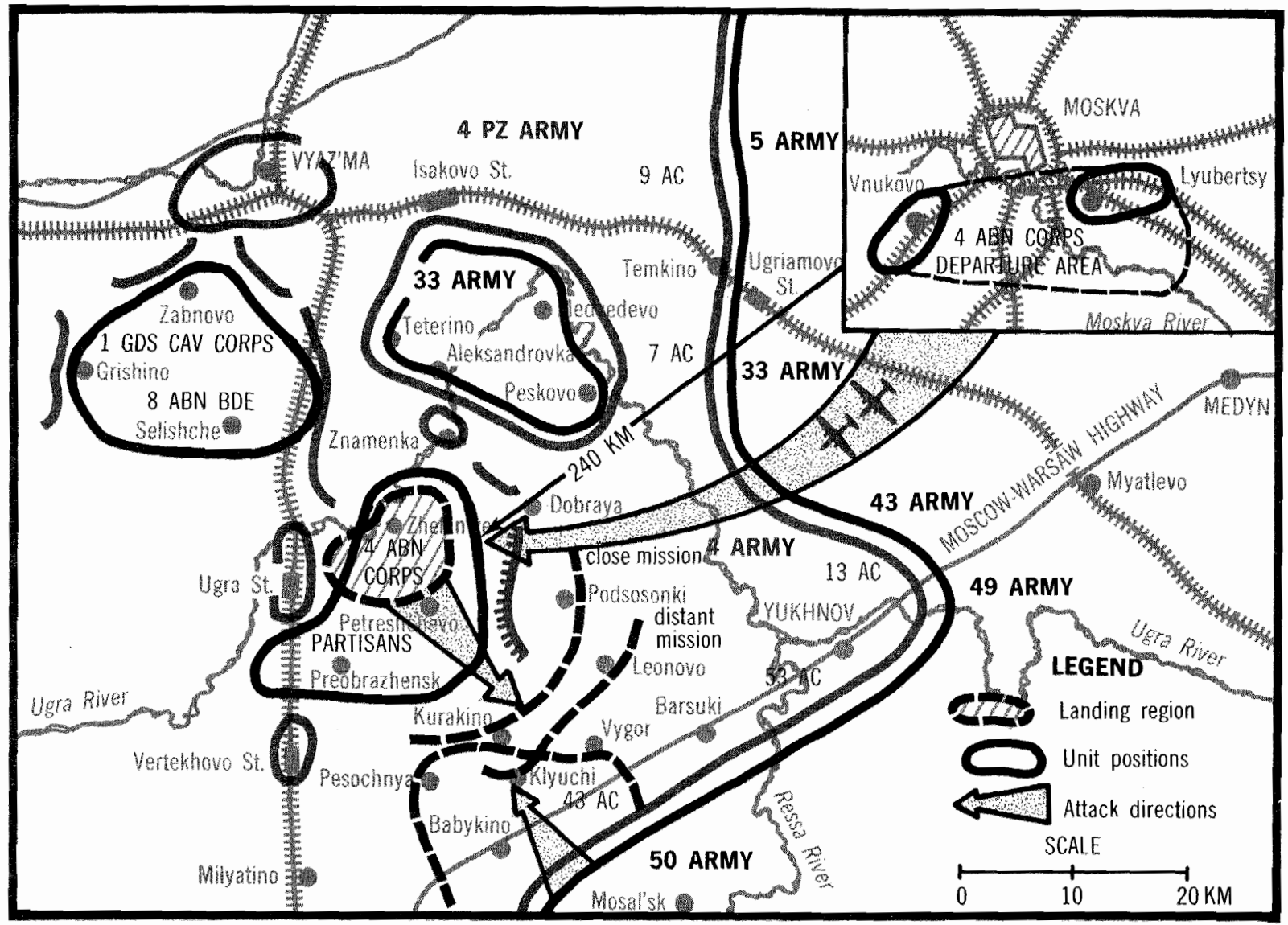
Operational Planning

Despite advancing up to 250 kilometers in some sectors and making temporary penetrations in others, the January Soviet offensive did not achieve its objectives. Operational gains came only at a prohibitive cost in men and equipment and never translated into strategic victory. The most articulate Soviet assessment reasoned that

> the absence of large tank units, of powerful aviation, of sufficiently strong artillery, of a fresh flow of reserves, understrength forces, large deficiencies and difficulties in logistics (first and foremost weapons and ammunition)--all that rendered impossible the decisive development of success to the depth of the defense after a penetration of the enemy front was realized--finally, the Western Front was capable of conducting operations only in separate sectors with limited means.[1]

The great, surging Soviet counteroffensive was over, but the Stavka renewed its efforts to liquidate the Germans in the Yukhnov pocket and link up front forces with Soviet forces now trapped in the Vyaz'ma pocket, namely, 8th Airborne Brigade, 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, and four divisions of 33d Army. On 1 February, the Stavka appointed General Zhukov to coordinate those efforts as supreme commander of forces on the western direction, specifically the Kalinin and Western fronts. Zhukov mustered his scarce reserves to resume the offensive in selected critical sectors. Following the Stavka's orders, Zhukov turned his attention to the German Yukhnov Group (4th Army's 12th, 13th, 43d, and 57th Army corps), whose destruction would open the way to relieve Vyaz'ma. Whether the weary Soviet troops could concentrate enough strength to overcome the German units was critical. By now, the Germans were receiving a steady stream of reinforcements and were building formidable hedgehog defenses woven into village strongpoints that dotted the area adjacent to main communication arteries.

The German situation had improved markedly by early February (see map 11, p. 60). The Germans firmly held Vyaz'ma, and the Soviet threat of 11th Cavalry and 1st



Map 11. Western Front Positions, 15 February 1942, and the Plan of 4th Airborne Corps

Guards Cavalry corps had ebbed on both flanks. The right wing of 4th Panzer Army (20th Army Corps) had linked up with the left wing of 4th Army (12th Army Corps) and constructed an unbroken front east of the Ugra River. The Soviet 33d Army thrust had been cut off at its base, and the Germans had surrounded 33d Army's four advanced divisions southeast of Vyaz'ma, threatening the Soviet divisions with piecemeal destruction. The Gzhatsk-Yukhnov line remained firm, as did German positions facing westward from Rzhev toward Sychevka. The 12th, 13th, and 43d Army corps of 4th Army defended the northern, eastern, and southern approaches to Yukhnov, while 57th Army Corps and 10th Motorized Division of 4th Army worked frantically to create a continuous defensive line to protect the Moscow-Warsaw Rollbahn southwest of Yukhnov. With the Moscow-Warsaw and Moscow-Minsk roads under German control, Soviet forces of the Western Front's left wing (10th, 50th, and 49th armies) were contained south of the Moscow-Warsaw highway. The Stavka understood that if left unchanged, this situation doomed the encircled Soviet forces near Vyaz'ma. If those encircled forces were crushed, the Germans would further strengthen their front with units presently tied down in reducing the encircled Soviet forces.

At the Stavka's direction, Zhukov agreed to a limited offensive designed to free encircled forces, cut a gap in the Moscow-Warsaw road, and, if possible, encircle the German Yukhnov Group (see map 12, p. 220).[2] The Stavka transferred the 4th Airborne Corps to Western Front control to provide Zhukov additional strength. The corps had the 9th and 214th Airborne brigades, plus the 1st Battalion, 8th Airborne Brigade. Its mission was to jump into the Velikopol'ye, Shushman, and Zhelan'ye areas and to conduct operations toward Pesochnya, Klyuchi, Tynovka, and Leonovo, adjacent to the Moscow-Warsaw road (see map 13, p. 221). In coordination with 50th Army, it would also continue operations against the Germans around Yukhnov.

Lt. Gen. I. V. Boldin's 50th Army was to attack across the Moscow-Warsaw road, meet 4th Airborne Corps at Batishchevo, Vygor, Klyuchi, and Pesochnya, and subsequently strike Yukhnov from the west. If successful, 4th Airborne Corps's and 50th Army's thrusts would permit an advance into the regions southwest and southeast of Vyaz'ma where 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and 33d Army were operating.

The defenses the Germans had just erected along and south of the Moscow-Warsaw Rollbahn southwest of Yukhnov were tenuous. The 57th Panzer Corps defended the sector

that Belov's cavalry corps had passed through two weeks earlier. The 19th Panzer Division, 137th Infantry Division, one regiment of the 52d Infantry Division, and a portion of the 10th Motorized Division defended a twenty-kilometer stretch of the road southwest of the Ressa River, with other 10th Motorized Division elements deployed thinly to the southwest. These forces struggled with lead elements of Soviet 50th Army as it pushed through the snows past Mosal'sk toward the Rollbahn.[3] Clearly, additional strength was necessary for the Germans to defend the highway. To provide this strength, 4th Army, on 16 February, ordered the 43d Army Corps to help defend the highway from the Ressa River to Fomino.[4] The 43d Army Corps's 31st, 34th, and 131st Infantry divisions defending Yukhnov slowly disengaged units and moved them southwest. The 12th and 13th Army corps contracted their defensive lines north and east of Yukhnov and took over a portion of 43d Army Corps's vacated positions south of the city. The continuing bitter temperatures (-35° to -40°C) made the redeployment even more arduous, and knee-deep snow made even the Rollbahn difficult to use.

Also besieged by the cold and snow north of the Moscow-Warsaw Rollbahn and along the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov road were the rear service areas of 4th Army's front-line divisions and scattered army security and support units. These units would be the first obstacles for the Soviet airborne force to overcome. South of the projected airborne landing area were rear service elements of the 31st Infantry Division in the villages of Pesochnya, Dertovaya, and Klyuchi and in nearby hamlets.[5] East of the landing site, at and around Zherdovka and Podsosonki, were elements of the 131st Infantry Division. To the northeast, rear elements of the 98th Infantry Division and a 4th Army SS Police Regiment garrisoned the key Ugra River crossings at Znamenka. Other 98th Infantry Division units defended the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov road on both sides of Klimov Zavod. Farther north, at Yermaki, on the road from Znamenka to Vyaz'ma, was Service Detachment 152 of the 52d Infantry Division. Finally, west of the airborne landing zone along the Vyaz'ma-Kirov rail line, four companies of Group Haase protected the critical rail bridge across the Ugra River.[6] The 5th Panzer and 23d Infantry divisions, clearing airborne forces and Soviet 33d Army elements from either side of the Vyaz'ma-Kirov rail line south of Vyaz'ma, posed an even greater threat.

Alarmed by the earlier airborne operations of the 250th Airborne Regiment and by Belov's recent operations, these small garrisons had erected all-round defenses centered on the stone houses of the villages. Where possible, the Germans had built breastworks and, often,

snow and ice barricades and ramparts. Villages within artillery range of one another had prearranged mutual defensive fires. Scarce armored vehicles and transport vehicles had been formed into mobile detachments to patrol the snow-covered roads and to maintain tenuous communications, especially along the Rollbahn and Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov supply arteries. In mid-February, with their attention riveted on the strained front lines, the Germans endured the cold isolation and awaited the Russians' next move, scarcely suspecting it would again come from the skies.

4th Airborne Corps Assault

The 4th Airborne Corps staged from the Lyubertsy and Vnukovo airfields. Partisans of the 1st Partisan Regiment operating in the Zhelan'ye area under Kirillov would assist the corps landing and assembly of forces. The 4th Airborne Corps would drop from two flights of aircraft on each of three nights. An aviation transport group of forty-one PS-84s and twenty-three TB-3s would carry the paratroopers.[7] Although plans existed to drop radio crews before the operation, none were actually dropped. Instead, partisan units lit bonfires to guide the planes to their destinations. This tactic had limited success, however, for numerous fires existed anyway because of the cold and the fog, and the Germans had lit diversionary fires. Moreover, German aircraft also guided on the fires.

On the night of 17-18 February, the first battalion from 8th Airborne Brigade dropped (see map 14, p. 222). As in the earlier drop in January, instead of jumping from 600 meters, the paratroopers had to jump from 1,000 to 1,200 meters because of weather and fog.[8] The wide dispersion of men and supplies and the deep snow made reassembly difficult in the severe terrain of the forested, roadless region. Once again, many aircraft lost their way and returned with their human cargo rather than risk dropping them into enemy strongholds. Disrupted flight schedules prompted extra sorties and required more time for the actual drop.

From 17 to 23 February, the 9th and 214th Airborne brigades jumped into their drop zones. Misfortune struck on the last evening of drops when German aircraft intercepted the transport carrying the corps commander and staff officers. The damaged transport escaped, but the German attack had killed General Levashev and wounded several staff officers. The corps chief of staff, Col. A. F. Kazankin, took command of the corps.[9] By the morning of 23 February, 7,373 men of his command had

dropped, but almost 30 percent of those men never found their way to the corps, battalion, and brigade assembly points. Although some fell directly onto German positions and were lost, an estimated 1,800 ultimately joined 33d Army units, 1st Guards Cavalry units, and partisan bands.[10] Obviously, the night drop had taken advantage of surprise, and thus few men were lost to German ground fire. Night conditions and heavy snow, however, inhibited reorganization and assembly.

The Germans noted the drop but could do little to disrupt it beyond dispatching a few air sorties to intervene. Since the dramatic, large-scale landing of the Soviet 250th Airborne Regiment on 20 January, German 4th Army had recorded numerous small airlandings at Lugi and Velikopol'ye. Suddenly, on the nights of 19 and 20 February, the 4th Army war diary recorded a significant surge in activity when the 52d Infantry Division reported that 145 aircraft had landed without interference on brightly lit fields at Lugi and Velikopol'ye.[11] Initially, the fatigue of overworked German aircrews had prevented effective Luftwaffe interference with the landings. Although air sorties were flown against the airborne forces, 4th Army regarded the efforts of the German air force as unsuccessful. Ground reaction was similarly ineffective. Weather conditions and shortages of ammunition for artillery pieces precluded resistance or offensive action. Moreover, 4th Army lamented the inability of its units to prevent the airborne forces from cutting the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov road. Even the strongest German garrison could do little to thwart the airborne landings.[12]

Once over the initial surprise, the Germans anxiously awaited the paratroopers' next move. The long period of airborne assembly and regrouping caused the Germans to underestimate the total enemy force and to wonder about Soviet intent. Russian inactivity caused subsequent critics to question 4th Army and 43d Army Corps estimates that 3,000 paratroopers had landed. In fact, more than 7,000 Soviet troops had made the jump, and about 5,000 had successfully assembled.

While the Germans puzzled over Soviet intentions, Colonel Kazankin, by the evening of 23 February, had established communications with his 9th and 214th Airborne brigades, which had reassembled at Svintsovo and Gryada, respectively. He had also contacted 50th Army and learned that its units were locked in heavy fighting with the Germans at Sapovo and Savinki near the Warsaw road. But no breakthrough had yet been made. Kazankin now faced an advance southward more than thirty kilometers across the

rough, snow-covered country. The broken terrain, forests, and frozen swamps made any movement without skis difficult. The only consolations were that the few roads would not support German vehicles and the Germans were not skillful at winter operations in open terrain. Alerted by the drop, the Germans used the time the paratroopers were assembling to strengthen their network of village defenses. In villages, the Germans had shelter and warmth against bitterly cold weather; the Soviets had to fend for themselves in the open.

February Offensive

Colonel Kazankin ordered his forces to make a two-pronged attack southward toward the Warsaw road and 50th Army.[13] From its jumping-off area at Glukhovo, 9th Airborne Brigade was supposed to advance through Vyazovets, Kurakino, and Klyuchi; occupy Preobrazhensk and Vyazovets; and then destroy the enemy in the Pesochnya, Klyuchi, and Tynovka strongpoints. One battalion (4th) with partisans attached was to secure Ugra station. The 214th Airborne Brigade was supposed to seize Ivantsevo and Tat'yanino and reach Novaya, Mokhnatka, and Leonovo by the evening of 24 February. The 1st Partisan Regiment, subordinate to 4th Airborne Corps, would cover the airborne forces' rear along a line through Gorodyanka, Sviridovo, Andriyaki, and Bel'dyugino against German attacks from the direction of Znamenka and Vyaz'ma. Part of the force was to cooperate with the 4th Battalion, 9th Brigade, in attacks on Ugra station. Three hundred men of the 4th Battalion, 8th Brigade, were reserves for 4th Airborne Corps.* Almost all Soviet movement and combat were to be conducted at night to capitalize on darkness and to avoid detection and attack by German air units. Darkness provided security, but it also meant slow movement through the deep snows of the rough terrain.

On the night of 23-24 February--which in peacetime would have marked the end of Red Army Day festivities celebrating the Soviet Army's birthday--Colonel Kazankin led his brigades southward. The advance initially fared well. Colonel Kuryshev's 9th Airborne Brigade overran several German outposts, and a surprise attack secured Vertekhovo station from Group Haase before the Germans could react. Heavy German automatic weapons fire from

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*The remaining 250 men of this battalion had jumped into the Yurkino area near Dorogobuzh to reinforce their parent unit.

positions in Ekaterinovka and Pesochnya halted the brigade advance on the outskirts of Prechistoye and Kurakino. Lieutenant Colonel Kolobovnikov's 214th Airborne Brigade's surprise night attack had only limited success against Ivantsevo, Kostinki, and Zherdovka. Insufficient Soviet artillery and mortar preparation and heavy German fire thwarted the attacks.[14]

German rear service units from five regiments of the 131st, 31st, and 34th Infantry divisions were strongly entrenched in a thick network of villages, the strongest of which were Dubrovna, Kurakino, Dertovaya, Gorbachi, Zherdovka, Kostinki, Ivantsevo, Pesochnya, and Klyuchi.[15] Each of the villages was a company-size strongpoint for all-round defense, and a system of mutually supporting automatic weapons and artillery fires tied each village into a defensive network with nearby villages. Moreover, the Germans had been alerted to the presence of the airborne units, but they did not know the units' precise location.

On the morning of 25 February, the airborne corps relied on resolute surprise attacks to reduce these villages. By day's end, 9th Airborne Brigade had secured Dubrovna, Kurakino, Borodino, and Gorbachi, but was still unable to overcome German opposition in Dertovaya and Ekaterinovka. The 214th Airborne Brigade occupied Tat'yanino after heavy fighting, blockaded Ivantsevo, and moved its advanced elements through the snow to Kurakino.[16]

In spite of heavy German opposition, the airborne corps had advanced twenty to twenty-five kilometers on separate axes toward their junction with 50th Army, which was still fighting over a sector of the Moscow-Warsaw road. Elements of the 4th Airborne Corps and partisans along the rail line north of Ugra station succeeded in taking Debransky and Subbotnik from Group Haase. They captured seven rail cars full of bombs, food, and weapons. Fighting farther south near Ugra station revealed strong German garrisons at each station of the Vyaz'ma-Kirov rail line, demonstrating the great importance the Germans attached to defense of the railroad.[17] The major objectives for the airborne forces were the German strongpoints at Pesochnya and Klyuchi, whose capture would open the way to Astapovo, Lyudkova, and 50th Army.[18]

Klyuchi was the key. At a critical road junction on a ridge, it dominated the surrounding flat countryside.[19] Moreover, its defensive network interlocked with other villages, which, taken together, dominated the Warsaw

highway to the south. On 26 February, the 9th Airborne Brigade attacked Klyuchi from the north. German aircraft and artillery pounded the periphery of the village, while the German garrison sortied with tanks and infantry into the fringes of the surrounding woods. Heavy fighting raged all day, either in the woods near the village or in the outskirts of the village proper. After three hours of night fighting, 9th Airborne Brigade captured the town and killed most of the garrison. Small groups of German survivors withdrew southward to Malyshevka, another strongpoint about two kilometers north of the Moscow-Warsaw road.[20]

On the morning of 27 February, with the Warsaw road almost in sight, the corps pushed on toward Malyshevka. The Germans blasted the paratroopers with artillery and air attacks. German infantry and tanks fighting 50th Army south of the highway were shifted to the north to defend against the airborne force. Far from its landing sites, the airborne force lacked supplies as well as mobility and fire support. Conversely, the Germans' proximity to the Warsaw road gave them the opportunity to use their superior mobility to bring up fresh units. So, 4th Airborne Corps units withdrew to Klyuchi, frustrated by their inability to traverse the last two kilometers to the Warsaw highway and by the inability of 50th Army to assist them. At Klyuchi on 1 March, the paratroopers established a temporary defensive line anchored on the villages of Vertekhovo station, Klyuchi, Gorbachi, Petrishchevo, Tynovka, Yurkino, Andronovo, and Novaya. Corps headquarters took stock of its heavy losses, regrouped its forces, and replenished its dwindling supplies of ammunition and food.[21]

March Offensive

The respite from combat, however, was brief. Taking advantage of superior mobility and firepower, a German battalion of infantry supported by artillery and tanks began counterattacks north of the highway (see map 15, p. 223). Repeated German attacks from 1 to 5 March failed to dislodge the Soviet paratroopers from their defensive line. This time, the Soviet airborne force had the advantage of a village and forest-based defense, while German mobile forces, once they had left the road, found the going difficult in the forests north of the highway.

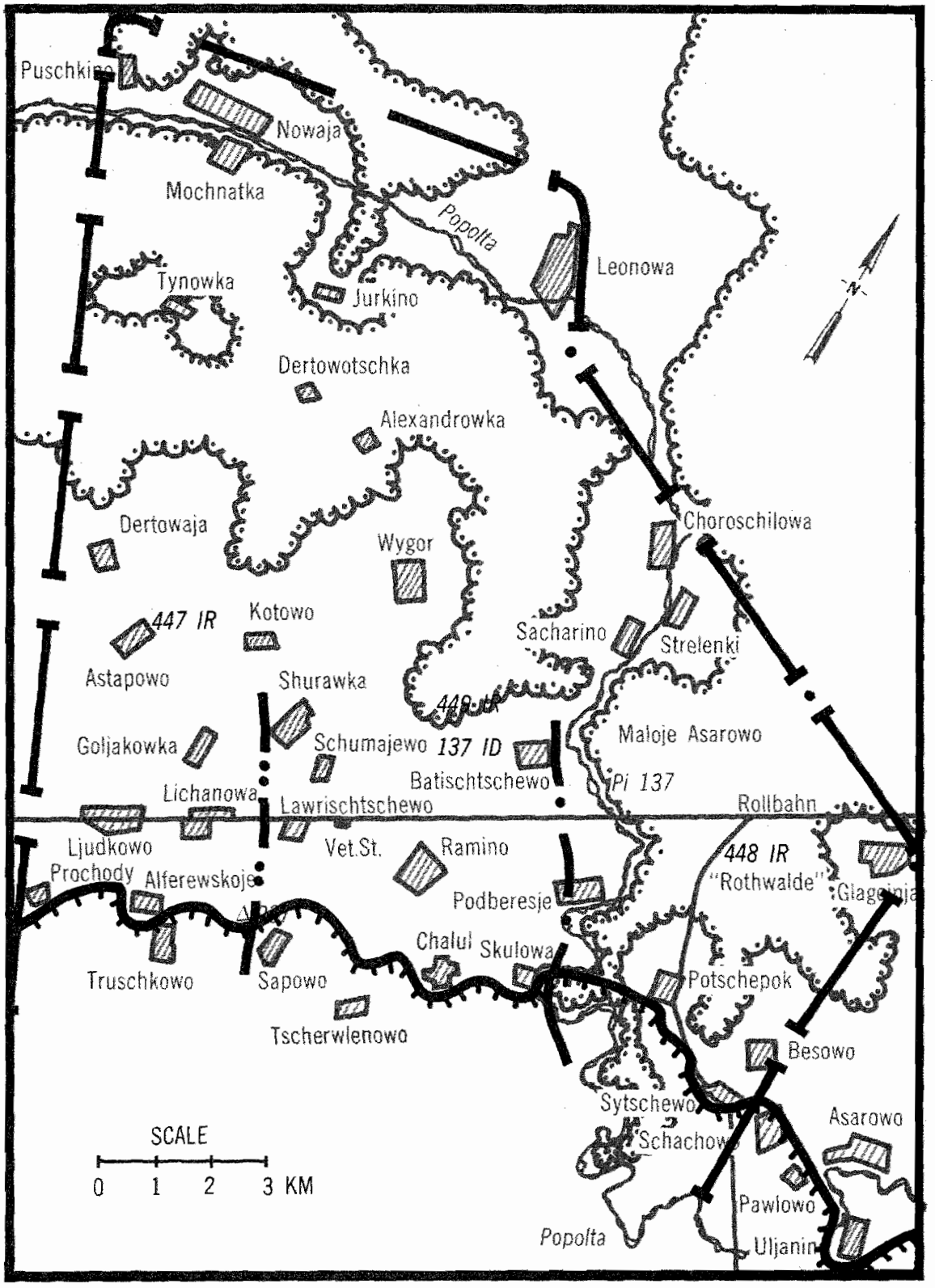
On 4 March, developments to the northeast resulted in new orders for the airborne corps. Soviet 43d and 49th Army pressure on Yukhnov had finally forced the Germans to abandon the city and the salient around it. The 43d Army

Corps withdrew its remaining divisions from the Yukhnov salient to the southwest where they joined the 137th Infantry Division and other 4th Army units in defenses south of the Moscow-Warsaw Rollbahn. Each division occupied a sector for all-round defense (see map 16, p. 69). The bulk of each division's strength faced southeast against Soviet 50th Army. Small battalion-size Kampfgruppen, often organized from division support units, occupied villages north of the Rollbahn to defend against Soviet airborne, cavalry, and partisan units. These divisions relied on the interlocking village defenses and Rollbahn communications to thwart Soviet attacks. Until the end of winter, 43d Army Corps relied on occasional battalion-size forays north of the road to keep Soviet forces in the rear from mounting a successful, concerted drive southward to link up with 50th Army. On 7 March, 43d Army Corps assumed responsibility for the entire Rollbahn defense. While 43d Army Corps moved southwest of Yukhnov, the 12th and 13th Army corps of 4th Army occupied prepared positions facing east along the Ugra and Ressa rivers.[22]

In a flash of optimism generated by the German withdrawal, the chief of staff of the Western Front sent out the following orders:

> Comrade Boldin [50th Army], Comrade Kazankin [4th Airborne]. Enemy is withdrawing from Yukhnov along the Vyaz'ma highway.
>
> High Command order:
>
> 1. Comrade Boldin, strengthen the tempo of the offensive, in every possible way cut the Warsaw highway and complete the encirclement of the enemy in that region.
>
> 2. Comrade Kazankin, while fulfilling the basic mission--strike against Malyshevka and Grachevka and send part of the force to cut the Vyaz'ma highway near Slobodka. Organize ambushes along the Vyaz'ma highway to destroy the enemy.[23]

On 3 March, General Boldin dispatched his assistant chief of reconnaissance in a PO-2 aircraft to 4th Airborne Corps headquarters to coordinate the upcoming operations. Boldin passed word to Kazankin that, in view of Kazankin's failure to break the German front at Lavrishchevo and Adamovka, 50th Army would now attack toward hill 253.2. The following morning, Boldin specified that 50th Army's attack route to the hill would be via Solov'yevka and Makarovka and that the attack would occur on the night of



Map 16. German 137th Infantry Division Defensive Area

5-6 March against the German 31st, 34th, and 137th Infantry divisions. He requested that 4th Airborne Corps cooperate, first by sending reconnaissance forces toward 50th Army and then by attacking to meet 50th Army units.[24]

Colonel Kazankin followed Boldin's request and assigned 9th Airborne Brigade, reinforced by the corps's artillery battalion and part of the 214th Airborne Brigade, to secure Malyshevka and subsequently Bavykino (800 meters from the Warsaw road), where 50th Army advance units had promised to meet the airborne force. The 9th Airborne Brigade would attempt to take Malyshevka by envelopment, a simultaneous surprise attack from both flanks and from the front. The 214th Airborne Brigade covered 9th Airborne Brigade's right flank by an advance on Pesochnya.

While in the woods north of Malyshevka, Colonel Kuryshev of 9th Airborne Brigade issued orders to battalion commanders and organized fire support. A short artillery barrage would precede the 0300 infantry attack. After dark, the battalions began their painstaking advance to assault positions. The 2d Battalion ran into problems early. At 2100, while moving through the northern edge of woods one kilometer south of Klyuchi, the unit encountered heavy German fire and halted. The 3d and 4th battalions continued to advance, expecting to make a coordinated attack. At 0100, the 3d Battalion approached Malyshevka from the northeast and, at first light, attacked without waiting for the 4th Battalion. Heavy German resistance and a flank attack by a German ski battalion forced 3d Battalion back toward Gorbachi. With 3d Battalion already repulsed, 4th Battalion arrived late because of the deep snow, attacked Malyshevka, and secured footholds in the northwest and northeast portions of the village. Immediate German counterattacks, however, denied 4th Battalion time to dig in and drove the unit north out of the village.[25]

The supposedly concerted Soviet attack failed. Poor reconnaissance resulted in underestimation of German strength in Malyshevka, which actually numbered two infantry battalions with antitank guns and mortars, later reinforced by a ski battalion. The disjointed nature of the attack also doomed the operation. German reserves counterattacking on 6 March forced the airborne force to conduct a grueling withdrawal through deep snow at agonizingly slow speeds (one kilometer an hour) back to its original assembly areas. After its unsuccessful offensive, 4th Airborne Corps, on 7 March, tried to consolidate its defensive area by capturing German

positions at Pesochnya and Ekaterinovka. Both attempts failed.

The 4th Airborne Corps's attempt to link up with 50th Army was condemned to failure in advance. The corps's 3,000 men, with their light weapons and short supplies, were exhausted by more than two weeks of combat and were simply too weak to engage the heavy German defensive line.[26] The front commander had overestimated the capability of his forces. The 50th Army had proved earlier the futility of trying to break the formidable German defenses on the Moscow-Warsaw road. After the failed linkup, the situation stabilized. Airborne forces continued conducting diversionary operations against the German rear from their base area near Zhelan'ye.

Concentrating their forces for operations along a number of axes, the Germans sought to root out and crush the troublesome airborne force. The bulk of the 131st and elements of the 34th Infantry divisions, reinforced by the 449th Infantry Regiment of 137th Infantry Division, massed near Kostinki, Leonovo, Ivantsevo, Dertovaya, and Andronovo to push toward Novaya, while elements of the 331st and 31st Infantry divisions assembled south of 4th Airborne Corps positions.[27] The Germans built a strong defensive cordon around the airborne force with minefields, snow barriers, abatis, and pillboxes to restrict airborne force movement along the Slobodka-Znamenka road and toward the Moscow-Warsaw highway. Meanwhile, German task-organized mobile groups planned to penetrate the airborne defensive area from the southeast and south.

On 11 March, after a thorough reconnaissance of the area, the German 131st Infantry Division attacked Andronovo and Yurkino after an artillery preparation. The Germans attacked three sides at first light. They forced two platoons of 4th Battalion, 214th Airborne Brigade, to withdraw into the woods west of Yurkino where the Soviets managed to hold their positions. German attacks in the center of the corps defense against Novaya and Tat'yanino failed. Particularly heavy fighting occurred at Gorbachi, a key Soviet strongpoint within artillery range of the Warsaw road. Klyuchi and Gorbachi were constant thorns in the Germans' side. Because of their proximity to the Moscow-Warsaw road, they interfered with German communications.

At dawn on 13 March, after an intense artillery preparation, two German infantry battalions from the 31st and 34th Infantry divisions attacked Gorbachi from the northeast, west, and south. Repeated German assaults,

taken under fire by the paratroopers at ranges of fifty to seventy meters, finally secured a foothold in the airborne defense. The 1st Battalion, 9th Airborne Brigade, was unable to dislodge the Germans. At 1700, the commander of 2d Battalion, Capt. S. P. Plotnikov, dispatched one of his companies from Klyuchi on skis to reinforce the 1st Battalion. Advancing rapidly through the forest, the ski battalion attacked the German left flank and forced a German withdrawal to Astapovo. By 1800, the two battalions had driven the last German troops from barns on the northern side of the village. The 2d Battalion commander's decisiveness and skillful maneuver had won the battle. A telegram from the Western Front Military Council lauded the efforts of the airborne force: "The Corps operated in outstanding fashion, in spite of difficulties. Give to the units operating in the Gorbachi region my thanks."[28]

Yet, despite the victory at Gorbachi and a respite offered by the arrival of a major snowstorm on 14 March, German pressure increased unrelentingly as German reinforcements continued to arrive in the area. By 18 March, the 131st Infantry Division had taken Pushkino from the 4th Battalion, 214th Airborne Brigade, and had reduced the battalion to only thirty men. The Germans had threatened Borodino, Tynovka, Gorbachi, and Klyuchi and had pushed back the corps defensive lines east of Kurakino.[29] Facing this heavy pressure, the corps sought and received front permission to withdraw to a defensive line of Vertekhovo station, Zhukovka, Akulovo, Prechistoye, Kurakino, Novinskaya, and Dacha. The Soviet government recognized the paratroopers' efforts by awarding an honorific title to the 4th Airborne Corps.

Despite 4th Airborne Corps's 19 March withdrawal to better defensive positions, German attacks continued (see map 17, p. 224). On 25 March, German units penetrated the positions of Capt. D. I. Bibikov's 4th Battalion, 9th Airborne Brigade, at Kurakino. In a street battle that lasted all day and night, the 4th Battalion suffered thirty-eight killed and ninety-one wounded but repulsed elements of the German 131st Infantry Division. Although inflicting heavy casualties on the German force, the 4th Battalion, 9th Brigade, emerged with only eighty-eight men fit for combat.[30] The survivors transformed Kurakino into a fortress of small strongpoints, with the battalion command post as the center. Repeated small-scale German attacks on Kurakino culminated on 31 March with a major German assault against the junction of 9th and 214th Airborne Brigade positions at Prechistoye, Dubrovnya, and Kurakino. German heavy artillery and aviation strikes preceded and accompanied the attack.

Having both suffered and inflicted heavy losses, 4th Airborne Corps units abandoned the three strongpoints and established new defenses in the forests to the northwest.

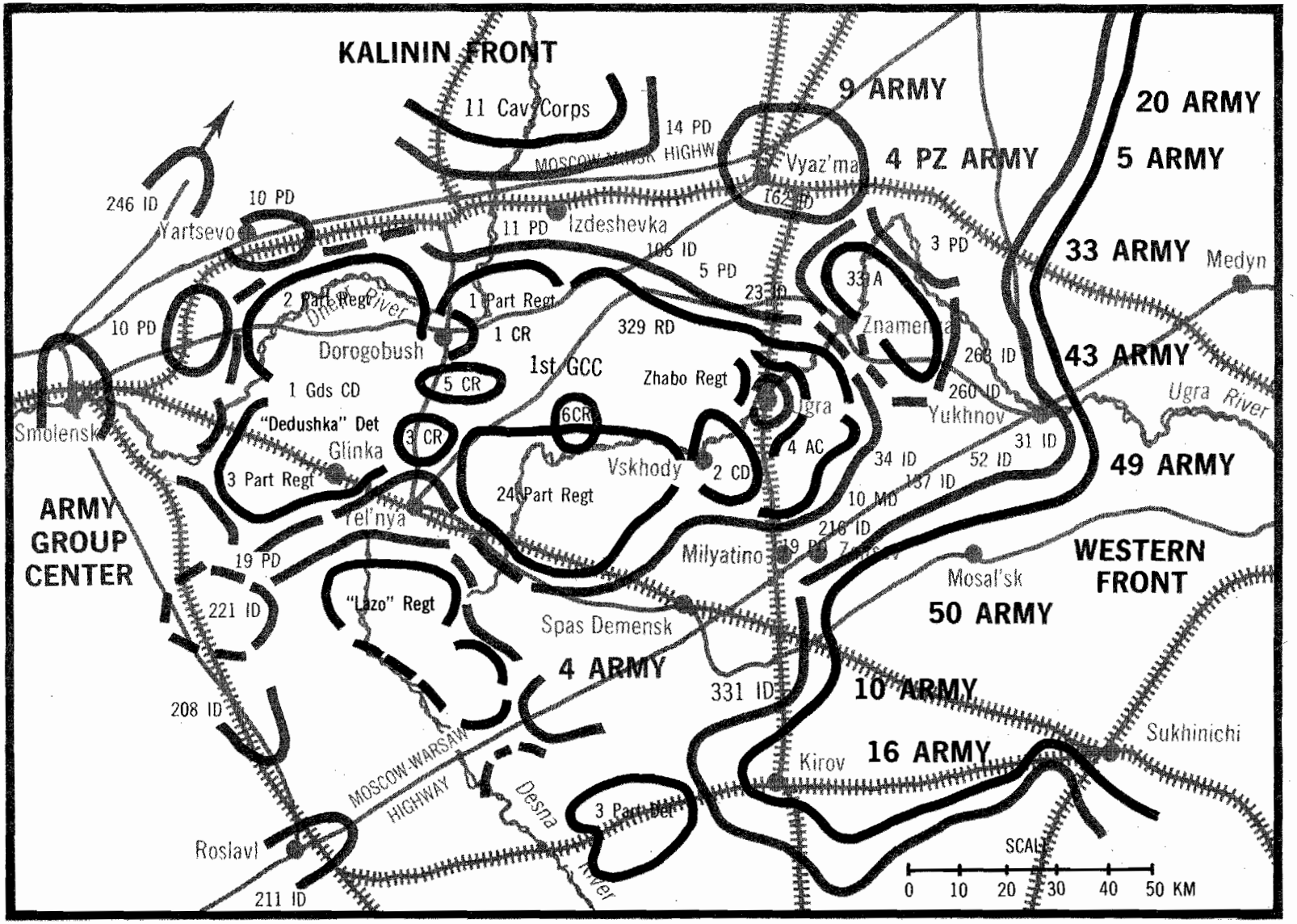
The 4th Airborne Corps's March defensive battles achieved limited success in holding off the attacks of elements of three German divisions. But the corps suffered greatly. By the end of March, 2,000 paratroopers were sick or wounded, including 600 who required evacuation.[31] Supplies were short, antitank ammunition was gone, and rations were very low. Without reinforcement, there was little chance to resist against the continuing German attacks. Furthermore, the imminent spring thaw would make movement even more difficult than had the earlier heavy snow cover.

While the airborne force tried to join 50th Army, other encircled Soviet forces fought for survival. By mid-April, elements of 33d Army had been decimated under constant German counterattacks.[32] Remnants of the 329th Rifle Division, 33d Army, and the 250th Airborne Regiment, separated from 33d Army, managed to join Belov's 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, but only after the Germans had destroyed the bulk of those units in late March in a pocket north of Perekhody. The 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, thwarted in its attempts either to free Vyaz'ma or to rescue 33d Army, withdrew its depleted forces westward toward Dorogobuzh where, supported by partisans, it reorganized its units and replenished its supplies in March. Belov disbanded his three light cavalry divisions and used them to reinforce his remaining units, the 1st and 2d Guards Cavalry divisions, the 329th Rifle Division remnants, and two partisan detachments.[33]

April Offensive

By late March, it was apparent that only joint efforts of the encircled units would ensure their survival as fighting entities. In late March, Belov's cavalry corps moved eastward in a last, futile attempt to rescue the remnants of 33d Army or, failing that, to join with 4th Airborne Corps to reinforce joint efforts to break out of German encirclement (see map 18, p. 74).[34]

As 1st Cavalry Corps moved east, German attacks on 4th Airborne Corps intensified. The German 131st Infantry Division's attacks on 2 and 3 April hit airborne positions at Novinskaya, Dacha, and Akulovo, further shrinking the restricted airborne defensive perimeter. German tanks and artillery made the task of defense even more difficult. On 7 April, the 4th Airborne Corps received some



Map 18. Territory Occupied by Belov's Forces, March—May 1942

assistance when 8th Airborne Brigade returned to its parent unit from 1st Guards Cavalry Corps. Reduced to reinforced battalion strength in the fighting alongside Belov, Colonel Kazankin assigned to the 8th Brigade defensive positions on the 4th Airborne Corps right flank along the rail line from Preobrazhensk to Zhukovka. This was the weakest portion of the airborne defensive line, and indications were that German forces were beginning to mount counterattacks there. The only other Soviet force in the region was the 2d Guards Cavalry Division. Belov had dispatched it south to help Kazankin after the failure of the final attempts to rescue 33d Army. The 2d Guards Cavalry Division, after securing Ugra station, occupied positions in the Baskakovka area and, from 7 April, operated with 8th Airborne Brigade to repel German probes north along the rail line from Buda.[35] To further complicate matters for the Soviets, the German Group Haase still held out at Voznesen'ye and Senyutino in the rear of 2d Guards Cavalry Division.

Kazankin's fears for his right flank were well founded. On 9 April, after a systematic reconnaissance, German forces with air, artillery, and armor support struck northward against the junction between 2d Guards Cavalry Division and 4th Airborne Corps. Following heavy fighting, the Germans secured Vertekhovo station and Zhukovka.[36] By nightfall on the tenth, the German force had also seized Ugra station and Kombaya and had lifted the Soviet siege of the German garrison at Voznesen'ye.[37] The slashing German attack continued on the eleventh with other German forces advancing from the northeast.

With the situation rapidly deteriorating, Belov fired off the following message to Zhukov's headquarters:

> I am reporting to you an assessment of conditions and proposals. The extent of the corps front in encirclement exceeds 300 kilometers. Enemy strength: On a line Milyatino-Yel'nya determined to be six infantry divisions. Toward Yel'nya are fortifications from Roslavl to Smolensk. West of the Dnepr an undetermined force defends. To the north--Yartsevo, Semlovo, Volosta Pyatnitsa station--mixed units, including the 35th and 23d Infantry divisions, cover the approaches to the railroad.
>
> Conclusion: The corps participates in the encirclement of the Vyaz'ma-Yel'nya-Spas Demensk enemy group and in its turn is in operational encirclement.

The strength of the corps and extent of the front forces me to turn to defensive operations. The initiative is clearly in the hands of the enemy. There are no reserves. In such conditions, I suggest an offensive plan:

1. To break the encirclement ring to meet 50th Army in the general direction of Milyatino.

2. To this end concentrate in Vskhody a shock group made up of 1st and 2d Guards Cavalry Divisions, 4th Airborne Corps, and partisan detachment Zhabo.

3. Basic group of Colonel Moskalika's detachment to leave a small group to blockade Yel'nya and with the main force attack Spas Demensk.

4. Leave "Dedushka" detachment to hold Dorogobuzh. Dnepr floods help that mission.

5. To secure the operation from north and northeast leave the 329th Rifle Division and small partisan detachments.

6. With 50th Army units and possibly 10th Army to seize the Warsaw highway in the Zaitsev heights section, Yersha, and also Milyatino. Thereafter to dig in on the road in the appointed sector.

7. After my linkup with Boldin in the Milyatino area to unite my corps with my trains including artillery, the tank brigade, the 7th Guards Cavalry Division and throw the corps either on Yartsevo to join with the Kalinin Front or for another assignment.

8. Preparations of the operation will involve 7-10 days and possibly will succeed in forestalling an enemy offensive.

No. 1596. Belov. Miloslavsky. Vashurin.[38]

On the eleventh, Zhukov approved Belov's proposal. By then, however, Belov's enthusiasm had waned because Zhukov had forbidden him to weaken forces around Dorogobuzh and told him that 50th Army was not yet ready to join the attack.[39] Belov decided to attack anyway and, on the twelfth, issued appropriate orders to his units, which now included 4th Airborne Corps (see map 19, p. 225).

Those orders required 4th Airborne Corps to regroup and join 1st Guards Cavalry Corps in an advance southward along and east of the rail line to Milyatino. When ready, 50th Army would launch an attack (its third) northward to meet Belov's forces.[40] The distance from Belov's forces to 50th Army was only twenty-five kilometers, but between them were heavily entrenched German units in all-round defensive positions.

The same day, Colonel Kazankin developed his offensive plan.[41] While the 214th Airborne Brigade would continue to hold an airborne base area, the 8th and 9th Airborne brigades would strike south in the direction of Buda, Novoye Askerovo, Staroye Askerovo, and Milyatino to cooperate with 50th Army and to pierce the Moscow-Warsaw highway. The specific orders tasked 8th Airborne Brigade to attack on an axis of Bol'shaya Myshenka, Malaya Myshenka, western Buda, and Staroye Askerovo. The 9th Airborne Brigade was ordered to advance through eastern Buda to Novoye Askerovo. The 214th Airborne Brigade was to secure a defensive line from Akulovo to Dubrovna and to cover the flank of the main force from Baraki through Plotki and Platonovka to Akulovo. On the 4th Airborne Corps's right flank, the 2d Guards Cavalry Division was to bypass enemy strongpoints and to reach Fanernovo factory, three kilometers southwest of Baskakovka station. To protect the rear of 4th Airborne Corps, one battalion of the 1st Partisan Regiment occupied former airborne defensive lines facing Vyaz'ma.

The offensive began on the night of 13-14 April, and, by dusk on 18 April, the 8th and 9th brigades had surprised German forces and secured Vertekhovo station, Terekhovka, Bol'shaya Myshenka, and Bogoroditskoye.[42] That evening, Belov received heartening news from Western Front headquarters. It seemed that 50th Army had already secured the Zaitsev heights and was but six kilometers from Milyatino--this after being unprepared to attack only three days before.[43] In any case, the front commander ordered Belov to accelerate his advance and rejected Belov's request to bring the 1st Guards Cavalry Division forward from Dorogobuzh. Belov's forces pushed southward on the night of 14-15 April and occupied Platonovka, Baraki, and Plotki. On the left flank, the 214th Airborne Brigade took Akulovo, but heavy German fire halted further advance. Meanwhile, 2d Guards Cavalry Division reached within three kilometers of Baskakovka. Heavy German air attacks and ground resistance, however, made Belov rue the absence of his best cavalry division. Without a reserve, he could not sustain the advance much longer. On the fifteenth, heavy German air attacks and ground counterattacks threw General Boldin's 50th Army forces off

Zaitsev heights and back away from the Warsaw highway. That setback rendered Belov's attack futile.

Belov pushed his forces forward, hoping they could break the German lines by themselves. Belov's forces took Buda on 17 April and were only three kilometers north of Milyatino. There the offensive stalled and soon recoiled under renewed German counterattacks. After a full day of heavy battle, the Germans retook Buda at 1600 on 18 April and halted airborne advances on Novoye Askerovo and Kalugovo.[44]

Belatedly, on the nineteenth, with airborne offensive strength expended, reinforcements arrived from the Western Front. The 4th Battalion, 23d Airborne Brigade, commanded by Sr. Lt. S. D. Kreuts and numbering 645 men, had jumped during the previous three days into a drop zone west of Svintsovo.[45] With these meager reinforcements, the 4th Airborne Corps regrouped and again attacked toward Novoye Askerovo.

The 214th Airborne Brigade covered the eastern perimeter, and covering detachments from Malaya Myshenka to Baskakovka station screened in the west. The corps's main force moved through the now completely thawed swamplands southward toward their objective. On the night of 20-21 April, the soaked and weary 8th Airborne Brigade attacked the heavily fortified and mined German-held village, only to be repulsed. At 0200, the brigade withdrew to the southern edge of the forest just north of Novoye Askerovo.

While 8th Airborne Brigade attacked, German units pounded airborne positions from Milyatino, Kalugovo, and Baskakovka. The Germans struck the 9th Airborne Brigade, defending 8th Airborne Brigade's flank and rear. The 9th Brigade used ambush tactics to exact a heavy toll of Germans. By morning, the Germans had given up their attacks.

The 1st Guards Cavalry Corps reconnaissance units identified elements of the German 331st Infantry Division (557th and 306th Infantry regiments) and 504th Motorized Engineer Regiment in the Malaya Myshenka, Baskakovka, Buda, and Butovo regions and the 41st Motorized Regiment, 19th Panzer Division, supporting the 31st Infantry Division in the Novoye Askerovo and Kalugovo regions.[46] Thus, elements of at least one panzer and two infantry divisions held the narrow corridor between 4th Airborne Corps and 50th Army. Most of the German units held prepared fortifications established to defend the Moscow-Warsaw highway.

Despite the long odds against success, 4th Airborne Corps made a final attempt to break the Germans' iron grip on the Moscow-Warsaw highway. On the night of 23-24 April, corps units struck at Novoye Askerovo three times, but heavy German machine gun and mortar fire from both Novoye Askerovo and Staroye Askerovo and German counterattacks from Staroye and Novoye Kalugovo forced the paratroopers back to their starting position. Similar attempts by 2d Guards Cavalry Division to take the Fanernovo factory also failed. The two-kilometer zone to the Warsaw highway remained insurmountable.[47]

The next day, the Germans struck back at Belov's force. With tank and air support, they attacked from Buda, Staroye and Novoye Askerovo, and Kalugovo. German units pushed the airborne corps back into new defensive positions. The Western Front commander, General Zhukov, had no choice but to order 4th Airborne Corps to cease offensive actions. Such attacks no longer served any useful purpose because 50th Army's attack on Milyatino at 0200 that day had been repulsed. On 26 April, 50th Army also went on the defense for the foreseeable future.[48]

Conditions facing 4th Airborne Corps could scarcely have been worse. The Germans had eliminated the 33d Army pocket and driven Soviet front forces onto the defense. German units could now regroup and, when the spring thaw ended, thoroughly crush the last threat in their rear, namely, 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and 4th Airborne Corps. Now that the spring thaw was in progress, rivers were running high, swamps were unlocked, and terrain thus hindered movement of Soviet troops already facing a growing network of fortified positions and roads teeming with armed German convoys. In these conditions, resupply of the corps was impossible, except by risky direct-parachute delivery.

The front commander consequently ordered airborne corps units to return to their 12 April--before the Milyatino offensive--positions. The Germans poured more troops into the area vacated by 4th Airborne Corps but did not resume their counterattacks immediately (see map 20, p. 226).

Encirclement and Breakout, 1 May-23 June 1942

The first half of May was quiet, as the effects of the spring thaw stifled coordinated action by either side. The 4th Airborne Corps used the lull to improve its defensive positions south and east of Ugra station. Sufficient supplies were dropped or flown to improvised

airstrips to reequip and resupply corps units. Returning aircraft also flew wounded personnel back to bol'shaya zemlya (the big world). The 1st Guards Cavalry Corps redeployed into a wide area from Dorogobuzh to south of Vyaz'ma and refitted its units. The 1st Partisan Regiment covered the north-northeastern flank of 4th Airborne Corps.

Augmented by the remnants of 8th Airborne Brigade, 250th Airborne Regiment, a battalion of 23d Airborne Brigade, and some personnel from 33d Army, corps forces numbered 2,300 men, plus 2,000 wounded and 1,700 partisans. Weaponry consisted of seven antitank guns, thirty-seven antitank rifles, and thirty-four battalion mortars.[49] With this force, 4th Airborne Corps defended a perimeter of thirty-five kilometers.

Belov and Kazankin still hoped to break out from the German encirclement. Their hopes rose even more when, on 9 May, the chief of operations for the Western Front, Maj. Gen. S. V. Golushkevich, flew into General Belov's headquarters with news of a future Soviet offensive.[50] The offensive would involve 50th Army, reinforced by new Soviet mechanized formations, and would occur no later than 5 June. But the nagging question remained, "Would the Germans attack first?" Undeniable evidence suggested that as many as seven divisions of the German 4th Panzer Army and 43d Army Corps of 4th Army were preparing to attack the encircled Soviet forces from both north and south. So, Belov and Kazankin prepared to meet the German blow.

The Germans reinforced their garrisons and concentrated new units at Mikhali, Veshki, and Znamenka to attack against the airborne positions. On 23 May, the Germans dispatched a diversionary force from Milyatino. The members wore Soviet uniforms, carried Soviet weapons, and were supposed to destroy airborne headquarters. But, instead, the 8th and 9th Airborne brigades intercepted and destroyed the diversionary unit on 23-24 March. Captured Germans revealed German planning for so-called Operation Hanover, an attack that would involve seven divisions from two army corps advancing from Znamenka (northeast), from Milyatino (south), and from Dorogobuzh station (northwest). The objective of the two- to three-day operation was to split 1st Guards Cavalry Corps from 4th Airborne Corps and then to destroy each piecemeal.[51]

At 0400 on 24 May, in pouring rain, Belov heard the distant rumble of guns announcing the opening of the German offensive (see map 20, p. 226). All headquarters soon confirmed the sound of the guns and, more ominously, revealed the coordinated nature of the German attack. The

6th Partisan Regiment at Vskhody reported to Belov that Germans had overrun their positions with scarcely a pause. The commander of the 6th Regiment was killed, and the 8th Guards Cavalry Regiment was driven into and through Vskhody.[52] This German attack on Vskhody and a similar one north along the rail line toward Ugra were indicative of the enemy's intent to separate the cavalry corps from 4th Airborne Corps units.

At the same time, Kazankin's airborne units were hard pressed on all sides. After the 0400 artillery preparation, elements of the German 23d Infantry, 5th Panzer, 197th Infantry, 131st Infantry, 31st Infantry, and 19th Panzer divisions with aviation support attacked airborne positions from Mikhali, Znamenka, and Milyatino. Only the eastern sector of airborne defenses was relatively quiet. Unable to stop the concerted German advance and facing certain annihilation if he held his ground, Colonel Kazankin, with Western Front approval, designated covering units on his defensive lines. On the night of 24-25 May, he moved his main forces westward toward the Ugra River at Selibka in hopes of crossing and rejoining Belov's force.[53]

When 4th Airborne Corps reached the Ugra River on the morning of the twenty-sixth, it found that German forces had brushed aside partisan units on the far side and occupied Pishchevo, Selibka, and Sorokino. The corps lacked river-crossing equipment to traverse the 120-meter-wide water--an obstacle compounded by strong, tricky currents and open swamps on the far bank. Fortunately, the 8th Airborne Brigade could conceal itself in the forests on the near bank of the river while it reconnoitered a means to cross the river. By day's end, the brigade had found three large and several small boats at Pishchevo.[54]

Meanwhile, Belov launched several local counterattacks to relieve pressure on 4th Airborne Corps. The 6th Guards Cavalry Regiment, with two T-26 light tanks, attacked German units crossing the Ugra at Vskhody and forced them to withdraw. At great risk, the understrength 2d and 7th Guards Cavalry regiments of 2d Guards Cavalry Division rushed to the Sorokino bridgehead of the 8th Airborne Brigade and assisted the remnants of the corps in their river crossing on the night of 26-27 May.[55] After the crossing, Kazankin ordered his forces to break out of the German encirclement by moving westward between Selibka and Chashchi and to regroup in the forests south of Podlipki. Subsequently, the corps would move via Frolova and Kurakino to Pustoshka and unite with Belov's forces, which had preceded them. At 0030 on 28 May, the Soviets moved

into the darkness, infiltrated around German forces, and reassembled south of Podlipki at first light. The withdrawal had been accomplished in such secrecy that German units opened an artillery barrage at 0600 on 29 May on Chashchi and Selibka, where they still assumed the 4th Airborne Corps was entrenched.[56]

Not all corps units were so successful in escaping destruction. Surrounded at Bol'shaya Myshenka, one company of the 8th Airborne Brigade perished to a man. The 214th Airborne Brigade, covering the eastern airborne perimeter defenses and the rear guard of the corps's withdrawal, fought its way out of encirclement on the night of 28-29 May near Fursovo, finally crossing the Gordota River and joining the corps west of Podlipki.

Despite a diary entry by Halder that "Fourth Army has closed the ring around the main body of Belov," by the twenty-eighth, Belov's cavalry corps had escaped and reestablished a fairly firm front facing east on the north bank of the Ugra River at Vskhody.[57] His forces included 1st Guards Cavalry Division, 1st and 2d Partisan divisions, and seven tanks, including a heavy KV* and a medium T-34. Moreover, the 23d and 211th Airborne brigades, with 4,000 men, had landed to reinforce the corps and assist Belov in his withdrawal.[58] The 2d Guards Cavalry Division and 4th Airborne Corps would soon join Belov after their escape from German forces to the east. By 0400 on 30 May, 4th Airborne Corps had arrived in Pustoshka. The 329th Rifle and 2d Guards Cavalry divisions had preceded them. Belov's force was now complete, though worn down, and numbered about 17,000 men.[59]

Belov anticipated the beginning of the Soviet June offensive. He detailed a shock group of 1st Guards Cavalry Division (4,500 men), 4th Airborne Corps (5,800 men), and a partisan regiment to cooperate with 50th Army. Perhaps Vyaz'ma might yet be taken. But Belov's hopes were dashed when Soviet forces near Kharkov suffered a major defeat that canceled the June Soviet offensive. The die was cast for 1st Guards Cavalry and 4th Airborne Corps. German pressure continued to build. The German 23d Infantry and 5th and 19th Panzer divisions, advancing from the north and east, pushed back the 329th Rifle Division and occupied the best of Belov's landing strips (see map 21, p. 227). On 4 June, Belov and Kazankin dispatched a message to front headquarters outlining the

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*Model Klimenti Voroshilov.

situation and requesting approval of their plan to "penetrate east of Yel'nya in the region of the 5th Partisan Rifle Regiment subsequently to break through to Kirov to unite with front forces."[60] The next day, the Western Front recommended either a move north to link up with the Kalinin Front or a move east to Mosal'sk where Soviet forces were most active. Both moves were impossible, however, because the Dnepr River to the north was flooding, and main force German units prevented escape to the east. The Western Front finally agreed that Belov should move southeast toward Kirov to rejoin 10th Army. That move meant that Belov had to leave the major partisan units behind to operate in small groups against the Germans.

Belov's planned route of withdrawal passed through the forests south of Yel'nya, where S. Lazo's 24th Anniversary of the Red Army Partisan Detachment operated, and then across the Warsaw highway into the forests west of Kirov, where Captain Galyuga's partisans could assist the airborne forces. The 4th Airborne Corps would follow the axis of Khlysty, Glinka, and Filimony. The 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and 329th Rifle Division advanced on the left.[61]

At noon on 6 June, the 160- to 200-kilometer march began. The next day, the two corps endured heavy German air attacks near Filimony. After that, movement was restricted to nighttime to avoid hostile aircraft, and, on 10-11 June, corps units hid in the forests of Lazo's partisans, where they replenished their food and ammunition.[62] By the night of 15-16 June, the corps had reached the Moscow-Warsaw highway and was planning its attack in the Denisovka and Pokrovskoye sectors, with a regrouping in the forests east of Pervovo Buikovo (see map 22, p. 228).

Reconnaissance units estimated that the German force in that sector was one infantry regiment, with a tank company on continuous patrol along the highway.[63] The troops' exhaustion made an envelopment of the German position impossible. A surprise night attack on a broad front offered the only chance for success. Belov organized his forces on a narrow front in the woods opposite the highway. The 4th Airborne Corps on the right had three brigades in first echelon and two in second echelon. The 329th Rifle Division was in reserve. On the left, Belov organized 1st Guards Cavalry Corps with the 1st and 3d Guards Cavalry regiments in first echelon and the 6th and 5th in second echelon. Second-echelon units stayed with the horses. The weakened 2d Guards Cavalry Division was in reserve.

They attacked in darkness without any artillery preparation. Soviet units advanced piecemeal because the Germans took each unit under fire as they detected it. First-echelon cavalry regiments successfully broke across the road through a gauntlet of heavy German machine gun and mortar fire. Subsequent small groups crossed in dashes until German tanks arrived, firing down the highway. Soviet cavalry groups balked at crossing the road under the withering fire as daylight approached. Maj. Gen. V. K. Baranov of 1st Guards Cavalry Division rallied the force of 3,000 cavalry and several thousand paratroopers who hurled themselves across the road in an unstoppable mass. German fire killed many, including the 6th Cavalry Regiment's commander, Lt. Col. A. V. Knyazeva. Those who crossed the road successfully made a frantic dash southward. Those who followed ran a gauntlet of fire that stripped the trees of their leaves and took a frightful toll of casualties.

Almost all of General Baranov's 1st Cavalry Division succeeded in crossing the deadly road, as did about half of Kazankin's 4th Airborne Corps. However, the 2d Guards Cavalry Division, 8th Airborne Brigade, and stragglers from other airborne brigades could not cross nor could the 329th Rifle Division and the corps staff. Belov remained with these forces, trusting in Baranov's and Kazankin's ability to unite their forces with 10th Army.[64]

Colonel Kazankin reorganized his truncated 4th Airborne Corps and, harried by German air attacks, moved southeast into the forests east of Podgerb. There the unit rested from 17 to 21 June, replenishing its ammunition and food under the protection of Galyuga's partisan detachment. Colonel Kazankin notified the 10th Army commander of his intentions to break through the German lines and requested artillery support and whatever other assistance 10th Army could provide. Wounded were evacuated to front hospitals by light aircraft operating from cleared forest landing strips, and the corps prepared to attack a German sector near Zhilino, just north of Kirov. The plan to weaken German defenses involved diversionary attacks by machine gunners and artillery fire and infantry attacks by front units. A forward detachment of machine gunners led the corps's attack in deep echelon, with the wives and children of the partisans in the middle of the formation. After a four-hour fight and 120 casualties, 4th Airborne Corps finally reached 10th Army positions and safety.[65] Belov's force and the remaining 8th Airborne troops under Major Karnaukhov (commander of the first airborne detachment to land in the enemy rear) ended their hegira on the night of 27-28 June, when they,

too, broke through German lines north of Kirov.[66] After five months of bitter combat, one of the longest airborne operations in history had ended.

Conclusions

Elements of 4th Airborne Corps had operated in the German rear for more than six months. In continuous battle, the paratroopers had freed 200 villages (many of which remained in partisan hands), moved 600 kilometers, killed many Germans, and tied down seven divisions of four German army corps, thus limiting the Germans' counter-attack potential. German assessments, however, credited the Soviets with varying degrees of success. A German postwar critique of Soviet airborne operations around Moscow stated:

> The support given the partisans by parachutists considerably increased the latter's striking power and their threat in the rear of the German Armies. There is also no doubt that, in addition to mere reinforcement and supply by air, the systematic recruiting, equipment, and training of new troops was made possible by the Russians in the rear of the Germans. . . . However unpleasant it was for the Germans to have this danger in their rear and although it especially affected systematic supply of the front, at no time was there a direct, strategic effect. The Chief of Staff of the German Fourth Army stated in this connection that "Although the whole matter was very annoying it had no strategic consequence."
>
> According to the statements made by the Commander in Chief of the Fourth Panzer Army, the army estimated the breakthrough at the front to constitute a substantially greater danger than the parachute jumps in the zone of communications.[67]

General of Infantry Guenther Blumentritt, chief of staff of German 4th Army, wrote, "Strategically, this commitment by the Russians had no detrimental effects in spite of the critical situation of the Fourth Army. From the tactical viewpoint, on the other hand, the 'red louse in one's hide was unpleasant.'"[68] Blumentritt, however, was impressed enough by the Soviet airborne operations to write a special postwar study concerning operations against rear lines of communication that focused on the

Soviet airborne experience of 1941-42 and its applicability in modern battle.[69] The Germans did acknowledge limited Soviet airborne successes:

> The situation in Fourth Army was made far more serious by the appearance of the Russian airborne corps functioning as a compact unit. The war diary of this army almost daily mentions the fear that the Rollbahn will be threatened simultaneously from the north and south and the army cut off. The withdrawal of the army to the Ressa-Ugra line at the beginning of March 1942 may be regarded as a tactical result of this threat; that is to say that, in addition to other factors, it was due to the effects of the Russian airborne corps. It became necessary to release German forces (131st Infantry Division) to attack the airborne troops. Another direct result of the fighting for the Rollbahn was the abandonment of the plan to make a joint attack at the end of March with the German Second Panzer Army and the Fourth Army to retake Kirov. The forces set aside by the Fourth Army for this purpose were tied down by the violent attacks of Russian Tenth [50th] Army on the Rollbahn from the south and the simultaneous threat to it from the north by the airborne corps and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, combined into Group Belov. The effective share taken by the airlanding corps in this was relatively small.[70]

The assessment uncannily pinpointed the precise reasons for a lack of greater Soviet success:

> The following may well have been the decisive reasons:
>
> a. The lack of the element of surprise.
>
> b. The lack of artillery and heavy weapons, although for the rest, the airborne troops were well equipped and trained. But this lack substantially diminished their striking power.
>
> c. The difficulties of the terrain and of the weather, which undoubtedly decreased the mobility of the Russians also.
>
> d. The lack of coordination in the measures, taken by the two separate forces north and south of the Rollbahn, and the lack of synchronization in the date and hour of the attack (perhaps also

> influenced by road conditions); hesitation of the airborne troops between attacking and going on the defensive.
>
> It is possible that there were also difficulties in the attempt to supply the troops exclusively by air and a rapid decrease of combat strength.
>
> Not the least reason for the failure of the Russians was the steadfastness of German troops.[71]

That higher headquarters shared the concern of front-line commanders is evidenced by Halder's diary, which repeatedly mentions the airborne threat to Army Group Center.

For all their personal heroics and individual sacrifices, Soviet airborne units had failed in their primary mission--a failure for which the High Command was to blame. A mission with operational-strategic aims had achieved only tactical and diversionary objectives. The offensive it had supported also failed for reasons beyond the control of the individual airborne units.

Why did the offensive and airborne operation fail? The answers fall into three areas: first, High Command planning; second, execution and technical difficulties; and, third, weather. At the highest command level, official Soviet critiques of the winter offensive best summarized the failure:

> When our offensives carried our forces deep into the depth of the position, there was unsatisfactory coordination between our forces which had broken into the enemy position and those which remained on the original front line. The initial [immediate] task given armies by front commands covered too long a phase of the operation, and flexibility was lacking in the change or correction of such initial missions in light of the subsequent development of the situation. . . . Mobile formations were given proper initial instructions (missions), but in the course of operations they often got cut off, and cavalry corps ended often by operating not in cooperation with the main force.[72]

Dizzy with success over the results of the December counteroffensive, the Soviet High Command continued that offensive in January with depleted forces. Mobile groups,

in particular, lacked the power to sustain the offensive. They achieved penetrations but were seldom able to exploit them. Exploitation forces entered the narrow penetrations and advanced only to find themselves exhausted and at the mercy of better equipped foes. The Germans, ordered to stand fast, used their heavier armament to close the penetrations and to trap the Soviet exploitation forces.

Furthermore, the High Command clung too long to original hopes and plans. It forbade isolated forces from operating with other units until it was too late, and it required them to attack their original objectives until their combat strength was spent. Thus, Yefremov's three divisions of Soviet 33d Army perished east of Vyaz'ma. First forbidden to join Yefremov, Belov was then forced to leave a major element of his force in Dorogobuzh. Only in April could the remnants of all encircled units join forces. By then, it was too late to conduct a serious offensive operation with any prospects for success. The Soviets themselves properly concluded that

> the launching of large-scale operations [in winter] impulsively, without regard to the available troops and resources, leads to a scattering of forces and a failure to achieve substantial results. [Moreover,] mobile formations [including airborne] in offensive operations under winter conditions are capable of carrying out independent operational missions. But the limitations imposed on them by winter conditions make it advisable for them to operate relatively near to the main body of the army and in close cooperation with it.[73]

Operational planning for the several airborne assaults was hasty and incomplete. The poorly planned movement of aircraft and personnel to the launch airfields disrupted the overall operational plan. Coordination between the airborne force and the main front unit it was to link up with was nonexistent or limited. Aviation support of the operation, both combat and transport, was insufficient. Insufficient advanced reconnaissance of the landing site resulted in unrealistic assessments of enemy strength. Logistical support was inadequate in both weapons and amounts of supplies needed to overcome enemy forces. Lack of communications prevented efficient assembly and coordination of forces.

On top of the poor operational plans, technical difficulties further disrupted smooth operations. The lack of sufficient aircraft capable of carrying and accurately dropping paratroopers lengthened the dropping

phase, made aircraft and airfields vulnerable to German attack, and guaranteed dispersal of the combat troops in the drop area. Lack of navigational equipment on the ground and in the aircraft made accurate delivery almost impossible. Scarce numbers of trained aircrews aggravated this problem. Shortages of good radios hampered communications throughout the operation.

The harsh weather conditions severely hindered the operations of both sides but had a particularly severe effect on the less mobile Soviet forces. Low temperatures (-30° to -45°C) and deep snows (to a depth of one meter) limited rapid assembly and movement of forces and robbed the airborne forces of their ability to capitalize fully on the initial surprise they achieved. Only surprise produced by rapid movement could compensate for the light armament of airborne units.

Slow Soviet movement resulting from all these problems puzzled the Germans and confused them as to the actual Soviet airborne force mission. Postwar German critics claimed

> the operation [January-February] does not present the characteristics of an airlanding operation in the sense of an attack from the air. Rather, the fighting is solely a ground operation, only the assembly of forces takes place by air. This assembly although taking place in the rear of the enemy, nevertheless occurred in an area which the enemy no longer controlled. The operation had sound prospects for success, but the Russians failed to take quick action and exploit the element of surprise. They let weeks pass between the first landings and the decisive thrust. As a result they lost the best chance they had for succeeding. . . . The situation of German Fourth Army [would have been critical] if the Russians at the end of January 1942 had landed their brigade, which up till then had been landed in scattered units, as a compact force in the area southwest of Znamenka. If these airborne forces had then established communications between the Russian Thirty-Third and Tenth [50th] Armies, in cooperation with Cavalry Corps Belov, the German Fourth Army would have been completely encircled. It would have been doubtful whether this army could have broken out of encirclement, in view of the condition it was in at the time. The reasons for the way the Russians behaved are not known. Perhaps, it was the temptation to achieve a greater objective, the encirclement of

> the German Fourth Panzer Army and Ninth Army. Perhaps it was impossible for them to undertake a landing synchronized in both time and space. It is useless to speculate without additional information on the subject from the Russians.[74]

Actual events, as revealed by the Soviets, confirmed the correctness of German speculation.

Mitigating these failures is the fact that this first Soviet airborne operation occurred during a desperate period under great pressures and extremely complex conditions. Unrealistically, the Soviet High Command threw all the forces at its disposal into a massive attempt to crush the Germans, who had recently wreaked havoc on the Soviet Union but who now seemed vulnerable to a Soviet counterblow. Reflecting on the regulations of the 1930s and their prescription for modern successful deep battle, the High Command seized upon the panacea of airborne operations, keeping in mind what the regulations promised the use of such forces could produce, namely, confusion and ultimate defeat for the enemy.

The offensive of January 1942 was a bold, though flawed, attempt to follow the prescription of the 1930s for victory. To the offensive, bold, imaginative resort to deep battle would produce victory. But, in 1942, it did not. Only later in the war, when forces and equipment matched doctrine and when leaders educated themselves to the necessities and realities of battle, would the older concepts contribute to victory.

Airborne forces paid the price of High Command failures. About 14,000 men jumped into the cauldron of battle around Vyaz'ma.[75] These men, under brave leaders, endured the subzero cold of January and February, and those who survived contended with the rotting moisture and mud of April and May. They fought daily battles with Germans, hunger, and the elements, and they reaped little of the euphoria of victory. About 4,000 Soviet paratroopers survived the four-month ordeal. Their only reward, save survival, was the knowledge that they had endured the longest airborne operation in history. Their personal sacrifice and endurance left a legacy of lessons, a step in the education of an army.

CHAPTER 5

OPERATIONAL EMPLOYMENT: ON THE DNEPR, SEPTEMBER 1943

Operational Planning

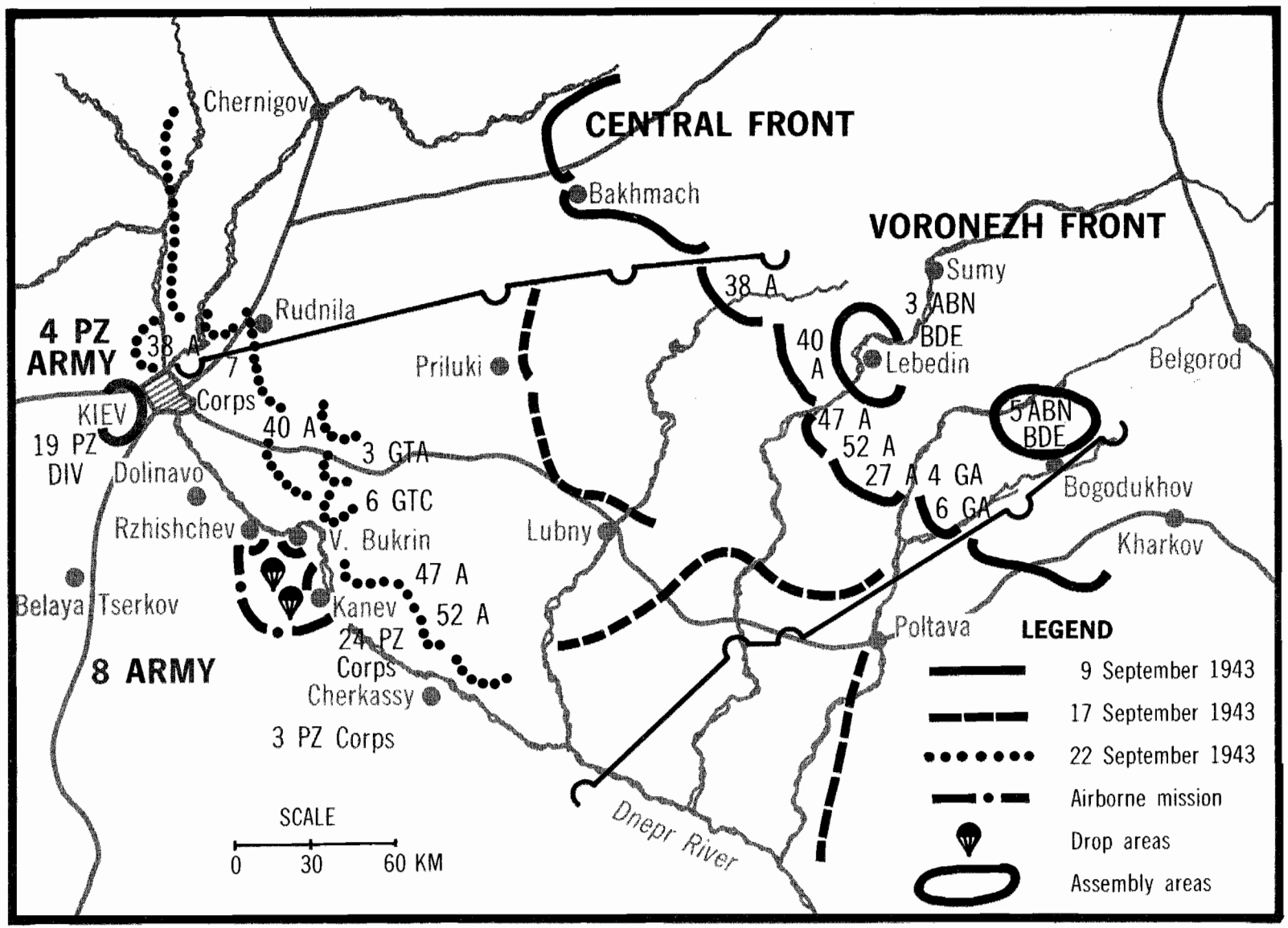
The Soviets conducted their second and last operational level airborne assault in September 1943 during the Soviet advance to the Dnepr River. Having repulsed major German attacks in a strategic defensive operation at Kursk in July 1943, Soviet forces counterattacked in mid-July and August with two of their own offenses. Operation Kutuzov, launched in mid-July, drove German forces from the Orel salient. The second offensive, Operation Rumyantsev, begun in early August, smashed German 4th Panzer Army and Operational Group Kempf, and severely mauled German mobile operational reserves. By late August, the Soviets had captured Kharkov and had begun a broad front pursuit of the German forces withdrawing toward the Dnepr River line.

Though largely unfortified, the Dnepr River was a significant obstacle to future Soviet advances. The German command believed that this river barrier would stabilize the eastern line of contact for the long term. Soviet planners had to establish firm bridgeheads over the Dnepr River to prevent the Germans from stabilizing the fluid front.

During the second half of September, Soviet forces from the Kharkov area accelerated their advance toward the Dnepr (see map 23, p. 92). The Soviet Central Front advanced westward toward the river on a general axis running north of Kiev. Spearheaded by Lt. Gen. P. S. Rybalko's 3d Guards Tank Army, the Voronezh Front lunged at the Dnepr in a sector from Kiev to south of Cherkassy. As the Soviet advance accelerated, the German command rushed troops in to man the Dnepr River line.

Facing weakening German resistance, General of the Army N. F. Vatutin, Voronezh Front commander, in response to Stavka orders to accelerate his advance, ordered the following measures on 19 September:

> To the commanders, 3d Guards Tank Army, 38th Army, and 40th Army. The enemy, while withdrawing, tries to burn all the bread [crops]. Conditions demand a maximum offensive tempo. I order:



Map 23. Voronezh Front Advance to the Dnepr, September 1943

1. Comrade Rybalko move with care at a speed of 100 kilometers per day to the Pereyaslavl area by means of your best mobile units and tanks, to arrive not later than 22-9-43.

2. Commanders of 40th and 38th Armies speed the tempo of the offensive, first of all with mobile forces, to arrive at the Dnepr River also on 22-9-43.

3. Report measures undertaken.

Vatutin[1]

The Voronezh Front's mobile group (3d Guards Tank Army with 1st Guards Cavalry Corps) raced forward, with all three corps in first echelon, on a front of seventy kilometers, and reached the Dnepr River on the night of 21-22 September. The next day, forward units secured small bridgeheads across the Dnepr at Rzhishchev and Velikyi Bukrin.[2] The same day, lead elements of 40th Army reached the river and also secured a small bridgehead.[3] Heavy German air attacks and the Soviets' lack of bridging equipment to allow tanks to cross the river placed the bridgeheads in danger of destruction by German counterattacks. At this critical juncture, the Stavka decided to use an airborne assault to widen the bridgehead at Velikyi Bukrin (see map 24, p. 229).

The Soviet High Command anticipated the need to use airborne forces in the Dnepr River operations. During August and September, the Stavka ordered Maj. Gen. A. G. Kapitkokin, commander of airborne forces, to train airborne forces intensively for missions in the near future. The 3d Airborne Brigade held exercises near Moscow, and the 1st, 5th, and other brigades underwent similar training.[4] As the Soviet offensive proceeded favorably, the Stavka, in early September, detached the 1st, 3d, and 5th Guards Airborne brigades from the airborne administration and assigned them to the Voronezh Front commander for use in the planned airborne operation. To ensure unity of command, Maj. Gen. I. I. Zatevakhin, deputy commander of airborne forces, commanded the new airborne corps. His staff officers were from the airborne administration. The new 10,000-man corps contained Col. P. I. Krasovsky's 1st Brigade, Col. P. A. Goncharov's 3d Brigade, and Lt. Col. P. M. Sidorchuk's 5th Brigade.[5]

The airborne forces commander and the long-range aviation commander jointly planned the operation (see

map 25, p. 230). By 16 September, airborne force headquarters had detailed plans for objectives, force composition and unit missions, requisite phasing of preparations, and conduct of the operation. The airborne forces commander was responsible for the overall plan and all stages until the actual loading of the force onto aircraft. The aviation commander was responsible for the plan's in-flight phase. The Voronezh Front commander exercised control of the operation after landing. To facilitate joint planning, the airborne force staff (an operational group) was at Lebedin with the aviation operational groups and the 2d Air Army command post, which supported the Voronezh Front. The new airborne corps staff was also in Lebedin, but, as the time for operation neared, it moved nearer to the front lines to the 40th Army headquarters.

On 23 September, the communications network of the units involved became operational. The airborne force operational group established communications with the Voronezh Front, 40th Army, and the long-range aviation operational group, as well as with 2d Air Army and the airfields from which the airborne corps would depart. Concentration of the airborne corps and its equipment at these airfields was supposed to be completed two days before the operation commenced on the night of 23-24 September.

The airborne corps's mission, as established by General Vatutin, was to cooperate with the front to secure a bridgehead on the right bank of the Dnepr River near Velikyi Bukrin and to widen and fortify the expanded bridgehead.[6] Specifically, the corps would seize Lipovyi Rog, Makedony, and Stepantsy and prevent German counterattacks from penetrating the west bank of the Dnepr in the sector from Kanev to Traktomirov. The planned corps defensive perimeter was thirty kilometers deep and fifteen to twenty kilometers wide.

Colonel Krasovsky's 1st Guards Airborne Brigade would land near Lazurtsy, Beresnyagi, and Grishentsy to capture Makedony and Sinyavka and to prevent enemy counterattacks toward Kurilovka and Bobritsa. Colonel Goncharov's 3d Guards Airborne Brigade would land near Grushevo, Makedony, and Tulitsy to secure a defensive line from Lipovyi Rog to Makedony, and to prevent a German advance to Chernyshi and Buchak. The 3d Brigade would hold the line until 40th Army units arrived from Traktomirov and Zarubentsy. Lieutenant Colonel Sidorchuk's 5th Guards Airborne Brigade would land near Trostynets, Kovali, and

Kostyanets to secure a defensive line from Gorkavshchina through Stepantsy to Kostyanets and to prevent an enemy advance to the Dnepr from the south and southwest.[7]

The two-night landing would require 50 PS-84 aircraft, 150 IL-4/B-25 aircraft, 10 towed gliders, and 35 A-7 and G-11 gliders. Aircraft would lift the force from Smorodino and Bogodukhov airfields near Lebedin, a distance of 175 to 200 kilometers from the drop sites. Each aircraft would make two to three sorties a night.[8] The 1st and 5th Guards Airborne brigades would land the first night, 3d Guards Airborne Brigade the next night. Gliders carrying artillery would land during the intervals between the drops of the parachute echelons.

Aircraft equipped with cameras would conduct continuous reconnaissance of the area for three days before the operations to provide information on enemy dispositions in the drop area. Front aviation units would strike German targets detected by reconnaissance. Bombers would attack the area immediately before the paratroopers jumped from their aircraft. After the drop, front assault and bomber aviation would provide close air support as directed by the airborne corps commander. Communications units dropped into the landing area would provide close coordination between air and land forces. In addition, artillery observers would accompany the force to ensure timely artillery support, and a squadron of artillery adjustment (spotting) aircraft would help control and shift artillery fires. Thirty-five aircraft would carry supplies to the airborne force and evacuate casualties on return trips from the bridgehead. The paratroopers brought two days' rations and two or three basic loads of ammunition.[9] The Voronezh Front commander provided 100 vehicles for movement of men and materiel to the airfield.

The actual landings would be made in several phases. Small units would jump into the area first to clear landing sites and to establish contacts with local partisan units. The brigades would follow, landing according to a schedule worked out jointly by the corps staff and the military transport aviation staff. Radio communications would link the brigades to the corps and the Voronezh Front command post. The auxiliary command post of the Voronezh Front and the command post of 40th Army also had stations in the communications net. Elaborate security measures included strict radio silence during the preparatory phase and signal call signs of airborne units designated as so-called replacement units to mask their true nature.[10]

On 19 September, Gen. G. K. Zhukov, Stavka representative, approved the plan. He stressed that the missions of the Voronezh Front and the airborne corps had to correspond to the time of landing. Zhukov ordered Vatutin to update brigade missions.[11]

Meanwhile, the pace of the Soviet advance had quickened, and, on 21-22 September, lead elements crossed the Dnepr River. Then, a series of unforeseen events disrupted the carefully laid plans for conducting the airborne operation. Airborne forces were unable to concentrate at the airfields in the required two-day period because of insufficient railroad cars to move the corps. Furthermore, the railroad tracks were in disrepair, so the requisite supplies and equipment for the forces did not arrive on time. In addition, bad weather prevented military transport aviation from assembling the necessary aircraft at the proper airfields. Only eight planes arrived at the airfields at the appointed time.[12]

Plans were altered accordingly (see map 26, p. 231). General Vatutin, who arrived at 40th Army headquarters on the morning of the twenty-third, issued amended orders. He delayed the drop one day, to the night of 24-25 September, and, instead of committing three brigades over two nights, he decided to send the two that could complete their movement to the departure airfields. Vatutin ordered the 3d Guards Airborne Brigade to land southeast of Rzhishchev near Tulitsy, Beresnyagi, Lazurtsy, and Potaptsy. The 3d Brigade would secure a defensive line from Lipovyi Rog through Makedony and Sinyavka to Kozarovka and hold it until the approach of 40th Army, while blocking German movement from the west and southwest. The 5th Guards Airborne Brigade was to land west of Kanev near Kovali, Kostyanets, and Trostynets; secure a line from Gorkavshchina through Stepantsy to Sutniki; and hold the line until Soviet forces advanced from Buchak, Selishche, and Kanev. The 5th Brigade would also block a German advance from the south and southwest.[13] The 1st Guards Airborne Brigade would be in reserve, scheduled to join the other brigades on the second or third night of the operation, as soon as the brigade could concentrate at departure airfields.

The delay in the operation and the last-minute changes in plans caused near chaos in command channels. The airborne command and airborne landing forces received the changes on the twenty-third at 40th Army headquarters. The commander of airborne forces and the corps commander needed the entire day to clarify missions, evaluate the situation, and make decisions in response to the alterations. Orders to subordinate units went out on the

twenty-fourth. Brigade commanders, in turn, studied the changes, made their decisions, and issued their orders a mere one and one-half hours before the troops loaded onto the aircraft. This ripple effect resulting from changed orders most affected battalion and company commanders and their men. Company commanders had only fifteen minutes before takeoff to brief their subordinates. Platoon leaders passed the information to their men during the flight to the drop zone. As a consequence,

> the lateness in mission assignment to units and subunits of the landing force deprived the commanders of the opportunity to clarify problems of coordination within the landing force and with other combat arms, to check on how subordinates understood the mission, and to map out a battle plan after landing in the enemy rear. Preflight drills were not conducted with personnel or officers, either on maps or on mock-ups of the terrain, in connection with the forthcoming mission.[14]

Shortage of time forced brigade and battalion commanders to limit their briefings to basic information about drop zones, assembly areas, objectives, and defensive zones. They did not address questions of supplying the troops adequate weaponry. On the assumption that front units would quickly relieve the paratrooper force, parachute units lacked both shovels to dig entrenchments and antitank mines with which to establish an effective defense. Troops did not even carry ponchos for protection against the night frosts of autumn.[15]

Moreover, Soviet commanders had virtually no intelligence on enemy dispositions in their drop area. Bad weather had prevented aerial reconnaissance, but commanders operated on the assumption that German forces were weak, as indeed they had been up to a week before the operation. Unknown to the Soviets, however, the situation was dramatically changing. In essence, a race to the Dnepr River in the Rzhishchev-Kanev area was in progress. What was at stake was the possibility of a major Soviet foothold on the south bank. Before 22 September, there had been virtually no German troops defending the south bank in this critical sector. The 4th Panzer Army was withdrawing to and across the Dnepr at Kiev. The 8th Army, responsible for defense of the Dnepr from south of Kiev to south of Cherkassy, still had the bulk of its forces on the river's north bank. The 24th Panzer Corps (34th, 57th, 112th Infantry, and 10th Motorized divisions) was supposed to anchor 8th Army's left flank. Until the 24th Panzer Corps could disengage from heavy fighting with

advancing Soviet forces on the north bank of the Dnepr, a large gap would exist in the German Dnepr defenses north of Kanev.[16]

It was this gap that lead elements of Soviet 3d Guards Tank Army approached. When small groups of Soviet troops crossed the river on the morning of 22 September, few German troops were on the south bank. That day, 120 noncommissioned officer candidates from the flak combat school at Cherkassy and the reconnaissance battalion of 19th Panzer Division manned scattered defenses along the river. The remainder of 19th Panzer was still crossing the Dnepr at Kiev. The evening of the twenty-first, 8th Army ordered 24th Panzer Corps to move its most mobile elements across the river and to secure the undefended section. The 24th Panzer Corps began disengaging from combat on 22 September and moved its lead elements to the river's south bank at 1500 on 23 September, just as Soviet infantrymen who had crossed the river at Zarubentsy and Grigorovka attacked and pierced the thin German defensive screen.

The same afternoon, 4th Panzer Army, fearing for the open right flank, sent an urgent message to 8th Army to hasten reinforcement of the German defenders. The 8th Army responded and, at 2010 on 23 September, ordered the main force of 19th Panzer Division and the truck-mounted 72d Infantry Division to reinforce 19th Panzer Division's hard-pressed reconnaissance battalion in the Dnepr bend. But that reinforcement would take precious time. The best hope for successful reinforcement still lay with the 24th Panzer Corps, which, by the evening of 23 September, had succeeded in moving the bulk of its forces across the river at Kanev. By 2115, the 57th Infantry Division had crossed the Dnepr and was occupying positions east and west of Kanev. The 112th Infantry Division was in the process of crossing the river to reinforce German units in the threatened Dnepr bend. The 34th Infantry and 10th Motorized divisions crossed later in the evening. The 34th deployed to 24th Panzer Corps's left flank, west of Rzhishchev, 10th Motorized Division to the area east of Rzhishchev. By 0500 on 24 September, movement of the panzer corps across the river was complete, so the Germans demolished the bridge at Kanev. Motorized elements of all 24th Panzer Corps divisions had moved to their new defensive sections, and division main bodies would follow during the day. Completing the German defensive picture, the 19th Panzer Division continued to move toward the Dnepr bend from Kiev.[17]

German redeployments occurred just in time to contain Soviet forces in the Dnepr bend. By noon on the

twenty-fourth, the Soviets had secured Traktomirov, Zarubentsy, and Grigorovka, but they lacked the strength to push farther south to unite those bridgheads into a more formidable lodgment. By late afternoon on 24 September, the 57th and 112th Infantry divisions were in their defensive positions, the 34th Infantry Division was closing into its positions, and 19th Panzer and 10th Motorized divisions were en route to their new positions --positions that, unfortunately for the Soviets, traversed the precise regions where Soviet airborne forces would land. All this movement occurred unbeknown to Soviet intelligence.

Airborne Assault

Throughout 24 September, men of the airborne brigades, supplies, and supporting aircraft were being assembled at the departure airfields. Despite the one-day delay, the full complement of aircraft did not arrive. By the time 5th Guards Airborne Brigade had assembled, for instance, only forty-eight of the required sixty-five LI-2 aircraft had arrived; bad weather had halted the remainder. In addition, for safety reasons, aircraft commanders insisted on loading fifteen to eighteen units (men and cargo), instead of the planned twenty on each aircraft.[18] Because these changes disrupted planning calculations, commanders reallocated men and cargo just before takeoff, which resulted in a significant quantity of supplies left sitting on the runway.

Landing preparations were also careless. Many battalion and brigade commanders did not carry radio crews with them, but Colonel Goncharov had the entire command group of 3d Guards Airborne Brigade with him on his plane. The same storm front that contributed to general ignorance concerning enemy dispositions also prevented advanced marking of drop zones with bonfires and colored squares.

At 1830 on 24 September, 3d Guards Airborne Brigade departed; lead elements of 5th Brigade took off two hours later (see map 27, p. 232). The capacity of fuel trucks supporting the aircraft was less than expected, so they could not fuel the planned number of aircraft on time. The first wave of aircraft, due to takeoff ten minutes before the second wave, could not complete its launch on time. As soon as an aircraft had received fuel, it took off, so both waves took off intermingled. Refueling of subsequent waves was equally confused, and airborne troops shifted from one plane to another in search of an earlier departing flight. Fuel shortages naturally developed.

Because of the fuel shortage, 5th Brigade operations from Bogodukhov had to be halted at 0100 on 25 September, although all the men had not yet been lifted into action.[19]

Nevertheless, a total of 298 sorties (instead of the planned 500) departed the airfields and dropped 4,575 paratroopers (3,050 from 3d Brigade and 1,525 from 5th Brigade) and 660 light parachute bags with ammunition and supplies. However, 2,017 men, or 30 percent of the planned drop, most of them from 5th Brigade, were left at the airfields. By first light on 25 September, the drop of 3d Brigade was complete. Unfortunately, aircraft carrying 3d Brigade's 45-mm antitank guns were not ready on time and thus failed to join the flight.[20]

In a repeat of the Vyaz'ma operation (see chap. 3), inaccurate drop techniques scattered the airborne forces far and wide over the region. One aircraft dropped its men into the Dnepr River, and one dropped its human cargo into friendly positions on the near side. Two aircraft dropped their men in what turned out to be a safer area deep in the enemy rear. Indicative of the turmoil, thirteen aircraft simply returned without dropping their men, which further complicated the already confused flight schedule.[21]

The aircraft flying over the intended drop zone ran into dense hostile antiaircraft fire. The pilots' evasive action did not improve the accuracy of the drop. Most paratroopers jumped from aircraft flying 200 kilometers an hour at altitudes of from 600 to 2,000 meters and taking evasive action to avoid the antiaircraft fire. But even greater shocks awaited the paratroopers. Instead of landing in the planned, relatively compact ten-by-fourteen-kilometer area, they found themselves scattered over a thirty-by-ninety-kilometer area. The area was also infested with German defensive positions.[22] In short, the airborne assault was a disaster.

The amazement of German troops on the ground, viewing the armada of aircraft spewing forth long strings of paratroopers, was surpassed only by the horror of Soviet paratroopers quickly aware of what awaited them. Lead Soviet airborne forces jumped into the Dubari-Grushevo area "just as the first troops of the main body of the 19th Panzer Division reached this locality by way of Pii and Potaptsy. As a result, the parachutists and their transport planes came under accurate defensive fire. The approaching aircraft were dispersed while the parachutists, who had in the meantime jumped, were scattered on the ground."[23] German accounts describe the reaction

of German troops as the paratroopers descended onto their positions. Some German troops fired small arms and machine guns on the paratroopers as they descended, while others turned their heavier weapons on the falling host of parachutes. Col. E. Binder of the 19th Panzer Division recorded a vivid picture of the events:

> The 19th Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion was fighting west of Zarubentsy. The armored personnel carrier battalion of the 73d Panzer Grenadier Regiment, with elements of the division staff of the 19th Panzer Division, was advancing by way of Pii-Potaptsy-Dudari[Dubari]-Kolesishche; it was followed by the main body of the 73d Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and the 74th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. Behind these forces came the rest of the division, including the 19th Panzer Regiment. After the Germans had reached Dudari [Dubari], the first Russian parachutists jumped from a transport plane flying at an altitude of 600 to 700 meters directly above the little village. While these parachutists were still in the air they were taken under fire by machine guns and a 20-mm four-barreled flak gun. A half minute or a minute later, the second plane came over and thereafter at like intervals other planes followed, flying in single file; only seldom did two crafts fly side by side.
>
> The parachutists were fired on while they were still in the air with all available weapons, including rifles and the flak guns which had in the meantime been set up. As a result the fourteenth or fifteenth plane turned off in a northerly direction and dropped its parachutists in the area of Romashki. These parachutists were immediately taken under fire by men of the supply trains, repair teams, and maintenance sections of the 19th Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion.
>
> The jumps, which continued for one to one and a half hours, steadily became more irregular, one of the reasons being the swift German counteraction and another the signal lights going aloft on all sides. The parachutists were dropped without any plan. Wherever they landed they were immediately attacked. Those who could took cover in the numerous clefts in the ground.
>
> With the parachutists split up in small groups, the fate of the undertaking was sealed. During the night great numbers of prisoners were

brought in. The rest of the parachutists were destroyed the next day.[24]

Throughout the night, German troops, using the white parachutes as beacons, hunted down and killed disorganized groups of Soviet paratroopers. The backdrop of bonfires, glowing embers, and German and Soviet flares illuminated the bizarre and macabre battle.

As they fell to earth, individual paratroopers fired on German postions, returning the deadly fire directed at them. On the ground, the troops frantically attempted to reassemble to survive in the midst of the enemy. The dispersed landing of the paratroopers and darkness offered some succor to the attackers, but only partial compensation for the huge initial losses they suffered. Between Dubari and Rossava, the Germans counted 1,500 parachutes in the first twenty-four hours, as well as 692 Soviet dead and 209 prisoners. Near Grushevo, the 3d Company, 73d Panzer Grenadier Regiment, suffered heavy losses while annihilating an estimated 150 Soviet paratroopers in what was really a microcosm of the bigger battle.[25] Well into daylight on the twenty-fifth, fragmented skirmishes raged as small groups of Soviet paratroopers waged unequal struggles with German forces. Succinctly put, "a series of fatal mistakes during preparation and during the landing placed the airborne troops in a very difficult position in the first hours after landing. All attempts of subunit commanders to gather their subordinates and establish command and control in the course of the night had no success."[26]

To survive, paratroopers from different units formed ad hoc groups. All hopes of accomplishing the brigade's missions faded. The landing problems forced higher headquarters to postpone indefinitely further drops of the 1st and 5th Airborne brigades.

5th Airborne Brigade Operations

After the disastrous landing, ground units turned first to survival and then to whatever damage they could inflict on the Germans. As units sought to assemble, a major communications problem compounded the effects of German resistance. Radios and radiomen had been widely scattered during the drop. Only five of twenty-six radios were operative; the remainder had been either destroyed or buried by their operators to keep them from German hands. Lieutenant Colonel Sidorchuk was the first to establish contact with Soviet forces on the left bank of the Dnepr. He passed a message in the clear to friendly forces.[27]

Airborne force headquarters and Voronezh Front headquarters sent additional radios across the river to establish communications. Three groups of men with radios dropped on the night of 27-28 September, but nothing more was heard of them. The next night, a PO-2 aircraft sent out with radios was shot down.[28] Not until 6 October did the front finally manage to establish even sporadic radio communications with elements of the landing force.

Surviving paratroopers reassembled slowly. Planned assembly areas were obviously too dangerous, so each man or knot of men had to improvise. On 25 September, the Germans systematically began to scour the countryside with mobile detachments of various sizes. German records indicate no great concern over the airborne drops. Soviet airborne forces were too fragmented and had sustained such heavy casualties that they posed no real tactical threat to German defenses. While the almost casual cleanup of airborne remnants progressed, the Germans focused their attention on the dangerous bridgeheads to their front. On the right flank of 24th Panzer Corps, SS Viking Panzer Division of the 3d Panzer Corps cleaned up airborne forces dropped south and southwest of Pekari. Meanwhile, Army Group South dispatched reinforcements to 24th Panzer Corps to assist in containing and reducing the Soviet bridgeheads. On the morning of 25 September, 20th Panzer Division was ordered forward to reinforce 24th Panzer Corps. The 72d Infantry Division also continued its march forward. The 24th Panzer Corps postponed an attack on the bridgeheads planned for 26 September and, instead, scheduled the attack for 28 September, by which time the reinforcements would have arrived. By then, 7th Panzer Division would also be available.

The planned attack finally occurred on 29 September, and, although it did not eliminate the bridgeheads, it did truncate them and remove the threat of a future Soviet breakout in the region. While the Germans prepared to deal with the bridgeheads, they paid only scant attention to the airborne force. By 2100 on 26 September, the Germans considered action against the parachutists to have been completed. By then, only remnants of the airborne force still resisted in the forests south of Kanev, north of Buchak, and south of Dubari.[29]

For the Soviets, the task now was to salvage whatever benefits possible from the abortive drop. From 25 September to 5 October in the area between Rzhishchev and Cherkassy, forty-three separate Soviet groups assembled, totaling 2,300 men of the 3d and 5th brigades' 4,575-man landing force.[30] Many others had been killed or captured, while still others managed to join the nine

partisan groups operating in the vicinity. A small group of 230 men who had survived drops into the Dnepr or behind Soviet lines rejoined main front forces.

Initially, the largest groups of assembled paratroopers gathered in three regions: 600 men in the Kanev and Cherkassy forests; 200 men around Chernyshi; and four groups totaling 300 men near Yablonovo.[31] These groups conducted diversionary attacks against German targets of opportunity. Much of their time, however, was spent searching for equipment, ammunition, and supplies that had been dropped into the region. Without these items, they could not operate. Because German patrols had gathered and destroyed the scattered Soviet supplies, ammunition shortages quickly limited the effectiveness of these units. Still, a few small groups experienced a modicum of success. On the night of 29-30 September, a group of 150 men under Sr. Lt. S. Petrosian successfully attacked a German police headquarters in Potok village and later ambushed a German artillery column south of the village. Petrosian's detachment made its way south through Maslovka to Kanev where, on 5 October, it joined a larger group commanded by the 5th Guards Airborne Brigade commander, Lieutenant Colonel Sidorchuk.[32]

By early October, surviving Soviet airborne groups were in the northern area from Rzhishchev to Kanev and farther south from Kanev to Cherkassy. In the north, where the terrain was relatively open and the Germans had extensive defensive positions, more than 1,000 paratroopers were forced to operate in small bands to escape detection. Consequently, their operations had limited effectiveness. In the south, however, the terrain was rough and heavily forested, and the sparsely populated region had few German defenses. Here, growing concentrations of paratrooper groups harassed the Germans for more than a month. Organized in at least five large detachments, more than 1,200 men operated in this region. The largest and most effective of these groups was the 600-man force commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Sidorchuk, which had come together by 5 October in the Kanev forest.

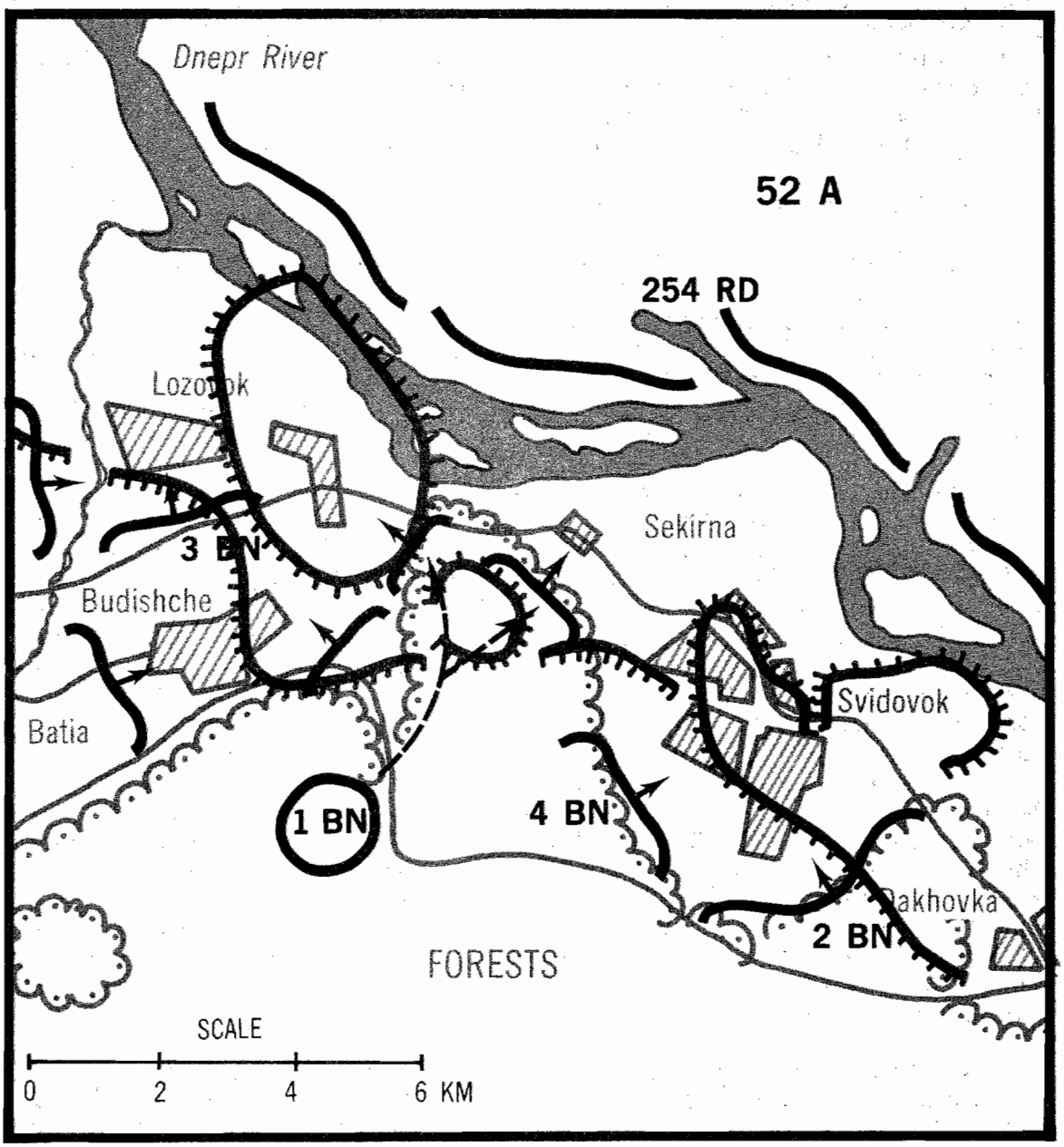
Unlike other groups, Sidorchuk's unit had sufficient manpower and equipment to organize. Sidorchuk's force had a brigade with three rifle battalions and sapper, antitank, reconnaissance, and communications platoons. On 6 October, by a stroke of luck, a radio crew joined the brigade and established communications with 40th Army headquarters and, through it, with front headquarters.[33] From 8 to 11 October, front delivered supplies and ammunition to the brigade in the Kanev area. After concerted German attempts to smash Sidorchuk's

brigade, the force, with authorization of the front commander, moved southward on 19 October into the more remote and, hence, more secure Tagancha forest. There it joined scattered groups, totaling about 300 men, operating under Senior Lieutenant Tkachev. This combined force of more than 1,000 men under 5th Airborne Brigade control established defensive positions in the forest and conducted forays and raids against small German garrisons and supply points near the periphery of the area.

The first successful Soviet attack occurred on 22 October when Sidorchuk's unit blew up the rail line between Korsun and Tagancha station, destroying a train in the process. That evening, his force assaulted the village of Buda-Vorobievska, scattering the staff of the German 157th Reserve Battalion and burning warehouses in nearby Potashnya. The attacks, however, did not go unanswered. The next day, heavy German attacks on Sidorchuk's forest position took a heavy toll in his unit. Consequently, the brigade withdrew under cover of darkness southward through Baibuz into the Cherkassy forest northeast of Bol'shoye Starosel'ye. By then, the brigade had picked up additional personnel and numbered about 1,200 men, despite earlier losses. Sidorchuk added one more battalion to his force and armed it with weapons dropped by front aircraft.[34]

The 5th Airborne Brigade established a defensive base in the Cherkassy forests and raided German installations and communications routes in the region from 28 October to 11 November. Aside from conducting diversionary raids, the unit also passed intelligence information to the 2d Ukrainian Front, in whose sector it operated. The brigade established communications with 52d Army, which was preparing to cross the Dnepr River in the Cherkassy sector.

On 11 November 1943, forty days after landing in the German rear, the paratroopers received orders to participate in a new operation intended to achieve what the October operation had failed to achieve, namely, the advance of Soviet main forces across the Dnepr (see map 28, p. 106). The 52d Army ordered Sidorchuk to attack and capture the villages of Lozovok, Sekirna, and Svidovok, on the left bank of the Dnepr River, thereby assisting the river crossing by 52d Army units. The attack was scheduled for 12-13 November. A 52d Army liaison officer visited Sidorchuk to coordinate army missions, order of attack, and the mission the brigade was to perform.[35] The 5th Brigade's attack would coincide with an attack by the 254th Rifle Division from across the Dnepr River. The Germans in Lozovok had one infantry



Map 28. 5th Airborne Brigade Operations, November 1943

battalion with engineer units. At the nearby village of Yelizavetovka were two companies from the 266th Infantry Regiment, 72d Infantry Division, while an infantry battalion and five tanks defended Svidovok. Sidorchuk assigned 1st Battalion to take Sekirna by surprise, while the 3d Battalion would attack Lozovok. The 2d Battalion had the difficult job of reducing the Svidovok strongpoint. In reserve, 4th Battalion would assist the 2d Battalion. Two attached partisan detachments would occupy Budishche, halt German movement from Moshny to Lozovok, and assist 3d Battalion should the need arise. All of the night attacks would occur simultaneously.[36]

At 0100 on 13 November, brigade units in attack positions waited for Sidorchuk's signal to move through the darkness to attack. Maj. A. Bluvshtein's 2d Battalion (4th, 5th, and 6th companies) faced a German battalion entrenched in several strongpoints, but lacking anchored flanks. The five German tanks at Svidovok posed a considerable problem for the lightly armed paratroopers.

Bluvshtein's plan of attack took maximum advantage of surprise and darkness. Advancing without artillery preparations, two assault groups would tie down the defenders and, if possible, secure the strongpoints on the south fringe of Svidovok. Following the assault groups, two rifle companies would attack along the main street and, in coordination with units operating on the left, overcome the strongpoints in the center of the town. One company would advance on the town from the east toward the church in the town center. While the three companies drove into Svidovok, one squad with machine pistols would deploy on the southeast side of the town to cover any German relief from Dakhnovka. After the battalion secured the town and emerged on the northeast side, two companies would secure islands in the Dnepr, while the third company blocked enemy approach routes from Dakhnovka. Major Bluvshtein established a small reserve of a platoon armed with automatic weapons, one machine pistol, and an antitank rifle.

At 0400, the assault groups attacked, employing hand grenades and small-arms fire. Hard on the heels of the assault groups, the 4th and 5th companies, followed by the reserve, moved down the darkened streets toward the center of town and secured the nearest strongpoints before the surprised German garrison could react. From the east, the 6th Company attacked German outposts on hill 73.8, but heavy German automatic weapons fire halted their attack. Approaching the center of town, the 4th and 5th companies ran into machine gun and tank fire that stopped their

advance. The 6th Company, unable either to take or to envelop hill 73.8, retreated under intense German fire.

The 4th Battalion, itself facing heavy enemy fire on 2d Battalion's left, detached one platoon to cover its advance. The remainder of the battalion entered Svidovok from the west to envelop German strongpoints in the center of town. Bluvshtein maneuvered his reserves to the east to attack the strongpoints from the right flank. An automatic weapons platoon attacked the strongpoints frontally, using the houses for cover, and the antitank riflemen engaged the five tanks, destroying one.

For the final push, a company of 4th Battalion joined the 4th and 5th companies and the automatic weapons platoon in overcoming German resistance. Having lost two more tanks in the battle, the Germans withdrew to northeast of the town where they joined the force that had retreated from hill 73.8. Meanwhile, other Soviet units took Lozovok and Sekirna and established defenses along the Ol'shanka and Dnepr rivers.

Despite its success, 2d Battalion now faced a bigger threat. A German relief battalion with seven tanks rushed down the road from Dakhnovka, broke through 2d Battalion's covering force, and attacked Svidovok from the flank and rear. Unfortunately for Bluvshtein and Sidorchuk, the 254th Rifle Division of the 2d Ukrainian Front was unable to mount its attack across the Dnepr on the night of 12-13 November. German forces attacking from south and east ejected the 2d and 4th battalions from their newly won prize. To avoid German encirclement in Svidovok, the two battalions withdrew into the forests west of the Dnepr. It was a fitting denouement for the frustrating, tragic operation.

To close the tale of the 5th Airborne Brigade, on the night of 13-14 November, advanced elements of 254th Rifle Division captured a foothold on the left bank of the Dnepr. By 15 November, that division, followed by 52d Army, had cleared the river towns and linked up with 5th Airborne Brigade. After thirteen more days of combat, 5th Brigade was evacuated to the rear. It had endured two months of harrowing combat under the most adverse conditions. Lieutenant Colonel Sidorchuk, commander of 5th Guards Airborne Brigade, Major Bluvshtein, and others received the title "Hero of the Soviet Union" for their feats, not the least of which was simple survival. More than 60 percent of the force never returned.[37] Other survivors received mention in orders and medals, small consolation for the thousands who had perished in the poorly coordinated operation.

Conclusions

It is understandable that the Dnepr operation was the Soviets' last major airborne operation. Even compared with the Vyaz'ma ordeal of 1942, the Dnepr operation is a classic case of how not to conduct an airborne operation. As at Vyaz'ma, the men of the parachute units were not at fault, for they were victims of circumstances, the worst of which were higher command planning failures of criminal proportions.

Stavka staff officer and future chief of the General Staff S. M. Shtemenko remarked on the operation but only addressed the most basic failure: "The launching of a massive airborne assault at nighttime bears witness to the ignorance of the organizers of the affair, since experience indicates that the launching of a massive night assault, even on one's own territory, was associated with major difficulties."[38]

The choice of a night operation was deliberate, and those who made the decision were well aware of the risks that a night drop entailed. The Vyaz'ma experience of such drops was available. Beyond that, planning deficiencies for the Dnepr operation would have condemned a daytime drop to abject failure. A Soviet critique of the operation surfaced the basic requirements for any successful airborne operation:

> Experience has affirmed that the conduct of airborne operations demands from commanders and staff a high degree of foresight, an ability to define optimum missions and timing for the landing, sober assessment of combat capabilities of forces designated for the operation, and sharp agreement [coordination] on their actions.[39]

On all these counts, the Dnepr operation was a distinct failure. German critiques echoed this assessment:

> The Russian command lacked the necessary sensitivity for the timing, the area, and the feasibility, as well as a correct evaluation of the German forces in the organization of the joint operation. The whole action carries the stamp of dilettantism. Fundamentally the reasoning was sound, but apparently an expert was lacking to implement the plans. The operation was accordingly a failure.[40]

In their haste to cross the Dnepr River, the Soviets committed the airborne corps without adequate preparation

time.[41] Personnel and aircraft were hastily gathered and poorly coordinated. Responsible headquarters planners did not provide proper equipment and support. They committed the corps into an area where intelligence data on the enemy was virtually lacking, thus feeding the unit to waiting German guns. In his 19 September review of plans, Zhukov warned planners to proceed with prudence. They did not, and the operation failed. In the words of a Soviet critic, "In this regard, the commander of the Airborne Forces deserved a reprimand because he did not draw the appropriate conclusions from the experience of 4th Airborne Corps, which had landed [at Vyaz'ma] in the winter of 1942."[42]

German critics pointed out that both the timing and the location of the airborne drop were ill-advised. An operation conducted against the key Dnepr River bridge at Kanev even as late as 23 September could have resulted in the destruction or Soviet possession of the bridge, the isolation of 24th Panzer Corps on the north bank of the river, and a possible major Soviet bridgehead over the river.[43] The Germans praised the capability of individual airborne unit officers and soldiers:

> There were individual cases . . . where tenacious and fanatic resistance was put up by the Russian soldier. The officers did try to reach the rendezvous according to the sketches captured by the Germans. [However,] captured sketches of the enemy rendezvous areas facilitated the German measures. Whenever Russians were encountered, the German officers took the pertinent measures without needing to consult their superiors.
>
> This explains why there was no long drawn out fighting in the rear of the corps.[44]

Amid the chaos of battle, the Germans did underestimate the strength of the Soviet forces and, hence, the damage inflicted on the Soviet force. According to German records, "of the 1,500 parachutes counted . . . in the area west of the Dnepr line and west of Cherkassy-Rzhishchev it is safe to say the total strength was at least 1,500 to 2,000 men, since it is certain that a considerable number of parachutes were never found or were not seen from the air. During the first two days about two-thirds of the minimum strength had been put out of action."[45] In fact, more than 4,500 Soviet parachutists had dropped into the region.

Even the Vyaz'ma operation had achieved certain tactical and diversionary results. The Vyaz'ma force

survived insertion into the German rear and conducted operations for more than four months, while tying up precious German troops. Not so on the Dnepr; the Dnepr force was spent within a matter of hours after takeoff, and all hope of tactical gain was lost. The few diversionary operations carried out by Sidorchuk's command and the host of other tiny groups scarcely justified the tragic losses the airborne corps endured.

German assessments credited the Soviet airborne drop with having only an extremely limited impact. Thus, "because of the lack of German forces, this area [Kanev region] could never quite be cleared of enemy forces. As a result, it constituted a latent threat to German rear communications and occasionally had unpleasant effects."[46]

The final irony, symbolic of the wasted efforts of the paratroopers, was that in early 1944, when Soviet armies had crossed the Dnepr at virtually every point and pushed deep into the German rear, the only portion of the river still in German hands was that area around Kanev, the October 1943 objective of the airborne corps.

The Dnepr operation ended Soviet operational use of airborne forces. The experiences at Vyaz'ma and on the Dnepr revealed the weaknesses of airborne forces: dependence on weather conditions, great vulnerability, technical deficiencies, and fragile support systems. "In large airborne operations, serious mistakes occurred that reduced the effectiveness of the airborne force. That created in the High Command a hesitation to believe in the use of such airborne forces."[47] For the remainder of the war, major airborne units, whose men had proven their courage and endurance, would serve in a role that the Soviet army was more accustomed and better trained to play, namely, infantry conducting ground operations.

CHAPTER 6

TACTICAL EMPLOYMENT

General

Soviet experiences with tactical airborne operations were more productive than their operational experiences. Because tactical operations involved smaller units (up to a battalion or a regiment) employed at more limited depths (twenty to thirty kilometers) than operational landings, they were better suited to the Soviets' level of expertise and technology during the war years. High-level command controlled such operations more closely, and the shallow depth of employment allowed better coordination between airborne and ground forces.

The missions of units conducting tactical operations were limited in nature and, hence, more easily attainable. Tactical operations usually involved missions that facilitated the ground advance in an army sector, such as engagement of enemy fire delivery systems, disruption of enemy command and control, dislocation of the enemy supply system, and attacks on critical junctions and bridges on the enemy lines of communication. These tactical operations involved relatively small forces in support of a specific unit's advance, so they were of shorter duration. The short duration alone reduced logistical problems, increased the chances of airborne unit survivability, and produced better chances of tactical success. In addition, small groups of men were better able to escape enemy detection during landing and operation. They could avoid the twin threats of enemy ground attacks and damaging air attacks.

Tactical airborne operations, by virtue of their small size and limited duration, resembled diversionary operations. The primary difference between the two was in the intent and, to a degree, the depth of each. Tactical operations occurred close to the front, but small-unit (usually less than a battalion) diversionary operations extended well into the enemy rear. Airborne units performing tactical missions operated in close coordination with forces (usually armies) advancing on a precise axis, and usually linkup was envisioned within a matter of days. Diversionary units usually engaged German objectives deep in the rear of enemy lines of communication or attacked targets whose destruction would weaken the German war effort in general. Diversionary units also conducted special reconnaissance and sabotage

missions deep in the enemy rear. Of course, some operations, such as Odessa in 1941, did not fit neatly into either category.

Overall, however, the Soviets were more satisfied with their tactical and diversionary operations and believed that those types of operations provided greater returns for manpower expended than did the large-scale airborne operations. After the 1943 disaster along the Dnepr, the Soviets restricted themselves to small-scale airdrops. A brief review of the more significant Soviet tactical experiences shows how they fared compared with the operational experiences described earlier.

Teryaeva Sloboda, December 1941

During the Soviet counteroffensive around Moscow during December 1941 and January 1942, the Soviets threw into combat virtually every resource at their disposal to break the back of German Army Group Center. The Soviets were particularly interested in employing those forces and techniques that facilitated deep battle and exploited tactical successes. They sought to use mobile units of every variety, although such units were in short supply at this stage of the war. Among those few mobile units that could lend depth to the battlefield were airborne forces.

The Kalinin Front conducted the first of several tactical airborne operations. Beginning on 5 December, that front opened the Klin operation, an attempt by 30th Army and 1st Shock Army to drive German 3d and 4th Panzer groups from the northern environs of Moscow and, if possible, to destroy them. Pressured by the shock groups of the two Soviet armies, the Germans did withdraw through Klin to establish a new defensive line near Volokolamsk, along the Lama and Ruza rivers.[1] The German retreat took place in subzero weather over snow-covered roads running through the village of Teryaeva Sloboda.

To disrupt the German withdrawal, the Soviets, on the night of 14-15 December, dropped near that village a detachment of 415 paratroopers of the 214th Airborne Brigade, commanded by Capt. I. G. Starchak.[2] Its missions were to destroy bridges, interdict the road, and create general confusion among German forces withdrawing along the road from Klin (which fell to 30th Army on 15 December). For nine days, Starchak's unit harassed the retreating German forces in a wide sector along the roads from Klin to Volokolamsk, from Klin to Novo Petrovskoye, and from Volokolamsk to Lotochino. It repeatedly cut the rail line from Shakhovskaya to Novo Petrovskoye,

interfering with the flow of German logistics.[3] After the Soviet occupation of Volokolamsk on 19 December, Starchak's unit moved west and continued harassing operations for six more days before being withdrawn for use in other operations. If subsequent operations were any indication, the Soviets were pleased with the achievements of Starchak's command. If he did as well as they claimed, the Soviets should have been pleased.

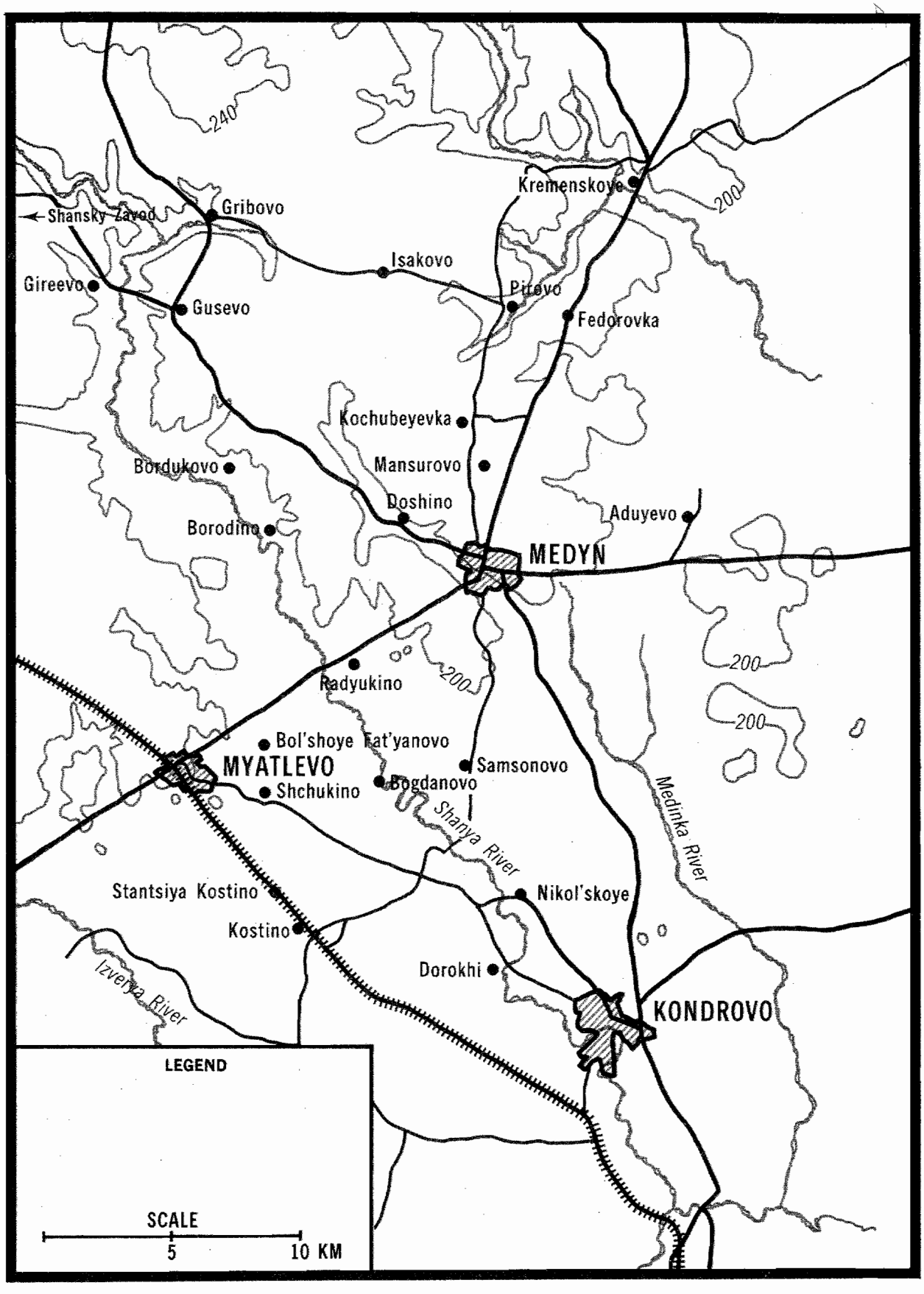
Medyn, January 1942

Apparently satisfied with the results of the earlier tactical airborne drop, Stavka and front planners decided to integrate similar airborne operations into the general Soviet offensive planned for early January 1942. Such airborne operations were also designed to disrupt German command and control and logistical systems, block German withdrawal, and assist the advance of ground armies.

Pursuant to these aims, two associated drops would take place to facilitate the advance of the Western Front. Western Front Directive no. 269 of 9 January amplified earlier Stavka directives by ordering 43d, 49th, and 50th armies and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps to attack from the Kaluga-Maloyaroslavets area against German forces in the Kondrovo, Yukhnov, and Medyn areas (see map 29, p. 116).[4] Two battalion-size airborne landings would occur along the axis of advance of 43d Army in the Medyn area. The parachute landing force consisted of one battalion of the 201st Airborne Brigade, one battalion of the 250th Rifle Regiment, and an airlanded group made up of the remainder of 250th Rifle Regiment, commanded by Maj. N. L. Soldatov, who would command the entire operation.[5]

The planned airborne drop would occur in the German rear along the boundary between 20th and 57th Army corps of German 4th Army. On 29 December, Soviet assaults by 33d and 43d armies on an axis of Maloyaroslavets, Borovsk, and Medyn split the two German corps. The 20th Army Corps recoiled west and northwest of Borovsk where, on 4 January, it was attached to 4th Panzer Army. The 57th Army Corps (34th Infantry, 98th Infantry, and 19th Panzer divisions) and 12th Army Corps of 4th Army, by now fighting as intermingled Kampfgruppen, conducted a fighting retreat westward through deep snow and -30°C temperatures from Maloyaroslavets to Medyn.[6]

On 3 January, the Western Front directed Soldatov to drop his two parachute battalions in the vicinity of Medyn. First, he was to secure landing strips on which to



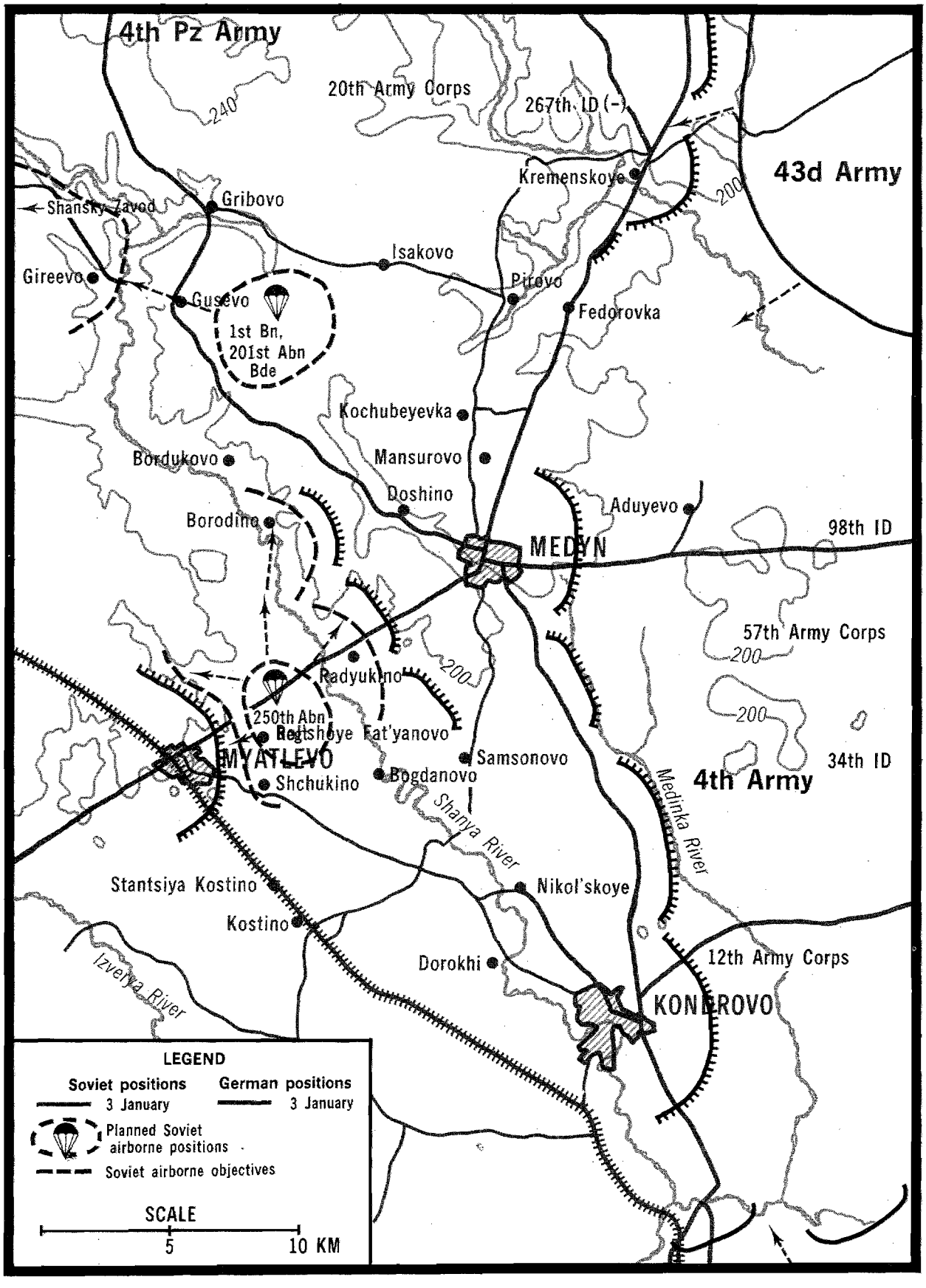
Map 29. Medyn Area

land his regiment (see map 30, p. 118). Then, the units would cut all highways from Medyn to Gzhatsk and Kremenskoye, capture Myatlevo station and temporarily cut the rail line, and block German 4th Army withdrawal routes from Medyn to Yukhnov and movement of German reinforcements to Medyn. They were also expected to fight until the estimated 5 January approach of 43d Army into the area.[7]

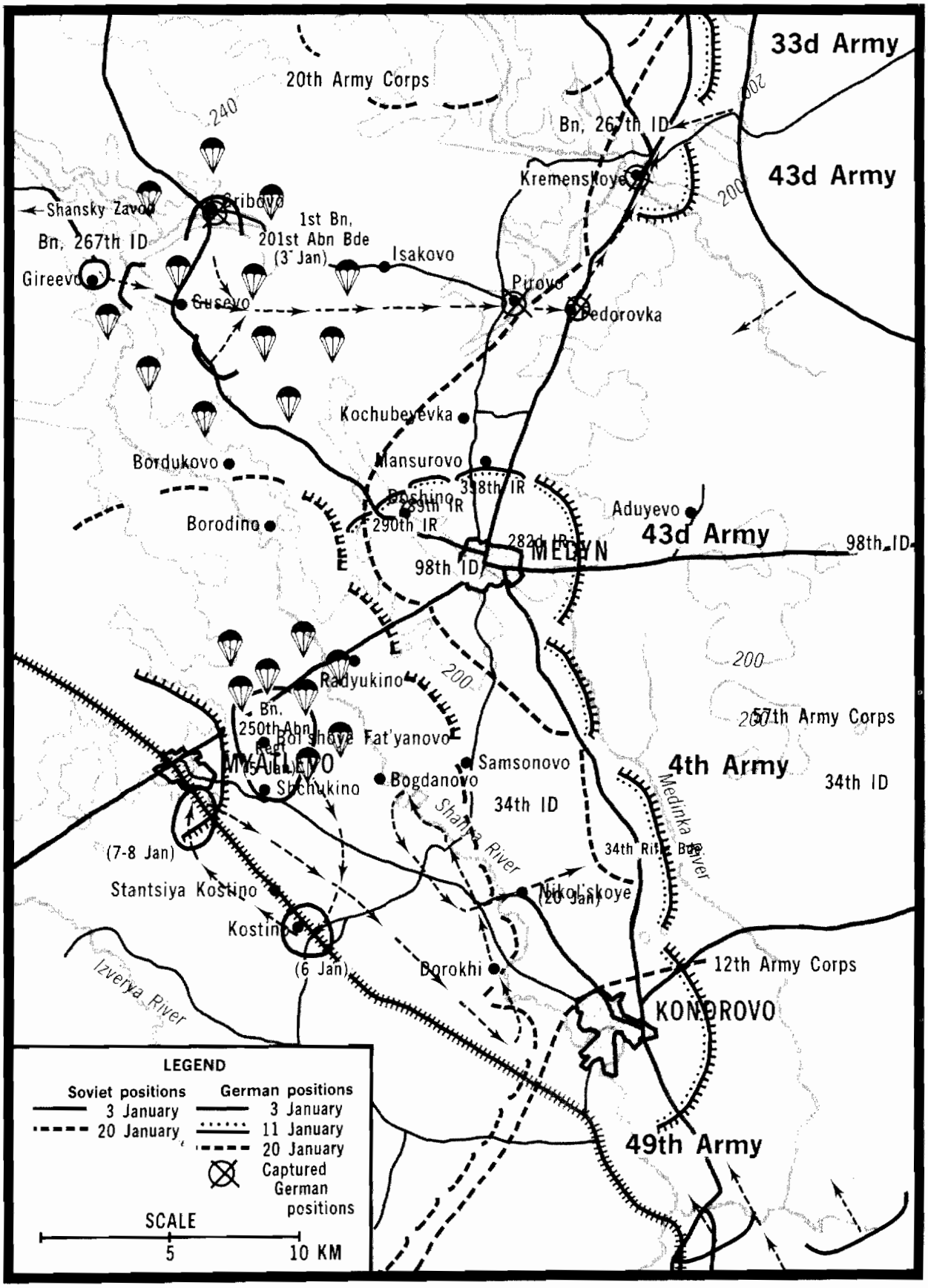
Soldatov assigned Starchak's battalion of the 250th Rifle Regiment the mission of securing the airfield at Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo and holding it until Soldatov's airlanding force arrived. The second parachute detachment, Capt. I. A. Surzhik's battalion of the 201st Airborne Brigade, would land northwest of Medyn near Gusevo, Borduko, and Isakova to capture and hold a bridge over the Shanya River, to occupy Shansky Zavod and Kremenskoye, and, with his main force, to cut the Yukhnov-Medyn highway. After Starchak's battalion captured Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo, Soldatov's main force of 1,300 men was to land there. The scarcity of aircraft available for the operation (twenty-one TB-3s and ten PS-84s) dictated that the operation occur in distinct phases: Surzhik's battalion would land the first day, Starchak's the next.[8]

On the night of 2-3 January, Captain Surzhik led his battalion of 348 men into the Gusevo region (see map 31, p. 119). After assembly, his battalion drove the surprised Germans out of the villages of Gribovo and Maslova, destroyed the bridge over the Shanya River, and established defensive lines. After several days of interdicting the roads northwest from Medyn and repulsing German attempts to reopen the road, Surzhik's battalion moved northeast, capturing several villages and ultimately linking up, after 11 January, with the advancing 43d Army forces at Kremenskoye.[9]

Meanwhile, Major Starchak's battalion, which numbered 416 men instead of the planned 202, attacked Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo and Yukhnov (see map 31, p. 119).[10] After a reconnaissance and air strikes on Medyn, Starchak's battalion would land at the airfield in three stages. A securing group under Capt. A. P. Kabachevsky would jump into the area immediately adjacent to the airfield and secure runway facilities to allow aircraft from the starting command (startovaia kommanda) to land its forces. A security group would establish defensive positions two or three kilometers from the airfield and block any enemy advance. A platoon-size reserve, dropped with the battalion commander onto the airstrip, would respond to any threat that arose on the airfield.



Map 30. Medyn Airborne Operation Plan, 3 January 1942



Map 31. Medyn Operation, 3—20 January 1942

The last element of the battalion to land would be the starting command, equipped to prepare the airfield to receive aircraft. Thirty minutes after the initial parachute drop and immediately after the security group had landed, the starting command would jump. After landing, the starting command would establish landing signals, remove runway obstacles, and receive Major Soldatov's airlanding force. Meanwhile, the battalion would send out reconnaissance patrols in different directions to a distance of five to ten kilometers. If Starchak failed to take the airfield, he was to notify Soldatov and move his battalion north to join Surzhik's forces. Before the operation, each officer and individual trooper was given the plan of operations so each could still carry out his part, even if the plan was disrupted.

On the night of 3-4 January, Major Starchak's parachute group jumped into the airfield and faced heavy resistance. Transport aircraft received heavy German antiaircraft fire throughout the drop, which caused an inaccurate drop and forced some aircraft to return to base without dropping any paratroopers. Starchak assembled about 85 percent of his men and attacked the German garrison. At 0300 on 4 January, the starting command aircraft appeared over the airfield but could not land because of continued enemy resistance below and heavy snow covering the landing strip. So, the starting command returned to its home airfield. On 4 January, Starchak continued to fight for the airfield. By nightfall, he had secured it, and his battalion had established a perimeter defense around the field, as well as the villages of Bol'shoye and Maloye Fat'yanovo and Shchukino. The following day, front sent two MiG and one U-2 aircraft to establish communications with Starchak's unit, but this attempt failed. Although the U-2 did land, it quickly flew off when it mistook Starchak's men for Germans. Heavy snow throughout 5 and 6 January also hindered establishment of communications and covered the runways. In such deteriorating conditions, front headquarters canceled Soldatov's landing and ordered Starchak's battalion to operate independently.

On 5 January, Major Starchak's battalion left Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo to conduct diversionary attacks against German installations. At Kostino, he destroyed a bridge, and then on the night of 7-8 January, he captured Myatlevo station, destroying two trains and twenty-eight German tanks. From 8 to 19 January, Starchak's battalion operated southward from Medyn to the Kondrovo area, ambushing German supply convoys and harassing withdrawing German forces. The battalion also destroyed bridges across the Shanya River at Bogdanov, Samsonovo, and

Yakubovsky. These bridges were critical to an orderly German withdrawal. Finally, on 20 January, the remnants of the battalion, eighty-seven men, including the wounded Starchak, linked up with the advancing 34th Separate Rifle Brigade of 43d Army near Nikol'skoye on the Shanya River.[11] The rest of Starchak's command had perished during the seventeen days of combat.

Starchak had accomplished his basic mission and secured the airfield at Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo. Inadequate reconnaissance, however, had not detected the actual size of the German garrison, and it took longer than planned to attain the objective. Moreover, better air cover might have improved the operation's success. Planners had also failed to consider weather conditions, predictably severe in January. Thus, Major Soldatov's larger operation failed. Though Major Starchak had shown flexibility and initiative in undertaking the diversionary tasks and his men had endured a long, difficult operation, the overall operation revealed deficiencies that would plague subsequent larger Soviet airborne operations.

Zhelan'ye, January 1942

The next tactical airborne operation occurred hard on the heels of the operation at Medyn. Likewise, it included veterans who had planned or conducted the earlier operation. The operation coincided with the expanded Soviet January offensive into the flanks of Army Group Center and with growing Soviet hopes to envelop the entire German strategic grouping. By mid-January, the left wing of the Western Front had penetrated German defenses south of Yukhnov with 50th and 10th armies, spearheaded by Maj. Gen. P. A. Belov's 1st Guards Cavalry Corps. The attack hit German 4th Army's left flank and tore a major gap between 4th Army and 2d Panzer Army. On 4th Army's right, 43d Army Corps fell back toward Yukhnov, while 40th Motorized Corps, using small Kampfgruppen, tried to stave off Soviet forces driving into the German's rear on 43d Army Corps's right flank.[12] Simultaneously, while the Soviet 43d and 49th armies pressed German 4th Army units back toward Yukhnov from the east, 33d Army threatened Yukhnov from the north. North and east of Yukhnov, a twenty-kilometer gap existed between 20th Army Corps of 4th Panzer Army and 57th Army Corps of 4th Army. The divisions of 57th Army Corps, with other units of 4th Army's 12th and 13th Army corps, were withdrawing into prepared positions along the Shanya River west of Medyn. These positions covered the northern, eastern, and southern approaches to Yukhnov. The 4th Army's left flank, however, was suspended in midair. The 98th

Infantry Division of 57th Panzer Corps, reinforced by the 52d Infantry Division, watched helplessly as Soviet 33d Army divisions marched through the deep snow westward past 98th Infantry Division's left flank in the Domashnevo area north of Myatlevo.[13] On 13 January, Col. Gen. Franz Halder noted in his diary, "The gap north of Medyn is as perturbing as ever."[14] The Stavka and Western Front wanted 33d Army to advance to Vyaz'ma and to link up there with 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, moving from the south, thus sealing the envelopment of a major portion of German Army Group Center. Before that linkup, however, Belov's cavalry corps had to penetrate newly established German defenses along the Moscow-Warsaw highway southwest of Yukhnov. The Western Front decided to conduct a tactical airborne operation north of the highway to assist Belov's crossing of that historic artery. The 250th Airborne Regiment and the 1st and 2d battalions of the 201st Airborne Brigade would land forty kilometers south of Vyaz'ma near Znamenka, Zhelan'ye, and Lugi, a region thirty-five to forty kilometers behind the German front lines (see map 32, p. 233).[15] Using skis for mobility after their landing, the Soviet forces could block German use of the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov highway and the Vyaz'ma-Bryansk railroad line, thereby disrupting German supply efforts. They would also attack the German Yukhnov group from the rear, thus easing Belov's task.

Soviet aerial reconnaissance indicated that a German division headquarters, supply units, and an infantry battalion garrisoned Znamenka. Another German battalion guarded an ammunition depot at nearby Godunovka. A major German headquarters was at Podsosenki, and elements of an infantry battalion were strung out at Klimov Zavod, Sidorovskoye, and Sinyukovo. Farther west, one battalion each garrisoned Debryansky and Ugra station.[16] Deep snow isolated these garrison strongpoints from one another, for only the main roads remained open to traffic.

The airborne force completed outfitting and training at Vnukovo airfield under supervision of the air force administration of the Western Front. Then, by 17 January, the units and aircraft had finished their combat preparations. Twenty-one PS-84 aircraft would make the landing effort. These aircraft had been assembled from the civil air fleet, with several TB-3 bombers of the 23d Bomber Aviation Division available to transport 45-mm antitank guns.[17]

It was supposed to be a three-stage descent. First, the 1st and 2d battalions, 201st Airborne Brigade, would jump and secure Znamenka airfield, organize all-round

defense, and prepare to receive the starting command and airlanded group. Second, the starting command would arrive to set up a control area for the main landing. Third, thirty minutes after the starting command landed, the main force of the 250th Airborne Regiment would begin landing, transported in two to three aircraft groups to avoid congestion at the landing strip.[18]

At 0335 on 18 January, the first sixteen planeloads of paratroopers departed Vnukovo, and, by 0900, 425 men of the 201st Airborne Brigade had dropped between Znamenka and Zhelan'ye (see map 33, p. 234). A second group of ten aircraft flew in the next night, but bad weather forced some of the aircraft to abort their drops. So, only about 200 more men jumped, bringing the total to 642 men, lightly armed with mortars and antitank rifles. The starting command (sixty-five men) landed at 1750 on 18 January from four PS-84 aircraft. Guided in by partisans, the planes landed at night, in snow fifty to sixty centimeters deep, on an unfamiliar field, only 1.5 to 2 kilometers from enemy-occupied Znamenka.[19] The aircraft lacked skis, so only one was able to take off after discharging its cargo. German troops destroyed the remaining aircraft the next day.

After landing, Captain Surzhik's 1st Battalion, 201st Airborne Brigade, assembled near Zhelan'ye and attacked the Znamenka airfield. But they were unable to break through the strong German defenses, so paratroopers and the starting command near Znamenka disengaged from German forces and joined Surzhik's command at Zhelan'ye after a march through knee-deep snow.

Throughout the nineteenth, Captain Surzhik's men, partisans, and local inhabitants prepared a landing strip northwest of Plesnovo.[20] On the twentieth, Surzhik was able to radio headquarters, "Landing on wheels is possible . . . send [the remaining force] urgently. Surzhik."[21]

Despite unfavorable weather and heavy German artillery fire, an additional 1,100 troops landed in the Zhelan'ye area, although the force had had to resort to only night landings from 20 to 22 January. These landings brought total strength at Zhelan'ye up to 1,643 men. During the landings, the Germans shot down three Soviet aircraft, killed twenty-seven paratroopers, and wounded nine others.[22]

The airborne force began fighting within hours after landing. One company of the 2d Battalion, 201st Airborne Brigade, cut the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov highway near Zamosh'ye and Murashovka and captured fifty-four German supply

wagons. Two German companies with artillery support counterattacked the company during two days of heavy fighting.

Meanwhile, the 43d, 49th, and 50th armies of the Western Front battered German positions at and southwest of Yukhnov, and the 1st Cavalry Corps appeared ready to strike across the Moscow-Warsaw highway. On 20 January, General of the Army G. K. Zhukov, the Western Front commander, radioed Major Soldatov, the 250th Airborne Regiment commander, to accomplish the following missions:

> By the morning of 21 January, with part of your force, secure Klyuchi, establish communications with Belov, and cooperate with him by striking blows against the enemy in the direction of Lyudinovo.

Zhukov soon expanded his original order:

> First--do not leave the Znamenka, Zhelan'ye, Lugi area, at any cost hold the region, and occupy Znamenka; second--our units [units of 33d Army] on 22 January enter the Temkino area with the mission of establishing communication with you; third--give help to Belov with part of your force, for example, two battalions; fourth--at all costs halt enemy movement along the Yukhnov-Vyaz'ma highroad.[23]

Major Soldatov sent the 1st and 2d battalions, 201st Airborne, under Captain Surzhik to attack Klyuchi and Lyudinovo (see map 34, p. 235). On the twenty-second, they moved southward through the deep snow at an agonizingly slow pace. During the march, they eliminated small German garrisons at Tat'yanino, Borodino, Aleksandrovka, Andryanovka, and Novaya. Surzhik's force reached Tynovka on 28 January and met Belov's 1st Cavalry Corps, which had cut the Warsaw road only the day before.

While Surzhik linked up with Belov's cavalry, Soldatov's 250th Airborne Regiment and A. A. Petrukhin's partisan detachment attacked Znamenka on the nights of 22 and 23 January. Strong Soviet attacks failed to dislodge the German garrison. Simultaneously, the 3d Battalion, 250th Regiment, and a company of the 1st Battalion, 201st Regiment, fought Germans on the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov road. To the west, the 1st Battalion, 250th Regiment, attacked German positions at Ugra station and cut the Vyaz'ma-Bryansk rail line at two locations.[24]

On 24 January, front ordered Soldatov to "reconnoiter [German positions] in the direction of Starosel'ye, and

Semlevo" (fifteen kilometers southwest of Vyaz'ma), which added yet another mission to the 250th Regiment.[25] The next day, units of the regiment captured Gorodyanka and prepared an attack on Bogatyri and Lipniki along the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov road.

Until the twenty-ninth, the area of 250th Regiment's operations expanded, especially eastward along the Vyaz'ma-Yukhnov road. Although several sections of the road were cut, the important town of Znamenka remained under German control even after heavy Soviet airborne attacks on the night of 29-30 January.

On 31 January, the 250th Airborne Regiment linked up with Belov's cavalry en route to Vyaz'ma and then moved northward. On 2 February, when 1st Guards Cavalry Corps reached the southeast approaches to Vyaz'ma, where it joined newly arrived 8th Airborne Brigade, the 250th Regiment moved northeast to join advanced elements of 33d Army approaching Vyaz'ma from the east. Two days later, the regiment joined the 329th Rifle Division of 33d Army so that both units could fight as a regular combined arms unit in the ensuing battle of encirclement.

The operations of 250th Airborne Regiment and 1st and 2d battalions, 201st Airborne Regiment, were a success. They secured a base area in the German rear, disrupted German logistics and communications, and assisted the advance of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps. The airdrop and airlanding went fairly well--most of the force landed--and, once on the ground, units performed their multiple missions well, despite organizational and equipment limitations.

The problems of the operation again resulted from planners' mistakes. The operation was too long. Equipped with only light weapons and lacking armor and even medium artillery, the airborne force had to operate for fifteen days isolated from the main force.[26] During that time, the front assigned them too many missions and thus fragmented airborne strength. Front had an exaggerated notion of what a small force could accomplish. The five-day landing period was too long, cost the unit the element of surprise, and permitted the Germans to organize their defenses and counterattacks accordingly.

The landing operation suffered because the starting command landed at a different airfield from the parachute force and, even worse, less than two kilometers from German-held Znamenka. Furthermore, during the operation, troops had difficultly on skis, indicating a lack of good training.

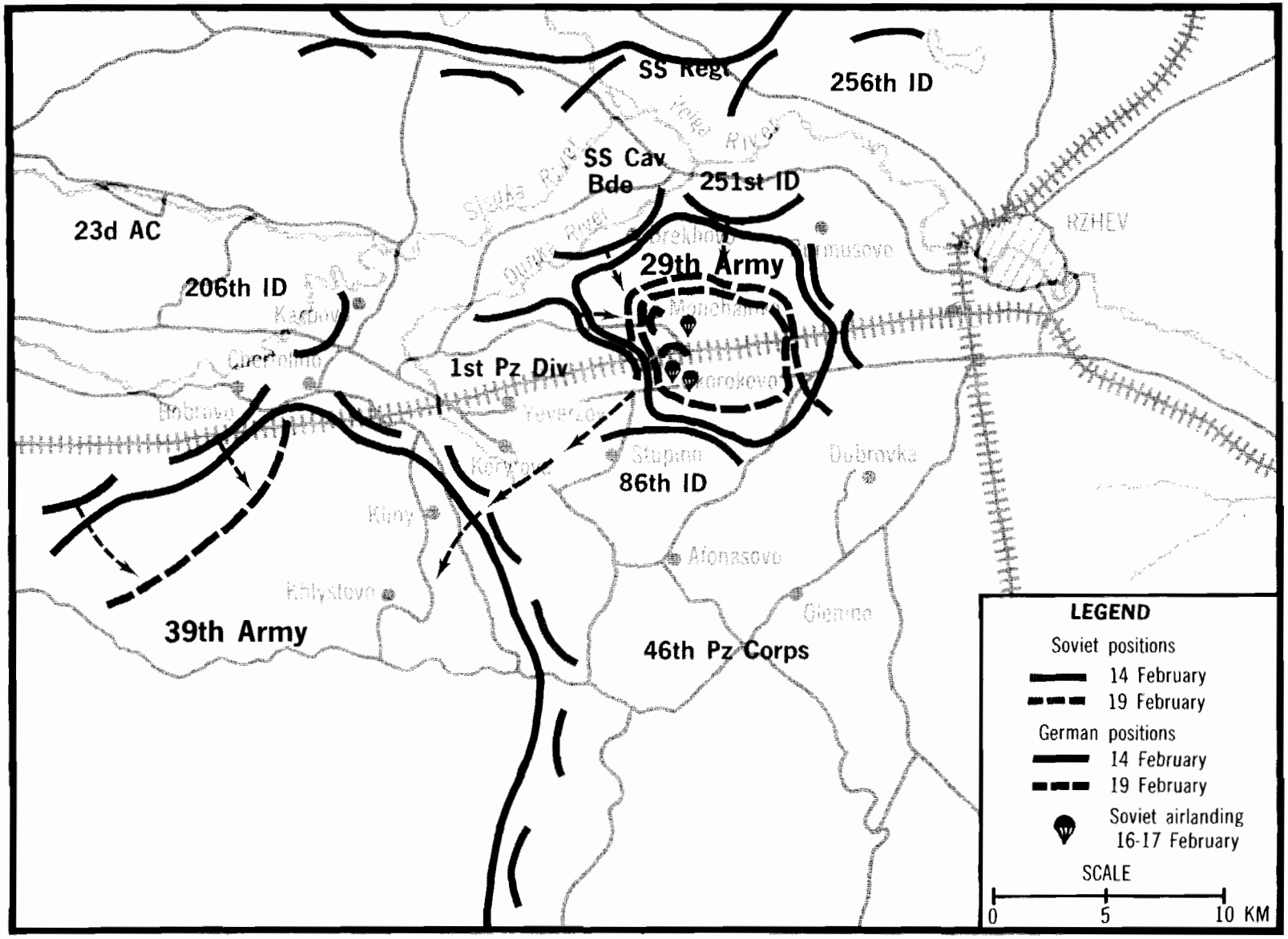
On the positive side, the regiment did accomplish its mission, and it proved the utility of operating with partisan detachments, which was mutually beneficial. This operation launched the long, complicated string of airborne operations collectively known as the Vyaz'ma airborne operation.

Rzhev, February 1942

Ongoing Soviet airborne operations in January and February 1942 aimed at encircling German forces on the approaches to Moscow, but one operation was to do the reverse--assist Soviet forces trapped in a German encirclement. After the attack by the Kalinin Front in late January, the 39th and 29th armies, led by the 11th Cavalry Corps, pushed southward west of Rzhev toward Vyaz'ma. In early February, however, German 9th Army forces counterattacked and trapped 29th Army southwest of Rzhev.[27] The Kalinin Front commander ordered 29th Army to break out of the trap and to rejoin 39th Army to the southwest. He also mounted an airborne operation designed to reinforce encircled forces and to help 29th Army break out.

The 4th Battalion, 204th Airborne Brigade, of Sr. Lt. P. L. Belotserkovsky took off from Lyubertsy airfield to jump into the Monchalovo-Okorokovo area (see map 35, p. 127). Signal fires arranged in the form of triangles and squares marked the drop zone in the middle of the 29th Army area. Officers acquainted all personnel with the names of villages in the drop zone and provided junior commanders sketches of the drop zone.

The 500-man battalion jumped from two flights of aircraft on the night of 16-17 February.[28] But because the entire operational area--friendly as well as enemy--was ablaze with fires of one sort or another, the planned signal system failed. At least 100 men did not drop. Those who jumped did so from heights of 300 to 400 meters. In spite of heavy antiaircraft fire, no aircraft were lost. The seven-by-eight-kilometer encirclement area was subject to heavy German artillery fire. Moreover, German troops had penetrated into the encircled Soviets' defensive perimeter. Paratroopers literally landed in active fighting and had great difficulty assembling and finding the supplies and heavy weapons that had been dropped in "soft bags."[29] German submachine gunners contested the landing, while a German infantry company with several tanks threatened Okorokovo from the northeast.



Map 35. Rzhev Operation, February 1942

Lieutenant Borismansky's company landed at Okorokovo where it defended the northeast approaches to the town from the morning of the sixteenth until 1700 on the seventeenth. The 2d Company's assistant commander defended Monchalovo against repeated German infantry and tank attacks. Lieutenant Kovalevsky's 1st Company, along with a portion of Lieutenant Brusintsy's 2d Company, engaged in a house-to-house, street-to-street battle over Everzovo.

On the sixteenth, the battalion commander, Senior Lieutenant Belotserkovsky, gathered sixty men south of Okorokovo and finally joined Lieutenant Borismansky's group northeast of the town. Only by nightfall on 17 February had the battalion commander finally succeeded in reassembling his command and establishing communications with the 29th Army commander.

For several days thereafter, the battalion supported 29th Army's breakout to the southwest by covering the flanks and rear of the withdrawing Soviet forces. Especially heavy fighting occurred at Zabrody where the battalion repulsed repeated German attacks. After suffering heavy casualties, the battalion, on 22 February, followed remnants of 29th Army into 39th Army lines.

The operation at Rzhev differed from other airborne operations because its intent was simply to reinforce an encircled unit. Whether 29th Army could have broken free of German encirclement without airborne assistance is a moot point. Using such a small force for such a hazardous operation was indicative of the extremity of 29th Army's position. The actual drop experienced the same technical and coordination problems that previous drops had endured. Repeatedly facing the same problems surely must have adversely affected unit capabilities and performance in battle.

Kerch-Feodosiya, December 1941-January 1942

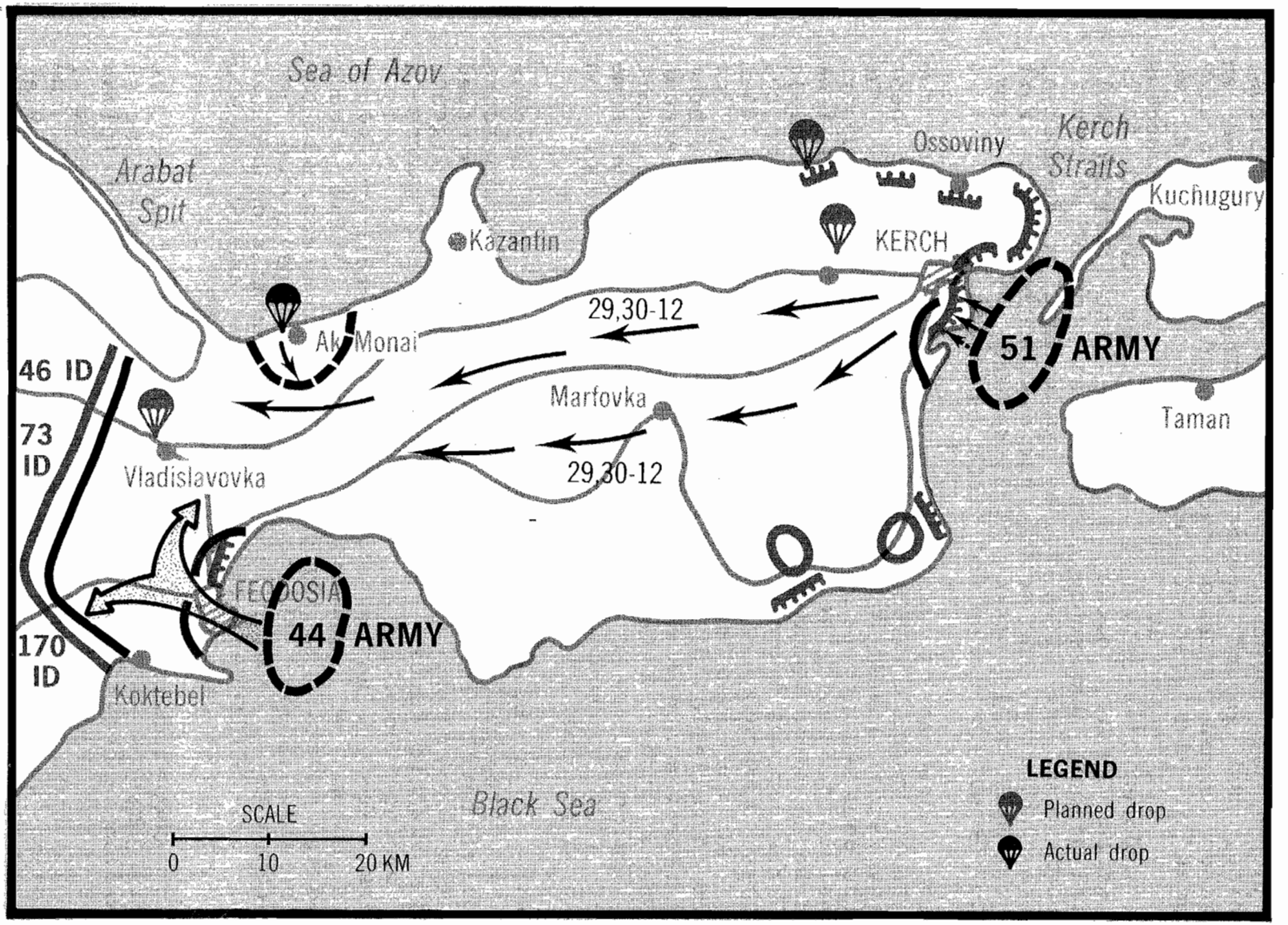
Although the focus of war remained fixed on the approaches to Moscow, the German offensive tide also swept across the plains of southern Russia. By October, German armies had conquered the Ukraine and reached the Don Basin. Col. Gen. E. Manstein's 11th German Army surged into the Crimea, besieged the Soviet naval base at Sevastopol, and drove Soviet forces from the Kerch peninsula, the eastern extremity of the Crimea. In early December, while Manstein reduced Sevastopol, the Stavka ordered the Transcaucasus Front to prepare an operation to recapture the Kerch peninsula, raise the siege of Sevastopol, and expel Manstein from the Crimea.

The operation was an overly ambitious one. On 13 December, the Stavka ordered two armies and elements of the Black Sea Fleet to conduct a joint amphibious, airborne, and ground operation.[30] They confronted an estimated German force of two divisions and two cavalry brigades at the eastern end of the peninsula and two infantry regiments at Feodosiya.[31] The Transcaucasus Front ordered 51st Army and the Black Sea Fleet to force the Kerch Strait, occupy Kerch and the Turkish wall fortifications, and subsequently attack toward Ak Monai. The 44th Army and fleet forces would land at Feodosiya, capture that city, and occupy various nearby towns. Part of 44th Army would attack Marfovka and, with 51st Army, destroy German forces on the Kerch peninsula.[32]

The airborne forces' role was to support the amphibious assault with a parachute company drop near Baragova station west of Kerch (see map 36, p. 130). The paratroopers would capture a base of operations to support a naval force landing at Cape Zyuk. An airborne unit from 2d Airborne Corps would capture the Vladislavovka airfield for Transcaucasus Front aviation units to use. After the landings, parachute units would be subordinate to 44th Army. At the last moment, however, high seas and ice forced cancellation of the Ak Monai landing. The airborne units received a new mission from front: land near Arabat and block either a German advance down the Arabat spit from Genichesk or a German withdrawal along the same route. The commander of airborne forces planned and conducted the operation.

While Major Nyashin's airborne battalion at Krasnodar airfield prepared for the drop, small reconnaissance groups of naval paratroopers carrying radios were dropped into the German rear to collect and transmit intelligence to the assault force. On 31 December, during extremely poor weather conditions, the force took off in TB-3 bombers. Heavy cloud cover forced the aircraft to fly in single column at substantial intervals. Thick clouds forced the aircraft to fly at seventy-five meters, too low for a safe drop. After the aircraft navigator had threatened Major Nyashin with aborting the mission because of the low altitude, the two agreed to ascend to 450 meters in the clouds just before the jump.[33]

In those harrowing conditions, the paratroopers finally jumped. As they fell, Germans troops escorting an ammunition convoy fired machine guns at the helpless troops. Heavy winds dispersed the paratroopers. Assembly was difficult, but the dispersion also created the impression among the Germans that a much larger Soviet force was landing. Heavy but fragmented fighting followed



Map 36. Kerch-Feodosiya Operation, December 1941—January 1942

the drop. Small groups of paratroopers painstakingly infiltrated past German strongpoints and advanced on Ak Monai. When the battalion had assembled enough men, it attacked and captured a German artillery position on the north flank of the Ak Monai defenses. Early on 1 January 1942, the battalion had occupied defenses at Ak Monai and across the base of the Arabat spit.

Meanwhile, 44th Army occupied Feodosiya and advanced ten to fifteen kilometers inland to Vladislavovka, but there the Germans stood fast and prevented a Soviet encirclement of their forces. As the Germans withdrew westward, the Soviet airborne force split into diversionary groups and harassed retreating German forces. The paratroopers were later replaced by a naval infantry unit. The front commander's decision to cancel the airborne drop designed to secure Vladislavovka airfield for Soviet fighters meant that Soviet forces would lack effective air cover during the entire offensive.[34]

Although the Kerch-Feodosiya airborne landing was a relatively small operation, less than battalion size, it suffered the same ills as the larger operations. Its size was insufficient to achieve its assigned mission. Bad weather hindered landing operations, and reconnaissance had failed to detect enemy strength and dispositions. At the command level, planners vacillated between objectives and thus were unable to tailor a force suited to the mission. As in other operations, the airborne force landed in dangerous conditions, but, once on the ground, the forces acted resolutely. The battalion commander displayed initiative when conditions seemed appropriate for him to change the unit's mission. The operation was a microcosm of other unsuccessful Soviet operations by larger airborne units.

Diversionary Operations

Diversionary operations were the most numerous and, perhaps, the most successful type of airborne operation the Soviets conducted. Diversionary operations varied in mission and size. Small landing parties struck at objectives deep in the enemy rear. Others simply established contact with an organized partisan band to raid German rear areas. Larger reconnaissance or sabotage groups reported on enemy dispositions and troop movements or attacked important enemy installations. Operations by these groups kept the German enemy rear in turmoil and tied down in a security role German forces that could have been put to better use at the front. At the other

extreme, small organized groups conducted diversionary raids in support of operations by other ground elements. Often, diversionary operations sought to achieve political, as well as military, aims. The following examples illustrate their diversity.

In early July 1941, German forces drove deep into the Ukraine. The 204th Airborne Brigade organized more than ten landings in the enemy rear, usually at night, to attack German lines of communication and logistical facilities.[35] Airborne forces bypassed or encircled in the initial German offensive routinely undertook such diversionary operations in the enemy rear areas. These operations were the earliest manifestations of the significant partisan network that in later years grew throughout German-occupied territory, particularly in Belorussia.

A well-organized diversionary operation with direct tactical implications occurred during the defense of Odessa in September 1941.[36] After months under siege by Rumanian and German forces, the Soviet garrison counterattacked with seaborne, airborne, and garrison forces. The sea assault and the garrison's sortie were supposed to be simultaneous. During the artillery preparation, thirty minutes before the assault, twenty-three parachutists were dropped near a German communications complex and along the probable route of enemy reinforcements. The small group's surprise attack on 22 September paralyzed the enemy. With little resistance, parachutists linked up with the amphibious assault group that evening. The next day, with the enemy withdrawing, the airborne and naval force joined the Odessa garrison. This local victory forced two Rumanian divisions to withdraw to new positions farther from the Odessa harbor and permitted the safe evacuation of the garrison from Odessa to Sevastopol in the Crimea in early October.[37]

During the critical months of the fall of 1942, German forces advanced to Stalingrad and into the Caucasus. German aircraft operating from Maikop raised havoc at Soviet installations along the Black Sea.[38] On the night of 24 October, forty paratroopers, transported in TB-3 and PS-84 aircraft, raided the Maikop airfield. Partisan guides led the way as the paratroopers dropped on and nearby the airfield. After an hour-long struggle, the Germans finally drove off the airborne force, which had destroyed twenty-two of the German's fifty-four aircraft and damaged another twenty. Fourteen paratroopers were killed.

Other small drops of from 80 to 200 men occurred in support of the Novorossiisk amphibious landing of February 1943, the Kursk operation of July 1943, and an operation near Polessk in September 1943.

Perhaps the most interesting airborne operations were conducted during the Soviet Manchurian offensive of August 1945.* Late in that operation, after Soviet troops had penetrated deeply into Manchuria and after the Japanese command had decided to surrender, twenty airborne landings brought Soviet soldiers to major Manchurian and Korean cities and Japanese command installations. In Manchuria, these landing detachments ranged from 150 to 500 men. All forces were airlanded without reconnaissance and sometimes in an atmosphere of uncertainty about Japanese reactions. The landings were as much political as military in their aims, for they sought to reinforce Japanese intentions to surrender, hasten disarmament of the sometimes recalcitrant Japanese troops, and establish a Soviet presence in Manchuria.[39] The Manchurian airborne assaults were forerunners of Soviet paratroop landings in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Soviet diversionary operations were more successful than larger operations. They were more economical in terms of manpower, and they could be mounted by limited means and with more primitive techniques. Although their direct dividends were sometimes not readily apparent, their long-term influence mounted. They were a useful adjunct to the successful partisan warfare of 1943 and 1944. Since the war, the Soviets have viewed diversionary operations with considerable interest.

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*See Lt. Col. David M. Glantz, August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria, Leavenworth Papers no. 7, and August Storm: Soviet Tactical and Operational Combat in Manchuria, 1945, Leavenworth Papers no. 8 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, February 1983 and June 1983 respectively).

CHAPTER 7

THE POSTWAR YEARS

The Intellectual Context

During the inevitable demobilization of the immediate postwar years, the Soviet Union concentrated its analytical energies on building an armed force to guarantee its security and its emerging sphere of influence. Another objective was to advance Soviet interest whenever possible. If a single slogan has personified Soviet attitudes since the almost messianic seizure of Berlin in May 1945, it has been the words so often seen in print, on walls, and on placards in the Soviet Union, "Nikto ne zabyt, nichto ne zabyto" (No one will forget, nothing will be forgotten). Accordingly, the Soviet Union examined the historical lessons of the recent past and proceeded to build for the future.

The military was no exception. The historical lessons of the late war loomed large. For the Soviets, it had been the ultimate struggle (equivalent in Stalin's view to nuclear war) out of which would emerge ultimate truths. Never before in history had such a titanic struggle been waged--a twentieth century Kulturkampf (war of culture)--in which only one culture could emerge supreme. The Soviet Union had won, but at tremendous cost and sacrifice and against tremendous odds. The victory confirmed for the Soviets the validity of not only their military theory but also their political ideology, and it proved that the Soviet military could absorb the shock of major defeats, learn from those defeats, and win. Thus, original Soviet military theory, the events and lessons of war, and the postwar theory that emerged victorious had an aura of truth, tried and tested in the heat of war as it was. Security for future generations demanded that those truths be transmitted to younger military officers as accurately and in as much detail as possible. The historical study of war experience and technique was the essential base from which to derive subsequent theory. By extension, without such a historical basis, present theory could not be understood. Obviously, as a counterpoint, or antithesis, to the thesis of that emerging theory stood the technological changes since 1945. Today in the Soviet Union, a synthesis of those elements exists: the tried and true techniques and theory of the past juxtaposed against and modified by the technological changes that have occurred since the profound experiences of the Great Patriotic War.

The Soviet Union reformed its military establishment in 1946, and theories, practices, and organizations judged to have contributed most to victory were emphasized. Taken from 1944-45, the offensive model stressed deep operations; maneuver; and judicious use of massed armor, artillery, and airpower to effect success on the battlefield. Combined arms armies remained the numerically most important element of the Soviet force structure. These armies were organized into rifle corps and rifle divisions, just as in the late war years, but now they also contained integrated tank and mechanized elements. Mechanized armies of mechanized and tank divisions, as the heirs to the wartime tank armies, mechanized corps, and tank corps, emerged as the Soviet army's powerful mobile force and, as such, received the most attention and resources. The Soviet Union also maintained as many as ten airborne divisions in the immediate postwar years as an adjunct to its large, increasingly mechanized army. But the real emphasis remained on mechanized ground warfare, and airborne forces played only an auxiliary role. Stalin's view of war, in general (reflected in his "Permanent Operating Factors"), plus his skeptical view of airborne operations, in particular, and the absence of a sufficient technological base to sustain airborne operations relegated large airborne forces to the realm of theory rather than practice.[1]

Theoretical study of airborne warfare, however, continued. Soviet military theorists intensely studied war experiences to refine the precise missions airborne forces should perform. Theoretical missions were extensive, reaching into the strategic realm.[2] Theorists also investigated airborne organizations, planning, equipment, delivery techniques, and methods of ground operations. Despite this intellectual activity, there remained severe reservations about the real utility and survivability of airborne forces in modern mechanized combat. The ghosts of Vyaz'ma and the Dnepr were too vivid. While Stalin lived, guards airborne divisions did exist, but those divisions were copies of the guards airborne divisions of the late war years. A model for the Soviet army, they were elite divisions, well trained and well equipped. Prospects for these show troops being used in actual airborne warfare would remain remote until Stalinist doubts as to their effectiveness had faded and airborne forces had an efficient airborne transport to the battlefield and had equipment to ensure survival in battle. Sophisticated theory, elaboration of missions, and organizational adjustments would develop in tandem with technological changes--changes that would soon occur

and that would result in a rejuvenation of airborne warfare theory and practice.

The Stalinist Years: 1946-53

The general postwar reorganization of the armed forces also affected airborne units. At the highest command levels, the air force lost control of airborne forces when they became directly subordinate to the Ministry of Defense in June 1946. The position of commander of airborne forces was reestablished, and Col. Gen. V. V. Glagolev was appointed the first postwar commander (April 1946).[3]

During the demobilization, new airborne divisions emerged from rifle divisions and guards airborne brigades. The new guards airborne divisions were organized under airborne corps headquarters control and paralleled the organizational structure of a rifle division. They lacked, however, the heavy weapons that augmented rifle division TOEs in the postwar years (that is, the medium tank and self-propelled gun regiment).[4] The new units had both organic parachute and airlanded (glider-delivered) regiments. Controlled by the aviation of airborne troops branch of the air force, air transport divisions consisted of transport and glider regiments and provided lift capability within the airborne corps. An airborne corps had from two to three guards airborne divisions and an air transport division.[5]

The weaponry available to the units and the air-delivery means provided by the air force determined both the potential combat role of these airborne divisions and unit training, which was rather limited at first. Until basic technological changes occurred, training and combat use had to be patterned after World War II operations and therefore were limited in scope. Thus, "in the first postwar years, real changes in the means of fulfilling military missions by airborne forces did not occur. It is fully understandable because there were changes in neither the techniques nor means of landing."[6] Airborne divisions were combined arms operational-tactical divisions that operated in close concert with tank and mechanized forces and aviation units during front offensive operations.

Front operations in 1946-53 aimed at overcoming enemy army group defenses to a depth of 150 to 200 kilometers by means of successive army operations. The front's operational formation consisted of a first echelon of combined arms armies, a front mobile group of a mechanized

army and a second echelon, plus front aviation, airborne forces (one to two divisions), a front antiaircraft group, and a reserve. An army organized itself into a first echelon of several rifle corps; a second echelon of a rifle corps or several rifle divisions; an army artillery group; an army antiaircraft group; and combined arms, antitank, tank, engineer, and chemical reserves. Sometimes, an army employed a mobile group of a separate mechanized or tank division.[7]

Front operations had a close mission of first penetrating the enemy army group defense and then encircling and destroying the enemy force. First-echelon combined arms armies performed this mission. The front's subsequent mission was to develop the offensive with mechanized armies to destroy enemy operational and strategic reserves.[8] The front's and army's operational frontage and depth of mission increased, compared with norms of the third period of the Great Patriotic War. The Soviets expected the duration of front and army operations to be shorter than had been the case during the war years.

In front operations, airborne forces operated to operational depths (100 kilometers) to assist the mechanized armies in exploiting the initial breakthrough. Airborne operations were an integral part of front offensive operations or amphibious operations.[9] Furthermore, after 1950 Soviet theorists visualized potential use of airborne forces in separate sectors, in conjunction with other ground, naval, and air forces, to achieve strategic offensive missions. Specially prepared rifle forces, military transport, front aviation, and antiaircraft forces (PVO Strany) would be attached to the airborne force on such occasions.[10]

Because of the light nature of the airborne force and limited transport aviation, the guiding principles for the use of airborne forces were the same as during the Great Patriotic War. Airborne forces would be

> landing in limited regions, securing and holding objectives until the arrival of main front forces. Missions were thus passive. The depth of landings did not exceed 20 to 100 kilometers, and the length of independent combat action was comparatively short. Air transport of that time, the IL-12 and IL-14 aircraft were able to land only personnel with light weapons, including 82-mm mortars.[11]

Even more modern aircraft were in relatively short supply. The official 50 Years of the Soviet Armed Forces

stated, "however, in the airborne forces there remained not a few of the obsolete aircraft (IL-2) with low speed and cargo capacity. Therefore, for towing gliders and transport of heavy equipment TU-2 and TU-4 [bombers] supplied by the air force were used."[12] This limitation changed after 1950, when large numbers of modern aircraft became available.

Foreign assessments recognized the overall Soviet airborne employment concepts and the emphasis on surprise, deception, and use of darkness. A U.S. assessment noted

> the Soviets believe that airborne troops should be used as a surprise element and should be employed in sufficient strength to insure successful operation against the selected objective. The enemy rear and flanks are probable areas of employment. Darkness and deception are used in order to strike the enemy when and where he least expects it. The airborne assault includes paratroopers and air-landed troops transported by either helicopter or cargo aircraft or both. Although gliders may be used, helicopters and assault-type aircraft are expected to play the primary role.[13]

Although the materiel status of airborne units still limited the scope of operations, it was improving:

> Support weapons that can be airlifted include both towed and self-propelled antitank guns, antiaircraft guns, mortars up to 120-mm, recoilless rifles, and lightweight vehicles. The previous Soviet dependence upon captured enemy equipment and supplies has now been somewhat reduced. The lack of armor and heavy caliber artillery in the airhead, however, must still be compensated for by close support ground attack aircraft and early linkup with friendly ground forces.[14]

Doctrine and field exercises shaped specific missions airborne forces were to perform.[15] The paramount mission was to secure crossing sites (bridges or fords) over major water obstacles on the main axis of the ground force attack. Securing such crossings would preempt enemy defenses. If airborne forces faced a defended crossing, they would maneuver around the enemy flank and rear while the main force attacked from the front. Another important mission was to seize important objectives or key terrain in the operational depths of the enemy defense in order to assist main forces in encircling and destroying the enemy

or in order to block enemy withdrawal or reinforcement. In airborne operations, key terrain included water obstacles, mountain passes, and defiles between lakes. In other instances, an airborne force could land over a wide area to disrupt enemy withdrawal plans by conducting harassing attacks on his columns or by destroying roads and communications routes. At the lower end of the combat spectrum, smaller airborne units could attack small, but important, objectives, such as airfields, enemy command posts, key road junctions, bridges, warehouses, and enemy bases. Complementing amphibious operations, airborne forces could make surprise landings to secure beachheads where amphibious naval forces could land. In amphibious operations, airborne forces could block the advance of enemy reserves to a beachhead or prevent enemy withdrawal from the beachhead. In certain cases, paratroops could seize a port or naval base facilities.

With such doctrinal missions, airborne forces trained using tactics derived from wartime experiences. Most airborne training involved close coordination of airborne units with mechanized mobile forces operating in realistic simulation of wartime conditions, to include all-weather and all-season exercises. Parachuting techniques, orientation of units on the ground, rapid assembly of units, timely seizure of objectives, and establishment of defenses on the ground capable of holding terrain until arrival of mobile ground forces received emphasis.[16] Operations occurred in distinct phases: first, landing in a limited geographical area; second, securing objectives; and, third, holding those objectives until the main force arrived. Missions were passive because, after landing, paratroopers lacked mobility and heavy mobile firepower.

Foreign analysts recognized the Soviet view of the levels of war and postulated three types of Soviet airborne operations: strategic, operational, and tactical. Scope and significance of the action distinguished the three types. Strategic operations were large and were carried out deep in the enemy rear. The objective was "to impair the enemy's war making capabilities by seizing or neutralizing industrial, administrative, and other strategic targets."[17] To be successful, strategic operations required continuous air superiority to secure air delivery and supply routes and to protect the airborne force before and after landing. Operational level airborne assaults were "effected deep in the enemy's rear defensive area in conjunction with frontal operations by ground forces of at least army size."[18] This phased operation began with small airborne forces dropping to seize airfields and landing areas. A main body of varied size and composition

airlanded on the captured airfield, performed its combat mission, and linked up with advancing ground forces. Tactical airborne operations were smaller assaults by paratroopers or by aircraft- and helicopter-transported units operating at shallow tactical depths in the enemy defense. Such forces usually operated on a main attack axis

> to facilitate the breakthrough of the main zone of resistance; to delay the forward movement of enemy reserves and divert their commitment from the point of the main effort; to complete the encirclement of enemy forces and take control of commanding heights; to seize enemy antitank, artillery, and atomic delivery systems and simultaneously disrupt his communications lines; to disrupt enemy rear area activities and destroy stocks of ammunition and fuel; to seize tactical airfields, bridges, and other tactical objectives; and to assist in river crossing operations and support amphibious landings.[19]

When discussing these missions, Soviet theorists constantly focused on two major concerns. The first was the necessity to reduce airborne force drop time to improve surprise, unit concentration, and firepower once on the ground. The second was the need to attain air superiority over the drop area to protect the transports from enemy antiaircraft fire and aviation and to provide air support for airborne units on the ground in order to compensate for their inherent weakness in fire support.[20] Constant field exercises provided solutions for both problems. Larger aircraft and improved drop techniques reduced the existing two- to three-day war years' drop time to one to two days. This speed provided greater tactical surprise and led to more effective ground operations. To reduce drop time even more and to capitalize on surprise, the Soviets emphasized the importance of reconnaissance and a time-phased rapid assault on or near the objective. Reconnaissance determined the suitability of the landing sites, enemy dispositions, and weather conditions that could affect the assault. Actual landings occurred in three distinct waves. The first wave of paratroopers secured and marked landing areas for gliders, helicopters, and transport aircraft. The second wave of gliders and/or helicopters carried troops and light equipment into the secured landing area. A third wave of transport aircraft lifted additional troops and heavier equipment into the landing area.[21] Clearly, these procedures incorporated the experiences and lessons of World War II operations.

Airborne forces trained on the basis of World War II experiences. Simultaneously, the materiel standards of airborne units evolved, thus improving their capabilities. There was a concerted effort to improve airborne troop weaponry and its sustainability in combat. Units received more automatic weapons, modern artillery, mortars, antitank guns, and antiaircraft guns. To supplement the wartime 45-mm guns and 50-mm and 82-mm mortars, airborne forces received the self-propelled guns ASU-57 and later the SU-85 (1962), 85-mm antitank guns, 120-mm mortars, and 122-mm (M-30) howitzers.[22] Units had increased firepower, better antitank protection, and improved, though still limited, mobility. New GAZ-67 trucks and tractors could move guns, and the ASU-57 was mobile. However, personnel could not move so readily. Parachute battalions and companies still advanced to combat on foot and also attacked on foot in combat formation, supported by ASU-57 guns, recoilless guns, and 82-mm mortars. When attacking the enemy flank and rear, airborne forces rode on the self-propelled guns.[23]

A primary concern in the first postwar period was also the availability of delivery aircraft. Without adequate numbers of aircraft configured to carry airborne units and their equipment and to drop them accurately, airborne operations remained theoretical. The Soviets lacked such aircraft during the war. After 1945, they developed and fielded new aircraft better equipped to land airborne forces more accurately. The IL-12 and IL-14 aircraft of the late 1940s had improved carrying capabilities and guidance systems, but, because of their side cargo doors, they lacked the capacity to deliver large, bulky items to the battlefield. A new generation of gliders, towed by the TU-2 and TU-4 bombers, could carry men and equipment more effectively. New aircraft and improved guidance systems increased the depth at which airborne forces could operate. Similar experimental work produced safer parachutes capable of carrying larger equipment payloads. Improved parachutes also permitted dropping equipment from aircraft flying at speeds of 280 to 300 kilometers per hour rather than the standard 160 to 180 kilometers per hour.[24]

Beyond these developments, work also proceeded on helicopters. By the end of the first postwar period, the Soviets had produced the MI-1 and MI-4 helicopters. Though Soviet theorists certainly considered the use of helicopters for airlanding operations, real progress in this regard would not be made until later.

Airborne operations in the first postwar period were an integral part of Soviet offensive theory. Training of

airborne forces continued apace with that theory. Materiel limitations, however, inhibited prospects for full implementation of the theory. The introduction of modern equipment gradually improved the airborne forces' capabilities and brought them closer to the conceptual framework governing their combat use. Although there was progress in the first postwar period, the status of airborne forces did not improve, and the Soviets did not fully recognize their important contemporary role until the mid-1950s.

The Nuclear Era: 1953-68

In the mid-1950s, several important factors merged to produce a renaissance in the stature and importance of airborne forces. Stalin's death in 1953 removed a major obstacle in the path to reform. In the broadest sense, Soviet military thought after Stalin began to cast off the shibboleths harbored since the end of the Great Patriotic War and began judging military affairs with more emphasis on the contemporary situation, but without abandoning faith in the lessons derived from the war. A recognition of the importance of nuclear weapons and the possibility of surprise engendered by initial wartime use of those weapons triggered this basic revision of military theory and force reorganization. The following period, usually identified as the Zhukov reforms, was characterized by intense reinvestigation of all areas of military science in the light of technological changes. This reappraisal resulted in a wholesale reorganization of the armed forces, a redefinition of the role and capabilities of the various arms and services within a new concept of military operations, and accelerated development and fielding of new weaponry. A second wave of change began in the early 1960s, keynoted by Nikita S. Khrushchev's January 1960 speech announcing Soviet recognition of a "revolution in military affairs."[25] The second wave represented a full maturation of concepts developed during the first, or Zhukov, phase.

The emergence of a new view on war, in general, and offensive operations, in particular, was fundamental to the changes after 1953. The new view held that general war would likely begin with a nuclear exchange. Ground operations would occur against this nuclear backdrop, and the mission would be to mop up the theater after a devastating nuclear exchange. Ground operations would involve the action of mobile tank and motorized rifle formations, supported by rocket forces conducting high-speed deep operations, often on multiple axes, to exploit the effects of nuclear strikes, defeat enemy

forces, and conquer and occupy territory.[26] In this nuclear environment, ground forces would play a distinctly secondary role to that of strategic rocket forces.

Such doctrine required a reorganization of the armed forces. That reorganization created smaller, more mobile forces capable of fighting and surviving on a nuclear battlefield. Marshal G. K. Zhukov began the first wave of structural changes in 1954 and 1955, and his successors continued them after his ouster in 1957.[27] The ponderous mechanized armies and mechanized divisions were abolished, as were rifle corps, rifle divisions, and cavalry divisions. A new streamlined tank army replaced the mechanized army, and a more flexible motorized rifle division replaced both the mechanized division and the rifle division.[28] The combined arms army emerged as a balanced force of tank and motorized rifle divisions, and the tank division was reduced in size as well.[29] Units were fully motorized, and new equipment, rocket artillery, new tanks (T-55), tactical missiles, armored personnel carriers (BTR series), and early model surface-to-air missiles were incorporated into the force structure. The ground forces became a mobile, useful adjunct to strategic rocket forces, capable of flexible, semi-independent operations on a nuclear battlefield.

The second wave of change occurred after 1961, when the Soviets further streamlined both motorized rifle and tank divisions and tailored them to the nuclear battlefield.[30] Equipment modernization continued with the introduction of the T-62 tank, antitank guided missiles (ATGMs), infantry combat vehicles (BMP and BMD), and tactical missiles at division level. This "Khrushchev period" placed even greater emphasis on the predominance of nuclear weapons on the battlefield.

These fundamental doctrinal changes affected the airborne forces and their role in contemporary operations. Airborne units were tailored to perform more realistic combat missions on the nuclear battlefield. Symbolizing the closer integration of airborne operations with ground operations was the integration of airborne forces into the ground forces in 1956.[31] New weaponry also made airborne units more mobile, hence more capable of surviving on the nuclear battlefield. Military theorists could now postulate new, more realistic missions for airborne forces. The Soviets defined the theoretical context of airborne force use as follows:

> Nuclear rocket weapons are able to strike enemy forces located at any distance from the front lines. However, considerable gaps in time

between nuclear strikes on objectives in the deep rear of the enemy and the entering of that region by ground forces do not permit to a full measure exploitation of the results of those strikes. The problem of shortening that gap can be resolved by landing airborne forces in the region struck by rocket forces in order to secure key enemy positions. Airborne units came to be considered a combat means able to exploit effectively and quickly the results of nuclear strikes and completely destroy the enemy. Moreover, airborne forces could undertake new missions, such as destroying enemy nuclear delivery means, bases, and warehouses for nuclear weapons, etc.

They retained the missions of cooperating with the ground forces in securing administrative and industrial centers of the enemy, seizing crossings and bridgeheads on wide water obstacles, mountain passes and any difficult area to access.[32]

Airborne unit capabilities improved as well, so "the basic tendency of the development of tactics in that period became a rejection of the passive defense of limited regions (objectives) and a transition to maneuver combat in a wider region."[33] Improved airborne unit mobility and broadened combat uses occurred with the appearance of nuclear weapons because

the possibility of suppressing the enemy improved, especially in enemy antiaircraft systems in the landing region. Favorable conditions were created for landing large airborne assaults. Use of nuclear weapons created high tempos for offensive action of ground forces and shortened the period of time they took to arrive in the landing region. This permitted increasing the depth of regiment and division drops.[34]

The introduction of nuclear weapons greatly expanded the overall airborne mission, and the fielding of new weaponry and airborne delivery systems also increased the variety of missions airborne forces could perform. New antitank weapons (PTURS), self-propelled artillery (ASU-85), light armored vehicles (PT-76), and an airborne combat vehicle (BMD in 1973) improved airborne force survivability in combat, as well as sustainability on longer duration operations. Furthermore, new transport aircraft, including the AN-8 (1956), the AN-12 (early

1960s), and ultimately the AN-22, enabled airborne forces to deploy with more versatile combat weaponry at longer ranges.[35] Theorists could also articulate more precise tactical and operational missions, such as the use of air assaults to reinforce the action of forward detachments on the offensive.

> The role of forward detachments in rapidly exploiting the results of nuclear strikes and securing high rates of advance has also increased. Tactical airlandings--a new element of the combat formation in divisions--could perform such missions as destruction of enemy nuclear delivery means and closing gaps created as a result of their use.[36]

Airborne forces also came to play a greater role in meeting engagements. By operating deep in the enemy's rear, tactical airlandings and ground forward detachments could, in a meeting engagement, forestall enemy use of nuclear conventional fire and block deployment of the enemy main forces.[37]

Army exercises reflected this extensive expansion in airborne missions within the Soviet Union and outside the nation's borders. A major innovation appearing in exercises of the late 1950s was the use of maneuverable airborne forces in the enemy's rear area. Exercises in the late fifties and early sixties routinely included airborne elements. By 1963, Soviet airborne forces were participating in such exercises abroad. During Warsaw Pact Exercise Quartet held in East Germany that year, at least one airborne regiment with heavy equipment dropped from AN-12 aircraft. An advanced assault reconnaissance group of reinforced company size landed initially, secured the landing site, and prepared for further drops. The main body dropped by parachute with heavy equipment and secured the airfield for a subsequent large airlanding operation.[38] Quartet initiated a series of similar exercises in the late sixties using the same general scenario, each involving larger forces.

Perhaps the clearest statement concerning the employment of Soviet airborne forces, and one that best described the function of airborne forces within the realm of the revolution in military affairs, appeared in V. D. Sokolovsky's classic work on military strategy:

> During the operation [the offensive], wide use will be made of tactical and operational airborne landings. These will have the task of solving problems of the most effective use of

> the results attained by massing nuclear strikes. . .[such as] capture of the regions where nuclear weapons are located, important objectives, river crossings, bridgeheads, mountain passes, defiles and the annihilation of strategic objectives which cannot be put out of commission in any other way. Helicopters will be used as the main means of dropping tactical airborne troops. Transport planes can be used for operational landings. To assure the landing of a large airdrop at a great depth, the enemy air defense must be neutralized by ECM [electronic countermeasures], air operations, and rocket strikes.[39]

Sokolovsky's work not only captured the expanded role of airborne forces, but also marked the emergence of new concepts of air delivery using the helicopter.

Official U.S. assessments of Soviet airborne force missions changed little from the fifties to the sixties. Assessments categorized Soviet airborne operations as strategic, operational, and tactical and described the nature of these missions in the same language used in 1958.[40] One subtle change was the mention of a new front special purpose mission. A special purpose mission was classified as "a highly specialized, small-size operation conducted by a well-trained unit generally of company size or smaller. These operations are designed to harass and disrupt lines of communications, to conduct sabotage, or to support partisan activities."[41] The assessment also noted the emergence of Soviet concern for helicopter operations as a vital means for facilitating rapid ground advance. Specifically, "helicopter assaults usually involve forward detachments and are used to assist the attacking forces to maintain a high tempo of attack. This is accomplished by using a helicopter assault to surmount obstacles and large areas of contamination."[42]

Conducted in the Ukraine from 24 September to 3 October 1967, Exercise Dnepr amply demonstrated the expanded role of airborne forces. Elements of two guards airborne divisions participated and engaged in both operational and tactical landings. At the operational level, a reinforced airborne division landed to secure an objective deep in the enemy rear. In the phased landing, first a lead battalion parachuted as an airborne reconnaissance force. Heavy transports followed and dropped a forward detachment and then the main force. A novelty of the drop was the use of rockets to break the fall of parachute-landed heavy equipment. At the tactical level, a helicopter-borne battalion-size force secured a

bridgehead across the Dnepr for ground forces to exploit.[43] This symbolic replay of the unsuccessful 1943 Dnepr operation signaled Soviet commitment to the expanded role of airborne forces and became a model for future exercises.

Contemporary Airborne Operations

After Khrushchev's fall from power, a lengthy debate began over Soviet military policy. It culminated in significant changes by the early 1970s. The Soviets reassessed Khrushchev's single-option war-fighting strategy and reached a consensus that conventional war was possible. Theorists initially treated techniques of conventional war within a nuclear environment. But by the 1970s, that context had eroded, so theorists wrote about both nuclear and conventional war. Historical and theoretical military writings evidenced such a shift in emphasis and seemed to indicate a basic change in the Soviet view of war.[44] The Soviets still considered nuclear war a real possibility, but they increasingly indicated an acceptance of, and perhaps a desire for, a nonnuclear phase of operations. They appeared to conclude that the existence of a strategic and tactical nuclear balance (or superiority for the Soviets) could generate a reluctance on both sides to use nuclear weapons, a form of mutual deterrence that increased the likelihood that conventional operations would remain conventional. At a mininum, the Soviets prepared themselves to fight either a nuclear war or a conventional war in a "nuclear-scared" posture prepared for either eventuality. This Soviet version of "flexible response" emphasized the necessity for expanding and perfecting the combined arms concept.

Such a concept of modern war had a major impact on Soviet force structuring and military theory. Light units of the Khrushchev era (in particular, the motorized rifle division) now received significantly heavier weaponry and, to some extent, increased manpower. A new emphasis on front operations and tactics and the study of such previous operations required development and fielding of new weapons in greater numbers in line units, a process that continued throughout the seventies.[45]

These changes in military policy, of course, affected the airborne forces. The combat capability of airborne divisions increased with the introduction of the BMD airborne combat vehicle, the 140-mm multiple rocket launcher, the BRDM reconnaissance vehicle, the ASU-85 assault guns, new ATGMs, and new antiaircraft guns and missiles.

The IL-76 jet transport aircraft substantially improved Soviet airlift capacity. The articulation of tactical, operational, and strategic airborne missions did not change significantly from the early 1960s. The caveat that such missions could be performed in either a nuclear or a conventional environment was important.[46] For theorists, the primary concern was the issue of airborne force survivability in a more lethal tactical and operational environment, especially without benefit of the devastating striking power of nuclear weapons. The problems of Soviet airborne units in the Great Patriotic War again became a focus of study and concern.[47] The major objective for such study was to determine what missions the airborne force should perform in such an intense combat environment and, more important, how it should perform such missions. That study's major by-product was the investigation of the most suitable delivery means--helicopter or aircraft--for an airborne force. Soviet study of U.S. experiences in Vietnam, in part, intensified this concern over helicopter-borne airmobile operations.[48]

Study and experience proved the vulnerability of forces parachuted into combat or airlanded from aircraft. An alternate means emerged in the 1950s when the MI-4 helicopter appeared in the Soviet aircraft inventory. The MI-4, a helicopter capable of carrying troops, light vehicles, and artillery, was used in the first experimental helicopter-lift operations in the mid and late 1950s. Other helicopters, the Yak-24 and MI-6, appeared in the late fifties and added the much-needed lift capacity to the helicopter force. The MI-6 could transport heavier weapons and about sixty-five men into combat.[49] Helicopter development ultimately dovetailed with the new theoretical requirements to wage war on the nuclear battlefield. Helicopters, rather than aircraft, seemed better suited to perform many of the newly articulated missions. Therefore, exercises involving helicopter-lifted forces increased, reaching a peak during the 1967 Dnepr exercise. The addition of two new helicopters to the inventory in the seventies fueled the more and more convincing arguments for helicopter superiority. The MI-8 troop transport helicopter provided improved troop transport capability, and the MI-24 attack helicopter afforded accompanying fire support for helicopter-landed operations.[50]

As the equipment improved, theorists discussed the utility of helicopters in operational and tactical level operations. Shortly after Exercise Dnepr, an article in Voennaya Mysl' (Military Thought) assessed the role of airborne forces in modern combat. Although accepting the

validity of airborne operations in general, it raised the helicopter issue:

> The creation of the helicopter has increased the possibilities for landing airlifted troops from the personnel of regular ground troops which have not been trained in airborne landing. And this, in turn, has helped to resolve certain serious problems. While in the parachute method of landing, the troops were greatly dispersed after their landing and their combat efficiency remained low for a certain period of time, the troops delivered to the landing region in helicopters are ready to enter battle immediately.[51]

This article's uniqueness was its emphasis on using other than airborne forces for such helicopter operations and on the technical and tactical advantages of helicopter-landed forces over parachute or airlanded forces.

By 1969, the Soviet investigation of a variety of air assault methods had produced detailed conclusions.[52] Although recognizing that airborne (parachute) forces could still operate successfully, Soviet theorists highlighted the conditions that made their use difficult. Parachute forces required special training and equipment to perform their mission, a mission, moreover, that depended on favorable weather conditions for success. Also, to land an airborne force of sufficient size, parachute troops had to secure a suitable landing area. Because of the requirements of modern aircraft, such areas were often in scarce supply. Because the means of delivery usually dispersed airborne forces over a considerable area during landing, assembling men and equipment before beginning combat missions took a long time. Past experiences continually illustrated these difficulties, and exercises indicated the persistence of this problem.

The helicopter, however, solved part of the problem and provided greater flexibility to operational planners. Helicopters had better maneuverability in combat, carried heavier loads of men and equipment, and, by using vertical takeoff and landing, placed forces in precise combat order at a specific location, ready to commence ground operations. Because helicopters were able to land in a wide variety of locations, forces could more readily secure their objectives. Helicopters could also operate at considerable ranges and at high speeds, thus making them less vulnerable to enemy ground fire and detection than aircraft operating at low altitudes. During landing,

helicopter firepower could suppress enemy fire as effectively as, if not more effectively than, fighter aircraft escorting a landing force. Perhaps more important, however, was the fact that troop training for helicopter assault required less time, thus reducing preparation time for an operation. Furthermore, helicopters could carry any type of force into combat, including motorized rifle forces with their weapons and various types of support units. In short, helicopters could deliver a true combined arms force.

As articulated in 1969, the ideal tactical air assault unit was the motorized rifle battalion reinforced to be able to conduct long-term combat in the enemy rear, independently, if necessary, and free from the requirements of fire support from front units.

> Thus, a contemporary motorized rifle battalion could successfully conduct battle with its TOE weapons against large numbers of enemy tanks; every motorized rifle company could defend a strongpoint extending to one kilometer of front (sometimes more), having created in its sector high densities of automatic weapons fire. It is clear that in a tactical landing the battalion, on many occasions, must be reinforced by mortars and artillery, engineer subunits, radiation and chemical reconnaissance and other means to increase its combat capabilities.[53]

Besides motorized rifle battalions performing the usual helicopter air assaults, task-organized companies and even platoons could conduct such missions as seizing enemy nuclear delivery means, destroying command facilities, and disorganizing the enemy rear. As with airborne operations, helicopter assaults involved landing in enemy territory while facing enemy fighter aircraft, antiaircraft fire, infantry, artillery, and rocket fire. World War II had taught that successful completion of the missions required thorough preparation, uninterrupted reconnaissance, firm command and control, effective suppressive fire, adequate supply, and exact landing in the designated area.

By 1970, the concept of helicopter assault had become firmly entrenched in the lexicon of suitable airborne techniques. In the wide range of missions allocated to airborne forces, all that remained to be decided was which precise functions aircraft and helicopters would perform across the spectrum of airborne combat. In 1970, Col. A. A. Sidorenko's The Offensive articulated the tasks each type of force would perform. Writing in the context of

nuclear war, Sidorenko outlined the by now classic portrayal of the stages of nuclear war, adhering to Sokolovsky's general concepts. General airborne troops, using modern transport aviation and equipped with new weaponry, could perform the following basic missions in the enemy rear: destroy enemy nuclear delivery means; secure important areas and objectives; complete the utter defeat of enemy forces subjected to nuclear strikes; assist the attacking troops in overcoming water obstacles, mountain passes, and passages from the march; prevent the approach of enemy reserves and enemy withdrawal; and disrupt the operation of the rear area and troop control.[54]

Echoing Reznichenko's Taktika of 1966, Sidorenko emphasized the utility of airborne parties working in tandem with ground forward detachments. To penetrate an enemy defense, airborne forces

> landed from helicopters in the depth of the enemy's defense right after nuclear strikes can make more rapid use of their results than ground troops and can capture important areas, junctions of lines of communication, and crossings over water obstacles. They can hinder the approach of reserves and, thus, facilitate an increased rate of the attack.[55]

Similarly, helicopter-lifted forces could conduct pursuit operations to secure river crossings.

> In addition to forward detachments, tactical airborne landing forces can also be employed. Usually they are landed from helicopters on axes of operations of forward detachments, advanced guards and tank battalions, and regiments. The area for the airborne landing is chosen to ensure a rapid seizure of crossings and other important objectives and the assault crossing of the water barrier at high rate.[56]

Having dealt with tactical and operational missions, Sidorenko addressed accomplishment of diversionary missions at all levels of combat: "The outfitting of modern tactical airborne landing forces with powerful weaponry and combat equipment permits them to perform various missions by raid methods, to make surprise assaults on withdrawing and approaching enemy columns, control points, and rear service areas, and to cause panic in the enemy disposition."[57] Moreover, he pointed out that World War II had shown that darkness favored

successful employment of tactical airborne landings, in spite of the inherent difficulties of night operations.

With Sidorenko's postulations of airborne doctrine, Soviet military theorists and planners continued throughout the seventies to reform theory and to test the theory in frequent exercises and field training. The issue of airborne operations in a conventional environment, as well as in a nuclear environment, posed a particular challenge: specifically, a means to suppress enemy fire in the absence of nuclear strikes on enemy positions. The airborne forces also required greater firepower and protection in combat. The fielding of the MI-24 helicopter gunship and the BMD airborne combat vehicle, in part, solved these problems.

Foreign assessments detected the changing emphasis of Soviet airborne concepts, particularly the growing flexibility of those forces in a potential nuclear environment. Foreign military analysts presumed Soviet airborne forces would perform the primary missions of "helping ground forces maintain momentum in the attack by dropping to the rear of enemy defenses, possibly capturing or destroying key bridges and other installations and independent operations in overseas areas, possibly in conjunction with amphibious landings by naval infantry."[58] Aircraft-landed paratroopers along with helicopter- or aircraft-landed motorized rifle troops trained within a "nuclear battlefield" context in large-scale operations as part of a general advance or in small-scale drops to conduct reconnaissance, capture or destroy limited objectives, or inflict sabotage. This assessment concluded that battalion-size groups could operate up to 160 kilometers in the enemy rear area, regimental-size units up to 320 kilometers deep.[59] It ascribed to airborne forces the mission "to facilitate the movement of the ground strike force by seizing bridges and fords, capturing airfields for follow-up landings of airborne troops and heavy equipment, and carrying out sabotage missions against enemy nuclear launching and communications facilities."[60] This mission had the intent of disrupting the enemy's offensive and defensive capabilities.

Soviet exercises throughout the seventies were indicative of the more sophisticated use of airborne forces. The largest exercise occurred in March 1970 in Belorussia along the Dvina River. Under the direction of the airborne troops' chief of staff, Lt. Gen. P. Pavlenko, AN-12 aircraft (and one AN-22) dropped an entire airborne division (7,000 men) within twenty-two minutes. Its mission was to secure key terrain in the enemy rear and to

prevent the advance of enemy reserves after a friendly nuclear strike. In June 1971, another airborne division participated in Exercise Iug. In 1974-75 exercises, the new IL-76 and AN-22 aircraft dropped an airborne force after a drop of BMD vehicles. The IL-76 appeared again in February 1978 in Exercise Berezina in Belorussia. There, two battalions of an airborne regiment secured an airstrip for the landing of main force elements in IL-76 aircraft, which also carried SU-85 guns.[61] The decade-long series of exercises clearly demonstrated to Soviet military theorists the validity of their airborne concepts, and, with the new IL-76 with its 5,000-kilometer range, those concepts included operations in the strategic realm.

Since 1976, the scale of aircraft-delivered airborne operations has diminished, attesting not only to Soviet reluctance to advertise such a clearly offensive weapon, but also to a growing Soviet interest in helicopter-landed forces in both the operational and tactical context. The proliferation of Soviet articles on helicopter assault forces, paralleled by changes in the Soviet force structure and weapons, documents this growing belief in the utility of such forces.[62] The missions performed by helicopter-landed forces are virtually the same as those expressed in 1969, but more often without mention of nuclear warfare. In place of nuclear fires, the airborne landing force supports itself with its organic fires and ultimately with fire from the force advancing to link up from the front (a standard World War II procedure). Another mission often mentioned and once performed by parachute landing forces is to support an amphibious landing.

Force structure changes have accompanied the expanded mission of helicopter-landed forces. Large numbers of helicopters would deploy at potential wartime fronts, and virtually all motorized rifle battalions would be trained in an air assault role. The air assault brigade, an operational level helicopter assault force introduced at the front level, is a unique organization combining parachute elements with helicopter-lift units.[63] The brigade's combat elements consist of two BMD-equipped battalions, two parachute battalions, and an artillery battalion.[64] This organization provides the flexibility to operate with heavy BMD-equipped forces deep in the enemy's rear or with lighter parachute troops closer to the front lines. The air assault brigade provides the front commander a means of supporting either a penetration of enemy defenses or an exploitation into the operational depth of the defense (up to 100 kilometers). So, although helicopter assault forces have claimed a wider role in performing airborne missions, that role is commensurate

with the Soviets' reassessment of potential wartime combat requirements within their current concept of war. And helicopter assault forces share that role with more traditional airborne forces.

As helicopter operations expanded in the 1970s and additional helicopters and helicopter air assault units appeared in the Soviet force structure, the classic airborne division also improved its force structure and capabilities. The basic airborne division structure has changed little since the early 1960s. While retaining its basic triangular configuration (three regiments, each with three battalions), the division's size has diminished slightly. The introduction of new equipment, however, has markedly improved its firepower and mobility. From a strength of more than 7,500, the division has decreased to a present strength of about 6,500. Commensurate decreases in manpower have occurred at regimental, battalion, and company levels as the Soviets have introduced combat-fighting vehicles and have rationalized the division support structure.

Although official sources often disagree about the exact size and configuration of divisional subunits, some general trends have been distinguishable.[65] The gradual equipping of the airborne regiments after 1973 with the BMD airborne combat vehicle has reduced the regiment's size but has drastically increased its capability of maneuvering to its combat objective. The BMD's 73-mm smoothbore gun and ATGM have improved the regiment's and battalion's firepower. The new ATGM battery equipped with AT-3 Saggers has replaced the older gun antitank battery and further augmented battalion and regimental firepower. The BRDM reconnaissance vehicle and new GAZ-69 trucks have contributed to greater divisional mobility. Similar improvements have occurred in airborne individual weapons and automatic weapons. What has emerged from this modernization program is a more compact, powerful airborne unit that can more flexibly execute missions assigned to it by recently articulated doctrine. The modern airborne division, side by side with air assault battalions and brigades, poses a significantly greater battlefield threat than the older classic parachute division.

The Soviets have constructed airborne forces that can be transported into combat by helicopter and aircraft. These forces can flexibly perform the wide spectrum of tactical, operational, and strategic missions articulated since the early 1960s in both a nuclear and a conventional environment. Airborne forces can either perform strategic missions in support of a theater offensive or perform a variety of independent strategic missions. During either

day or night, they can conduct operational or diversionary missions to support a front offensive in close coordination with other front forces, and they can carry out a variety of tactical missions to support army offensive operations.

Strategic forces* will be composed of aircraft-delivered units of up to division size employed at considerable depths in the enemy rear. Because of the relative weakness of airborne divisions, without reinforcement by heavier forces, they will be employed only in the waning stages of hostilities, after enemy theater resistance has crumbled. Then they will secure key administrative, logistical, or communications areas. In addition, strategic airborne forces can be used as a political tool to "show the flag," demonstrate support for a government, or exhibit a "presence" in a region. Smaller airborne groups** will perform a lower level strategic mission, that of conducting diversionary operations deep in the theater rear. They will attack such key targets as nuclear delivery or storage sites, command and control facilities, communication centers, transportation control centers, and possible wartime seats of government.

Operational airborne forces*** will support front operations. They will operate in close coordination with other front forces to facilitate achievement of front missions, specifically penetration, exploitation, and destruction of enemy army group units. Airborne forces will operate at depths of 100 to 300 kilometers against enemy nuclear delivery means, command and control facilities, reserves, logistical facilities, and the rear of enemy army group forward defenses. The front air assault brigade will operate in tandem with the lead elements of the main attack army or the front operational group at depths of up to 100 kilometers to assist in penetration of the army group defensive zone or in exploitation into the army group rear.[66] Once the Soviets have penetrated enemy army group defenses, regimental or multiregimental airborne assaults will occur at depths of up to 300 kilometers to secure major terrain features, such as river crossings, or to disrupt enemy

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*Strategicheskii desant (strategic landing force).

**Desant spetsial'nogo naznacheniya (special landing force).

***Operativnyi desant (operational landing force).

attempts to regroup and reestablish new defensive lines. Such drops will occur only if warranted by the progress of the front offensive and if linkup with advanced ground force elements can occur within two or three days of the drop. Elements of airborne divisions will deploy as small diversionary teams in support of front operations. These teams will attack enemy nuclear delivery means and storage areas, command and control installations, and other targets, the engagement of which will disrupt enemy army group operations.

Tactical airborne forces,* primarily helicopter assault units, will support army operations. Reinforced motorized rifle battalion-size helicopter assault forces will support the advance of army and division forward detachments. The helicopter-landed forces, operating primarily at night, will destroy enemy covering forces by landing in their rear, preempt the establishment of forward defenses or penetrate those defenses by landing within or to the rear of them, and block movement of enemy reserves to reinforce or reestablish the forward defense by securing key terrain or road junctions in the enemy rear.[67] Platoon- or company-size helicopter assault units can also attack enemy nuclear delivery means and command and control installations in the army offensive sector. Depths of such tactical missions will be from 20 to 100 kilometers. Operational or tactical airborne units will also support operations of amphibious forces by securing beachheads or by blocking enemy movements to contain or crush an amphibious assault.

The seventies and eighties have seen Soviet airborne forces mature into what the visionaries of the 1930s anticipated they could become, namely, a full-fledged vertical dimension of deep battle. They are a credible, diverse, and survivable force whose capabilities add yet another facet to the concept of combined arms operations. Their existence is the result of years of careful study. Evolving technology has enabled military theorists and practitioners to realize the fruits of that study and to overcome many of the problems that have plagued previous airborne forces. A nation whose history should make it skeptical of prospects for airborne warfare has overcome that skepticism. The Soviets display new confidence in the capabilities of their expanded airborne force.

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*Takticheskii desant (tactical landing force).

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

Soviet experimentation with airborne operations has spanned half a century. That the Soviets would consider such a revolutionary military concept was understandable. Airborne operations were a natural outgrowth of a greater attempt to free battle from the fetters of positional warfare. Those who developed the concept of deep battle to restore the primacy of the offensive to the battlefield viewed airborne operations as another dimension of mobile, fluid war. Vertical envelopment by airborne forces emerged as an adjunct to high-speed mechanized operations intended to strike deeply into enemy rear areas. Tanks, mechanized infantry, and airborne forces became the means of effecting deep battle. Under the guidance of Marshal Tukhachevsky, the theory of deep battle matured and a force structure evolved to translate those theories into practice. But, although the members of the Soviet High Command accepted the utility of the new doctrinal concepts, reality weighed against full realization of their dreams.

Lagging technology, underdeveloped resources, and an unsophisticated populace were the realities Soviet leaders faced. In the thirties, equipment was scarce, technological levels were low, and Soviet manpower was still rooted in its peasant past. Research, industrial development, and education would overcome those problems, but only at a cost of precious time. Even if the developers of deep battle theory had survived to test and improve their theories in war, they might not have fully mastered the problems of translating advanced theory into practice. Perhaps, at best, their imagination might have better adjusted Soviet forces and doctrine to those realities. But the purges of the innovators settled the issue and sounded the death knell for the prewar Soviet army.

The ambitious plans of the Soviet High Command for successfully employing their massive and varied forces in battle foundered on the rocks of incompetent leadership, inadequate weaponry, and lack of equipment as sophisticated as the Soviet force structure. Concepts for integrating the combat power of infantry, mechanized, and airborne forces were useless in the absence of a sound command and control system. Without radios, a refined logistics system, or leaders capable of orchestrating the actions of large forces, Soviet military concepts became

mere dreams. In June 1941, the more rehearsed and technically competent German army, with its own concepts of deep battle and the means to realize those concepts, turned Soviet dreams into nightmares.

Soviet airborne forces escaped the worst effects of those nightmares. While Soviet mechanized forces perished and the Soviet ground force structure was shaken to its foundations, airborne forces maintained their cohesion and survived the harsh first months of war. The opening phases of war sucked airborne forces into the cauldron of ground combat. The fact that the Soviet High Command used these forces as fire brigades to stem the German tide where it rose highest testified to the High Command's high esteem for airborne units. Well trained, highly motivated, and relatively well equipped, the airborne forces paid a high price for their military competence. By late 1941, when few Soviet units qualified as elite, airborne forces still warranted that distinction. So, when the High Command mustered its forces to strike back at the Germans outside Moscow, airborne forces were thrown into action. The desperate battle of January 1942 drew airborne forces center stage. In a threadbare and imperfect attempt to realize offensive deep battle, the High Command committed airborne forces to combat in tandem with cavalry units, seasoned divisions from Soviet Asia, and exhausted survivors of the summer and autumn campaigns.

The airborne operations in the winter of 1942 were an adjunct to the surging efforts of the Soviet High Command to crush an overextended and exhausted German Wehrmacht. Lightly equipped airborne units, from battalion to corps size, conducted numerous airborne assaults over a four-month period in the German rear area in a vain attempt to disrupt German defenses, link up with Soviet ground forces, and destroy large chunks of German Army Group Center. Plagued by poor planning; inadequate quantities of transport aircraft; faulty coordination of air, ground, and airborne units; deficient weaponry; and the paralyzing cold of a severe winter, the airborne forces failed to achieve operational success. The high morale and endurance of the lightly armed units could not compensate for the loss of surprise, an element so critical for success. As a result, airborne operations became an endurance test. At stake was the survival of the units. Despite heavy costs in lives, airborne forces generally passed the test and survived.

Clearly, the paratroopers had a disconcerting effect on the Germans and made German defensive efforts more difficult. But however difficult it was for the Germans, their defenses held, and Soviet airborne operations failed

to achieve their primary missions. Again in 1943 on the Dnepr River, a hasty Soviet attempt to capitalize on the capabilities of airborne forces failed for many of the same reasons that 1942 operations had failed.

On the surface, major Soviet World War II airborne operations project an image of abject failure. Operational experiences did achieve only limited success, and so small was the success that the Soviets abandoned ideas of using large airborne forces later in the war. However, at the same time the Soviets were experiencing failure with large-scale operations, they were achieving success with tactical and diversionary airborne operations. Experience, whether good or bad, has been and still is for the Soviets a vehicle for education and improvement. The bitter airborne force experiences of 1942-43 were not merely noted and forgotten. The Soviets studied and evaluated them just as they did the other combat failures of 1941-42. That study rendered failure useful as an analytical tool to build a force and a doctrine that could succeed in battle. Soviet study of World War II airborne experiences focused on the major operational failures around Moscow and on the Dnepr. It also surveyed the other tactical and diversionary operations conducted throughout the war. That study paved the way for sounder theory and practice in the future.

The war pointed out those elements necessary for successful operational airborne assaults and created in the Soviets a resolve to address those necessities in the future. Study of war experience also evidenced the success of airborne forces in the tactical and diversionary realm, and, to this day, the Soviets have capitalized on building forces to exploit that dimension of battle.

In the immediate postwar period, the Soviets built a formidable airborne force and refined their airborne doctrine in light of wartime experiences. Although airborne forces had a distinct place in the operational and tactical scheme, that place was a modest one. The complexity of airborne operations, the vulnerability of airborne forces in high-intensity mechanized warfare, the limited delivery capability of transport aircraft, and the restricted mobility of airborne forces dictated that airborne units perform only modest missions in close coordination with ground forces.

The "revolution in military affairs" and improved Soviet technology resulted in a reemphasis on airborne warfare in the 1960s. The projection of nuclear firepower onto the battlefield spelled an end to dense combat

formations, tight multiple echelons, and contiguous defenses arrayed in great depth. Nuclear weapons fragmented combat and forced potential combatants to disperse their forces and to resort to mobility and speed to achieve operational and tactical success. If nuclear strikes could rupture and fragment defenses, then airborne forces could again operate at great depth with less fear of inevitable destruction. Airborne forces became a useful adjunct to high-speed armored and mechanized forces exploiting the effects of nuclear fires deep into enemy defenses.

Advances in technology increased the firepower and mobility of airborne forces and their survivability in battle, whether nuclear or conventional. The development of adequate transport means, helicopters for transport and fire support, air-transportable assault guns, airborne combat vehicles, light surface-to-air missiles, and improved communications equipment unfettered airborne forces. New types of airborne forces evolved, and the helicopter emerged as a versatile means for projecting airborne combat power.

Soviet airborne forces are structured to perform a multitude of missions to support offensive operations at any level. They are a flexible element of the Soviet combined arms structure. The Soviets have intensely studied the historical employment of such forces in combat. They understand the strengths and limitations of such forces, and they will use them judiciously. In practical terms, the Soviets place the greatest faith in the use of airborne troops at the tactical and operational levels. In the words of General of the Army V. Margelov:

> Now airborne forces are equipped with the most perfect means of waging combat. Perhaps in no other type of force is there concentrated such a variety of arms and equipment. Soviet airborne forces can appear in the enemy rear, having at their disposal all that is essential for the conduct of battle (operations); they are also able to perform large strategic missions in contemporary combat.[1]

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. For a brief survey of Frunze's work and thought, see Sovetskaya Voennaya Entsiklopediya [Soviet military encyclopedia], 8:342-45 (hereafter cited as SVE). A selection of his writings is in Voprosy strategii i operativnogo iskusstva v sovetskikh voennykh trudakh 1917-1940gg [Questions of strategy and operational art in Soviet military works, 1917-1940] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1965).

2. V. Matsulenko, "Razvitie taktiki nastupatel'nogo boya" [The development of tactics of offensive battle], Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal [Military history journal], February 1968:28-29 (hereafter cited as VIZh).

3. N. Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii i praktiki boevogo primeneniya vozdushno-desantnykh voisk v mezhvoennyi period" [The development of the theory and practice of the combat use of airlanding forces in the interwar period], VIZh, October 1982:72-77.

4. Ibid.

5. I. I. Lisov, Desantniki--vozduzhnye desanty [Airlanding troops--airlandings] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1968), 8-12.

6. Ibid., 11.

7. Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 73.

8. D. S. Sukhorukov, ed., Sovetskie vozdushno-desantnye [Soviet airlanding forces] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1980), 11; Lisov, Desantniki, 14-15.

9. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 12.

10. Lisov, Desantniki, 20.

11. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 13.

12. Lisov, Desantniki, 20-22.

13. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 13-14; Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 73.

14. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 14.

15. I. Korotkov, "Voprosy obshchei taktiki v sovetskoi voennoi istoriografii (1918-1941gg)" [Questions of general tactics in Soviet military historiography], VIZh, December 1977:88; Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 73.

16. Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 73.

17. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 15.

18. Voprosy strategii, 122.

19. Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 74.

20. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno; 34; Lisov, Desantniki, 22. In 1935, the brigade received the honorific name Kirov Brigade in memory of the Leningrad Communist party chief murdered in 1934.

21. Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 75.

22. Ibid., 74. The course stressed such topics as parachute training, landing techniques, and combined operations after landing, including regrouping for combat, maneuvers, raids on objectives, and techniques for accomplishing typical missions.

23. I. I. Lisov, Soviet Airborne Forces (Moskva: DOSAAF, 1967), 5-10, translated from the Russian title, Sovetskie vozdushno-desantnye voiska, by the Techtran Corporation in 1969. Today, DOSAAF (All Union Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Air Force, and Navy) performs the same function.

24. Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 74-75.

25. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 39.

26. Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 75-76.

27. Ibid., 76; Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 40. The parachute regiments were created from airborne troops of airborne brigades and airborne battalions. The two rifle regiments were the 43d and 90th of the 59th Rifle Division. A detailed English language description of the exercise is in A. Yeremenko, The Arduous Beginning (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 8-10.

28. John Weeks, The Airborne Soldier (Poole, Dorset, England: Blandford Press, 1982), 19.

29. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 41-42.

30. Ibid.

31. Ramanichev, "Razvitie teorii," 77.

32. Korotkov, "Voprosy obshchei," 89.

33. V. Daines, "Razvitie taktiki obshchevoiskovogo nastupatel'nogo boya v 1929-1941gg" [The development of tactics of combined arms offensive battle in 1929-1941], VIZh, October 1978:96.

34. Vremennyi polevoi ustav RKKA (PU-36) [Temporary field regulation of the Red Army] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1936), para. 7.

35. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 35-36.

36. Ibid.

37. Yeremenko, Arduous Beginning, 24-39.

38. Weeks, Airborne Soldier, 18-26.

39. Ibid., 20.

40. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 47-48. For details on Khalkhin-Gol action, see G. Shelakhov and G. Plotnikov, "Razgrom yaponskikh zakhvatchikov na reke Khalkhin-Gol" [Destruction of Japanese invaders on the Khalkhin-Gol River], VIZh, August 1969:31-41; P. A. Zhilin, ed., Pobeda na reke Khalkhin-Gol [Victory on the Khalkhin-Gol River] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1981); Edward J. Drea, Nomonhan: Japanese-Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939, Leavenworth Papers no. 2 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, January 1981).

41. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 49-50; Lisov, Desantniki, 31-32.

42. V. Kostylev, "Stanovlenie i razvitie vozdushno-desantnykh voisk" [The growth and development of airborne forces], VIZh, September 1975:82.

43. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 50.

44. Lisov, Desantniki, 37-38.

45. The 201st, 204th, and 214th Airborne brigades were stationed in European Russia; the 202d, 211th, and 212th Airborne brigades in the Far East. In 1940, the 211th and 212th brigades moved to the Ukraine. The 202d Airborne Brigade remained at Khabarovsk until March 1944, when it moved to Moscow. Ibid., 38.

46. V. A. Anfilov, Proval "Blitskriga" [The failure of blitzkrieg] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1971), 123; Lisov, Desantniki, 38-39.

47. Kostylev, "Stanovlenie," 82. The airborne corps consisted of the following brigades:

Location	Airborne Corps	Airborne Brigades
Pre-Baltic MD	5th	9th, 10th, 201st
Western Special MD	4th	7th, 8th, 214th
Kiev Special MD	1st	1st, 204th, 211th
Kharkov MD	2d	2d, 3d, 4th
Odessa MD	3d	5th, 6th, 212th

48. Ibid.

49. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 51. An airborne variant of the PS-84 would have permitted dropping twenty-five men from side doors and dropping equipment through a cargo door.

Chapter 2

1. For a candid view of Soviet readiness in 1941, see S. P. Ivanov, ed., Nachal'nyi period voiny [The beginning period of war] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1974); and especially V. Petrov, June 22, 1941: Soviet Historians and the German Invasion (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), with its translation of and commentary on A. M. Nekrich's 1941-1942 iyunya [June 1941-42] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1965).

2. General I. S. Bezugly, commander, 5th Airborne Corps; General A. I. Rodimtsev, commander, 5th Airborne Brigade; General A. S. Zhadov, commander, 4th Airborne Corps. For Rodimtsev's and Zhadov's airborne experiences, see A. I. Rodimtsev, Tvoi otechestvo, syny [Your fatherland, sons] (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1974); and A. S. Zhadov, Chetyre goda voiny [Four years of war] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1978).

3. Kostylev, "Stanovlenie," 82.

4. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 53-54.

5. Zhadov, Chetyre, 14-18. By 7 July, the 7th and 8th Airborne brigades had shrunk to 1,000 or 1,100 men each and fifteen 45-mm guns.

6. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 54-69; Rodimtsev, Troi otechestvo, 25-167. By late September, Rodimtsev's 5th Airborne Brigade had only about 500 men, twenty heavy machine guns, and twenty-five light machine guns. See also I. Samchuk, Trinadtsataya Gvardeiskaya [Thirteenth Guards] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1971), 3-24.

7. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 83.

8. Lisov, Desantniki, 39.

9. Kostylev, "Stanovlenie," 82.

10. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 146-79. A. V. Morozov, 39-ya Barvenkovskaya [39th Barvenkovo] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1971), 3-5, relates the experiences of one of those divisions.

11. Ibid., 161.

12. See also Rodimtsev, Troi otechestvo, 337-48; and Vasilii Ivanovich Chuikov, The Battle for Stalingrad (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964).

13. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 180-81.

14. Ibid., 181-84.

15. Lisov, Desantniki, 183.

16. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 226.

17. Ibid., 238.

18. Ibid., 238-39.

19. G. P. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty vo vtoroi mirovoi voine [Airlandings in the Second World War] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1962), 12.

20. Polevoi ustav krasnoi armii (PU-44) [Field regulations of the Red Army] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1944), 20-21.

21. Ibid., 21.

22. Ibid., 84-85, 157.

Chapter 3

1. Albert Seaton, The Battle for Moscow (Rockville, NY: Playboy Press, 1980), 240-56.

2. Chales de Beaulieu, et al., "Die Operationen der 4. Panzerarmee im Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion" [The operations of the 4th Panzer Army in the campaign against the Soviet Union], Foreign Military Studies MS no. P-206, Phase C, vol. 2, 68-90, reproduced by U.S. Army, Europe, 1959 (hereafter cited as MS no. P-206).

3. Franz Halder, The Halder Diaries: The Private War Journals of Colonel General Franz Halder (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976), 243.

4. Ibid., 244-46.

5. Seaton, Battle, 209-11.

6. V. D. Sokolovsky, Razgrom nemetsko-fashistskikh voisk pod moskvoi [The defeat of German-Fascist forces at Moscow] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1964), 307-10. Also, see Georgii Konstantinovich Zhukov, The Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), 352-53.

7. A. Vasilevsky, Delo vsei zhizni [Life's work] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1975), 201.

8. K. Reinhardt, Die Wende vor Moskau [The turning point at Moscow] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1972), 243-55, Skizze 6.

9. MS no. P-206, 104-23; M. Gareis, Kampf und Ende der frankisch-sudeten deutschen 98. Division [The combat and end of the Frankish-Sudeten German 98th Division] (Tegernsee, Federal Republic of Germany: Gareis, 1956); 199-201; Walter Friedrich Poppe, "Winter Campaign 1941-42: Campaign of the 255th Infantry Division East and West of Temkino, Mid-December 1941 to April 1942," Foreign Military Studies MS no. D-184, 1-12, reproduced by the Historical Division, U.S. Army, Europe, 1947.

10. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 85-86. Much of the operational and tactical detail of 8th Airborne Brigade operations and subsequent 4th Airborne Corps operations is in Sukhorukov's and Lisov's work and in A. Lukashenko, Dorogami vozdushnogo desanta [The paths of airborne forces] (Moskva: Moskovskii Rabochii, 1971). Henceforth, footnotes will highlight unusual facts or information

gleaned from other sources. For a general outline of the Vyaz'ma airborne operations in their operational context, see SVE, 2:445-46. The partisan role in the operations is covered in N. F. Yudin, Pervaya partizanskaya [The First Partisan (Regiment)] (Moskva: Moskovskii Rabochii, 1983).

11. For details on coordination of air and airborne forces, see A. Fedorov, Aviatsiya v bitve pod Moskvoi [Aviation in the battle of Moscow] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1971), 230-44.

12. Lisov, Desantniki, 95.

13. MS no. P-206, Phase D, vol. 1, 32-48; Panzer-Armee oberkommando 4/1a, Kartenlagen zum Kriegstagebuch, Nr 7-8 (Moskau), 24-29 January 1942, National Archives Microfilm (hereafter cited as NAM) T313, roll 348. Subsequent 4th Panzer Army unit positions shown on maps in the text are from this source, which covers the period 7 December 1941-26 April 1942.

14. Lisov, Desantniki, 96.

15. D. Sukhorukov, "Vozdushno-desantnye voiska" [Airlanding forces], VIZh, January 1982:40.

16. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 20.

17. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 86-87.

18. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 19. A single lift of the airborne force would have taken 550 to 600 aircraft. See Lisov, Desantniki, 100.

19. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 87.

20. MS no. P-206, Phase D, vol. 1, 40-42. German after-action reports confirmed the Soviet accounts. See Generalkommando V AK Abt 1a/1c, Die Luftlandetruppen der Roten Armee, 25 March 1942, 12-16, NAM T314, roll 252. See also 5. Panzer Division/1c, Tätigskeitsberichte mit Anlagen, 26-30 January 1942, NAM T315, roll 2311; and 11. Panzer Division/1c, Tätigskeitsberichte zum Kriegstagebuch 3, 26-30 January 1942, NAM T315, roll 589.

21. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 88. For details on Captain Karnaukhov's initial operations, see Lisov, Desantniki, 103-6.

22. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 20.

23. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 89-90. Twelve aircraft were damaged by antiaircraft fire, two were shot down, seven required repairs, and one disappeared while on a mission.

24. Ibid., 90. Onufriev brought with him 174 rifles, 129 automatic weapons, nine antitank rifles, twenty-two machine pistols, twenty 82-mm mortars, five 50-mm mortars, and one radio station.

25. Ibid., 92-93.

26. Halder, Diaries, 262.

27. Ibid., 263.

28. MS no. P-206, Phase D, vol. 1, 41.

29. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 91. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 20, claims that 2,328 men of 8th Brigade landed.

30. For Belov's operation during this time, see P. A. Belov, Za nami Moskva [Behind us Moscow] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1963), 177-219; and P. A. Belov, "Pyatimesyachnaya bor'ba v tylu vraga" [A five-month struggle in the enemy rear area], VIZh, August 1962:55-75. For operations of Soldatov's 250th Regiment, see N. Soldatov and A. Korol'chenko, "Znamenskii desant" [Znamenka airlanding], VIZh, December 1972:72-74.

31. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 204-7.

32. H. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings in Area of German Army Group Center," in "Russian Airborne Operations," Foreign Military Studies MS no. P-116, 17, reproduced by the Historical Division, U.S. Army, Europe, 1953.

33. MS no. P-106, Phase D, vol. 1, 120-31.

34. Lisov, Desantniki, 109.

35. Ibid.; MS no. P-106, Phase D, vol. 1, 120-28. The German 4th Panzer Army estimated Soviet strength in the German rear area at 12,000 men and German strength in the same area at only 7,000 men.

36. Ibid., 133.

37. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 209-10; Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 96.

38. MS no. P-106, Phase D, vol. 1, 136.

39. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 217-19; MS no. P-106, Phase D, vol. 1, 152-57. The Germans referred to this encirclement operation as the Andrejany Kessel (Andrejany Cauldron). The 5th Panzer Division and 23d Infantry Division (that arrived 24 February) reduced the pocket. The 4th Panzer Army claimed 2,380 Soviet soldiers killed and 1,762 prisoners. MS no. P-116 states that Soviet losses were 5,000 killed and 700 prisoners.

Chapter 4

1. Sokolovsky, Razgrom, 361.

2. Lisov, Desantniki, 112; Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 100.

3. W. Meyer-Detring, Die 137. Infanterie division im Mittelabschnitt der Ostfront [The 137th Infantry Division in the central sector of the Eastern Front] (Ansbach, Federal Republic of Germany: Georg Gebhardt, 1962), 129-31, 139. For unit dispositions before and after 15 February, see Heeresgruppe Mitte/1a, Anlagen zum Kriegstagebuch: Lagekarten, eigene und Feindlage, 1 January-31 March 1942, NAM T311, roll 225. An account of 4th Army's battles is in Armeeoberkommando 4/1a, Sonderbeilage zum Kriegstagebuch, Nr 14, Die Kampfe der 4. Armee im ersten Kriegsjahr gegen die Sowjets, June 1941-June 1942, NAM T312, roll 186.

4. Meyer-Detring, 137. Infanterie, 266; F. Hossbach, Infanterie im Ostfeldzug 1941-42 [Infantry in the eastern campaign] (Osterode, Harz, Federal Republic of Germany: Verlag Giebel-Oehlschlägel, 1951), 206.

5. Ibid., 204.

6. Seaton, Battle, 260-61; Meyer-Detring, 137. Infanterie, 134; Gareis, Kampf und Ende, 208-13; Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 9. Detailed German order of battle and unit dispositions are in Generalkommando V Ak/1a, Lagenkarten zum Kriegstagebuch 2, 7 February-29 April 1942, NAM T314, roll 252.

7. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 22.

8. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 101.

9. Ibid.

10. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 23, claims that 6,988 men had landed by 20 February. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 102, says the total was 7,373 by 23 February. Lisov, Desantniki, 114, cites the figure of 1,800 men who joined other units.

11. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 11; MS no. P-206, 138, states that the 52d Infantry Division reported that 130 aircraft landed 3,000 paratroopers on 19 and 20 February. Halder, Diaries, 272, entry for 20 February notes "A Gp Center reports increasing number of paratroopers put down behind its lines." The 52d and 98th Infantry divisions also confirmed the landing in 52. Infanterie Division/1a, Kriegstagebuch 6 mit Anlagenband B Operationsakten, 20 February 1942, NAM T315, roll 958; and 98. Infanterie Division/1a, Kriegstagebuch 4, 20 February 1942, NAM T315, roll 1203.

12. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 11-13.

13. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 103.

14. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 13. See also 31. Infanterie Division/1a, Kriegstagebuch 6, Bande I u. II mit Anlagenbande 1, 2, 4a, 4b, 4c, und 5, 1 January-31 May 1942, NAM T315, rolls 865-66; and 34. Infanterie Division/1a, Anlagenband 3 zum Kriegstagebuch 4, 1 January-28 February 1942, NAM T315, roll 877.

15. Lisov, Desantniki, 118. For a thorough treatment of German winter defenses, see the candid Sbornik Materialov po Izucheniyu Opyta Voiny, No. 2, Sentyabr-Oktobr 1942gg [Collections of materials for the study of war experience, no. 2, September-October 1942] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1942), 2-5, translated by U.S. Army, General Staff, G2, Eurasian Branch, Washington, DC.

16. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 104.

17. Ibid.

18. Hossbach, Infanterie, 104. Rear service elements of the 31st Infantry Division's 17th, 12th, and 82d Infantry regiments held Pesochnya, Klyuchi, and Dertovaya, respectively.

19. Lisov, Desantniki, 119

20. Ibid., 119-22. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 107, claims that the Germans lost 600 men of two infantry battalions and a regimental headquarters, as well as fifty horses and 200 sleighs. German accounts of Klyuchi battle

are in 31. Infanterie Division/1a, Kriegstagebuch 6, Bande I u. II, report of I/AR67, 2 March 1942, NAM T315, roll 865. German strength is given as 435 men. German losses are reported as 14 killed, 34 wounded, 2 missing, and 559 horses lost. The Germans suffered additional losses at Malyshevka and during the retreat from Klyuchi, but nowhere near the 600 claimed by the Soviets. The Germans reported 83 Soviets dead.

21. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 107.

22. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 15.

23. Ibid., 108.

24. Ibid., 108-10, covers subsequent operations against Malyshevka. The German garrison unit was identified as the 82d Infantry Regiment, 31st Infantry Division.

25. Ibid., 14. See also Generalkommando XLIII AK, Korpsbefehl Nr 121, 8 March 1942; and Korpsbefehl Nr 122, 9 March 1942, NAM T315, roll 1381.

26. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 108-10; Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 15. Reinhardt confirms 4th Airborne problems: "The behavior of the airborne troops itself seemed obscure and changeable. Sometimes the prisoners stated that the captured villages were merely to be held until the Tenth Army [50th Army] crossed the Rollbahn from the south, and sometimes that a breakthrough across the Rollbahn was planned. It appeared that the airborne force did not have any artillery or heavy weapons, and that its striking power was limited."

27. Lisov, Desantniki, 126-27. The Germans committed two regiments of the 131st Infantry Division (1,100 men). The remaining regiment was committed farther north against Soviet 33d Army's Group Yefremov. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 16. Details on 131st Infantry Division operations are in 131. Infanterie Division/1a, Kriegstagebuch 6 mit Anlagen, 6 March-16 June 1942, NAM T315, roll 1381.

28. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 111-12. See also 34. Infanterie Division/1a, Anlagenband 1 zum Kriegstagebuch 5, Teil 1, 1 March-31, July 1942, NAM T315, roll 877.

29. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 16, comments on the airborne defenses: "With difficulty, it [131st Infantry Division] plowed a way through the snow and attacked one village after the other. There were

reverses; the air landing forces were composed of the very best type of Russian infantry. They had ample machine guns, mortars, and automatic rifles. The German reports laid particular stress on the fact that these forces were trained marksmen. Installed in trenches made up of banked-up snow, they defended tenaciously the villages they had captured."

30. Lisov, Desantniki, 127-28.

31. Ibid., 131.

32. The Germans called the operation against encircled 33d Army the Droshino Kessel (Droshino Cauldron). Reduction of the cauldron is described in MS no. P-206, Phase D, vol. 1, 170-78, 198-201; and Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 21. In Halder, Diaries, 21, the entry for 16 April reads, "Russian Thirty-third Army has been liquidated." For descriptions of Soviet attempts to relieve 33d Army, see Belov, Za nami Moskva, 225-29; A. P. Beloborodov, Vsegda v boiu [Always in battle] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1962), 163-71; and P. A. Kuznetsov, Gvardeitsy--Moskvichi [Guardsmen--Muscovites] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1962), 163-71.

33. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 222-23.

34. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 18-19, confirms Belov's position on 18 March: "Under this [German] pressure Cavalry Corps Belov again drew south and apparently tried to establish contact with the airborne corps. In doing so it encountered the small German Group Haase at the railroad bridge over the Ugra. This group had been cut off since the end of February and was being supplied from the air. On 18 March the main body of the Russian Cavalry Corps was situated on both sides of the Vyazma-Kiev road and directly north of the Ugra. On this day for the first time radio communications between the Russian cavalry corps and the airborne corps were intercepted." Belov's attempt to rescue 33d Army began on the night of 27 March, but, by 14 April, it had failed. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 226-27; Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 20-21, notes Belov's attempted rescue.

35. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 116; Belov, Za nami Moskva, 228-29.

36. Lisov, Desantniki, 132.

37. For details on the relief of Group Haase, see 131. Infanterie Division/Ia, Kriegstagebuch 6, 6-10 March 1942, NAM T315, roll 1381. The 82d Infantry Regiment effected

the relief. Halder, Diaries, 296, notes the relief on 10 April: "Relief forces have battled through to Combat Group Haase, which will be taken back."

38. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 229-31.

39. Zhukov smoothed over his relations with Belov. See Zhukov, Memoirs, 356-58.

40. Halder, Diaries, 297-98, entry for 12 April notes 50th Army attack preparations: "On XXXX Corps front apparently preparations for an attack (two new divs.; tanks brought up)." The entry for the next day mentions: "Heavy attacks against Fourth Army and XXXX Corps and XII Corps." Some details concerning 50th Army's attack plan are in A. A. Andreev, Po voennym Dorogam, [Along military roads] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1971), 13.

41. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 118-19.

42. Lisov, Desantniki, 134. Details on the German defense are in 131. Infanterie Division, Kriegstage-buch 6, 13-25 April 1942.

43. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 231-32.

44. Halder, Diaries, 298-99, notes the heavy Soviet attacks on 40th Corps in the Milyratino sector and the return of "quiet" by the eighteenth. See also Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 22.

45. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 119; A. A. Yaroshenko, V boi shla 41-ya gvardeiskaya [Into battle went the 41st Guards] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1982), 4.

46. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 119.

47. Halder, Diaries, 301, entry for 22 April states: "In Fourth Army sector, the enemy attack at Fomino was repelled." Halder mentions no heavy activity in his entries for 23-24 April.

48. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 120; also noted by Halder, Diaries, 301.

49. Lisov, Desantniki, 137.

50. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 283.

51. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 121. For details on Operation Hannover, see Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings,"

22; Armeeoberkommando 4/1a, Lagekarten, Anlagen zum Kriegstagebuch, Nr 12, April-May 1942, NAM T312, roll 183; and 131. Infanterie Division/1a, [Reports, orders, and messages], 24 May-1 June 1942, NAM T315, roll 1381. Halder, Diaries, 318-20, mentions the operation often, particularly the bad weather and stubborn resistance of Belov's force.

52. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 294-95.

53. Lisov, Desantniki, 138-39.

54. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 122.

55. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 297.

56. Lisov, Desantniki, 139.

57. Halder, Diaries, 319.

58. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 123. The two airborne brigades also brought with them 131 antitank rifles, 48 50-mm mortars, and 184 machine pistols.

59. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 299. Belov's approximately 17,000 men included 1,800 from the 4th Guards Airborne Corps and 2d Guards Cavalry Division, 4,000 from the 23d and 211th Airborne brigades, 2,000 from the 329th Rifle Division and Zhabo's partisan detachment, 4,500 from the 1st Guards Cavalry Division, and the remainder from partisan units with Belov.

60. Ibid., 301.

61. Yaroshenko, V boi, 6-14. The 23d Airborne Brigade covered the withdrawal of Belov's force by defending against German attacks from the north. From 4 to 6 June, the brigade fought severe battles at Volochek, Afonino, and Kryakov against the German 11th Panzer and 23d Infantry divisions, advancing southwest from Vyaz'ma and south from Dorogobuzh. On 7 June, the brigade disengaged from the Germans and covered Belov's withdrawal west of Yelnya.

62. Halder, Diaries, 323, entry for 9 June states: "AGp Center reports break-out of Cav Corps Belov to the South." The following day, Halder added: "The escaped Cav Corps Belov is being pursued." On 11 June, Halder sourly noted: "Unluckily, the main body of Belov's Cav. Corps and of Fourth Airborne Brig. have escaped south."

63. The attack across the Warsaw highway is vividly portrayed in Belov, Za nami Moskva, 308-10. Both Lisov, Desantniki, 143, and Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 125, play down Soviet difficulty in crossing the highway.

64. Halder, Diaries, 327-28. Diary entries succinctly recount Belov's epic escape. On 16 June, Halder wrote: "Cav Corps Belov has again broken out and is moving in the direction of Kirov. Nothing that we could brag about." The following day, he recorded his final diary entry on Belov, noting with a touch of respect: "Cav Corps Belov is now floating around the area west of Kirov. Quite a man, that we have to send no less than seven divisions after him."

65. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 126-27.

66. On 24 June, Belov flew back to 10th Army headquarters in a U-2 light aircraft that landed in the partisan-held territory. Belov, Za nami Moskva, 320. Gunther Blumentritt, "Operations Against Rear Lines of Communications," Foreign Military Studies MS no. B-684, 6-7, reproduced by the Historical Division, U.S. Army, Europe, 1947. The former chief of staff of 4th Army wrote:

> General Belov who played a tragic-comic role and showed great daring in 1941-42 should be mentioned here. This Russian cavalry general crossed the Oka River in December near Farussa and Aleksin. By Christmas 1941 his cavalry troops and infantry on sleds had advanced as far as Yukhnov, deep in the rear of Fourth Army. It had been thought that he would cut the Rollbahn. However, for some reason he refrained from doing that. He crossed this road and disappeared in the swampy forests near Borodoritskoye. There he joined forces with partisans and airborne troops and constantly harassed the Fourth Army rear area. How he managed to obtain supplies was a mystery to us. He fought in this manner until May 1942. Only Russians and Russian horses can exist on absolutely "nothing." Nobody was able to catch him. German forces in the rear areas were too weak and not suited for that type of Indian warfare in the wintry forests. Only during May the entire forest area . . . was crossed by combat patrols from all sides. Parts of several divisions, including some motorized

units, were employed for this task. But Belov escaped with his forces time and again. In May 1942 he was finally cornered in the woods west of Spas-Demensk, but he broke through our lines with about 4,000 cavalry troops, galloped toward south across the Rollbahn, and disappeared again in the forests east of Roslavl; from there he slowly moved eastward via Kirov and, avoiding the German security lines, escaped behind the Russian front lines. This episode caused many humorous remarks at the time and the motorized troops which had taken part in the operation became the butt of these jokes. I admired General Belov as a soldier and I was secretly glad that he had escaped. It was said that he was received with all honors in Moscow, and rightfully so.

The boundless endurance of Russian men and horses who led a Spartan existence for 5 months during a hard winter in those forests is typical. Orders to Belov were transmitted from Moscow by radio or liaison planes.

67. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 26-27.

68. Ibid.

69. MS no. B-684, 5-8. Although Blumentritt uses the Soviet example to point out that "war against rear lines of communications can be very effective even on the ground," he believes "it will be the air force and armored units who are likely to attack the rear area of a modern army successfully in any future war."

70. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 27-28.

71. Ibid., 28-29.

72. Sbornik Materialov, 5.

73. Ibid., 6, 8.

74. Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 25-26.

75. Ibid., 30. The Germans estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 Soviet airborne forces operated at one time in the rear of German 4th and 4th Panzer armies, which was close to the actual number.

Chapter 5

1. K. S. Moskalenko, Na yugozapadnom napravlenii [In the southwest direction] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1972), 122.

2. Istoriya vtoroi mirovoi voiny 1939-1945 [History of the Second World War, 1939-1945] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1976), 7:212-13 (hereafter cited as IVMV). This volume devotes but four lines to the subsequent airborne landing. Elements of 51st Guards Tank Brigade, 6th Guards Tank Corps, 3d Guards Tank Army seized a small bridgehead at Grigorovka. See A. M. Zvartsev, ed., 3-ya gvardeiskaya tankovaya [3d Guards Tank Army] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1982), 95. See a brief synopsis of the operation in Ya. P. Samoilenko, "Dneprovskaya vozdushno-desantnaya operatsiya 1943" [The Dnepr airlanding operation, 1943], SVE, 3:206-7.

3. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 27.

4. E. Binder, "Employment of a Russian Parachute Brigade in Bend of the Dnepr Northwest of Kanev," in "Russian Airborne Operations," Foreign Military Studies MS no. P-116, 72, reproduced by the Historical Division, U.S. Army, Europe, 1953, confirms this: "A Russian parachute brigade was used in the operations. It had been organized and trained about a year previously in the area south of Moscow. Approximately half of the men in the brigade were trained parachutists who had on the average made seven to ten jumps. The rest of the brigade was composed of men from seven regiments all mixed up together. These men had not received any parachute training." Binder was chief of operations, 19th Panzer Division, at the time of the operation.

5. Ibid., 29; Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 195-96.

6. Ibid., 195.

7. Lisov, Desantniki, 158.

8. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 28. According to Lisov, Desantniki, 159, each airplane would carry twenty men.

9. Ibid., 160. Each man carried one and one-half units of fire. One unit was in a container.

10. Ibid.

11. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 197. Zhukov's memoirs do not mention the disastrous airdrop.

12. Lisov, Desantniki, 157.

13. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 198.

14. Lisov, Desantniki, 158.

15. Ibid., 159.

16. W. K. Nehring, "Employment of Russian Parachute Forces in Cherkassy-Kiev Area (24-25 September 1943)," in "Russian Airborne Operations," Foreign Military Studies MS no. P-116, 35-55, reproduced by the Historical Division, U.S. Army, Europe, 1952. Nehring was commanding general of the 24th Panzer Corps at the time of the Soviet airborne drop. Paul Carell Schmidt, Scorched Earth: The Russian-German War, 1943-1944 (New York: Ballantine, 1971), 401-44, confirms Nehring's account. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 198, portrays slightly more rapid German deployment.

17. Ibid; Binder, "Employment," 68-70.

18. Lisov, Desantniki, 162.

19. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 199. Germans cite 1730 as the time the drop began. Nehring, "Employment," 46.

20. Lisov, Desantniki, 162-63; Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 199; Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 31.

21. Ibid.

22. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 199.

23. Nehring, "Employment," 46.

24. Binder, "Employment," 70-71. Binder's account refers primarily to actions of the 19th Panzer Division reconnaissance battalion because the division's main body did not reach the area until 25 September.

25. Schmidt, Scorched Earth, 407. Nehring, "Employment," 47, 59, states that the bulk of Soviet casualties occurred from 24 to 26 September. He noted Soviet parachute drops at Dudari-Gruschevo (200 parachutes), at Shandra (300 parachutes), at Beresnyagi (400 parachutes), and in the region west of Pekari.

26. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 199.

27. Lisov, Desantniki, 166.

28. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 200.

29. Nehring, "Employment," 51-58.

30. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 32.

31. Lisov, Desantniki, 167-68.

32. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 200-203.

33. Lisov, Desantniki, 171-72.

34. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 203.

35. Lisov, Desantniki, 175.

36. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 204-6; and Lisov, Desantniki, 175-76, cover details of fighting, 11-15 November.

37. Lisov, Desantniki, 178.

38. S. M. Shtemenko, General'nyi shtab v gody voiny [General staff in the war years] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1981), 1:248.

39. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 210.

40. Nehring, "Employment," 56.

41. Ibid., 58, testifies to Soviet haste: "The Russians had not thought over the presumable course of events carefully enough; . . . [they] did not brief the main body of their troops on the mission, so that the men are said to have believed that they were going on a training flight."Binder, "Employment," 72, states that "the jumps came as a surprise. There was no advanced information. The Germans did not expect an operation of this sort."

42. Lisov, Desantniki, 177.

43. Nehring, "Employment," 58.

44. Ibid., 58-59.

45. Ibid., 60.

46. Ibid.

47. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 209-10.

Chapter 6

1. See Sokolovsky, Razgrom, 206-12, 250-54, for context of the operation; the airborne operation is not mentioned.

2. The operational account is from Lisov, Desantniki, 75-76; and Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 78-79.

3. Halder, Diaries, 235, entry for 19 December notes the growing rear area problem: "The Russians attack during the night and turn up behind our positions at the break of daylight."

4. See Sokolovsky, Razgrom, 317-20; and Lisov, Desantniki, 77.

5. Soldatov and Korol'chenko, "Znamenskii desant," 72. The 250th Airborne Regiment was formed in mid-December 1941 from the 250th Rifle Regiment, 82d Rifle Division, from the Trans-Baikal Military District. It had three battalions, one artillery battery, one mortar company, and a 45-mm antitank gun platoon. Its 1,425 men were trained in night combat in villages and in use of explosives.

6. MS no. P-206, Phase D, vol. 1, 80-90; Seaton, Battle for Moscow, 243; Gareis, Kampf und Ende, 191-94.

7. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 14.

8. Lisov, Desantniki, 77.

9. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 14; Lisov, Desantniki, 78-81; MS no. P-206, Phase D, vol. 1, 82-89. The 4th Panzer Army noted on 6 January that Soviet airborne forces, identified as the 201st Airborne Brigade, cut the Medyn-Shansky Zavod road east of Gireyevo. Unfortunately, the overextended right flank division of 20th Army Corps (267th Infantry) was unable to deal with this threat and to reestablish links with 4th Army's 98th Infantry Division, then conducting an agonizingly slow fighting withdrawal to Medyn.

10. Lisov, Desantniki, 77, cites the planned figure. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 16, gives actual landed strength. Subsequent action of Captain Starchak's battalion is covered in Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 137-39; and Lisov, Desantniki, 77-86.

11. Lisov, Desantniki, 86.

12. Seaton, Battle for Moscow, 248-50; Meyer-Detring, 137. Infanterie, 111-15.

13. Gareis, Kampf und Ende, 200-202; Lothar Rendulic, "Combat in Deep Snow," Foreign Military Studies MS no. D-106, 6-10, reproduced by the Historical Division, U.S. Army, Europe, 1947. Rendulic commanded the 52d Infantry Division.

14. Halder, Diaries, 253.

15. For context, see Sokolovsky, Razgrom, 345-50. On 349, he includes a short account of the airborne operation.

16. Lisov, Desantniki, 87; Gareis, Kampf und Ende, 208; Seaton, Battle for Moscow, 260. German records confirm that 4th Army rear service, security, and police units occupied these locations. A 4th Army police regiment and a 98th Infantry Division signal battalion garrisoned Znamenka. Other 98th Infantry Division service units garrisoned towns along the Znamenka-Yukhnov road, including Klimov Zavod. The 52d Infantry Division rear service units occupied towns along the road from Znamenka to Vyaz'ma.

17. Lisov, Desantniki, 87.

18. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 140; Soldatov and Korol'chenko, "Znamenskii desant," 71-72.

19. Lisov, Desantniki, 88-89. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 16, says 452 men landed the first day.

20. Soldatov and Korol'chenko, "Znamenskii desant," 72. About 1,000 partisans cooperated with the paratroopers, but only 800 were armed.

21. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 141.

22. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 16-17; Gareis, Kampf und Ende, 208; 98. Infanterie Division/1a, Kriegstagebuch 4, 15 January-5 March 1942. On the night of 20-21 January, 98th Infantry Division antitank and signal units observed a portion of the airlanding operation. They reported parachute jumps on 20 January near Klimov Zavod and larger airlandings on the night of 20-21 January near Voronovo (not shown on maps but presumed to be south of Znamenka). In the latter instance, 162 twin-engine aircraft landed on "brilliantly illuminated" landing strips.

23. Soldatov and Korol'chenko, "Znamenskii desant," 73.

24. Gareis, Kampf und Ende, 208-10; Seaton, Battle for Moscow, 261; Reinhardt, "Russian Air Landings," 7. The 98th Infantry Division reported combat with the airborne force near Znamenka on 29 January and, later, further north at Chodnevo (Khodnevo), Petrovo, and Mikaeli (Mikhali). Only by 2 February had the division succeeded in relieving the surrounded garrisons in its rear service area.

25. Soldatov and Korol'chenko, "Znamenskii desant," 74.

26. Ibid., 74. Soldatov's force was equipped with two 45-mm antitank guns, thirty-four mortars (including ineffective 50-mm), and eleven antitank rifles.

27. Sokolovsky, Razgrom, 335-38; IVMV, 4:311. See also Seaton, Battle for Moscow, 270; and Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 4/Ia, Kartenlagen zum Kriegstagebuch, Nr 7-8 (Moskau), 12-28 February 1942.

28. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 143.

29. Ibid.; and Lisov, Desantniki, 91, claim that 400 men made the drop. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 26-27, states that 75 men returned to the airdrome, 312 were dropped, and 38 fell into Soviet lines. Only 166 men of the 312 dropped made it into the 29th Army area. The details of combat are in Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 143-44.

30. IVMV, 4:295-99.

31. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdusyno, 81. Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 227, claims that only the 46th Infantry Division, a regiment of the 73d Infantry Division, and elements of the Rumanian Mountain Corps were available to resist the Soviets the first two days. D. D. Kodola, "Kerchensko-Feodosiiskaya desantnaya operatsiya 1941-42" [Kerch-Feodosiya landing operation, 1941-42], SVE, 4:145-47, states that German strength on the peninsula included the 46th Infantry Division, a Rumanian cavalry brigade, two tank battalions, two artillery regiments, and five antiaircraft battalions.

32. Sofronov, Vozdushnye desanty, 37.

33. Lisov, Desantniki, 184.

34. Ibid., 186.

35. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 59.

36. For a detailed account, see N. Krylov, Glory Eternal (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 237-67.

37. Halder, Diaries, 116-23, entry for 22 September reads: "At Odessa, the Romanians are making no headway." The entry for the following day notes that "Romanian reverses before Odessa are inconvenient." On 26 September, General Hauffe of the German Army Mission to Rumania reported "the Romanians cannot get Odessa by themselves" and passed to Halder a request for German assistance.

38. Lisov, Desantniki, 187-89.

39. Ibid., 191-98. More detail is in L. N. Vnotchenko, Pobeda na dal'nem vostoke [Victory in the Far East] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1971), 279-84.

Chapter 7

1. Stalin defined the "Permanent Operating Factors" as stability of the home front, morale of the armed forces, quantity and quality of divisions, armament, and the ability of commanders.

2. Yu. Kostin, "Air Landings in Contemporary Operations," Voennaya Mysl' [Military thought], August 1946, translated by the U.S. Army General Staff, G2, Eurasian Branch, Washington, DC. The author articulates a wide range of tactical, operational, and strategic missions, including disruption of enemy mobilization and strategic concentrations at the beginning of war, seizure of industrial regions, creation of new theaters of operations, and seizure of islands and beachheads. He concludes: "The possibilities of further growth of air transport equipment and long range bomber aviation lay a firm basis for employment of air landing troops on such a scale, that quite possibly further changes in the form of present day military operations may be necessary."

3. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 263.

4. The guards airborne division resembled a light rifle division and probably contained the following elements:

Guards airborne rifle division (about 7,000 men):

1 parachute regiment
  3 parachute battalions
2 parachute-glider regiments
  1 parachute battalion
  2 glider battalions
1 gun artillery regiment (24x76-mm guns)
1 mortar regiment (24x120-mm mortars)
1 antitank battery (12x45-mm, 57-mm guns)
1 reconnaissance company
1 signal company
1 engineer company
1 medical company
1 motor transport company

See U.S. Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Soviet Airborne and Aerial Supply Operations, Intelligence Research Project no. 9845 (Washington, DC, 1 October 1956), 10, declassified October 1982.

5. Ibid. The airborne corps probably consisted of two or three guards airborne divisions and an air transport division comprising three transport aircraft regiments (each with thirty-two aircraft) and one glider regiment of thirty-two gliders.

6. P. Pavlenko, "Razvitie taktiki vozdushno-desantnykh voisk v poslevoennyi period" [The development of airlanding force tactics in the postwar period], VIZh, January 1980:27.

7. Changing operational formations are addressed in David M. Glantz, "Soviet Operational Formation for Battle," Military Review 63 (February 1983):2-12. A combined arms army contained three rifle corps, a heavy self-propelled gun regiment, and support units. A mechanized army had two tank divisions, two mechanized divisions, and support units. The rifle corps comprised three rifle divisions, or two rifle divisions and one mechanized division, and support units. The tank division, with three medium tank regiments, a heavy tank self-propelled gun regiment, a motorized rifle regiment, and support units, had 10,659 men, 252 tanks, and sixty-three self-propelled guns. A mechanized division consisted of three mechanized regiments, a medium tank regiment, a heavy tank self-propelled gun regiment, and support units, for a strength of 12,500 men, 197 tanks, and sixty-three self-propelled guns. The rifle division consisted of three rifle regiments, a medium tank self-propelled gun regiment, and support units, for a strength of 11,013 men, fifty-two tanks, and thirty-four self-propelled guns.

8. For details, see I. Kh. Bagramyan, ed., Istoriya voin i voennogo iskusstva [History of war and military art] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1970), 478-87.

9. Ibid., 481; L. N. Vnotchenko, "Nekotorye voprosy teorii nastupatel'nykh i oboronitel'nykh operatsii (1945-1954gg)" [Some questions on the theory of offensive and defensive operations (1945-1953)], VIZh, August 1970:34.

10. Ibid., 37.

11. Pavlenko, "Razvitie taktiki," 27.

12. M. V. Zakharov et al., eds., 50 let vooruzhennykh sil SSSP [50 years of the Soviet Armed Forces] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1968), 489 (hereafter cited as 50 Let).

13. U.S. Department of the Army, Pamphlet no. 30-50-1, Handbook on the Soviet Army (Washington, DC, 1958), 33 (hereafter cited as DA Pam 30-50-1).

14. Ibid.

15. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 265.

16. Ibid., 260.

17. DA Pam 30-50-1, 33.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 34. Subsequent U.S. assessments continued to categorize Soviet airborne operations as strategic, operational, and tactical. A 1969 assessment incorporated the same verbiage as the 1958 assessment.

20. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 266; Kostin, "Airlandings," 15-17.

21. Lisov, Desantniki, 240, 250-51, 263-64; DA Pam 30-50-1, 36.

22. S. A. Tyushkevich et al., eds., Sovetskie vooruzhennye sily [The Soviet armed forces] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1978), 384-88.

23. Pavlenko, "Razvitie taktiki," 28.

24. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 264.

25. For a clear definition of the nature of the "revolution in military affairs," see R. Ya. Malinovsky, "Revolyutsiya v voennom dele i zadachi voennoi pechati" [The revolution in military affairs and the tasks of military writers], Problemy revolyutsii v voennom dele [The problems of the revolution in military affairs] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1965), 3-7 (hereafter cited as Problemy).

26. For an excellent statement of Soviet attitudes toward nuclear war in the 1954-60 period, see V. A. Semenov, Kratkii ocherk razvitiya sovetskogo operativnogo iskusstva [A short outline of the development of Soviet operational art] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1960), 289-97. For the post-1960 view, see I. S. Glebov, "Razvitie operativnogo iskusstva" [The development of operational art], in Problemy, 133-39.

27. In March 1953, G. K. Zhukov became first deputy minister of defense. He was minister of defense from February 1955 to October 1957, after which R. Ya. Malinovsky replaced him. For details on his career, see "Zhukov," SVE, 3:345-46.

28. The new tank army consisted of four tank divisions and support units. The motorized rifle division had three motorized rifle regiments, a medium tank regiment, and support units, for a strength of 13,150 men and 210 tanks.

29. The combined arms army comprised three or four motorized rifle divisions, one tank division, and support units. The tank division consisted of two medium tank regiments, a heavy tank regiment, a motorized rifle regiment, and support units, for a strength of 10,630 men, 368 tanks, and fifty-two self-propelled guns.

30. By 1968, the motorized rifle division had shrunk to 10,500 men and 188 medium tanks. The tank division's heavy tank regiment had become a third medium tank regiment, and the division strength had decreased to 9,000 men and 316 medium tanks.

31. V. Margelov, "Razvitie teorii primeneniya vozdushno-desantnykh voisk v poslevoennyi period" [The development of the theory of the use of airlanding forces in the postwar period], VIZh, January 1977:54.

32. Ibid., 58.

33. Pavlenko, "Razvitie taktiki," 28.

34. Ibid., 27-28.

35. Margelov, "Razvitie teorii," 59.

36. V. G. Reznichenko, "Osnovnye napravleniya razvitiya sovetskoi taktiki v poslevoennye gody" [The basic direction of the development of Soviet tactics in the postwar years], VIZh, August 1971:35.

37. Ibid., 36. For details on such use of airborne forces, see V. G. Reznichenko, Taktika [Tactics] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1966), 239-313.

38. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 296. For a good survey of exercises, see R. Oden and F. Steinert, "The Soviet Airborne Troops," Review of the Soviet Ground Forces, March 1980:5-12.

39. V. D. Sokolovsky, Voennaya Strategiya [Military strategy] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1968), 339, translated by the Foreign Technology Division.

40. U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Intelligence Agency, Handbook on the Soviet Armed Forces (Washington, DC, July 1969), 45-47.

41. Ibid., 46.

42. Ibid., 47.

43. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 270-72.

44. For a sample of the changing views, see M. M. Kiryan, "Armeiskaya nastupatel'naya operatsiya" [Army offensive operations], SVE, 1:239-44; N. Kireev, "Primenenie tankovykh podrazdelenii i chastei pri proryve oborony protivnika" [The use of tank subunits (battalions) and units (regiments) during the penetration of an enemy defense], VIZh, February 1982:38-40.

45. The motorized rifle division added a separate tank battalion, and its strength increased to 12,510 men and about 250 tanks. Tank division strength increased to 10,000 men and 325 tanks.

46. Kiryan, "Armeiskaya," 239-44.

47. It is perhaps not by accident that these experiences were first revealed in detail in 1968 with virtually nothing said about them before that date. The first general survey of Soviet and foreign airborne operations during World War II was written by Sofranov in 1962. Lisov's detailed work appeared in 1968, following the more general Lisov account, Sovetskie vozdushno-desantnye

voiska, published in 1962. Sukhorukov's detailed work followed in 1980. Few articles of substance on airborne experiences appeared before Lisov's work was published.

48. Articles on the U.S. experience include P. Maslennikov, "Nekotorye osobennosti taktiki sukhoputnykh voisk SShA vo V'etname" [Some characteristics of the tactics of U.S. ground forces in Vietnam], VIZh, August 1970:105-10; V. Matsulenko, "Voina v Yuzhnom V'etname" [The war in South Vietnam], VIZh, January 1971:37-49; A. Sinitsky, "Agressiya SShA v Kambodzhe i Laose" [The aggression of the U.S.A. in Cambodia and Laos], VIZh, July 1971:47-52; N. Nikitin, "Nekotorye operativno-takticheskie uroki lokal'nykh voin imperialisma" [Some operational-tactical lessons of the local wars of imperialism], VIZh, December 1978:60-66; V. Matsulenko, "Lokal'nye voiny imperializma (1946-1968gg)" [Local wars of imperialism, 1946-1968], VIZh, September 1968:36-51.

49. For information on specific helicopter types and capabilities, see G. H. Turbiville, "Soviet Airborne Forces: Increasingly Powerful Factor in the Equalization," Army 26 (April 1976):18-27; and G. H. Turbiville, "A Soviet View of Heliborne Assault Operations," Military Review 55 (October 1975):3-15.

50. Ibid.

51. K. Andrukhov and V. Bulatnikov, "The Growing Role of Air-Borne Troops in Modern Military Operations," Voennaya Mysl' [Military thought], July 1966, 175, CIA translation no. FPIR 0475/67 in Selected Readings from Soviet Military Thought (1963-1973), SPC report 584, selected and compiled by Joseph D. Douglass and Amoretta Hoeber, 173-84 (Arlington, VA: System Planning Corporation, April 1980).

52. An extensive analysis of tactical airborne (helicopter) landings is in I. S. Lyutov and P. T. Sayaidak, Motostrelkovyi batal'on v takticheskom vozdushnom desante [The motorized rifle battalion in tactical airlandings] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1969). In addition to theoretical, organizational, and operational details, it gives detailed instructions on how to engage specific missile systems (U.S. Corporal and Sergeant missiles).

53. Ibid., 12-13.

54. A. A. Sidorenko, The Offensive (A Soviet View), Soviet Military Thought, no. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 50, translated by the U.S. Air Force from the Soviet work, Nastuplenie (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1970).

55. Ibid., 149-50.

56. Ibid., 193.

57. Ibid., 173.

58. U.S. Department of the Army, FM 30-40, Handbook on Soviet Ground Forces (Washington, DC, 30 June 1975), 6-33.

59. Ibid., 6-36, 6-37.

60. Ibid., 6-37.

61. Sukhorukov, Sovetskie vozdushno, 278-92; Oden and Steinert, "Soviet Airborne Troops," 5-12.

62. For example, see V. Kokhanov, "By Joint Efforts," Soviet Military Review, December 1974:20-21, which discusses coordination of ground and airborne forward detachments; and M. Belov, "Airlanding Forces," Soviet Military Review, January 1979:22-23, which surveys airborne missions and conditions necessary for success.

63. U.S. Department of Defense, Soviet Military Power (Washington, DC, 1982), 29.

64. U.S. Department of the Army, FM 100-2-3 (Draft), Soviet Army Troop Organization and Equipment (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Threats Directorate, Combined Arms Combat Developments Activity, Combined Arms Center, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1982), 4-108. See also "Sowjetische Luftlande-Sturmbrigaden" [Soviet airlanding brigades], Soldat und Technik [Soldier and technology], December 1978:634. The air assault brigade has the following postulated organization:

1982 air assault brigade (2,000 men):

2 assault battalions (BMD)
2 parachute battalions
1 reconnaissance company
1 antiaircraft battery (6xZU-23)
1 artillery battalion
1 antitank battery (6x85-mm)
1 engineer company
1 signal company
1 parachute rigging and resupply company
1 transport and maintenance company
1 medical platoon/company
1 supply company
1 chemical defense platoon

65. Among official assessments of Soviet airborne division TOEs are the following:

1968 airborne division:

- 3 parachute regiments
  - 3 parachute battalions
- 1 artillery regiment
- 1 antiaircraft battalion
- 1 assault gun battalion (ASU-57/85)
- 1 reconnaissance battalion
- 1 engineer battalion
- 1 signal battalion
- 1 transportation battalion
- 1 chemical defense company

DOD, DIA, Handbook on the Soviet Armed Forces, 30.

1975 airborne division (7,200 men):

- 3 parachute regiments
  - 3 parachute battalions
- 1 artillery regiment
  - 1 artillery battalion (18x122-mm)
  - 1 rocket launcher battalion (140-mm)
  - 1 antitank battalion (85-mm)
  - 1 assault gun battalion (ASU-57/85)
- 1 antiaircraft battalion (18xZU-23)
- 1 reconnaissance battalion
- 1 engineer battalion
- 1 signal battalion
- 1 transportation battalion
- 1 maintenance battalion
- 1 medical battalion
- 1 chemical defense company
- 1 parachute rigging company

1975 parachute regiment:

- 3 parachute battalions (450 men)
- 1 mortar battery (6x120-mm)
- 1 antiaircraft battery (6xZU-23)
- 1 antitank battery (6x85-mm)
- 1 engineer company
- 1 signal company
- 1 medical company
- 1 maintenance company
- 1 chemical defense platoon

FM 30-40, 30 June 1975, A-14, A-15.

1978 airborne division (7,673 men):

3 airborne regiments (126 BMDs)
  3 airborne battalions
1 artillery regiment
  1 howitzer battalion (18x122-mm)
  1 rocket launcher battalion (18x140-mm)
  1 assault gun battalion (18xASU-85)
1 antiaircraft battalion (18xZU-23)
1 reconnaissance battalion
1 engineer battalion
1 signal battalion
1 transportation battalion
1 maintenance battalion
1 medical battalion
1 chemical defense company
1 parachute rigging company

1978 airborne regiment (1,837 men, 40 BMDs):

3 airborne battalions (350 men)
1 assault gun battery/battalion (9xASU-57)
1 antitank battery (6x85-mm)
1 antiaircraft battery (6xZU-23)
1 mortar battery (6x12-mm)
1 ATGM battery (6xAT-3)
  support units

U.S. Army, Combined Arms Combat Developments Activity, Concepts, Doctrine, and Literature Directorate, Threats Division, HB 550-2, Organization and Equipment of the Soviet Army (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 31 July 1978), 2-12, 2-13.

1980 airborne division (7,151 men, 127 BMDs, 13 BRDM/BRDM-2s):

3 airborne regiments (1 BMD, 2 non-BMD)
  3 airborne battalions
1 artillery regiment
  1 howitzer battalion (18x122-mm)
  1 rocket launcher battalion (18x140-mm)
1 assault gun battalion (18xASU-85)
1 antiaircraft battalion (18xZU-23)
1 reconnaissance battalion
1 engineer battalion
1 signal battalion
1 transportation battalion
1 maintenance battalion
1 medical battalion
1 chemical defense company
1 parachute rigging company

1980 airborne regiment (BMD) (1,322 men, 107 BMDs, 3 BRDMs):

3 airborne battalions (270 men)
1 ATGM battery (9xAT-3)
1 air defense battery (6xZU-23)
1 mortar battery (6x120-mm)
support units

1980 airborne regiment (non-BMD) (1,564 men, 10 BMDs):

3 airborne battalions (326 men)
1 BMD company (10xBMD)
1 mortar battery (6x120-mm)
1 antitank battery (6x85-mm)
1 air defense battery (6xZU-23)
support units

U.S. Army, Combined Arms Combat Developments Activity, Concepts, Doctrine and Literature Directorate, Threats Division, HB 550-2, Organization and Equipment of the Soviet Army (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 15 July 1980), 2-15, 2-19.

1982 airborne division (6,500 men, 330 BMDs):

3 airborne regiments (13 BRDM/BRDM-2s)
3 airborne battalions
1 artillery regiment
1 howitzer battalion (18x122-mm)
1 composite artillery battalion
(12x122-mm, 6x140-mm)
1 assault gun battalion (31xASU-85)
1 antiaircraft battalion (18xZU-23)
1 reconnaissance battalion
1 engineer battalion
1 signal battalion
1 transport and maintenance battalion
1 medical battalion
1 chemical defense company
1 parachute rigging, resupply company

1982 airborne regiment (1,455 men, 109 BMDs, 4 BRDMs):

3 airborne battalions (310 men)
1 mortar battery (6x120-mm)
1 antitank guided missile battery (8xAT-3)
1 air defense battery (6xZU-23)
support units

FM 100-2-3 (Draft), 1982, 4-188, 4-195.

66. Glantz, "Soviet Operational Formation," 10-11.

67. Army forward detachments would be of reinforced tank regiment size; division forward detachments of reinforced tank battalion size. See Kireev, "Primenenie," 38-39. For the origins of the concept and current applicability, see N. Kireev and N. Dovbenko, "Iz opyta boevogo primeneniya peredovykh otryadov tankovykh (mekhonizirovannykh) korpusov" [From the experiences of the combat use of forward detachments of tank (mechanized) corps], VIZh, September 1982:20-27.

Chapter 8

1. Margelov, "Razvitie teorii," 59.

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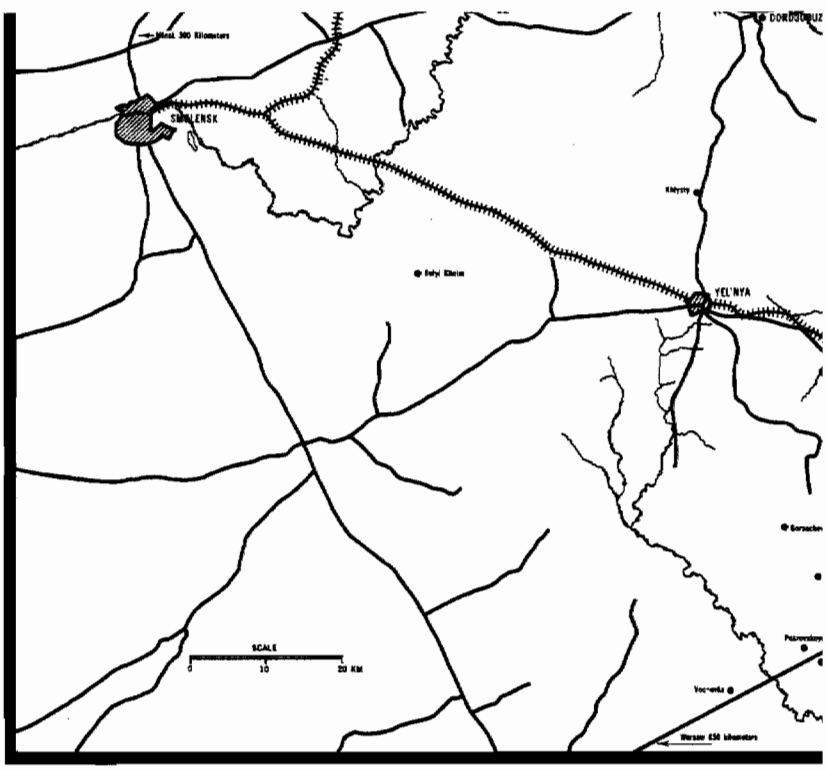
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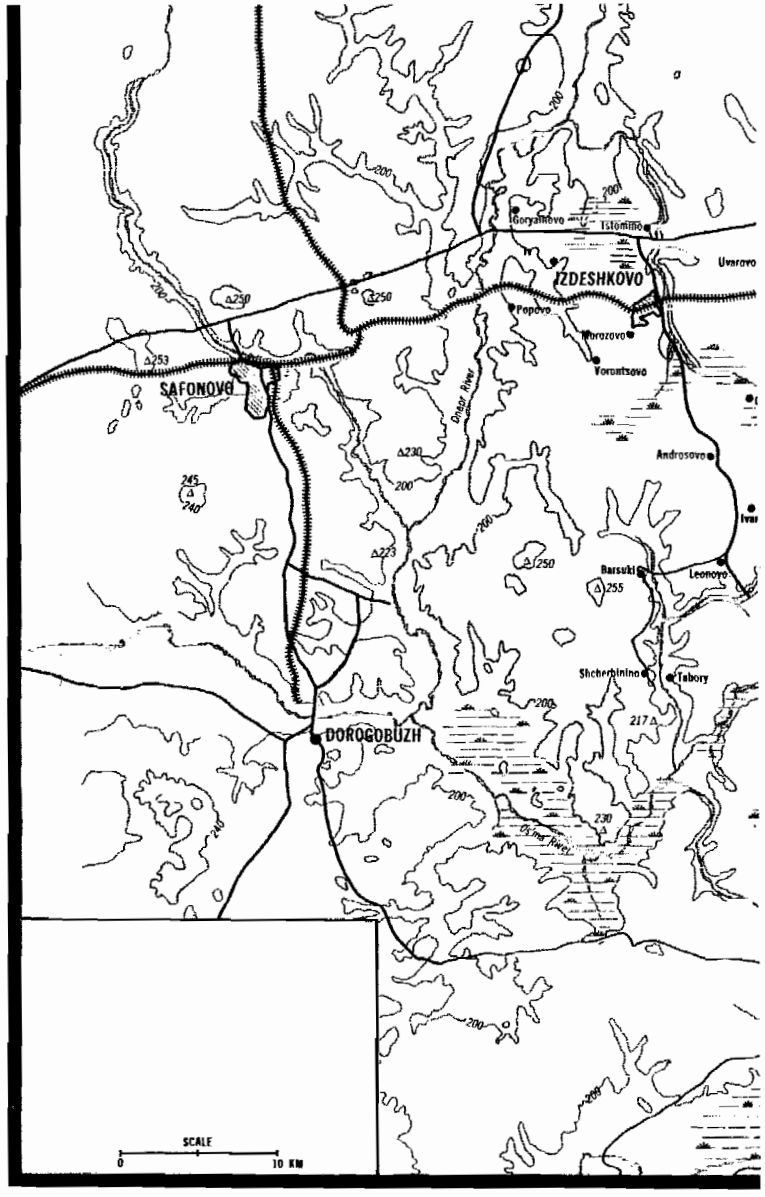
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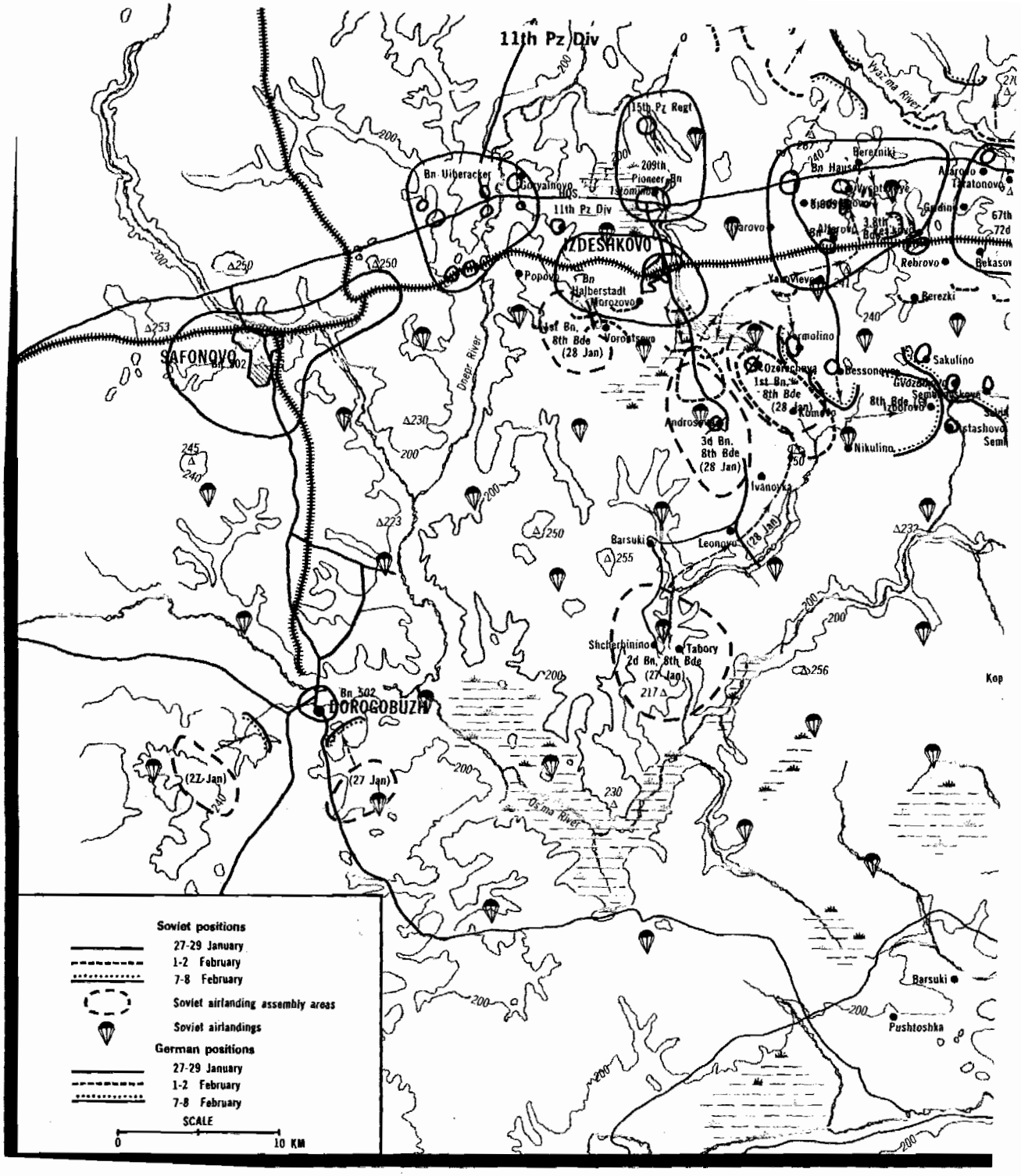
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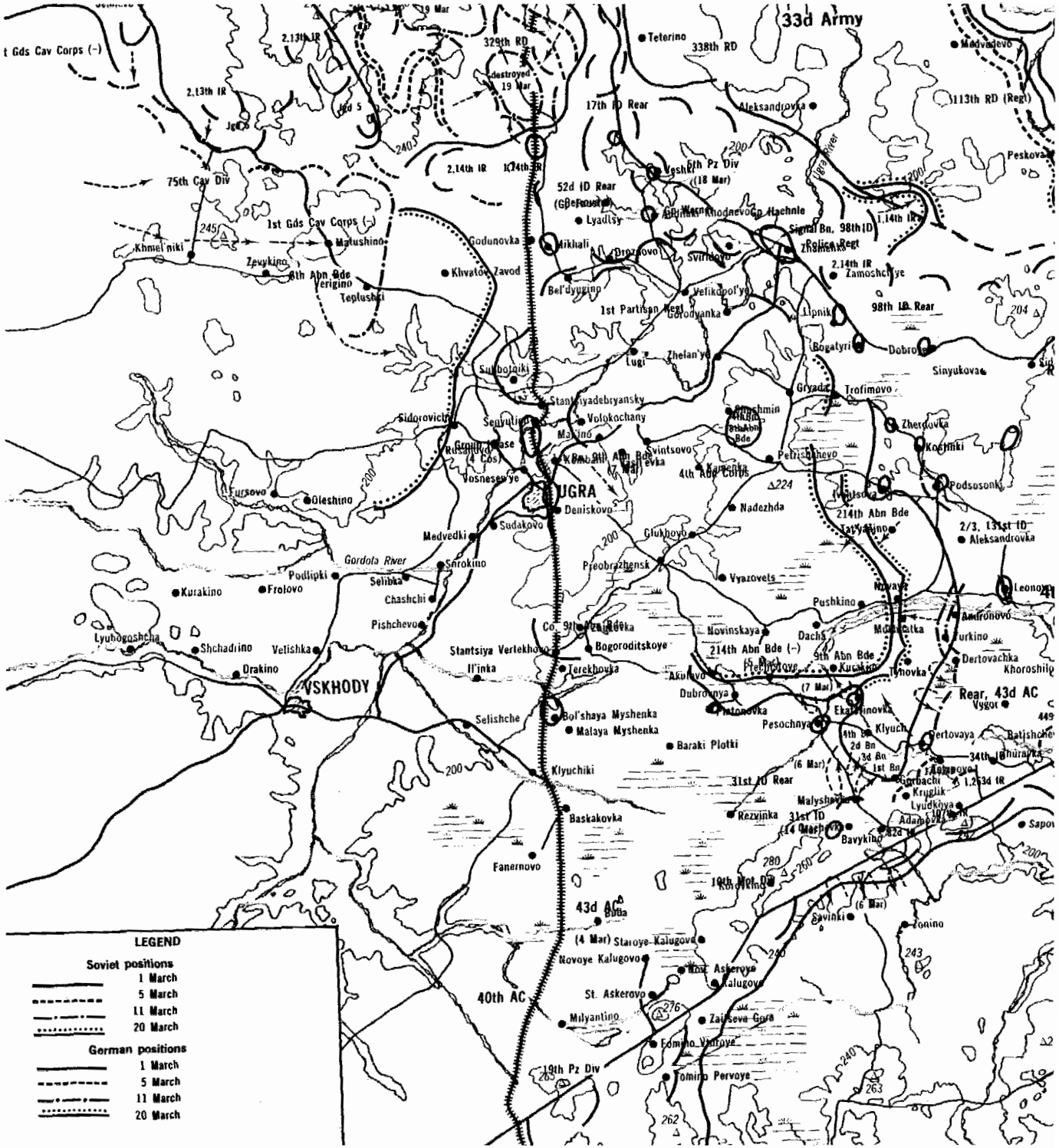


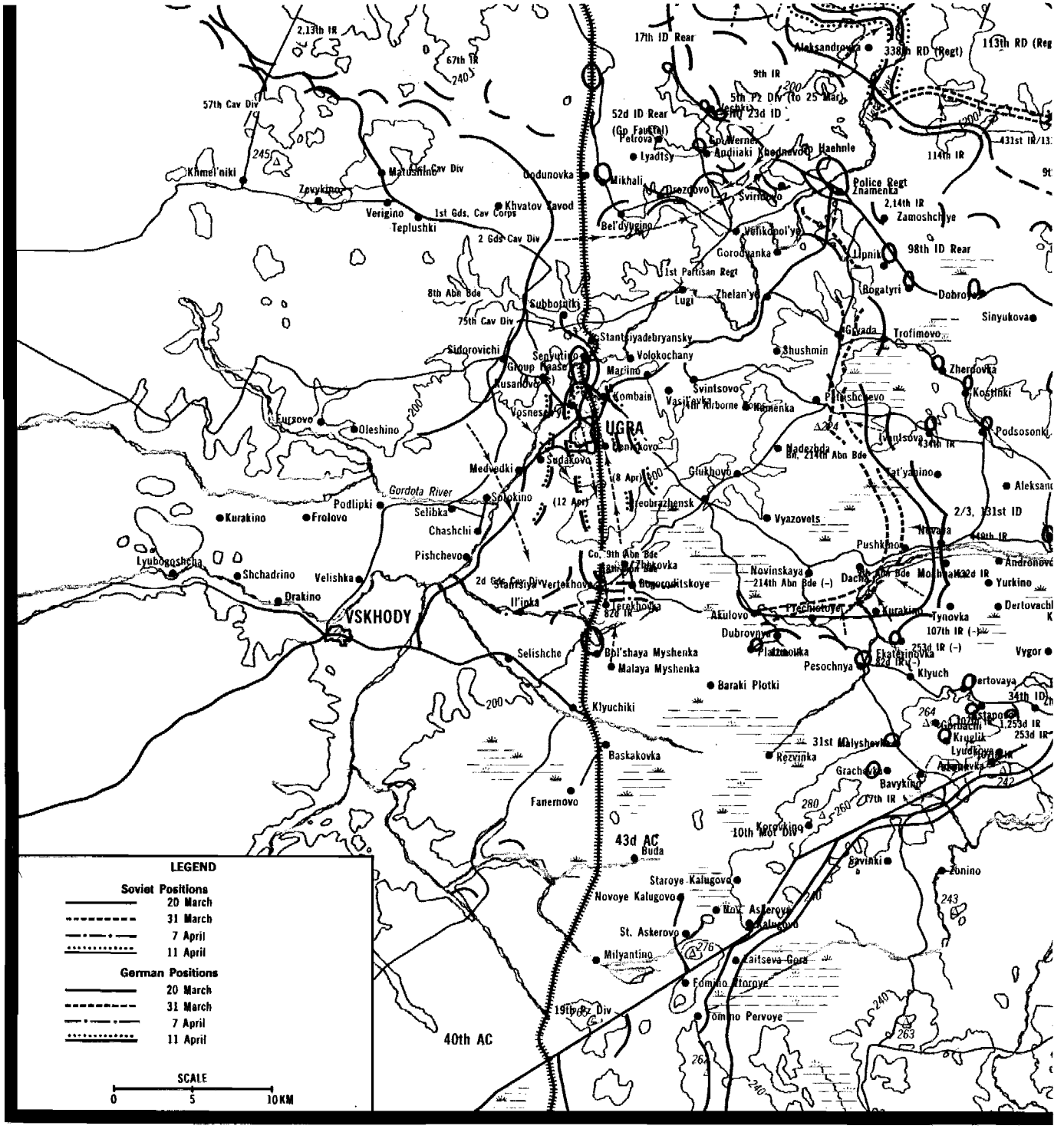
Map 3. Area of Operations, Soviet Winter Offensive, January—May 1942



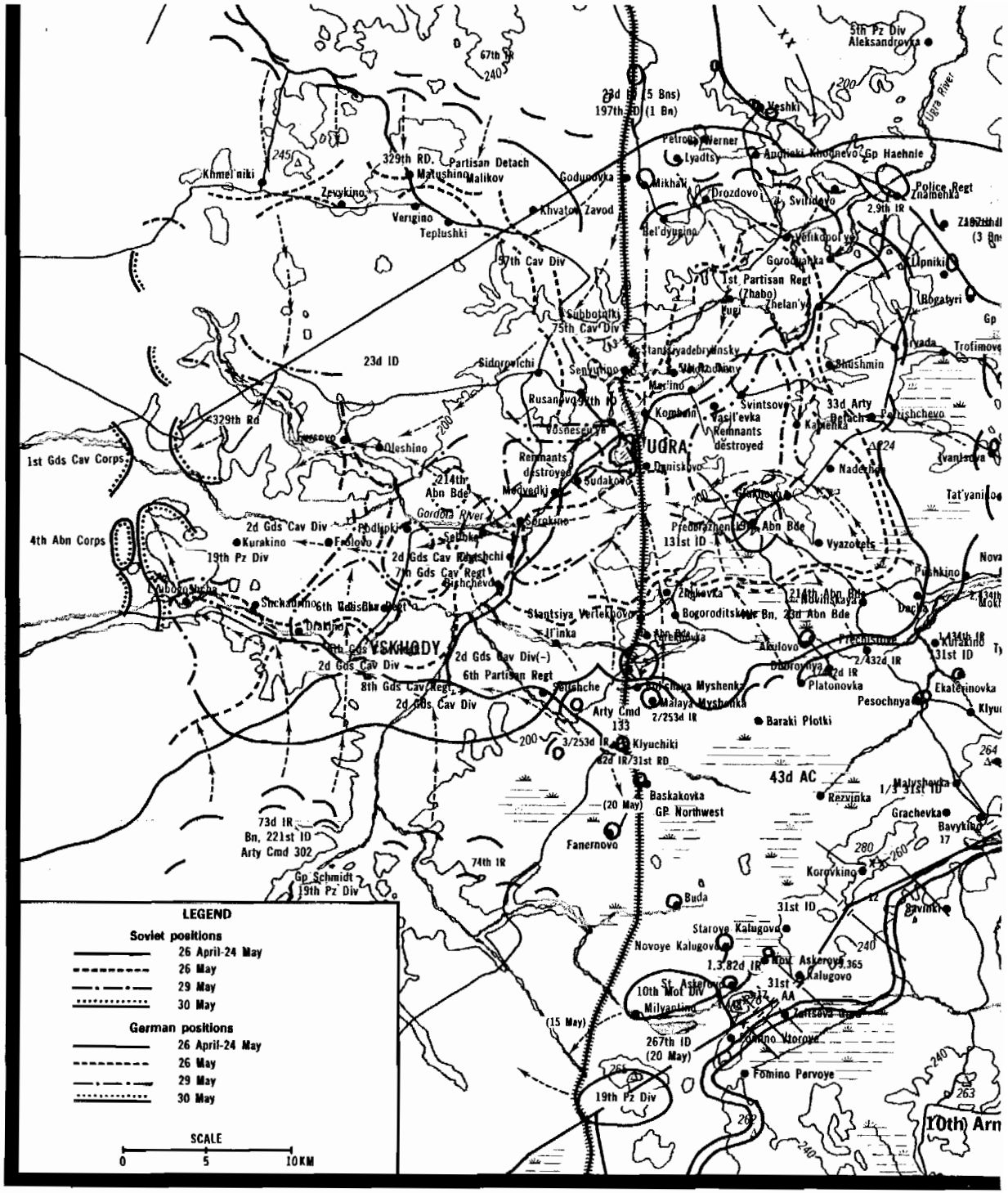
Map 5. Vyaz'ma-Dorogobuzh Area


11th Pz Div
15th Pz Regt
209th Pioneer Bn
Bn Uiberacker
Govyalnovo
HQS 11th Pz Div
IZDESHKOVO
Popovo
Bn Halberstadt
Morozovo
1st Bn, 8th Bde (28 Jan)
Vorobtsovo
SAFONOVO
Bn 302
Dnepr River
Ozerechnaya
1st Bn, 8th Bde (28 Jan)
Androsovo
3d Bn, 8th Bde (28 Jan)
Barsuki
Leonovo
(28 Jan)
Shcherbinino
Tabory
2d Bn, 8th Bde (27 Jan)
DOROGOBUZH
(27 Jan)
(27 Jan)
Ugra River
Vyazma River
Berezniki
Bn Hause
Varovo
Rebrovo
Berezki
Yermolino
Bessonovo
Sakulino
Komelo
Nikulino
Ivanovka
Pushtoshka
Soviet positions
27-29 January
1-2 February
7-8 February
Soviet airlanding assembly areas
Soviet airlandings
German positions
27-29 January
1-2 February
7-8 February
SCALE
0
10 KM

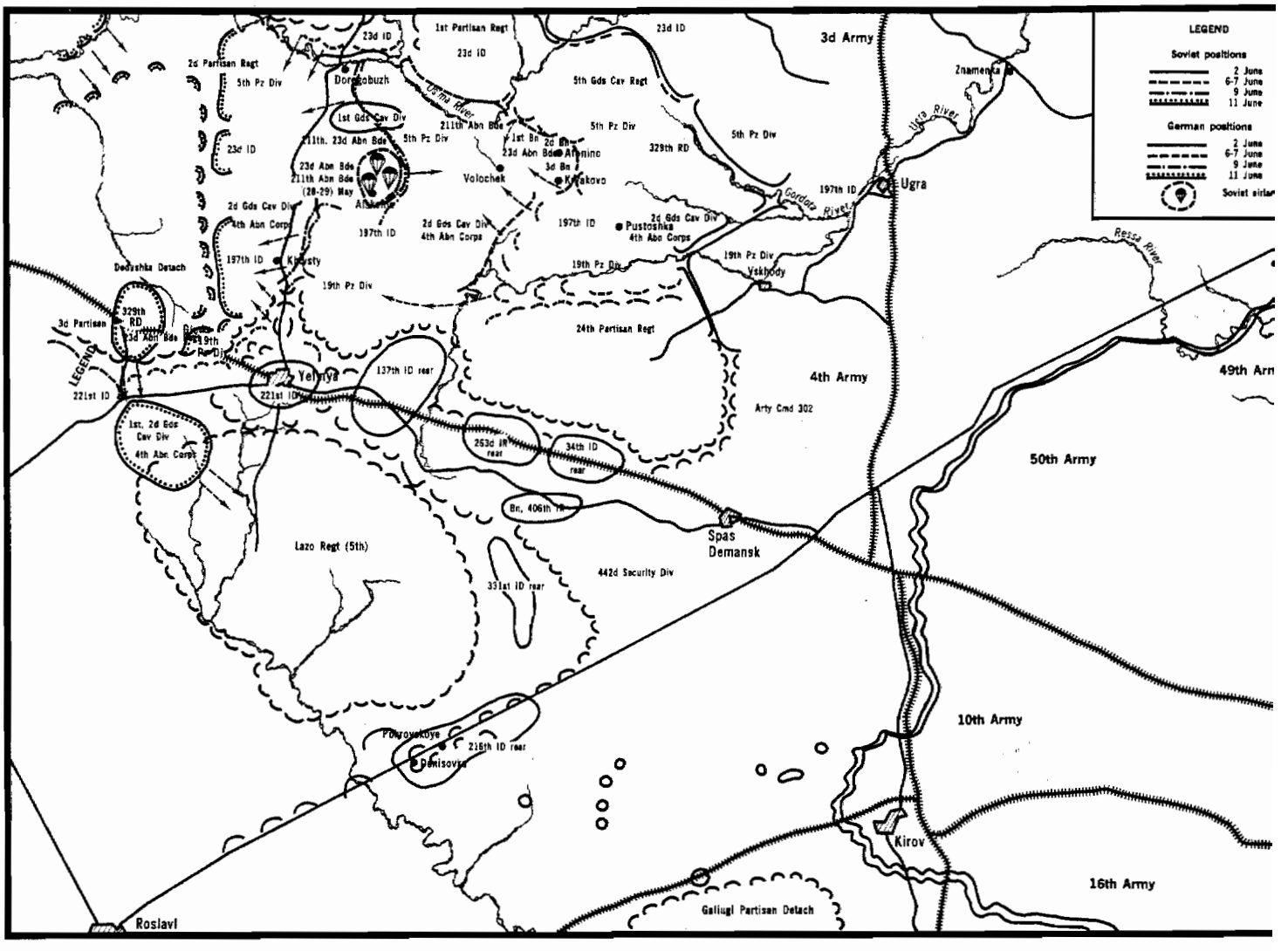

33d Army
t Gds Cav Corps (-)
2.13th IR
329th RD
destroyed 19 Mar
Teterino
338th RD
Madvadevo
1113th RD (Regt)
17th ID Rear
Aleksandrovka
Peskovatka
Ugra River
6th Pz Div (18 Mar)
52d ID Rear
Lyadisy
Knodnevo
Signal Bn, 98th ID
Police Regt
1.14th IR
2.14th IR
Zamoshch'ye
98th ID Rear
75th Cav Div
1st Gds Cav Corps (-)
Matushino
Khmel'niki
Zevykino
8th Abn Bde
Verigino
Teplushki
Godunovka
Mikhali
Drozdovo
Svirtsovo
Khvatov Zavod
Bel'dyugino
Velikopol'ye
1st Partisan Regt
Gorodyanka
Ilpnik
Bogatyri
Dobroye
Sinyukova
Lugi
Zhelan'ye
Sukhotoiki
Gryada
Trofimovo
Stanki
Yadebryansky
Sidorovichi
Volokochany
Ginshmin
Zhertovka
Kozlinki
Svintsovo
Petrishchevo
Karenka
4th Abn Corps
Tursovo
Oleshino
UGRA
Deniskovo
Nadezhda
Podsosonki
214th Abn Bde
Tat'yanino
2/3, 131st ID
Aleksandrovka
Sudakovo
Medvedki
Gordota River
Sorokino
Pleobrazhensk
Vyazovets
Podlipki
Selibka
Kurakino
Frolovo
Chashchi
Pushkino
Leonovo
Andronovo
Pishchevo
Novinskaya
Dachi
Turkino
Lyubogoshcha
Shchadrino
Velishka
Drakino
Stantsiya Vertekhovo
Bogoroditskoye
214th Abn Bde (-)
9th Abn Bde
Dertovachka
Khoroshilo
Il'inka
Terekhovka
Akulovo
Tynovka
Dubrovnya
Rear, 43d AC
Vygor
VSKHODY
Selishche
Bol'shaya Myshenka
Malaya Myshenka
Pesochnya
Ekaterinovka
Klyuch
Dertovaya
Ratishche
Baraki Plotki
2d Bn
3d Bn
1st Bn
34th Shuraykha
Klyuchiki
31st ID Rear
Gorbachi
1.263d IR
Kruglik
Lyudkovo
Malyshevo
Rezvinka
31st ID
Adamovka
Baskakovka
Bavykino
Fanernovo
10th Mot Bde
Korolkino
43d AC
Butta
Savinki
Zonino
Staroye Kalugovo
Novoye Kalugovo
Nov. Askerovo
Kalugovo
40th AC
St. Askerovo
Milyantino
Zaitseva Gora
Fomino Vtoroye
19th Pz Div
Fomino Pervoye
LEGEND
Soviet positions
1 March
5 March
11 March
20 March
German positions
1 March
5 March
11 March
20 March



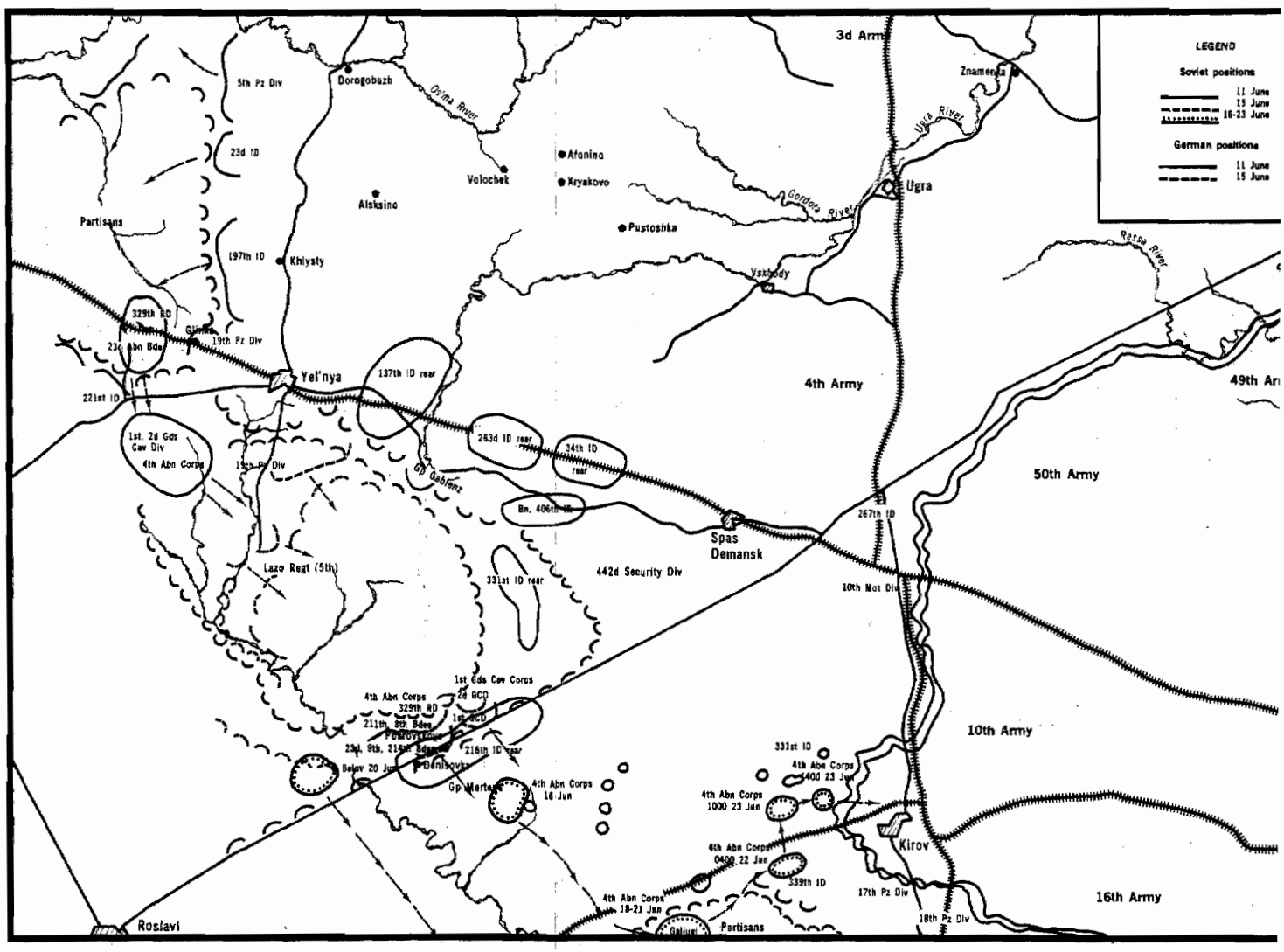
Map 17 4th Airborne Corps Operations, 20 March–11 April 1942



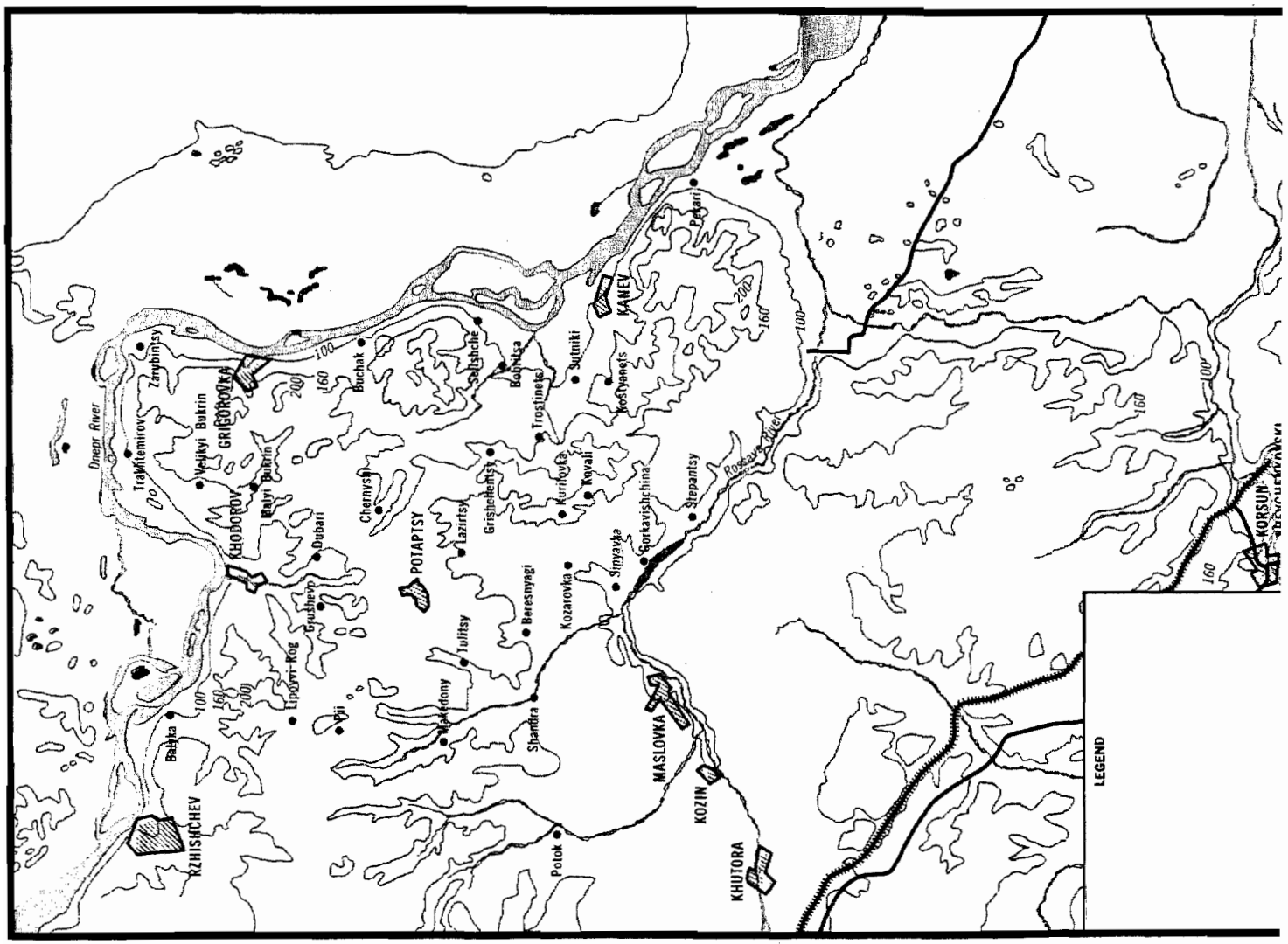
Map 20. 4th Airborne Corps and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps Operations, 26 April—30 May 1942



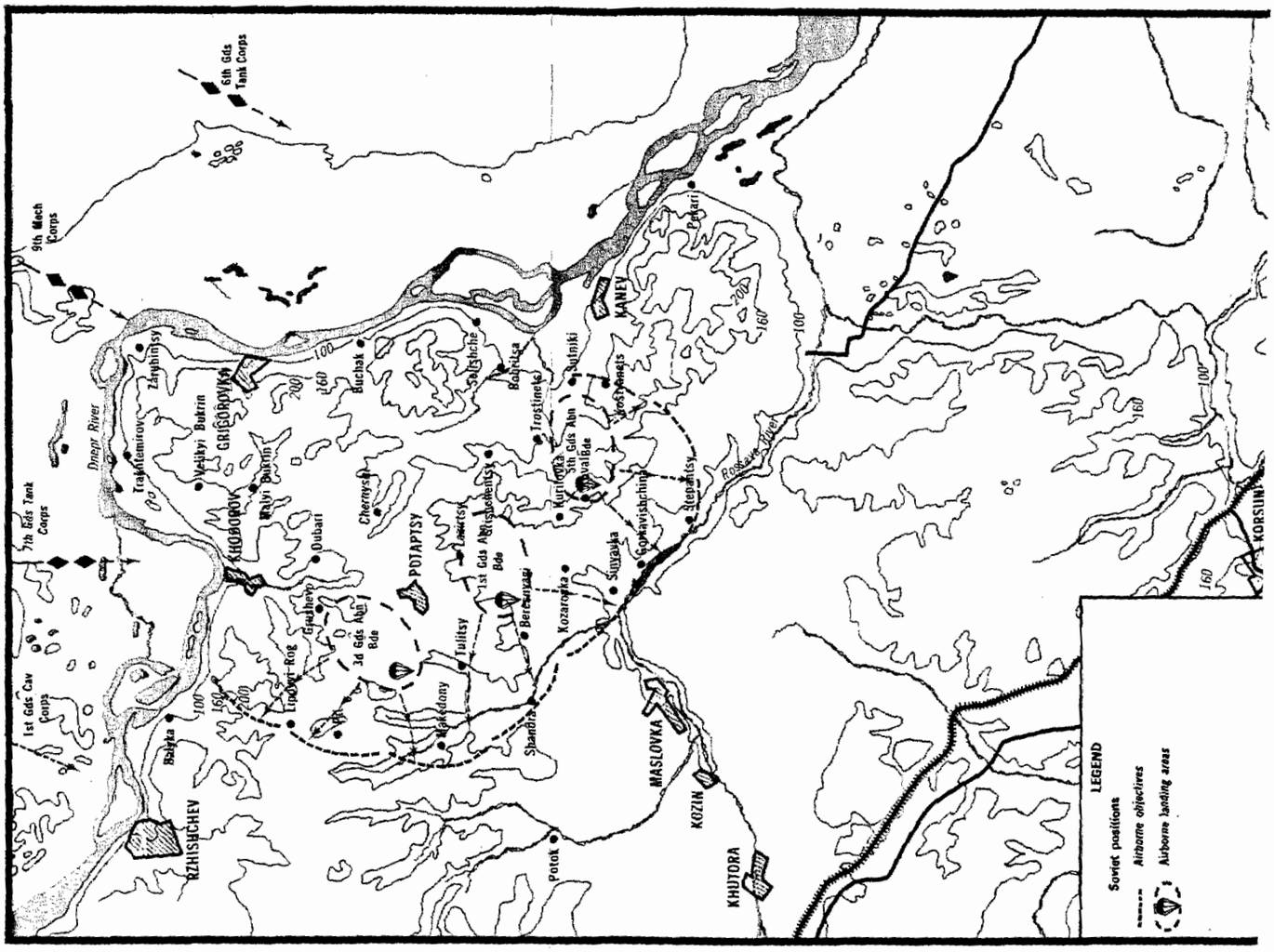
Map 21. Breakout to 10th Army, 1—11 June 1942



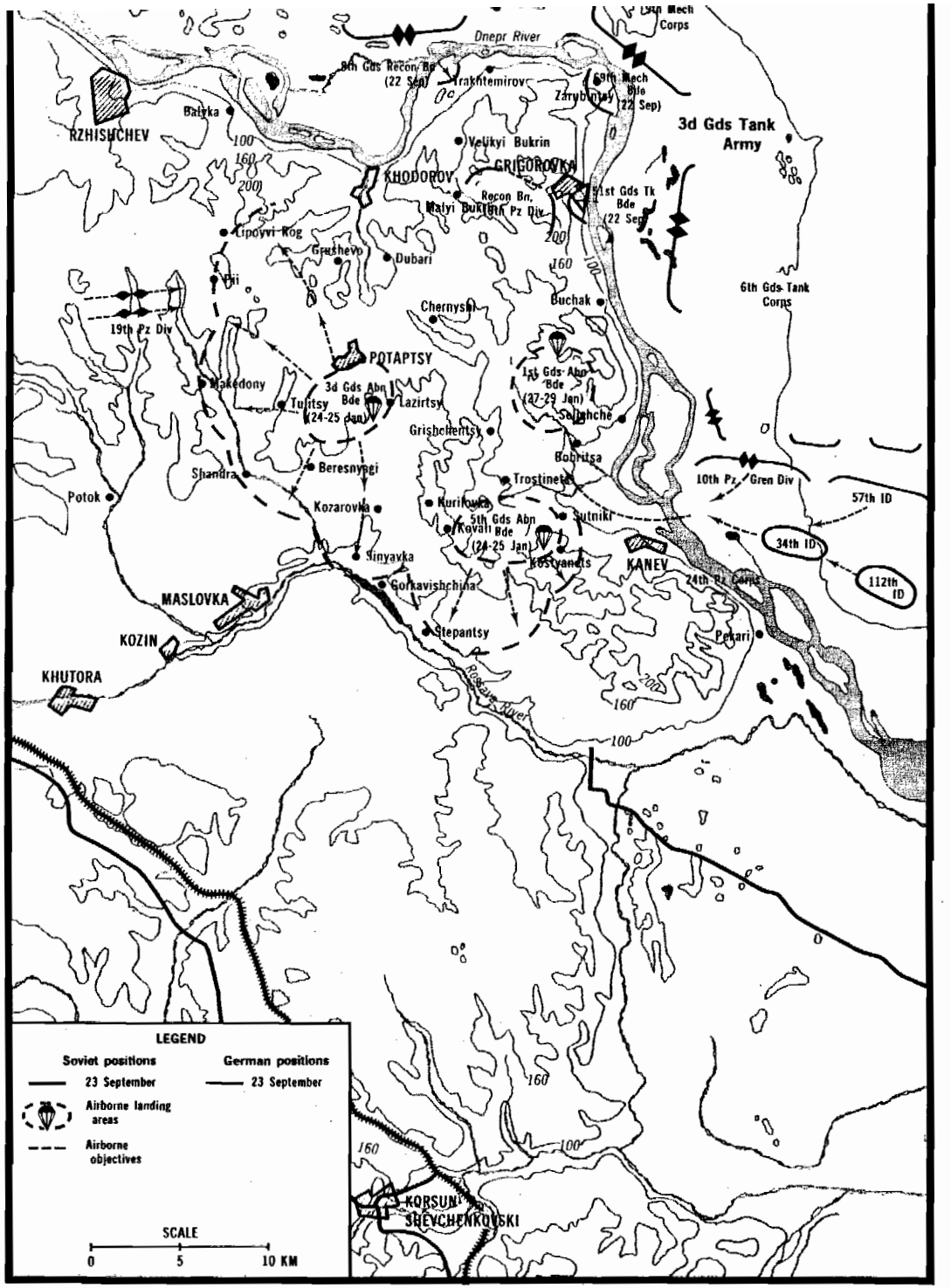
Map 22. Breakout to 10th Army, 11—23 June 1942

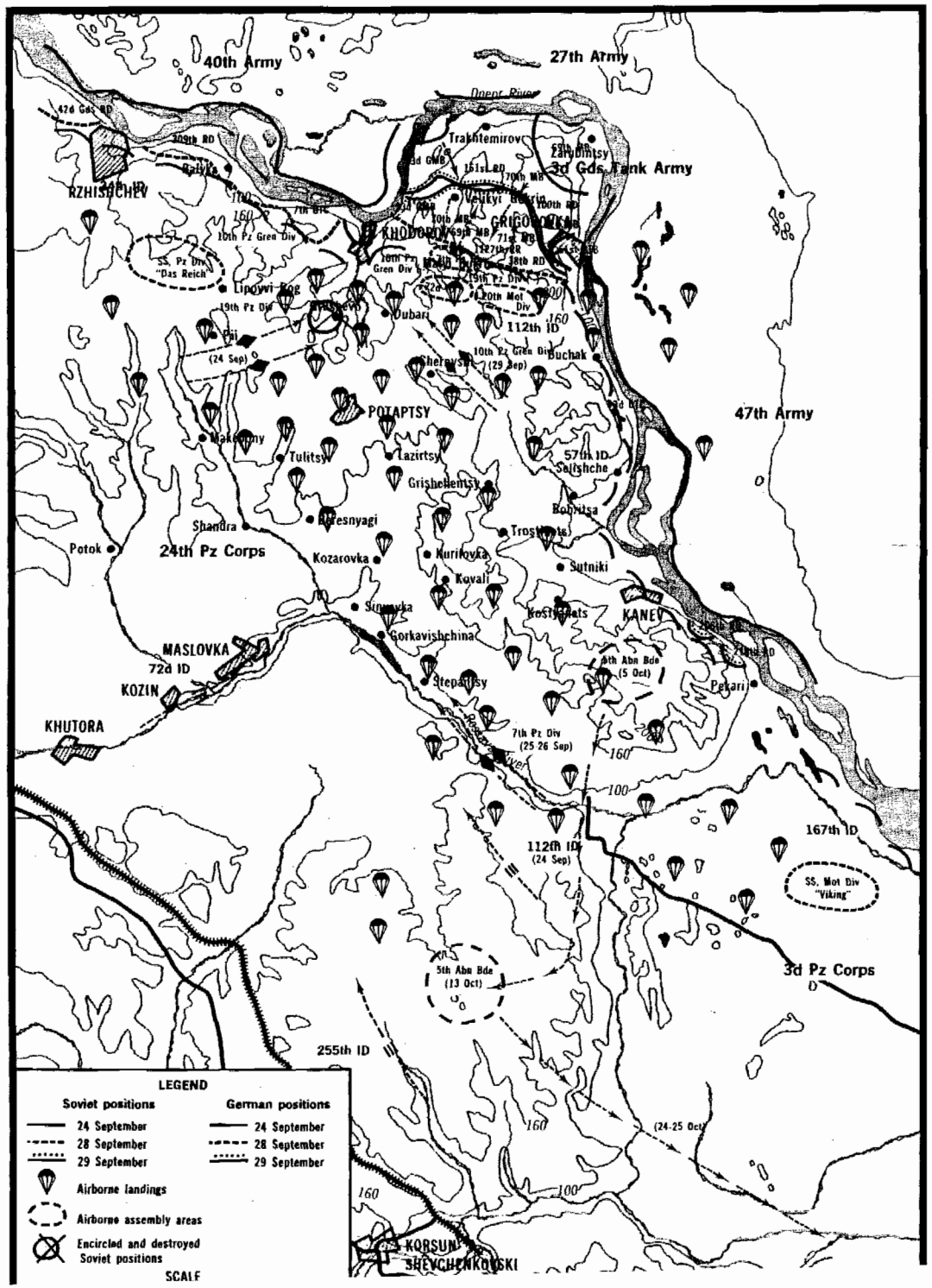


Map 24. Kanev-Bukrin Area



Map 25. Dnepr Airborne Operation Plan, 20 September 1943


Dnepr River
8th Gds Recon Bn (22 Sep)
Trakhtemirov
Zarybintsy
69th Mech Bde (22 Sep)
Corps
RZHISHCHEV
Batyrka
Velikyi Bukrin
3d Gds Tank Army
KHODOROV
GRIGOROVKA
Recon Bn, Maliyi Bukrin Pz Div
51st Gds Tk Bde (22 Sep)
Lipovyi Rog
Grushevo
Dubari
Pii
6th Gds Tank Corps
Chernyshi
Buchak
19th Pz Div
POTAPTSY
1st Gds Abn Bde (27-29 Jan)
Makedony
3d Gds Abn Bde (24-25 Jan)
Tulitsy
Lazirtsy
Grishchentsy
Bobritsa
Shandra
Beresnyagi
Trostinets
10th Pz Gren Div
57th ID
Potok
Kozarovka
Kurilovka
5th Gds Abn Bde (24-25 Jan)
Sutnikr
34th ID
Kovali
Kostyanets
KANEV
Sinyavka
24th Pz Corps
112th ID
Gorkavishchina
MASLOVKA
Stepantsy
Pekari
KOZIN
KHUTORA
Rosava River
LEGEND
Soviet positions
23 September
Airborne landing areas
Airborne objectives
German positions
23 September
SCALE
0
5
10 KM
KORSUN SHEVCHENKOVSKI



Map 27. Dnepr Airborne Operation, 24 September–13 October 1943

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COMBAT STUDIES INSTITUTE

Mission

The Combat Studies Institute was established on 18 June 1979 as a separate, department-level activity within the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for the purpose of accomplishing the following missions:

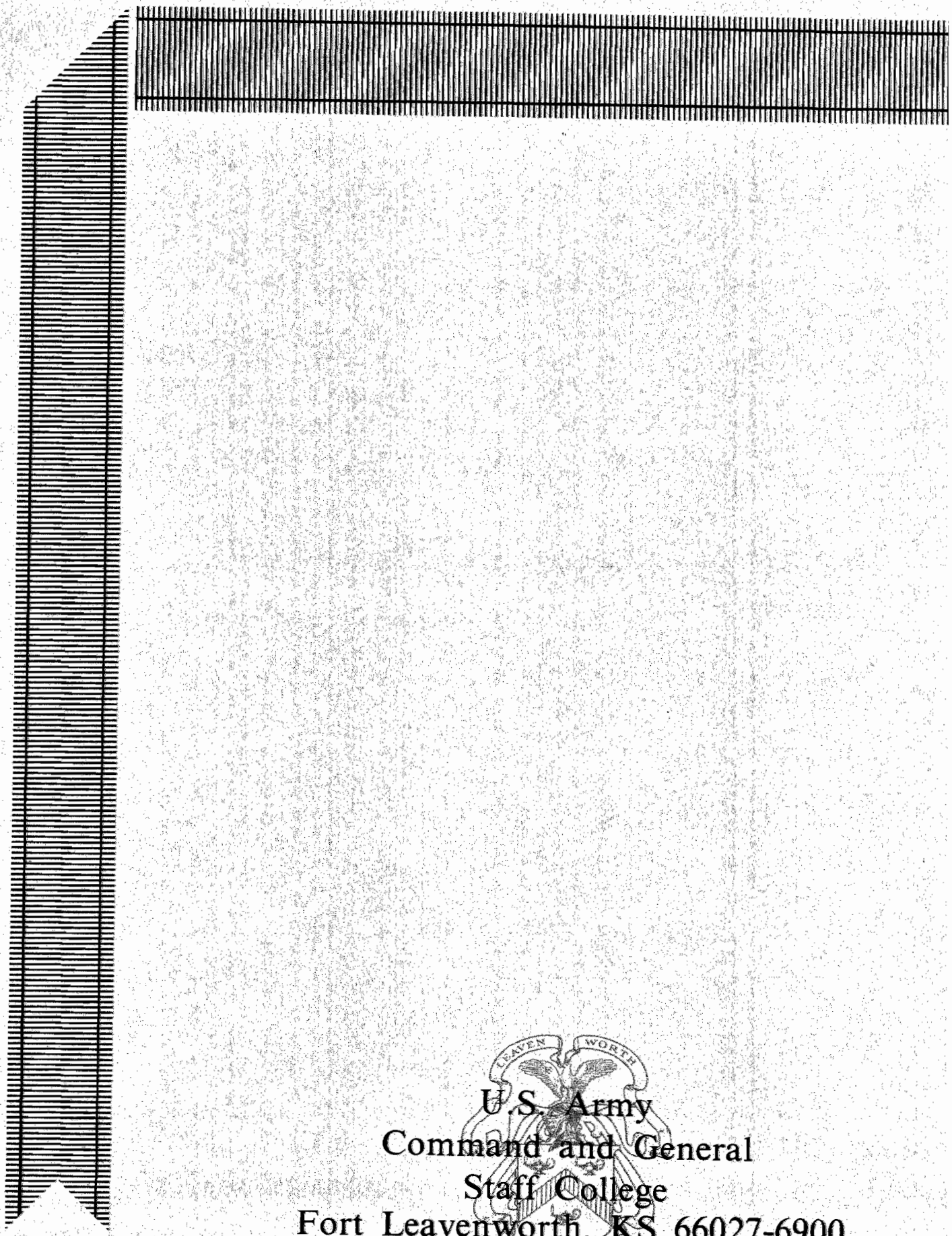
1. Conduct research on historical topics pertinent to doctrinal concerns of the Army and publish the results in a variety of formats for the Active Army and Reserve components.

2. Prepare and present instruction in military history at CGSC and assist other CGSC departments in integrating military history into their instruction.

3. Serve as the TRADOC executive agent for the development and coordination of an integrated, progressive program of military history instruction in the TRADOC service school system.

4. Direct the CAC historical program.

5. Supervise the Fort Leavenworth museum.



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83-CSI-3637(S)