Leavenworth Papers

No. 8

August Storm: Soviet Tactical and Operational Combat in Manchuria, 1945

by LTC David M. Glantz

Combat Studies Institute
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027

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FOREWORD

In this companion piece to *Leavenworth Paper No. 7*, "August Storm: The Soviet Strategic Offensive in Manchuria, 1945," LTC David M. Glantz focuses on the operational and tactical levels of the Manchurian campaign, highlighting the techniques that brought victory to Soviet combined arms during the last days of World War II. In eight case studies, Lieutenant Colonel Glantz examines various kinds of military operations, from tank armies crossing mountains and desert to joint ground and riverine actions conducted over diverse terrain, from heavily wooded mountains to swampy lowlands.

The operational and tactical techniques that the Russians employed in Manchuria evolved during four years of war in Europe, were adapted to the situation in the Far East, and reflected an imaginative and flexible approach to combat. No one technique stood in isolation from the others. For example, Soviet emphasis on maneuver during the campaign was successful because units at every level were task organized, tailored to objectives, terrain, and enemy strength, and time-phased into combat in such a way as to bring unrelenting pressure on enemy defenses. Surprise was a decisive factor on all fronts as Soviet units prepared in secrecy, attacked at night during inclement weather, and moved across territory considered to be impassable by the Japanese defenders. Having relinquished the initiative to the Soviets, the Japanese were never to regain it.

That Manchuria represented the culmination of the Soviet military experience in World War II and the last theater level operation undertaken by Soviet combined arms is in itself reason for U.S. Army officers to study this campaign. Beyond that, the Soviet war in Manchuria is instructive on a more general level. On the one hand, it demonstrates the value in warfare of careful planning, methodical preparation, and imaginative and unpredictable execution. On the other, it warns of the consequences of complacency and of underestimating one's opponent. For the thorough analysis and detailed narrative that they bring to the Manchurian campaign, Lieutenant Colonel Glantz's *Leavenworth Papers* will stand as the definitive works on the subject.

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Contents

Illustrations v
Tables vii
Abbreviations ix
Symbols xi
Introduction 1
1. Army Penetration Operations 7
   The Route 7
   Missions and Tasks 10
   Japanese Defenses 10
   Operational Planning 13
   5th Army Attack 21
   Conclusions 32
   Notes 32
2. Division Advance in Heavily Wooded Mountains 35
   Terrain 35
   Missions and Tasks 35
   Japanese Defenses 36
   Operational Planning 39
   Combat and Combat Service Support 41
   1st Red Banner Army Attack 44
   Conclusions 51
   Notes 52
3. Army Operations in Swampy Lowlands 55
   Terrain 55
   Missions and Tasks 55
   Japanese Defenses 56
   Operational Planning 58
   35th Army Attack 62
   Conclusions 66
   Notes 67

4. Set Piece Battle 69
The Setting 69
1st Red Banner Army Advance 73
5th Army Advance 82
Battle of Mutanchiang 88
Conclusions 96
Notes 97
5. Reduction of a Fortified Region 101
Hutou: Strategic Significance 101
Japanese Forces 101
Soviet Forces 107
Soviet 35th Army Attack 109
Conclusions 122
Notes 124
6. Army Operations in Arid Mountains 127
Situation in Western Manchuria 127
Missions and Tasks 128
Japanese Defenses 131
Soviet Operational Planning 132
39th Army Attack 138
Conclusions 148
Notes 150
7. Forward Detachment Deep Operations 153
Situation in Northwestern Manchuria 153
Japanese Defenses 154
Missions and Tasks. 155
Operational Planning 156
36th Army Attack 160
Conclusions 164
Notes 165
8. Joint Ground and Riverine Operations 167
Situation in Northeastern Manchuria 167
Japanese Defenses 168
Missions and Tasks 169
15th Army Attack 173
Conclusions 183
Notes 185
9. Conclusions 187
Use of Terrain 187
Surprise 188
Maneuver 189
Task Organization of Units 190

Illustrations

Maps

Introduction:
I—1. The Manchurian Campaign 2
I—2. Index to Case Study Locations 4

Case Study 1:
1—1. Area of Operations: 5th Army and 1st Red Banner Army 8
1—2. The Border Fortified Region 9
1—3. 5th Army Operations, 9—10 August 1945 195

Case Study 2:
2—1. 1st Red Banner Army Operations, 9—10 August 1945 46

Case Study 3:
3—1. 35th Army Operations, 8—12 August 1945 196

Case Study 4:
4—1. The Approaches to Mutanchiang 70
4—2. Japanese Defenses of Mutanchiang, 9 August 1945 72
4—3. Situation, 11 August 74
4—4. Situation, 12 August 77
4—5. Situation, 13 August 80
4—6. Situation, 14 August 87
4—7. The Fall of Mutanchiang, 14—16 August 197

Case Study 5:
5—1. Japanese and Soviet Positions on the Eve of the Attack 104
5—2. Overview of 35th Soviet Army Operations 108
5—3. Japanese Artillery Coverage at Hutou 112
5—4. Soviet Attack on Hutou 113
5—5. Soviet Reduction of the Hutou Fortress 117

Case Study 6:
6—1. 39th Army Operations, 9—13 August 1945 198

Case Study 7:
7—1. 36th Army Operations, 9—17 August 1945 199
7—2. The 205th Tank Brigade Assault on Hailar, 9—10 August 162

Case Study 8:
8—1. 15th Army Operations, 9—17 August 1945 174
8—2. The Assault Across the Amur River, 9—10 August 175
8—3. The Battle of Fuchin, 10—13 August 177
8—4. The Fall of Chiamussu, 14—16 August 184

Figure

2—1. Soviet 1st Red Banner Army Echelonment 42

Tables

Case Study 1:
1—1. Order of Battle, Japanese 124th Infantry Division 12
1—2. 5th Army Composition 13
Case Study 2:
2—1. Japanese 126th Infantry Division Composition 38
2—2. Japanese 126th Infantry Division Disposition 38
2—3. Soviet 1st Red Banner Army Composition 40
2—4. Soviet 300th Rifle Division Composition 43
Case Study 3:
3—1. Japanese 135th Infantry Division Composition 56
3—2. Soviet 35th Army Composition 59
Case Study 5:
5—1. Japanese 15th Border Guard Unit Strength 106
Case Study 6:
6—1. Soviet 39th Army Composition 130
6—2. Japanese 107th Infantry Division Composition 132
6—3. Allocation of Support Units to 39th Army Subordinate Units 136
Case Study 7:
7—1. Soviet 36th Army Composition 157
7—2. 36th Army Forward Detachment 158
Case Study 8:
8—1. Soviet 15th Army Composition 170
8—2. Amur Flotilla Support for 15th Army 172

Abbreviations

Soviet Forces

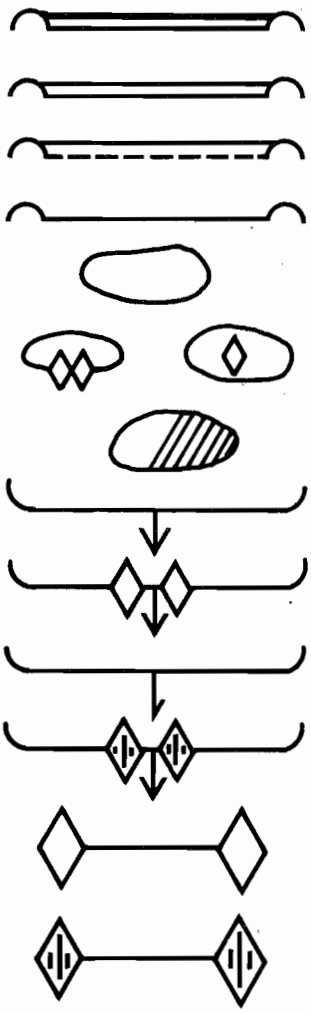
A ..... Army
AEB ..... Assault engineer-sapper brigade
BGBn ..... Border guards battalion
Cav-Mech Gp ..... Cavalry-mechanized group
CD ..... Cavalry division
FD ..... Forward detachment
FFR ..... Field fortified region
FR ..... Fortified region
G ..... Guards
HSPR ..... Heavy self-propelled artillery regiment
MB ..... Mechanized brigade
MC ..... Mechanized corps
MnRR ..... Mountain rifle regiment
MRD ..... Motorized rifle division
RBA ..... Red Banner Army
RBn ..... Rifle battalion
RC ..... Rifle corps
RD ..... Rifle division
RR ..... Rifle regiment
TA ..... Tank army
TB ..... Tank brigade
TC ..... Tank corps
TD ..... Tank division

Japanese Forces

BGU ..... Border guards unit
IB ..... Independent mixed brigade
ID ..... Infantry division

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

Japanese

	Field fortifications, defensive positions
	Fortified region, permanent
•	Section position
• •	Squad position
• • •	Platoon position
I	Company position
II	Battalion position
III	Regiment position
X	Brigade position
XX	Division position
--XX--	Division boundary
--XXXX--	Army boundary
--XXXXX--	Area army boundary
--XXXXXX--	Kwantung Army boundary

Introduction

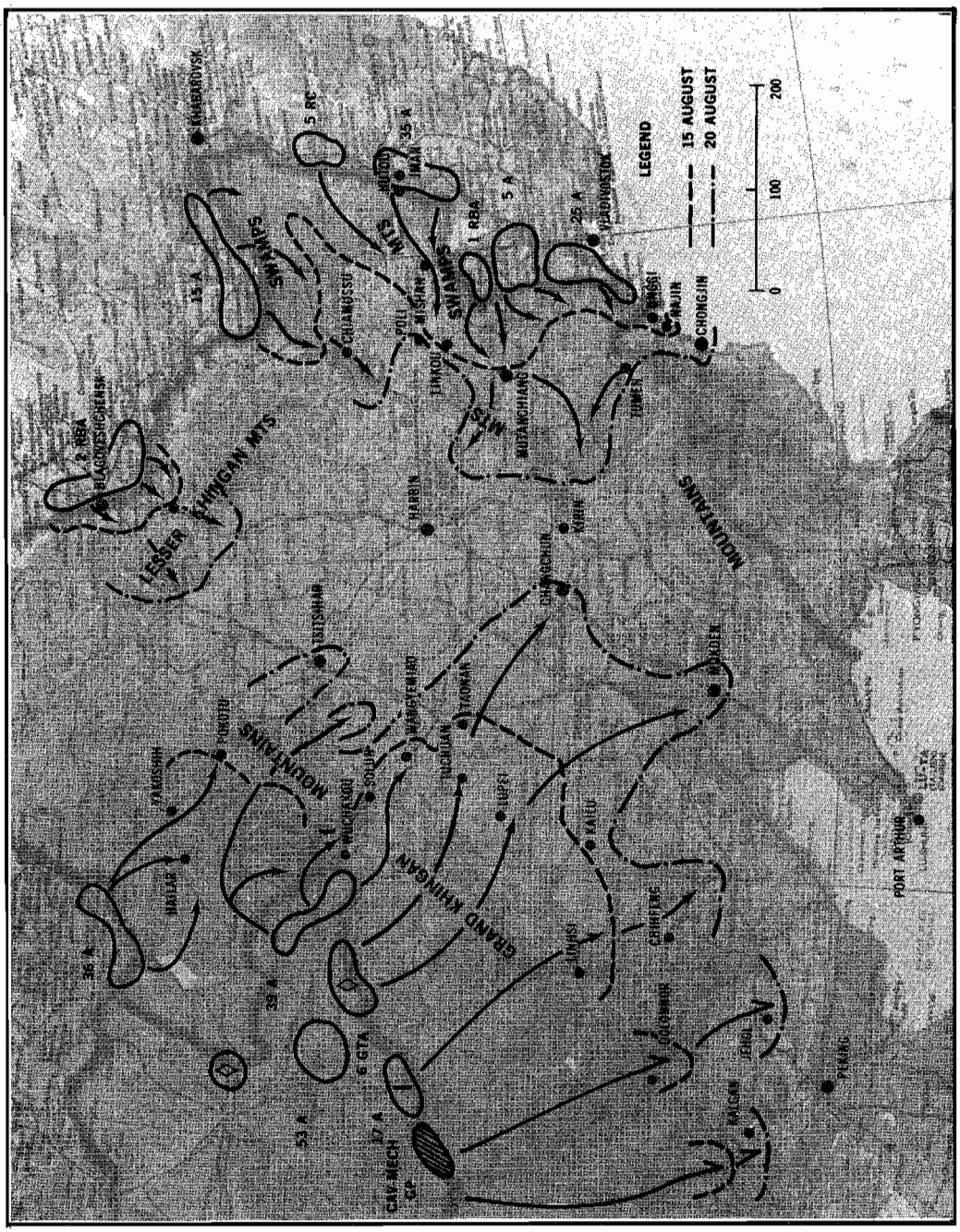
The 1945 Soviet campaign in Manchuria ended less than two weeks after it had begun. It took the Soviet Army about seven days to crush the Japanese Kwantung Army and end Japanese domination of northeastern Asia. The Soviets executed their self-styled strategic "Cannae"* by launching three separate fronts** along converging axes into central Manchuria (see map I—1). Shortly after midnight on 9 August, more than 1.5 million men commenced the attack. By attacking in the dark, on a broad front, along multiple attack axes, often across terrain the Japanese considered impassable, and, in many sectors, through drenching August rains, Soviet forces exerted maximum pressure on the surprised Japanese defenders. By organizing their forces to achieve a rapid advance in all types of terrain and by leading the advance wherever possible with armored forward detachments, the Soviets generated the speed necessary to overcome initial Japanese defenses and to preempt subsequent Japanese defensive efforts.

Soviet efforts yielded success. The three fronts penetrated western, eastern, and northern Manchuria, preempted Japanese defenses, and paralyzed the Japanese command and control system. The Russians bypassed, isolated, and annihilated Japanese covering forces, while Japanese main force units sought in vain to create a viable defense line. The massive scale of the Soviet attack underscored its audaciousness, relentlessness, and intrepidness.

Three combined arms armies and one tank army of the Soviet Trans-Baikal Front swept into Manchuria from the desert wastes of Mongolia, bypassed Japanese defensive positions, thrust across the undefended, yet formidable, terrain of the Grand Khingan Mountains, and erupted deep in the Japanese rear. Five days later, these forces threatened major population centers in Manchuria and rendered the Japanese high command incapable

*In 216 B.C., during the 2d Punic War, Hannibal's Carthaginian Army enveloped and destroyed a Roman Army at Cannae in what has since become the model for a successful double envelopment.

**A front is equivalent to a U.S. army group.



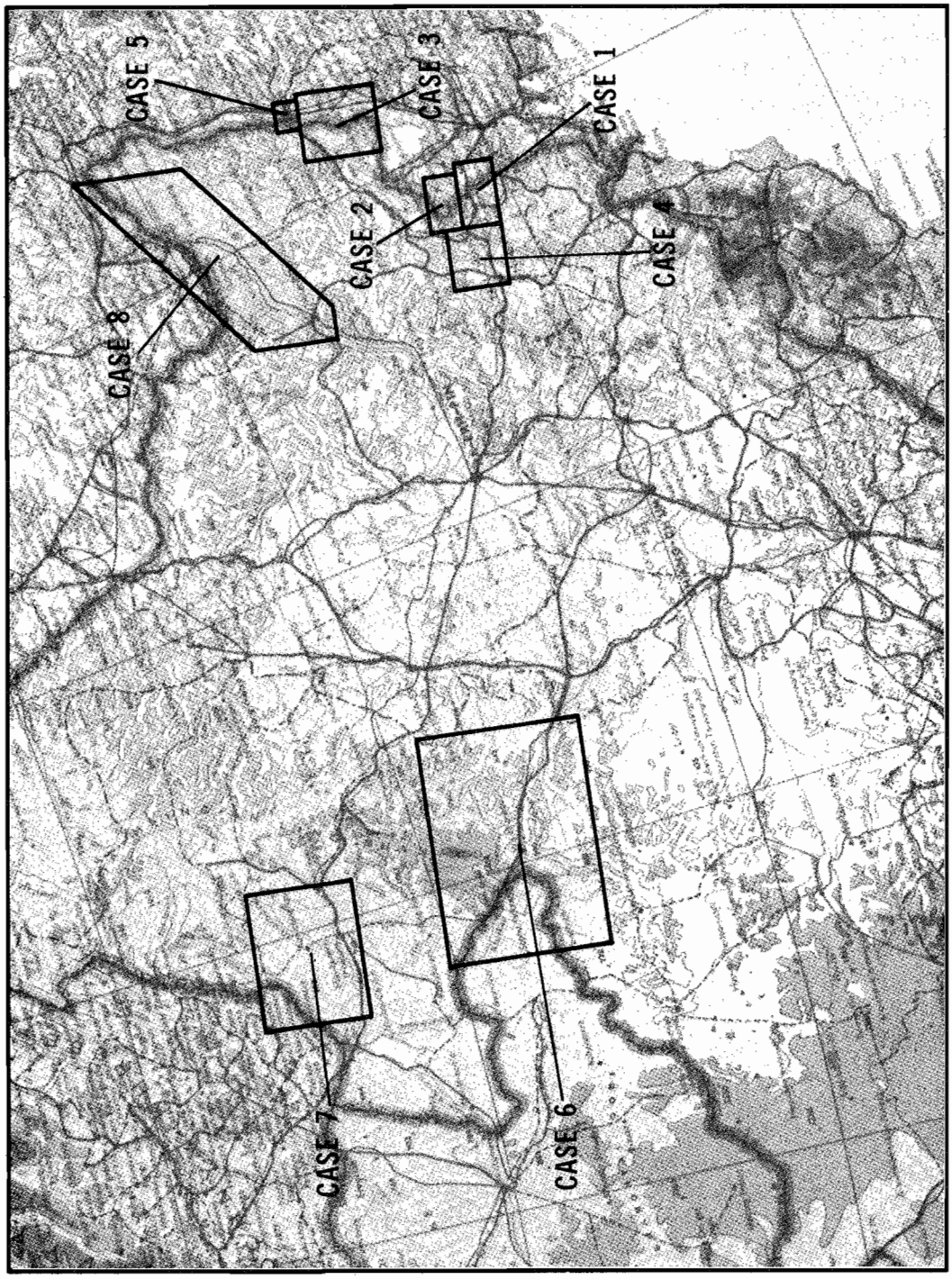
Map I—1. The Manchurian Campaign

of effective resistance. Simultaneously, four combined arms armies of the 1st Far Eastern Front smashed through Japanese defenses in eastern Manchuria and, by 16 August, had secured the key cities of Mutanchiang and Wangching, thus collapsing Japanese defenses anchored on the formidable terrain of that region. Supplementing the slashing Soviet attacks from east and west, two Soviet armies struck Japanese defenses in northern Manchuria, completing the ring of fire around the beleaguered Kwantung Army.

Each of the eleven Soviet armies of the three attacking fronts advanced along its own distinct axis. Because the Japanese considered the terrain along many of these axes to be impassable for large military forces, they did not fortify them. Japanese miscalculation, combined with the Soviets' ability to achieve strategic surprise and to use imaginative operational and tactical techniques, produced the rapid and utter defeat of the Kwantung Army. Although the Japanese did not formally surrender until 20 August, by 16 August Soviet forces had in fact secured all the objectives necessary for complete victory.

Leavenworth Paper no. 7, *August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria*, describes the full measure of Soviet strategic success. Strategic success in battle, however, depends upon the widespread achievement of operational successes, which, in their turn, result from cumulative tactical successes. While Leavenworth Paper no. 7 relates the scope of Soviet strategic and operational achievements in the Manchurian campaign, it touches only briefly on the tactical level of combat; the tremendous scope of the operations made it impossible to cover the tactical realm in detail without trebling the length of the essay. Yet the cumulative effect of numerous tactical successes contributed to the overwhelming Soviet strategic victory. Any study of the 1945 Manchurian campaign would be incomplete without a close scrutiny of the roots of Soviet victory—those tactical techniques the Soviets used to overcome the impediments of time, terrain, and enemy. The following eight case studies relate those techniques in detail. They have been selected because they best depict the wide variety of operations the Soviets conducted and because each case study examines army, division, or lower-level operations in regions characterized by distinctly different terrain (see map I—2).

The first case study, "Army Penetration Operations," describes Soviet army operations against Japanese defenses in the heavily wooded, hilly, fortified, eastern highlands of Manchuria. It includes a detailed description of the intricate planning required for Soviet 5th Army to penetrate the extensive Japanese defenses. Of particular interest are the operational and tactical techniques the army used to bypass and isolate Japanese fortified positions, thereby imparting momentum to the offensive. It offers an excellent example of maneuver at the lowest tactical level, across impassable terrain, and against strong fortifications.



Map I—2. Index to Case Study Locations

In "Division Advance in Heavily Wooded Mountains," the focus is on the attack of one Soviet rifle division across a roadless, hilly, forested region that the Japanese left only lightly defended. In order to accomplish its mission, the rifle division literally had to construct roads as it advanced. But the division also had to advance quickly enough to reach the Japanese rear before the Japanese could regroup and erect a viable defensive line. In this operation, the Soviets succeeded only through careful tailoring of combined arms units with strong engineer support at the lowest tactical level.

"Army Operations in Swampy Lowlands" shows Soviet forces succeeding in a region the Japanese considered unsuited for large-scale military operations. Two rifle divisions, with armor support, conducted a major river crossing and a four-day operation through swamplands to envelop Japanese defenses and isolate a major Japanese fortified region at Hutou in eastern Manchuria. This case study highlights the techniques the Soviets used to task organize forces in order to overcome these "insurmountable" obstacles.

"Set Piece Battle" details the course of battle on the approaches to the city of Mutanchiang in eastern Manchuria. There two Soviet armies advanced along parallel axes and struck major Japanese defensive positions east of the city. Soviet use of armor-heavy forward detachments imparted a momentum to the advance sufficient to preempt Japanese establishment of firm defensive lines east of Mutanchiang. Soviet forces destroyed Japanese units east of the city piecemeal and drove the Japanese units out of Mutanchiang more than ten days ahead of schedule. Although successful, this rapid Soviet thrust illustrates some of the drawbacks of conducting deep operations along separate axes.

"Reduction of a Fortified Region," written by Dr. Edward Drea of the Combat Studies Institute, focuses on what happened to Japanese fortified positions after the Soviets had isolated and bypassed them. Based on detailed Japanese and Soviet sources, the case study shows how the Russians went about reducing a major fortified complex. In the course of this action, the Soviets relied on air and artillery firepower and small tailored assault groups, rather than on costly massed infantry assaults, to systematically reduce each strongpoint.

In terms of terrain, the most remarkable Soviet operations in Manchuria took place in the west, where the Soviets massed large forces in remote areas and committed these forces to operations across seemingly impassable ground. Although 6th Guards Tank Army made the most dramatic advances in the west, it faced *only* the opposition of terrain. Therefore, "Army Operations in Arid Mountains" investigates instead the operations of 39th Army, which faced a strongly entrenched Japanese force flanked by the Grand Khingan Mountain barrier. In its attack, 39th Army adopted an indirect approach by attacking along two separate axes through territory the Japanese believed to be unsuited for military operations. This audacious

advance, led by maneuverable, armor-heavy forward detachments at every command level, took the Japanese utterly by surprise, rendered their fortifications superfluous, and quickly brushed aside the resisting Japanese units.

Of all the operational and tactical techniques the Soviets used in Manchuria, the creation and employment of forward detachments proved most valuable. Their tailored structure and bold, deep operations, made forward detachments the most innovative aspect of the campaign, one that both created and preserved the momentum of the Soviet advance. "Forward Detachment Deep Operations" investigates the success of one such forward detachment, the 205th Tank Brigade.

The river systems of northeastern Manchuria, with their associated swamps and marshes, proved a major obstacle to offensive undertakings and forced the Soviets to conduct extensive joint amphibious operations. "Joint Ground and Riverine Operations" focuses on how the Soviets coordinated successful amphibious operations that achieved high rates of advance through a region almost totally impenetrable by ground forces alone.

As microcosms of the strategic struggle that occurred in Manchuria, these eight case studies illuminate the tactical details of combat. They also surface the human dimension of battle. Ultimately, it is the performance of the division, the regiment, the battalion, the company, the platoon commander, and above all, the individual soldier that determines the outcome of the battle. While at the strategic and operational levels of war the human factor is often neglected, at the tactical level the soldier becomes the dominant factor. Only close analysis of tactical level combat with its emphasis on the human element can yield lessons of real value about the art of war. With this thought in mind, I wrote these case studies.

LTC David M. Glantz
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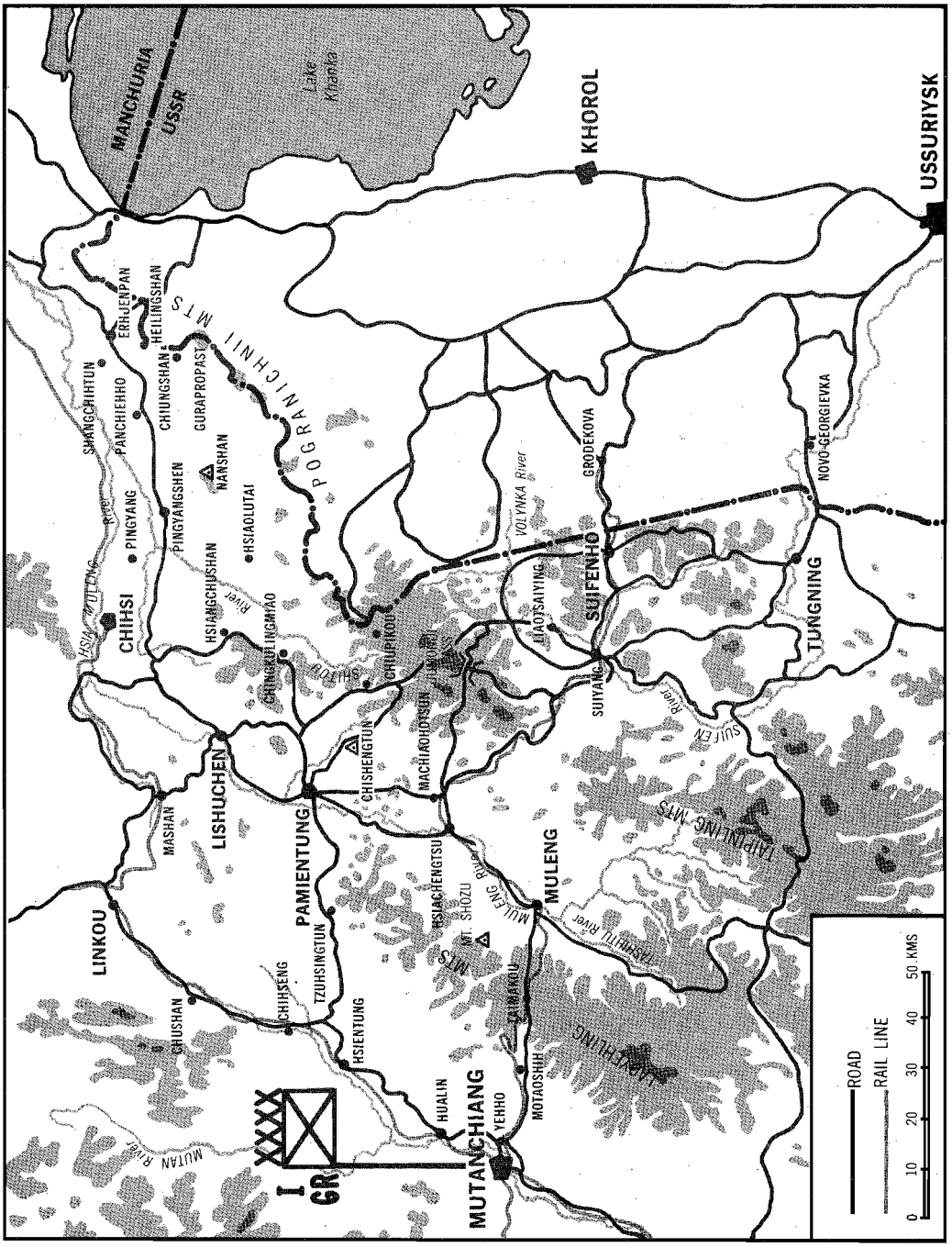
Army Penetration Operations

1

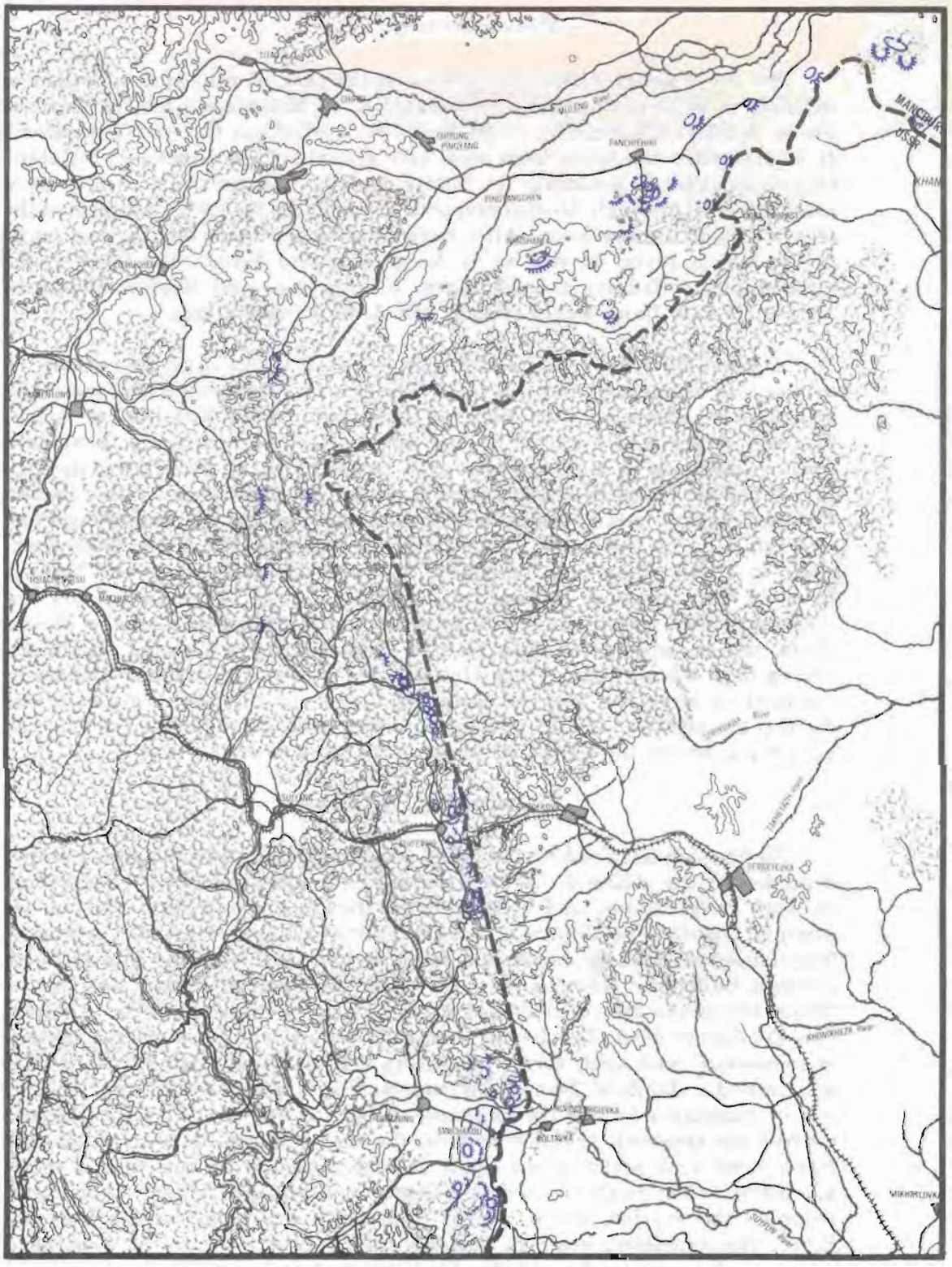
In the Manchurian campaign of 1945, the Soviet Army faced a myriad of offensive tasks. One of the most difficult was that of piercing the imposing Japanese defenses in eastern Manchuria (see map 1—1). Under the best conditions, a penetration operation can be costly, but a Manchurian summer can make the task doubly difficult. Only intensive planning, meticulous preparation, and artful conduct of the offensive can produce positive results. Such was the challenge facing the Soviet 5th Army.

The Route

The most direct avenue of approach from the Soviet Far East into eastern Manchuria was through the eastern Manchurian hills from Harbin in the central valley through Mutanchiang, across the Soviet Far Eastern border at Suifenho, and into the Ussuri River valley north of Vladivostok. The Eastern Manchurian Railroad followed this route, and the Japanese had fortified it with some of the most formidable defensive positions in Manchuria, attesting to the strategic value of this approach. Anchored at Suifenho, these Japanese fortifications dominated the approach into eastern Manchuria in much the same way as the Maginot Line canalized the main approaches to eastern France in 1940 (see map 1—2). On the flanks of this Manchurian fortified zone were dense forests and rugged mountains that the Japanese considered impenetrable by modern mobile armies and difficult even for infantry to traverse. Apparently, few Japanese military thinkers reflected on the French experience in similar terrain adjacent to the Maginot Line in 1940. The Soviets were better students of the Battle of France than the Japanese, and they emulated the German feat of 1940 by traversing the hindering Manchurian terrain and conducting an operational envelopment of Japanese forces in the border zones. Yet, for the Soviets, even this accomplishment was not sufficient. Contemplating deep operations against deep strategic objectives, they could not afford to leave large concentrations of Japanese forces astride communication and supply routes to their rear. So, the Soviets simultaneously conducted shallow tactical envelopment operations against the fortified regions in order to isolate and destroy them with minimum cost.



Map 1—1. Area of Operations: 5th Army and 1st Red Banner Army



Map 1—2. The Border Fortified Region

Missions and Tasks

The Far Eastern Command entrusted the task of penetrating Japanese defenses in eastern Manchuria to Marshal K. A. Meretskov's 1st Far Eastern Front. A *STAVKA* directive of 28 June 1945 spelled out the front's mission.[1] It would strike the main blow with two armies in the direction of Mutanchiang in order to penetrate the border fortified regions and to arrive on a line from Poli through Mutanchiang to Wangching by the fifteenth to eighteenth day of the operation. After consolidating its forces on the west bank of the Mutan River, as well as at Wangching and Yenchi, the front would continue the offensive toward Kirin, Changchun, and Harbin. Separate armies on each flank would support 5th Army's main attack.

Marshal Meretskov planned to deploy his front in a single echelon of armies. He designated General N. I. Krylov's 5th Army to make the main attack in coordination with General Beloborodov's 1st Red Banner Army. The 5th Army would attack in the direction of Mutanchiang, penetrate frontier defenses in a twelve-kilometer sector north of Grodekova, destroy the Japanese Volynsk (Kuanyuehtai) Center of Resistance of the Border Fortified Region, and advance forty kilometers to secure the Taipinling Pass and Suifenho by the fourth day. Meretskov expected 5th Army to advance sixty to eighty kilometers deep and to secure crossings over the Muleng River in the vicinity of Muleng by the eighth day of the operation. By the eighteenth day, the army was to have secured Mutanchiang on the Mutan River, this in conjunction with 1st Red Banner Army advancing on Mutanchiang from the northeast. Once Mutanchiang was secure, Marshal Meretskov planned to have the 10th Mechanized Corps (in the 5th Army's sector) develop the offensive to Kirin, where it would meet Trans-Baikal Front forces advancing across the Grand Khingan Mountains from the west.[2]

Japanese Defenses

The mission assigned to 5th Army was ambitious and extensive. Success depended on the ability of Krylov's troops to overcome difficult terrain, strong in-depth fortifications, and a determined, though understrength and unsuspecting, enemy. The Japanese Border Fortified Region extended across a forty-kilometer frontage north and south of the main highway and railroad through Suifenho.[3] Though in most areas the fortified region was ten to fifteen kilometers deep, defenses along the highway stretched thirty to thirty-five kilometers deep. The Border Fortified Region consisted of four centers of resistance, with each center occupying a frontage of from 2.5 to 13 kilometers and a depth of 2.5 to 9 kilometers. The Northeast and Eastern Centers of Resistance (which the Japanese called the Suifenho Fortified Region) covered the approach to Suifenho from the east on a ten- to twelve-kilometer front north and south of the main eastern Manchurian rail line. Twenty kilometers to the north, the Volynsk Center of Resistance (Kuanyuehtai Zone) occupied the wooded, brush-covered hills north and south of the Volynka River. Ten kilometers south of Suifenho, the Southern Center of Resistance

(Lumintai) sat on dominant hills overlooking the Soviet Far Eastern Province. These four centers of resistance occupied twenty-five kilometers of the total frontage of forty kilometers. Smaller field works were interspersed between them. A fifth center of resistance, consisting of lighter field trenches, dominated the road junction of Suiyang, thirty kilometers west of Suifenho. Grassy, brush-covered hills surrounded the Border Fortified Region and extended ten kilometers to the rear, finally merging into higher wooded mountains extending to the Muleng River.

The northern flank of the Border Fortified Region blended into the heavily wooded, brush-covered, and presumably impassable eastern Manchurian mountains north of the Volynka River. This lightly defended sector extended sixty kilometers from the northern edge of the Border Fortified Region to the Mishan Fortified Region northwest of Lake Khanka. The southern flank of the fortified region tied in loosely with the northern flank of the Tungning Fortified Region, twenty-five to thirty kilometers south.[4]

Japanese centers of resistance consisted of underground reinforced concrete fortifications, gun emplacements, power stations, and warehouses. Many of the reinforced concrete pillboxes had walls up to one and one-half meters thick, with armor plating or armored gun turrets. Some even came equipped with elevators for transporting the gun and its ammunition. In August 1945 the four main centers of resistance contained 295 concrete pillboxes, 145 earth and timber pillboxes, 58 concrete shelters, 69 armored turrets, 29 observation posts and command posts, and 55 artillery positions. These centers of resistance comprised three to six major strongpoints, each occupying 250,000-square meter sectors, up to two kilometers apart. Strongpoints, usually located on dominant heights, consisted of reinforced concrete positions or several timber and earth bunkers, as well as antitank, machine gun, and artillery firing positions. Machine gun bunkers were positioned every 250 to 350 meters; artillery positions with underground entrances, 500 to 700 meters or less.[5] The centers of resistance usually contained military settlements, complete with warehouses and a water supply. Communications trenches tied the entire complex of strongpoints together. The outer defenses of each strongpoint and the defenses of the center as a whole included multiple barbed wire barriers, mines, antitank ditches, and anti-infantry obstacles, usually covered by interlocking fields of machine gun fire.

Although the Japanese planned for a regiment to defend each center of resistance, a battalion could render credible defense because of the strength of the fortifications.* Companies usually defended strongpoints; sections, squads, and platoons manned outposts and satellite bunkers. The Fortified Border Region formed the first important Japanese line of defense in Manchuria.

*The Soviets considered each center of resistance the equivalent of a full infantry division.

Field works located eighty kilometers to the rear in the heavily wooded mountains west of the Muleng River composed a second Japanese line of defense. A third line of defense anchored at Mutanchiang, 150—180 kilometers to the rear, completed the defensive zone across which the Japanese hoped to delay and wear down advancing Soviet forces. For the Japanese defensive plan to function correctly, the Border Fortified Region had to take its toll of Soviet strength and time.

The Japanese 5th Army, which was responsible for the defense of much of eastern Manchuria, positioned its 124th Infantry Division to defend the Suifenho sector (see table 1—1). General Shiina, commander of the 124th Infantry Division, assigned one battalion from each of its three infantry regiments to defend the border region. The 1st Battalion, 273d Regiment, defended the Volynsk (Kuanyuehtai) Center of Resistance, the 1st Battalion, 271st Regiment, defended the Northeast and Eastern Center (Suifenho), and one company of the 1st Battalion, 272d Regiment, held the Southern Center (Lumintai).[6] Additional Japanese security, construction, and reserve units in the border region were available to reinforce the regular border garrison.

The bulk of the 124th Infantry Division was garrisoned at Muleng, Suiyang, and Hsiachengtzu, forty to eighty kilometers west of the border. Some of these units were building fortifications in the mountains west of Muleng in anticipation of a future conflict with the Soviet Union.[7]

Table 1—1. Order of Battle, Japanese 124th Infantry Division

124th Infantry Division, General Shiina	
271st Infantry Regiment	1 battalion at Suifenho
272d Infantry Regiment	1 battalion at Lumintai
273d Infantry Regiment	1 company at Kuanyuehtai
124th Artillery Regiment	
124th Engineer Battalion	
Raiding Battalion, Hsiachengtzu	
Attached units:	
31st Independent Antitank Battalion (minus 1 battery)	
20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment (minus 2 batteries)	
1st Independent Heavy Artillery Battery (150-mm guns)	
Tungning Heavy Artillery Regiment, 1 battalion (minus 1 battery)	
Mutanchiang Heavy Artillery Regiment (8×240-mm howitzers)	
13th Mortar Battalion	
Two independent engineer battalions	

Source: Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 154: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 181—83, 226—28.

The Japanese 126th Infantry Division, with headquarters at Pamientung, defended the 124th Infantry Division's left, while the 128th Infantry Division, headquartered at Lotzokou, defended its right flank. But both units occupied large sectors, and could thus provide little support to the 124th. Likewise, the 5th Army and First Area Army, with headquarters at Mutanchiang, could provide only minimal reinforcement from army and area army support troops and military school units.

Operational Planning

The Soviet 1st Far Eastern Front commander, Marshal Meretskov, structured his forces to insure rapid reduction of this Japanese Fortified Region. Soviet 5th Army was large because Marshal Meretskov provided considerable reinforcement and thus had adequate forces to maneuver through the fortified region and, if need be, to crush the Japanese by sheer weight of numbers and firepower. Soviet 5th Army contained 4 rifle corps of 12 rifle divisions, 1 fortified region, 5 tank brigades, 6 heavy self-propelled artillery regiments, 22 artillery brigades, 4 engineer brigades, an antiaircraft division, and numerous supporting regiments, for a total of 692 tanks and self-propelled guns, 2,945 guns and mortars, and 432 rocket launchers (see table 1—2).[8] Marshal Meretskov tasked 9th Air Army to provide air support for 5th Army; 252d Assault Aviation Division and 250th Fighter Aviation Division were to do likewise for both 5th Army and 1st Red Banner Army during the penetration operation and its pursuit phase; and 34th Bomber Aviation Division and 19th Bomber Aviation Corps were to provide air support as required under air army control.[9] These bomber units would provide invaluable support in the reduction of heavily fortified zones.

Table 1—2. 5th Army Composition

5th Army: Col. Gen. N. I. Krylov
- 17th Rifle Corps: Lt. Gen. N. A. Nikitin
  - 187th Rifle Division
  - 366th Rifle Division
- 45th Rifle Corps: Maj. Gen. N. I. Ivanov
  - 157th Rifle Division
  - 159th Rifle Division
  - 184th Rifle Division
- 65th Rifle Corps: Maj. Gen. G. H. Perekrestov
  - 97th Rifle Division
  - 144th Rifle Division
  - 190th Rifle Division
  - 371st Rifle Division
- 72d Rifle Corps: Maj. Gen. A. I. Kazartsev
  - 63d Rifle Division
  - 215th Rifle Division
  - 277th Rifle Division

105th Fortified Region
72d Tank Brigade
76th Tank Brigade
208th Tank Brigade
210th Tank Brigade
218th Tank Brigade
333d Guards SP Artillery Regiment
378th Guards SP Artillery Regiment
395th Guards SP Artillery Regiment
478th Guards SP Artillery Regiment
479th Guards SP Artillery Regiment
480th Guards SP Artillery Regiment
78th Separate Armored Train
15th Guards Gun Artillery Brigade
225th Gun Artillery Brigade
226th Gun Artillery Brigade
227th Gun Artillery Brigade
236th Gun Artillery Brigade
107th High Power Howitzer Artillery Brigade
119th High Power Howitzer Artillery Brigade
223d High Power Howitzer Artillery Brigade
218th Corps Artillery Brigade
219th Corps Artillery Brigade
220th Corps Artillery Brigade
222d Corps Artillery Brigade
237th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
238th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
61st Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade
20th Special Power Gun Artillery Regiment
32d Special Power Separate Artillery Battalion
34th Special Power Separate Artillery Battalion
696th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment
53d Mortar Brigade
55th Mortar Brigade
56th Mortar Brigade
57th Mortar Brigade
283d Guards Mortar Regiment (nonrocket)
17th Guards Mortar Brigade
20th Guards Mortar Brigade
26th Guards Mortar Brigade
2d Guards Mortar Regiment
26th Guards Mortar Regiment
42d Guards Mortar Regiment
72d Guards Mortar Regiment
74th Guards Mortar Regiment
307th Guards Mortar Regiment
48th Antiaircraft Artillery Division
231st Guards Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment

1277th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
1278th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
2011th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
726th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
129th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
300th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
461st Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
20th Motorized Assault Engineer Sapper Brigade
23d Engineer Sapper Brigade
63d Engineer Sapper Brigade
46th Motorized Engineer Brigade
55th Separate Ponton Bridge Battalion

Weapons:

692 tanks and SP guns
2,945 guns and mortars
432 rocket launchers

Source: M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 401.

By July 1945, 5th Army forces had completed their long movement by rail from the Königsberg area of East Prussia and had occupied concentration areas in the Ussurysk, Spass-Dalny, and Khorol areas, 100—120 kilometers from the Manchurian border. After about two weeks of reorganization and training, army forces began moving into waiting areas fifteen to twenty kilometers from the border. Because of the difficult, wooded terrain, the waiting areas of the 1st Far Eastern Front were closer to the border than waiting areas of other units assigned to the Far East Command. Movement into waiting areas, conducted primarily at night under stringent control to maintain secrecy, was completed by 25 July. Once in the waiting areas, 5th Army units continued training. The final movement of 5th Army to points of departure adjacent to the border took place during the nights of 1—6 August.[10]

Unit movement was according to the unit training plan, and each unit occupied positions prepared by engineers. Army artillery units, in a single four- to five-hour period, also moved at night into prepared positions. All movement by 5th Army into the sixty-five-kilometer zone along the border was highly screened to maintain secrecy and to achieve surprise. Soviet fortified regions stationed along the border carried on normal duties of defense and harvesting crops. Soviet troops were permitted normal leave. Officer control points manned by special groups of officers from front and army headquarters guided 5th Army units forward. Except for those associated with the signals traffic of normal border units, all radio networks maintained strict silence. The front's operational cover plan provided extensive

masking of movement by engineer units. Along roads and tracks under Japanese observation, engineers erected vertical masking walls and camouflaged overhead covers. The 5th Army zone alone contained eighteen kilometers of vertical walls and 1,515 overhead covers.[11]

During both the movement phase and the pauses in concentration and waiting areas, commanders and staffs conducted intensive training for the impending operation. The training plans of regiments and battalions included such subjects as operations over wooded, mountainous terrain, attacks on fortified positions, and overcoming water obstacles. Actual field training in such subjects occurred while units were on the move. Tank and self-propelled artillery units also trained on the difficult terrain over which they would operate. Artillery units completed firing practice in their concentration areas during July. At every level of command, staff war games and command post exercises were conducted to improve mutual coordination of units and to define the precise operational tasks required by each unit's mission. Groups of officers in 5th Army familiar with operations against fortified regions in eastern Europe shared their battlefield knowledge in classes with less experienced officers in 5th Army and other armies. Army headquarters also used officers with extensive Far Eastern experience to educate regiment, battalion, and company commanders on Japanese equipment, tactics, and fortifications.[12] By 6 August, 5th Army's deployment to points of departure along the border was complete.

To fulfill his assigned mission, General Krylov deployed his army in two echelons of rifle corps, concentrating the bulk of his force in a twelve-kilometer sector of his sixty-five-kilometer wide army zone, thus attaining overwhelming superiority over the Japanese defenders. The first echelon consisted of three rifle corps (65th, 72d, 17th) and one fortified region deployed from north to south across the army zone. The second echelon was one rifle corps (45th) positioned twenty-five to thirty kilometers to the rear. All rifle corps and divisions were in two-echelon formation except the 190th Rifle Division of 65th Rifle Corps, which deployed in one echelon in order to protect the heavily wooded, hilly right flank of 5th Army. Concentration of the bulk of 5th Army forces in the northern half of the army zone permitted units at all levels to attack in relatively narrow main attack sectors (army, 12 kilometers; rifle corps, 5—5.6 kilometers; rifle division, 2.5—2.8 kilometers; and rifle regiment, 1.0—1.8 kilometers). It also generated sufficient operational densities in penetration sectors to permit rapid penetration of the fortified region (one rifle division per 1.1 kilometer of front, 250 guns/mortars per kilometer, and thirty tanks/self-propelled guns per kilometer of front). The two-echelon army configuration placed thirty-nine rifle battalions in the first echelon of rifle divisions and sixty-nine battalions in the second echelons of rifle divisions, rifle corps, and army, thus providing sustaining strength for the offensive.[13]

Col. Gen. Krylov ordered Maj. Gen. A. I. Kazartsev's 72d Rifle Corps to conduct 5th Army's main attack, penetrate the Volynsk Center of Resistance in a zone five kilometers south of the Volynka River, destroy the defending enemy, and secure strongpoints *Ostraia* (Sharp) and *Grusha* (Pear)—a depth of three to five kilometers. The 72d Rifle Corps was expected, by the end of the first day, to have penetrated to a line eight kilometers deep. By the fourth day of the operation, the corps, in order to secure the passes through the Taipinling Mountains and Machiacho Station, a depth of forty kilometers, would develop the attack through Laiotsaiying and Suiyang northwest along the rail line. To sustain the attack of 72d Rifle Corps, General Krylov attached to the corps a vast array of supporting units; during the preparation, he also reinforced the corps with the 45th Rifle Corps's artillery. With this support the corps could mass 1,092 guns and mortars and 198 tanks and self-propelled guns against the main attack sector. This support provided operational densities of 5.4 rifle battalions, 218 guns and mortars, and 40 tanks and self-propelled guns per kilometer of front.[14]

General Kazartsev deployed the 72d Rifle Corps with the 215th and 63d Rifle Divisions in first echelon and the 277th Rifle Division in second echelon. The 63d Rifle Division on the corps's left would conduct the main attack to secure strongpoint Pear, while the 215th Rifle Division on the right would attack to seize strongpoint Sharp. By day's end, each division was supposed to have secured a lodgment eight kilometers deep in the enemy defense. The 277th Rifle Division in corps's second echelon would follow the attack of the 63d Rifle Division, and on the morning of the third day, from the Liaotsaiying area (eighteen kilometers deep), the 277th Rifle Division would lead the corps offensive to secure the road junction of Suiyang. All rifle divisions of the 72d Rifle Corps formed in two echelons of regiments, while rifle regiments formed in single echelon (except the 711th Rifle Regiment, which formed in two echelons in order to attack the north flank of strongpoint Sharp).

Both first echelon rifle divisions formed assault groups tailored to attack individual fortified points. The 215th Rifle Division used assault groups of up to platoon size, formed from the rifle companies of first echelon regiments. In the 63d Rifle Division, reinforced rifle companies of first echelon regiments formed larger assault detachments. In addition, both first echelon rifle divisions used advanced battalions* to initiate the night attack.[15]

On the right flank of the 72d Rifle Corps, Maj. Gen. G. H. Perekrestov's 65th Rifle Corps was to conduct a supporting attack with four rifle divisions. The objective was to penetrate the Volynsk Center of Resistance north of the Volynka River, to overcome strongpoint *Verblud* (Camel), and to advance to a depth of eight to ten kilometers by the end of the first day. Then the corps would develop the offensive, securing Machiacho Station by the third day. General Perekrestov deployed the 190th, the 97th, and the 144th Rifle

*One advanced battalion per rifle division.

Divisions in first echelon and the 371st Rifle Division in second echelon. Concentrated on the corps's left flank, the 144th Rifle Division would directly assault strongpoint Camel. The 97th and 190th Rifle Divisions would sweep across the virtually undefended, but heavily wooded, sector to the north of Camel in order to envelop that position from the flank and to maintain loose contact with the 1st Red Banner Army, advancing on the right of 5th Army. First echelon rifle divisions formed assault groups and designated advanced battalions similar to those of the 72d Rifle Corps.

The 17th Rifle Corps of Lt. Gen. N. A. Nikitin, on the left of 72d Rifle Corps, was to cooperate with the 105th Fortified Region and border guard battalions in isolating the Northeast and East (Suifenho) Centers of Resistance. Approximately two regiments of the 187th Rifle Division, backed by the 366th Rifle Division in second echelon, were to attack into the gap between the Volynsk and Northeast Centers of Resistance and then swing southwestward around the rear of the Japanese defenses, ultimately to cut the rail line and highway running from Suifenho to Suiyang. One regiment of the 187th Rifle Division would cooperate with the 105th Fortified Region and the 20th Assault Engineer-Sapper Brigade in securing the critical railroad tunnels and highway leading across the border into Suifenho from the east. The 45th Rifle Corps of Maj. Gen. N. I. Ivanov, in army second echelon, would develop the success* of 5th Army's two attacking corps. General Krylov planned to commit the corps on the morning of the fifth day of operations so that it might continue the offensive across the Muleng River.

Initial front directives for the attack of 5th Army mandated considerable artillery support formed in five distinct stages.[16] One day before the attack, special artillery groups would engage and destroy permanent Japanese fortifications. During a period of one and one-half hours to two hours on the night of the assault, artillery would fire in support of the advanced battalions. In addition, a four-hour artillery preparation on successive concentrations would precede the attack of main force units. To support the attack of main force units, artillery would fire a single barrage and consecutive concentrations. Finally, the artillery would provide fire support to accompany the advancing tank and infantry units to the depth of the defenses.

In order to perform these missions, the Soviets formed heavy artillery groups at every level of command. They created heavy gun and mortar groups in rifle regiments, rifle divisions, and rifle corps. In addition, each rifle corps formed an artillery destruction group and a long-range artillery group.** The high density of artillery in support of 5th Army marked the first time the Soviets massed such extensive artillery concentrations on such hilly and brush-covered terrain.

*Soviet terminology (*razvitie uspekh*) meaning to exploit gains made by attacking units.

**The artillery destruction group engaged fortified point targets, and the long-range artillery group provided interdiction fire and fire on deep targets.

To insure adequate artillery support throughout the duration of the offensive, artillery movements guaranteed constant fire support by at least 50 percent of all weapons at all times. After completion of the penetration operation, Marshal Meretskov planned to resubordinate part of the reinforcing artillery to the adjacent 25th and 1st Red Banner Armies.

Front aviation assets dedicated to support 5th Army and 1st Red Banner Army prepared a two-phase air operation. As part of the initial preparation, echeloned short-range and long-range bombers and assault aircraft would carry out 1,578 sorties to destroy enemy targets. During the troop assault phase, 1,330 sorties would support the attack. In order to better support forward troops, Marshal Meretskov, from 4 to 9 August, relocated fighter aircraft from peacetime airfields deep in the rear to bases twenty-five to thirty kilometers from the border. Bombers moved to new bases sixty to seventy kilometers (34th Bomber Aviation Division) and 170—200 kilometers (19th Bomber Aviation Division) from the border.[18]

Despite these extensive preparations, General Krylov, on the eve of the attack, cancelled the first three periods of artillery fire and the air destruction missions. Explanations for the absence of any sort of artillery preparation vary.[17] Front commanders ultimately decided whether to fire the preparation. General Krylov claimed that insufficient intelligence concerning the precise location of Japanese positions negated the value of the advanced destruction fires. The necessity for achieving surprise outweighed the value of only partial destruction of enemy fortifications. Consequently, General Krylov decided to destroy enemy firing positions by a surprise night attack of advanced battalions. Only if the attack by advanced battalions failed would he fire a four-hour artillery preparation. In any event, on the evening of the attack, heavy rains deluged the area for six hours, lessening the potential effectiveness of an artillery preparation and hence reinforcing the argument for abandoning it. The same cancellation occurred in all areas of the 1st Far Eastern Front, except at Hutou, where artillery strikes went as planned.

One of the most difficult problems facing planners was the use of tanks in the difficult terrain of eastern Manchuria. Only armor could guarantee the rapid reduction of Japanese fortified positions and the high-speed advance that the operation demanded. Consequently, commanders tailored tank and self-propelled gun units to function over the terrain and adjusted their tactical roles to guarantee maximum effectiveness. The front commander reinforced the 5th Army with five tank brigades and six heavy self-propelled gun artillery regiments that could provide fire support for the infantry formations, thus increasing their mobility. Generally, each rifle division on a main attack axis was reinforced with one tank brigade and one heavy self-propelled gun regiment (eighty-six tanks/self-propelled guns), thereby establishing armor densities of thirty tanks/self-propelled guns per kilometer of front.

After penetration of the tactical zone of defense, the reinforced tank brigades formed forward detachments for rifle corps and rifle divisions and began high-speed exploitation into the operational depths. As the mobile group of the front, 10th Mechanized Corps, with 249 tanks and self-propelled guns, prepared to develop the success of 5th Army.[19]

Front headquarters lavished extensive engineer support on 5th Army to overcome the formidable terrain, to aid in conducting night battles, and to help reduce fortified positions. Engineers conducted engineer reconnaissance,* installed camouflage, and repaired and constructed roads and bridges, defensive positions, and lines of departure. When the attack began, engineer-sapper units, as a part of the more than 100 assault groups formed in 5th Army, participated in reducing fortified positions. In order to supplement the work of assault units, 5th Army created two obstacle-clearing detachments in every first echelon rifle company. Road and bridge detachments composed of one rifle battalion and one to three sapper platoons formed in the rear of each rifle regiment to repair transport routes and to facilitate the movement of artillery.[20]

On the evening of 8 August, with preparations for the attack completed, the combat echelons of 5th Army, surrounded by the anonymity of darkness and soaked by August rains, rested in their jumping off positions and waited for the order to advance. Across the border, two or three kilometers away, the Japanese rested easily, manning only selected firing positions in their fortified zone, lulled perhaps as much by the security of the rain and the darkness and the hopes of deferred battle as by faulty intelligence. The intelligence picture painted by the 124th Japanese Infantry Division explains the complacency:

> During July and August, the division received information from subordinate and lateral units indicating the gravity of the situation with regard to the USSR. This information was utterly inconsistent with the optimistic information received from higher command. The division was at a loss for the truth, and consequently was often apt to take an optimistic view.[21]

The events of the first few hours of 9 August would take advantage of that Japanese complacency. Farther to the Japanese rear, similar attitudes were apparent. Together with other 5th Army division commanding officers and chiefs of staff, the 124th Infantry Division commander was attending a five-day conference and tabletop maneuvers at Yehho, Japanese 5th Army headquarters.

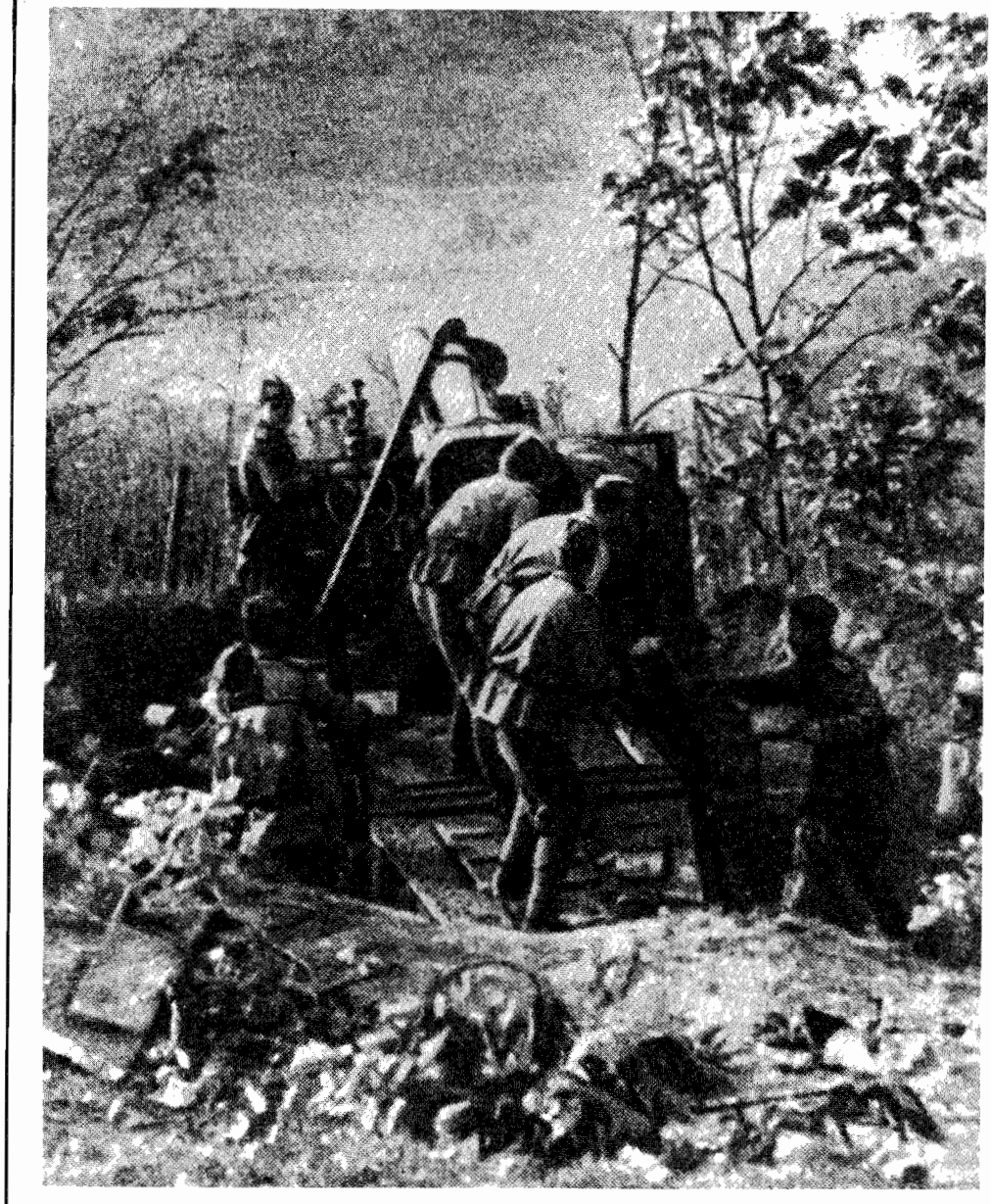
*Engineer reconnaissance determines enemy engineering efforts, terrain obstacles, and the condition of enemy engineer forces.

5th Army Attack

At 0100 on 9 August, the Soviet 5th Army advanced battalions with supporting tanks and self-propelled guns crossed the border and, in darkness and heavy rain, slowly made their way toward Japanese positions (see map 1—3). They advanced without an artillery preparation, in near silence, as the driving rain muffled the sounds of their movements. During the first hours of their advance, only scattered machine gun fire and exploding grenades punctuated that silence, as the Soviet assault units overran many Japanese positions caught unaware. The advanced battalions spread out in assault group configuration to destroy individual Japanese positions. When possible, they infiltrated through gaps in the Japanese defenses to threaten the vulnerable flanks of individual defensive positions and to gain the rear of the defenses. These advanced battalions seized many positions before the Japanese could occupy them; they took others by surprise after short, intense fights. In a few of the major strongpoints, the Japanese reacted quickly, occupied all defensive positions, and offered strong opposition.

Soviet assault group advances

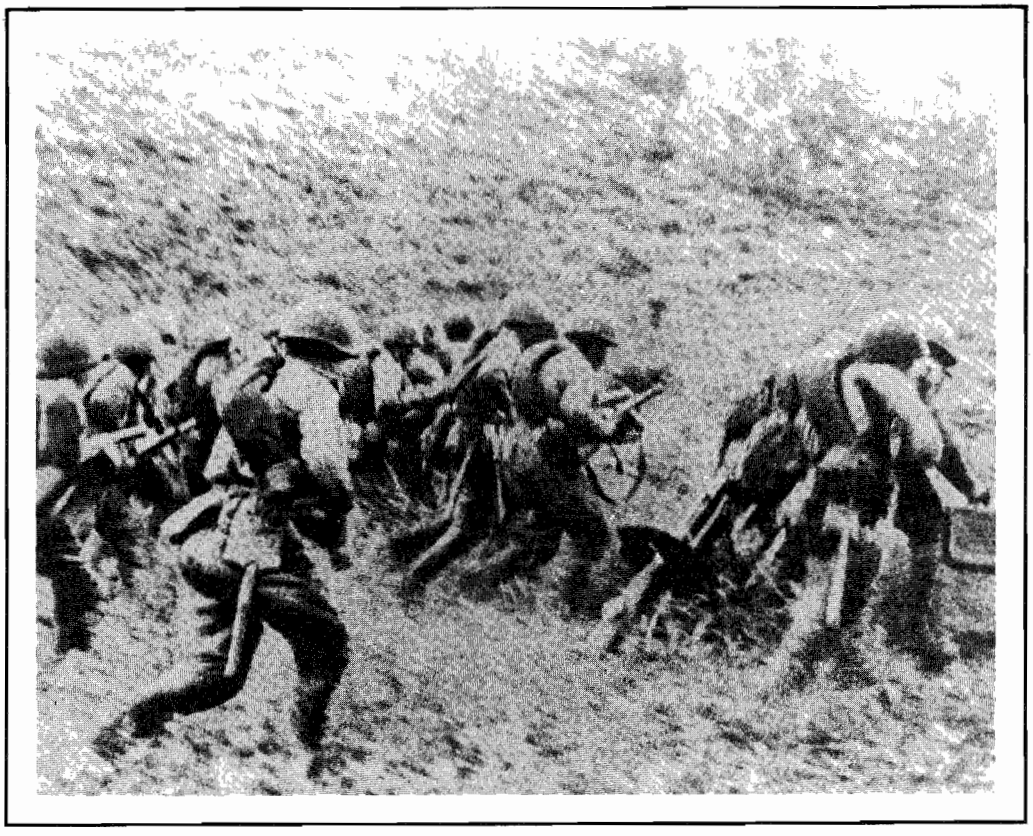
In the 65th Rifle Corps sector, on the right flank of 5th Army, the advanced battalions of the 190th and 97th Rifle Divisions moved forward over heavily wooded, hilly terrain to envelop strongpoint Camel from the north. By 0400 they had penetrated the forest to a depth of four to six



Soviet artillery in direct fire on a Japanese fortified position

kilometers, crossed the Shunlienchuan River, and occupied positions to the rear of Camel. Simultaneously, the advanced battalion of the 144th Rifle Division (785th Rifle Regiment), commanded by Major Glazunov, struck the front of strongpoint Camel. The Japanese were able to occupy all positions within Camel and successfully repulse Major Glazunov's initial attack. By

0700, the advanced battalion, with tanks and 152-mm self-propelled guns in support, was ready to resume the attack. After an intense ten-minute artillery preparation, Major Glazunov sent his 4th and 5th Companies against the front of Camel, while the direct fire from his tanks and self-propelled guns covered the assault. The 6th Company attacked Camel from the south. The simultaneous assault seized four pillboxes, killed one hundred Japanese, and paved the way for the advance of the main force of the 144th Rifle Division.[22]



Soviet infantry advances near Grodekova (5th Army)

South of the Volynka River, the advanced battalions of the 215th and 63d Rifle Divisions of 72d Rifle Corps moved forward against strongpoints Sharp, *Ofitserskaia* (Officer), and Pear. The 3d Battalion, 707th Rifle Regiment, 215th Rifle Division, moved out at 0100 as an advanced battalion to secure the Japanese positions on Sharp. Captain Shcherbakov's company of the 3d Battalion, 707th Rifle Regiment, would strike the primary Japanese defensive position on Sharp. Throughout 8 August, Shcherbakov's company officers studied the terrain and defenses and worked out a plan for approaching and reducing the strongpoint. They determined that careful movement

to the strongpoint would require two hours. So, at 0100 reconnaissance units of the company advanced through the darkness, using a compass azimuth to guide them. As they advanced they laid telephone cable for the lead platoon to follow. Other platoons followed in column. Each soldier carried an automatic weapon with three hundred rounds, a knife, and six to eight hand grenades. They advanced linked hand-in-hand to avoid being lost in the darkness and rain. About 0300, while sappers cut and marked lanes

5th Army forces advance

through the barbed wire and minefield, the company approached the strongpoint. By 0315 Captain Shcherbakov's platoons had surrounded the strongpoint, and other companies of Captain Moskalev's battalion were in position to assault Sharp. That coordinated assault began shortly after 0315 without the support of self-propelled guns or tanks, whose movement forward was hindered by swampy soil. Using explosives, backpacked flamethrowers, gasoline bottles, and hand grenades, the advanced battalion secured about half of the pillboxes and firing positions at Sharp by 0500.[23] By 0500, the advanced battalion of 63d Rifle Division had occupied strongpoint Officer, immediately adjacent to Sharp, and was preparing the way for main elements of the division to move through the gap between strongpoints Sharp and Pear.

Farther south, in the 17th Rifle Corps sector, heavy fighting erupted for control of the railroad tunnels east of Suifenho. An advanced battalion of the 187th Rifle Division moved forward to seize the concrete blockhouses and defensive positions covering the tunnels. While the advanced battalion attacked along the railroad, a battalion of the 20th Assault Engineer Sapper Brigade cut lanes through minefields and, with the support of tanks, attacked Japanese positions from the flank and rear. The 20th Assault Engineer Sapper Brigade destroyed five pillboxes and enabled the advanced battalion to secure the rail tunnels by 0600 on 9 August.[24]

Soviet infantry in the assault

The initial attack of army advanced battalions achieved its goal. By surprise, maneuver, and well-coordinated attacks, the battalions had seized several strongpoints and gained footholds in the remaining strongpoints. Their successful action permitted the main force to advance as planned at 0830 on 9 August and to move according to schedule through and beyond the Japanese fortified line. The success of the advanced battalions also negated the need for an extensive artillery preparation. Thereafter, only the direct fire of tanks and self-propelled guns and on-call artillery and aviation strikes supported the advance of the main force.

The Soviet night assault totally surprised the Japanese. Because the timing of the attack (at night), the climatic conditions (rain), and the infiltration style of the assault caused a general paralysis among the Japanese, the Soviets quickly severed enemy communications in many important defense sectors. Thus Japanese commanders at all levels had at best an inaccurate picture of the fighting. The Japanese never recovered from this initial shock, and their paralysis and inability to respond effectively to Soviet attacks persisted throughout the remainder of the campaign. Attesting to that confusion, the Japanese 3d Army chief of staff stated that the offensive of Soviet forces was so unexpected that the staff of the army in the course of the night of 8—9 August up to 1200 9 August did not know, and could not obtain, any news about what was happening on the border and what was the position of units.[25]

Japanese 5th Army received notification of the attack by phone shortly after 0100. Initial reports from the border sectors mentioned overflights of the border region and Soviet shelling of Japanese positions at Hutou. The 5th Army reported the incidents to First Area Army and summoned chiefs of staff and division commanders to a meeting. At 0300 in the Yehho Officers Club, the 5th Army commander told his assembled commanders that artillery shelling was underway and that "an element of their [Soviet] infantry seems to have broken through the border."[26] He then issued the following initial orders:

> The plan of the army for meeting the situation is that border elements will delay the advance of the attacking enemy by taking advantage of terrain and established border positions, while the main force will destroy the enemy's fighting power by putting up stubborn resistance in depth in our main defensive positions. . . .
>
> Elements of the 124th Infantry Division will occupy the established border positions at Lumintai, Suifenho, and Kuanyuehtai in an effort to stem the hostile advance, while the division's main force will immediately take up MLR [main line of resistance] positions west of Muleng and will destroy the enemy fighting power by opposing him in our defensive positions disposed in depth.[27]

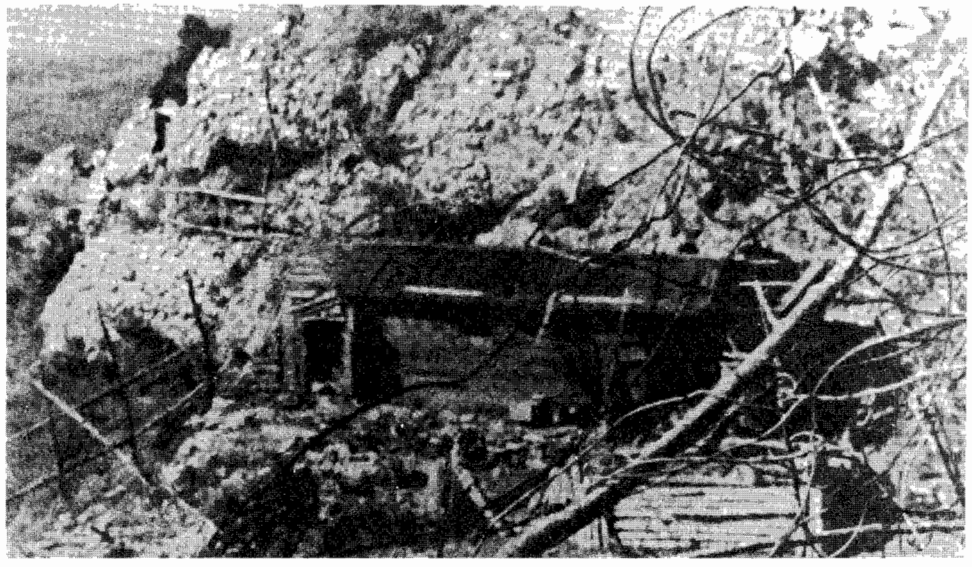
Each division commander passed the orders by phone to his staff and then departed Yehho for his headquarters. General Shiina of the 124th Infantry Division traveled by car to Muleng, where he arrived near dawn shortly after a Soviet air attack on the city. Shiina went to his headquarters and issued initial orders to his divisional units to occupy main line of resistance (MLR) positions, intercept the advance of the Soviets, and destroy it. He ordered the Suifenho and Kuanyuehtai garrisons to delay the advance of the enemy and sent Colonel Asu, commander of the 271st Infantry Regiment, to Suiyang to supervise evacuation of military stores, military personnel, and Japanese residents. Other orders authorized the use of support personnel to augment tactical units on the Muleng defense line, mandated shipment of supplies forward from Mutanchiang depot, and instituted a

demolition plan for bridges, roads, barracks, and government buildings. After notifying the civil government of the attack, General Shiina ordered his headquarters to prepare positions on Mount Ikkoko, west of the Muleng River.[28] Wherever possible, the orders were carried out, but in an uncoordinated and piecemeal fashion. Implementation of the demolition plan, for example in which bridges were destroyed prematurely, severely hindered the withdrawal of Japanese forces and equipment from the forward defensive area.

A heavy SP gun unit advances through eastern Manchuria

While the Japanese reacted to the events of the early morning hours of 9 August, the Soviet offensive accelerated. Advanced battalions completed the process of cutting corridors through the Japanese fortified positions even while main force units began moving forward. Second echelon rifle divisions prepared to detach forces in order to complete the reduction of isolated, but as yet unconquered, Japanese strongpoints. At 0930, in the 65th Rifle Corps sector, advanced battalions of the 190th and 97th Rifle Divisions attacked and destroyed the military settlements on the west slope of Camel strongpoint. An hour earlier, the main forces of the 97th Rifle Division and 144th

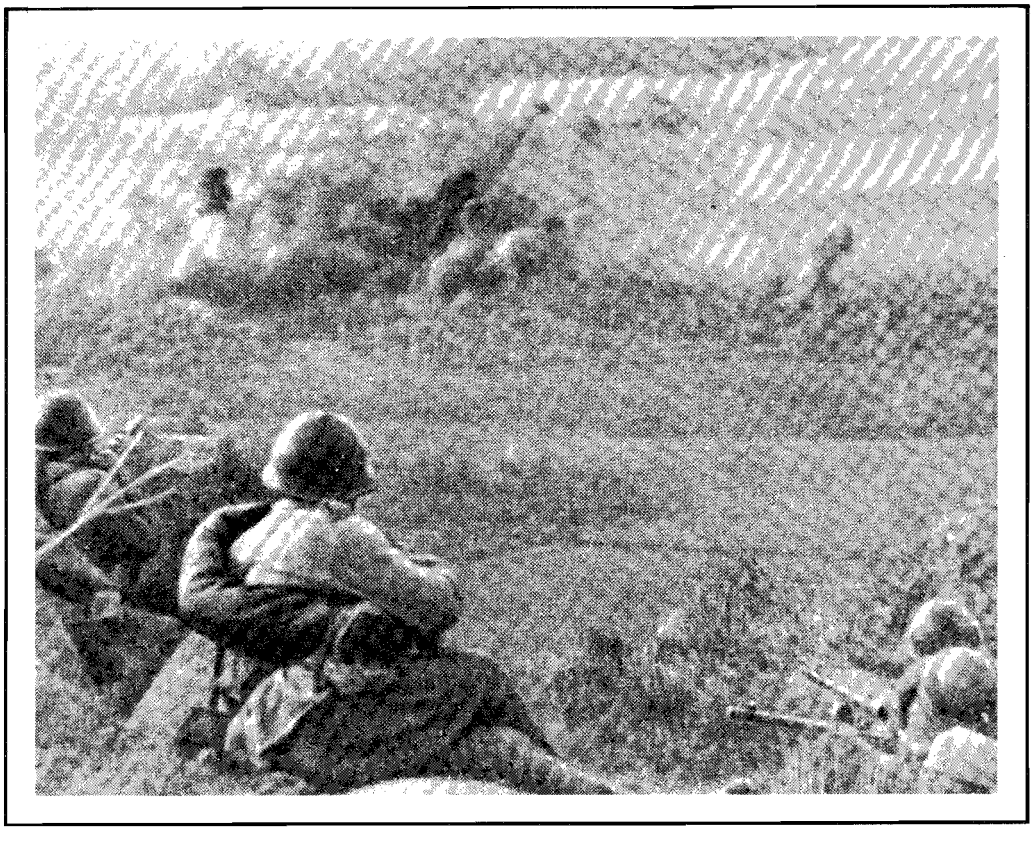
Rifle Division had attacked past Camel. A forward detachment consisting of a tank brigade and a heavy self-propelled artillery regiment and a battalion or regiment of infantry had spearheaded the advance of both divisions. By nightfall on the ninth, the 97th Rifle Division had advanced twenty kilometers via Jumonji Pass toward Machiacho Station. The 144th Rifle Division had penetrated sixteen kilometers and reached Liaotsaiying. Elements of the second echelon in 65th Rifle Corps continued to isolate the remaining Japanese positions on Camel.



Japanese fortified position in eastern Manchuria destroyed by Soviet artillery fire

South of the Volynka River, the advanced battalion of 72d Rifle Corps continued to reduce Japanese strongpoints Sharp and Pear. By 1200 on 9 August, the 215th Rifle Division had secured control of the Japanese military settlement on the western slopes of Sharp and had cut the vital military road running north and south, five kilometers inside the border. The advanced battalion of 63d Rifle Division also continued its operations against strongpoint Pear. Exploiting the success of the advanced battalions, the forward detachment of 215th Rifle Division, consisting of the 210th Tank Brigade and the 333d Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment with infantry support, advanced westward toward Suiyang at 1500 on 9 August. Another corps forward detachment led the advance of 63d Rifle Division on a path parallel to that of 215th Rifle Division. By evening, the 72d Rifle Corps

forward detachments had pushed fifteen to eighteen kilometers into the Japanese rear area. The 852d Rifle Regiment of the 277th Rifle Division in corps second echelon received the task of reducing remaining Japanese positions in strongpoint Sharp.[29]



Assault troops await the signal to advance

Thus, by nightfall of 9 August, lead elements of 5th Army had thrust sixteen to twenty-two kilometers into the Japanese rear area on a frontage of thirty-five kilometers, fulfilling missions not supposed to be accomplished until the second and third days of the attack. The speed of the Soviet advance—by thoroughly disrupting the timing of Japanese contingency plans—preempted all effective Japanese resistance. The forward detachments maintained that speedy advance. In the rear, second echelon forces undertook the arduous and sometimes gruesome task of reducing remaining Japanese strongpoints, which often held out to the last man. Supported by the direct fire of heavy self-propelled guns (152-mm), infantry companies and sappers used high explosives and flamethrowers to reduce each Japanese position, a three-day process.

On 9 August, the Japanese command tried to restore its defensive positions and to establish new defenses. That afternoon, Imperial General Headquarters issued to commanders of all theaters emergency orders that read, "The Soviet Union declared war on Japan and launched attacks at several places along the Soviet-Japanese and Soviet-Manchukuoan border at 0000 9 August. However, the scale of these attacks is not large."[30] The initial Kwantung Army estimate of the situation issued that evening echoed the unrealistic tone of this order: "The main force of the enemy on the eastern border [is] attacking between Pingyangchen and Tungning . . . . [The estimated force is] three infantry Divisions and between two and three armored brigades."[31] In reality, fifteen Soviet rifle divisions and eight tank brigades were assaulting Japanese positions at that time in that sector. Also on the ninth, First Area Army acknowledged that Soviet forces had broken through the border at Suifenho and Kuanyuehtai in the 124th Infantry Division zone and at Jumonji Pass near the divisional boundary of the 124th and 126th Infantry Divisions.[32] Soviet armor also threatened the Suifenho-Mutanchiang railroad and highway. The Japanese 5th Army, in turn, ordered its units to take up planned positions and, on the afternoon of the ninth, reinforced the 124th Infantry Division with two battalions from the 135th Infantry Division.

In the 124th Infantry Division sector, Colonel Asu of the 271st Regiment arrived at Suiyang at 1200 and proceeded to evacuate supplies and personnel. He organized a convoy of trucks that left that evening and arrived the next day at the Muleng River. He was, however, unable to cross the river, because the bridge had been destroyed in accordance with General Shiina's demolition plan. The Japanese appeared to be working at cross purposes. An attempt to move the vehicles across the river by fording and ferrying failed. Hardpressed by advancing Soviet units, Japanese troops escaped down the river and left most of the irreplaceable equipment behind. The abandoned equipment included several new Model 90 75-mm howitzers sorely needed by the division for fire support.[33]

A similar instance occurred in the 124th Infantry Division zone. On the ninth, Japanese 5th Army assigned the Mutanchiang Heavy Artillery Regiment to 124th Infantry Division control. The artillery unit (located at Hsienchangtsu), however, had no tractors to move its guns. To prevent them from falling into Soviet hands, the Japanese had to destroy all six of the valuable howitzers. While evacuation of the forward area continued at 1400 on 9 August, General Shiina and part of his staff moved to positions west of the Muleng River. Reports to his headquarters on the evening of the ninth indicated that heavy fighting was taking place on the border but that Japanese morale was still high.[34]

On 10 August, Soviet forces capitalized on the confusion in Japanese ranks by beginning rapid exploitation into the depths of the Japanese defense. The 65th Rifle Corps advanced on two axes across the Taipinling Mountains through Jumonji Pass in the north and along the main rail line in

the south, converging on Machiacho Station. The 72d Rifle Corps marched through Suiyang, sending one division on a sweep south and west toward Muleng and sending its other division along the rail line toward Machiacho. The 17th Rifle Corps advanced south in the rear of Suifenho to link up with 25th Army units, completing the reduction of the Tungning Center of Resistance. Forward detachments, operating ten to fifteen kilometers ahead of the main force, led the advance of corps units on all major axes.

5th Army troops entering Muleng

This rapid Soviet advance preempted Japanese efforts to establish new defensive lines (positions) or to withdraw in good order to planned defenses. Lead rifle regiments of each rifle division followed forward detachments and liquidated isolated Japanese defenders. By the evening of the tenth, Soviet 5th Army had advanced eighteen to thirty kilometers and had widened its penetration to seventy-five kilometers. By the morning of the eleventh, Soviet units were eighty kilometers deep and across the Muleng River, forcing the Japanese to fall back into defenses in the mountains west of Muleng. By the evening of the same day, the Soviets had snuffed out resistance in the Border Fortified Region.

Conclusions

In the course of two and one-half days, the Soviet 5th Army crushed Japanese resistance in the Border Fortified Region and pushed eighty kilometers into eastern Manchuria. Thorough Soviet planning, good coordination, and surprise stunned Japanese defenders. Japanese fortified positions on the border, which the Japanese had depended on so heavily, were bypassed, neutralized, isolated, and quickly destroyed, all at a minimum cost in terms of Soviet manpower. Led by forward detachments, the rapid Soviet advance through and beyond the fortified region had generated sufficient momentum to carry the Soviets to the Muleng River before the Japanese were fully aware of the gravity of the situation. Japanese commanders were unable to react to the Soviet initiative, and only on the eleventh were the Japanese able to establish a new defensive line in the mountains west of Muleng. They manned that defensive line, however, with troops severely shaken and disorganized by the events of the previous two days. Along the border, the 124th Infantry Division had lost three maneuver battalions and a major portion of its equipment during its hasty retrograde to new defensive positions.

Soviet 5th Army's performance exceeded the expectations of the 1st Far Eastern Front commander. Within sixty hours the army had attained objectives for which the Soviet timetable allotted eight days of combat. The Soviets accomplished this feat by detailed and secret operational planning, by a well-coordinated, timed application of combat power, by artful organization for combat, and by careful exploitation of terrain. Good planning rewarded the Soviets with surprise over the Japanese. The timed application of combat power by assault groups, advanced battalions, echeloned rifle regiments, rifle divisions, and forward detachments imparted momentum to the attack and sustained that momentum once it had built up. Units organized for precise combat tasks fulfilled these tasks with minimum losses. Thus assault groups relied on maneuver, firepower of tanks and self-propelled guns, and sapper skills to avoid costly frontal assaults. Specially tailored advanced battalions and forward detachments overcame "inhibiting" terrain and confounded the Japanese, who, until the end, remained convinced that no army could penetrate such "impassable" terrain. The surprise Soviet 5th Army achieved resulted from the timing, location, and manner of conducting the attack. Soviet success on 9—10 August was a measure of those achievements. With this success in hand, 5th Army continued to drive westward toward Mutanchiang.

Notes

1. *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny 1939—1945* [History of the Second World War 1939—45] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1980), 2:199—200 (hereafter cited as *IVMV*).
2. L. N. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda na dal'nem vostoke* [Victory in the Far East] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1971), 96—98. The 1st Far Eastern Front commander explains his mission in K. A. Meretskov, *Serving the People* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 344—46.

3. N. I. Krylov, N. I. Alekseev, and I. G. Dragan, *Navstrechu pobede: boevoi put 5-i armii, oktiabr 1941g—avgust 1945g* [Toward victory: The combat path of the 5th Army, October 1941—August 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1970), 423.

4. Japanese border fortifications are described in U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Studies on Manchuria, vol. 11, pt. 2, *Small Wars and Border Problems* (Tokyo, 1956).

5. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 52—54.

6. U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 154: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 225—32 (hereafter cited as JM 154).

7. Ibid., 181—83, 226—28.

8. P. Tsygankov, "Nekotorye osobennosti boevykh deistvii 5-i armii v Kharbino-Girinskoi operatsii" [Some characteristics of the combat action of 5th Army in the Harbin-Kirin operation], *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* [Military history journal], August 1975:83 [hereafter cited as *VIZh*]. Originally, 5th Army had five tank brigades, six SP artillery regiments, and twelve separate SP artillery battalions, for a total of 692 tanks and SP guns. See V. Ezhakov, "Boevoe primenenie tankov v gorno-taezhnoi mestnosti po opytu l-go dal'nevostochnogo fronta" [Combat use of tanks in mountainous-taiga regions based on the experience of the 1st Far Eastern Front], *VIZh*, January 1974:78. Before the operation began, 1st Far Eastern Front transferred one of these brigades (72d Tank Brigade) to 25th Army, thus reducing 5th Army tank and SP gun strength to 607. See I. E. Krupchenko, ed., *Sovetskie tankovie voiska 1941—45* [Soviet tank forces, 1941—45] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1973), 323; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 427.

9. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 116—17.

10. Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 425; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 79—80.

11. Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 429—30. Details on engineer support of 5th Army forward deployment are covered in A. F. Khrenov, "Wartime Operations: Engineer Operations in the Far East," *USSR Report: Military Affairs no. 1545* (21 November 1980):81—97, JPRS 76847, translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Services from the Russian article in *Znamya* [Banner], August 1980.

12. Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 430—32; Meretskov, *Serving the People*, 334.

13. Tsygankov, "Nekotorye," 84; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 428—30; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 101—2. All three sources relate the combat missions of all 5th Army rifle corps.

14. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 102; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 436—37.

15. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 103.

16. The original 5th Army artillery plans are in Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 106; Tsygankov, "Nekotorye," 84; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 433—34. The scope of artillery support of 5th Army is described in M. Sidorov, "Boevoe primenenie artillerii" [The combat use of artillery], *VIZh*, September 1975:15—17.

17. For the varying explanations as to why an artillery preparation was not fired, see Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 433—35; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 108; Meretskov, *Serving the People*, 350.

18. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 115—17.

19. Ezhakov, "Boevoe primenenie," 78, credits the 10th Mechanized Corps with 371 tanks and SP guns. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 95, gives the corps strength as 249 tanks and SPs. The difference reflects reassignment of one tank brigade and one SP artillery battalion from 5th Army to 25th Army and 10th Mechanized Corps.

20. Tsygankov, "Nekotorye," 86.

21. JM 154, 230.

22. V. Pavlov, "In the Hills of Manchuria," *Voennii Vestnik* [Military herald], August 1975: 30—32, translated into English by Office, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, U.S. Department of the Army; Krylov, *Navstrechu,* 436; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda,* 208.
23. Krylov, *Navstrechu,* 437—38; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda,* 200—202.
24. Khrenov, "Wartime Operations," 89; Krylov, *Navstrechu,* 438; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda,* 209.
25. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda,* 199.
26. JM 154, 59, 181.
27. Ibid., 181—82.
28. Ibid., 233—34.
29. Krylov, *Navstrechu,* 440—41; Tsygankov, "Nekotorye," 86—88; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda,* 208—11.
30. JM 154, 6.
31. Ibid., 8—9.
32. Ibid., 60—61.
33. Ibid., 185—86.
34. Ibid., 234.

Division Advance in Heavily Wooded Mountains

2

Terrain

Among the most rugged terrain sectors that Soviet forces had to traverse in their offensive into eastern Manchuria was the mountainous, wooded area dominating the border from north of Suifenho to Lake Khanka (see map 1—1). From Lake Khanka westward for forty kilometers, the land is open and rolling, although occasionally cut by gulleys and streams. Farther west, heights called *Gora Propast* (Mount Precipice) rise sharply from the plain. For eighty kilometers west of *Gora Propast* stretch the *Pogranichnii* (Border) Mountains, covered by dense forest growth and rising in places to almost 1,000 meters. Continuing southwest to east of Mutanchiang and Wangching, this range connects to the even higher craggy peaks along the northern Korean border. At the eighty-kilometer mark, however, the border, which follows the crest of the mountains westward, turns sharply south toward Suifenho, Tungning, and the sea.

Missions and Tasks

Into this mountainous salient, Marshal Meretskov, the 1st Far Eastern Front commander, placed the 1st Red Banner Army. This army, commanded by General A. P. Beloborodov, would fill the gap between 5th Army, operating against the principal Japanese fortified regions, and 35th Army, attacking in a sector north of Lake Khanka against the Mishan and Hutou Fortified Regions. The 1st Red Banner Army would lend major support to the 5th Army and secondary support to the 35th Army.

It was clear from the start that the main barrier to achieving success was the terrain, especially that on the army's left, immediately adjacent to the 5th Army sector. General Beloborodov said of the terrain:

> The particular features of the terrain over which we were to advance, for us, old Far Easterners, were generally known since the taiga was the same on both sides of the frontier. Mountain ranges with elevations running up to 1000 meters like a barrier separated the Soviet Maritime from the Central Manchurian Plain. The mountains were covered solid by virgin forests. Large oaks, cedar, pine, linden and birch overgrown with liana and

> wild grape alternated with creeping brush and subbrush. Thickets filled the spaces between trees, covering the ground like carpets with spines as long as one's finger and strong and sharp as a sewing needle. For an inexperienced person, these naturally created obstacles [that] in the literal sense could strip one in several minutes, cutting into your flesh and piercing the thick soles of your footwear. Here it would have been difficult even for experienced infantry. Along the foothills for many kilometers there stretched narrow also overgrown valleys which are called ravines or creek valleys. Through them flowed streams and creeks that were so swampy that even such a powerful and maneuverable tank as the T-34 became stuck. The swamps were found not only in low-lying areas but also in the hills. If you fought your way to the top of a hill you would be stuck in weak crumbling dirt. These were the particular features of the mountain taiga here.[1]

Marshal Meretskov, on 8 July, ordered 1st Red Banner Army to conduct, in coordination with 5th Army, the main attack of the front across this terrain in the direction of Pamientung, due west. Beloborodov's forces were to penetrate to a depth of thirty kilometers by the end of the third day of operations, thus clearing the mountainous taiga confronting them. On the eighth day the army would use strong mobile forces to capture Pamientung and the city of Linkou. Thereafter, the army would reach the Mutan River north of Mutanchiang (on the eighteenth day) and cooperate with 5th Army in reducing Japanese forces around that city. Simultaneously, the right wing of 1st Red Banner Army would attack northward, west of Lake Khanka, against the southern flank of the Japanese Mishan Fortified Region to assist 35th Army in securing that major defensive zone.[2]

Thus, 1st Red Banner Army was to advance to a depth of 150—180 kilometers in eighteen days, at an average rate of advance of eight to ten kilometers per day, indicative of the difficult terrain.* The most difficult period would be during the initial attack through the first eighteen to twenty kilometers of forest adjacent to the border. Although this region was sparsely populated (only scattered huts), it contained a few Japanese border posts connected by "mountain paths through which it would be difficult for even two persons to pass" and through which, General Beloborodov noted, "We were to move . . . with six rifle and antiaircraft artillery divisions, more than 400 tanks and self-propelled guns, a heavy artillery brigade, two combat engineer brigades and thousands of motor vehicles with freight."[3] For their part, the Japanese had left this sector lightly defended, scarcely suspecting that any force beyond light infantry could traverse it.

Japanese Defenses

The Japanese 126th Infantry Division, commanded by Lt. Gen. Kazuhiko Nomizo and headquartered at Pamientung, was responsible for defending the sector facing the Border Mountains. The defense posture of the 126th

*In good terrain, Soviets expected advance rates of up to one hundred kilometers per day.

Infantry Division resembled that of the 124th Infantry Division and consisted of a series of defensive positions from the immediate border to a depth of eighty to one hundred kilometers. The forward defenses were located on a line 120 kilometers long, some thirty to thirty-five kilometers from the border, with smaller outposts along the border. The forward defenses formed two distinct sectors, one covering the city of Pingyang, the other the city of Pamientung. The heavier defenses, running seventy kilometers, from Shangchihtun, north of *Gora Propast*, to Hsiaolutai, covered a sector the Japanese considered a likely secondary avenue of operations for Soviet forces. This line tied in to the southern defenses of the 135th Infantry Division at Mishan. Farther to the southwest was a second defensive line covering the approaches to Pamientung. This defensive line ran forty kilometers, from Chingkulingmiao to Jumonji Pass, across a sector the Japanese considered too rough and heavily wooded for major operations, and consequently, in need of only light defenses.

Major field fortifications at Shangchihtun, Panchiehho, Nanshan, and Hsiaolutai, together with smaller advanced posts, formed the Pingyang defense sector. Although one to two battalions were to defend each position, on 9 August only platoon- or company-size units garrisoned most positions. The Pamientung defensive line, for example, consisted of fortified positions at Chingkulingmiao, Lishan, and Jumonji Pass, each occupied by a platoon- to company-size force, with advanced outposts on the border.[4]

The mission of Japanese forces defending Pingyang was to delay the enemy for as long as possible in front of the forward defensive positions, then to conduct a fighting withdrawal through Pingyang and Lishuchen to other defensive positions to the rear. The garrison unit at Hsiaolutai, together with individual posts on the border, had the unrealistic mission of defending that position "to the last man."[5] Japanese units in the Pamientung sector would defend in their positions and, if the positions fell, were expected to conduct guerrilla warfare in the enemy's rear. Any withdrawing Japanese forces would destroy all roads, bridges, and barracks in order to slow the enemy advance.

An intermediate Japanese defensive line located just east of the cities of Pamientung and Lishuchen covered the important bridges over the Muleng River. A third defensive line, near Tzuhsingtun, ran north to south in the hills between Mutanchiang and Pamientung, where prepared field positions of 126th, 135th, and 124th Infantry Divisions presented a solid defensive front covering Mutanchiang from attack.

At the outbreak of war, the 126th Infantry Division consisted of the following units (see table 2—1):

Table 2—1. Japanese 126th Infantry Division Composition
277th Infantry Regiment
278th Infantry Regiment
279th Infantry Regiment
126th Field Artillery Regiment
126th Engineer Battalion
126th Transport Regiment
126th Signal Unit
Raiding battalion
20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment (1 battery)
31st Independent Antitank Battalion (1 battery)

Source: U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 154: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 246—47.

Table 2—2. Japanese 126th Infantry Division Disposition

Place	Strength
Pingyang Sector	
Shangchihtun	1 platoon
Erhjenpan	1 squad
Panchiehho	1 battalion (-) (2d Battalion, 278th Infantry Regiment)
Nanshan	1 platoon
Hsiaolutai	1 company
Hsiangchushan	1 company (reinforced by two machine gun platoons)
Pamientung Sector	
Chingkulingmiao	1 company
Lishan	1 company (reinforced with one machine gun platoon and a regimental gun)
Chiupikou	1 squad
Jumonji Pass	1 platoon
Pamientung	2 companies, 1 company of the raiding battalion (1st Battalion, 277th Infantry Regiment)

Source: U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 154: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 247, 250—53.

Of these forces, approximately two battalions defended the border. A battalion and a company of the 278th Infantry Regiment occupied positions at Pingyang, and a battalion (minus one company) of the 277th Infantry Regiment defended the Pamientung sector (see table 2—2).

The division headquarters was at Pamientung, but main elements of the division to the rear at Tzuhsingtun constructed fortifications and conducted field exercises. Thus, the Japanese deployed their forces to take maximum advantage of the difficult terrain. Small units located well forward would buy the time necessary for the division to redeploy and to occupy more formidable defensive positions to the rear. The main question was whether these small forces would be sufficient to accomplish their mission.

Operational Planning

General Beloborodov planned his attack after receiving his army's mission from Marshal Meretskov. Beloborodov's major problem was to conduct deep operations with a very large force over very restrictive terrain (see table 2—3). The complete absence of roads in his sector meant that any force crossing it would have to build and maintain its own road network. Yet these makeshift roads could transport only a limited force before the very weight of traffic made them impassable. So, Beloborodov ruled out a deep echelonment attack over a few routes, and chose instead a single echelon formation spread over many routes. In so doing, however, he ran the risk that small Japanese forces could use the terrain to slow or stop the multiple, but dispersed and therefore weakened, Soviet columns. Reducing that danger required careful task organization of forces, in particular the proper positioning of tank units and allocation of engineer support to sustain the advance. On 12 July, General Beloborodov visited the Maritime Group of Forces headquartered at Voroshilov-Ussuriiskii and tried to convince Marshal Meretskov of the correctness of his plan. Meretskov's earlier instructions had specifically directed 1st Red Banner Army to deploy in two echelons with three divisions forward. Beloborodov, however, argued for a single echelon configuration with four divisions leading the attack. Marshal Meretskov eventually approved General Beloborodov's plan.[6]

On 24 July, two days after 1st Red Banner Army forces had assembled in their waiting areas, General Beloborodov issued his combat orders.[7] On his right wing, from Lake Khanka to the Pogranichnii Mountains opposite the Japanese Mishan Fortified Region, he placed the 112th Fortified Region and 6th Field Fortified Region* (five machine gun and artillery/machine gun battalions) to protect the army's right flank, to prevent a counterthrust from Mishan along the west shore of Lake Khanka, and to conduct limited offensive operations, if the opportunity arose. Farther to the west, in the

*A field fortified region was more mobile than a regular fortified region and thus was more capable of conducting offensive combat.

Table 2—3. Soviet 1st Red Banner Army Composition

1st Red Banner Army: Col. Gen. A. P. Beloborodov
- 26th Rifle Corps: Maj. Gen. A. V. Skvortsov
  - 22d Rifle Division
  - 59th Rifle Division
  - 300th Rifle Division
- 59th Rifle Corps: Lt. Gen. A. S. Ksenofontov to c12/8/45—Lt. Gen. Khetagurov
  - 39th Rifle Division
  - 231st Rifle Division
  - 365th Rifle Division
- 6th Fortified Region
- 112th Fortified Region
- 75th Tank Brigade
- 77th Tank Brigade
- 257th Tank Brigade
- 48th Separate Tank Regiment
- 335th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment
- 338th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment
- 339th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment
- 213th Gun Artillery Brigade
- 216th Corps Artillery Brigade
- 217th Corps Artillery Brigade
- 60th Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade
- 52d Mortar Brigade
- 33d Guards Mortar Regiment
- 54th Guards Mortar Regiment
- 33d Antiaircraft Artillery Division
  - 1378th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 1710th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 1715th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 1718th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
- 115th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 455th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 721st Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 12th Engineer Sapper Brigade
- 27th Engineer Sapper Brigade

Weapons: 402 tanks and self-propelled guns

Source: M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 401.

mountains facing the Japanese Pingyang defenses, Beloborodov positioned the 397th Rifle Regiment of 59th Rifle Corps. Its mission was similar to that of the fortified regions. General A. M. Maksimov, Beloborodov's deputy, commanded the broad 120-kilometer right wing of the 1st Red Banner Army. An antitank reserve of two heavy self-propelled artillery regiments and the 60th Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade backed General Maksimov's force.

The main attack of 1st Red Banner Army would take place in a narrow sixteen-kilometer sector on the army's left. There the 26th Rifle Corps of General A. V. Skvortsov and the 59th Rifle Corps of General A. S. Ksenofontov, each with two rifle divisions abreast in first echelon, would penetrate Japanese defenses and advance separately and simultaneously toward Pamientung and Lishuchen in order to capture these important rail and dirt road junctions on the Muleng River. Thereafter, the two corps would advance on widely divergent axes to secure Linkou and the northern approach to Mutanchiang in a three-stage attack:

- four to five days to capture Muleng, Lishuchen, and Linkou;
- six to eight days to bring Soviet troops to the northern outskirts of Mutanchiang; and
- four to six days for 1st Red Banner Army together with 35th and 5th Armies to destroy Japanese forces at Mishan and Mutanchiang.

Combat and Combat Service Support

His initial planning completed, General Beloborodov then considered the important question of support for the operation. Artillery support was particularly difficult because of the terrain and the lack of roads on the Soviet side of the border. Just bringing the artillery into its initial firing positions became a tremendous feat. The rugged terrain and paucity of Japanese troops resulted in a decision to fire no artillery preparation.[8] By the night of the attack, however, 50 percent of army artillery was in position to provide necessary supporting fires. The 9th Air Army would support the attack with sorties against Japanese headquarters, communications facilities, and fortified positions.

Attaining enough speed to overcome the terrain impediments, to secure the objectives, and to sustain the drive along numerous separate axes of advance required mobile fire support. So the 1st Far Eastern Front reinforced each army with separate tank brigades and separate self-propelled artillery regiments. The 1st Red Banner Army received three tank brigades, three heavy self-propelled artillery regiments, and a heavy tank regiment in addition to its six organic self-propelled artillery battalions in the rifle divisions (a total of 410 tanks and self-propelled guns).[9] General Beloborodov attached two tank brigades and one heavy self-propelled artillery regiment

to the rifle corps. After their passage through the mountainous wooded terrain belt along the border, they would be used as forward detachments to lead the advance.

Front headquarters also provided heavy engineer support to 1st Red Banner Army, both to prepare army jumping-off positions and to help build and maintain roads for the advance. Engineer units opened trails twenty meters wide, crisscrossing the initial army positions along the border. They also constructed firing points for infantry and artillery, observation posts, and two major radial roads leading to the border, over which units could deploy forward. Engineers also established survey markers and directional aids on hills in order to orient Soviet forces moving forward through the forests.[10]

Following Beloborodov's orders, his rifle corps commanders deployed two divisions in first echelon and one in second echelon (see fig. 2—1). Tank and self-propelled artillery units assembled close behind the first echelon so that they could move out quickly to exploit the success of the initial attack. Each first echelon rifle division would advance on two or three axes along roads that the engineers would construct as the units moved forward.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6">Soviet 1st Red Banner Army Echelonment</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Army</td><td>1st Echelon</td><td colspan="2">26RC</td><td colspan="2">59RC</td></tr>
<tr><td>2d Echelon</td><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Reserve</td><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Corps</td><td>1st Echelon</td><td>300RD</td><td>22RD</td><td>39RD</td><td>231RD</td></tr>
<tr><td>2d Echelon</td><td colspan="2">59RD</td><td colspan="2">365RD</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reserve</td><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
</table>

Figure 2—1

The experience of the 300th Rifle Division, 26th Rifle Corps, illustrates in microcosm the detail required in the planning and conduct of the operation (see table 2—4). The 300th Rifle Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. K. G. Cherepanov, deployed in first echelon on a 2.5-kilometer front left of the other (22d) first echelon rifle division.[11] The 300th received as

reinforcements the 45th Howitzer Artillery Regiment, one tank company of the 257th Tank Brigade, and the 156th Sapper Battalion. Its mission was to attack in the direction of Mount Tiershiyihao-Chishengshan-Pamientung, to cross the heavily wooded region west of the border, to secure the western slope of Mount Tiershiyihao (the immediate mission), to secure crossing sites over the Shitouho River by the end of 9 August, and to prepare to advance on the follow-on objective of Pamientung. The depth of the immediate mission was three kilometers; the day's mission requirement was five kilometers. Hindering terrain limited the depth of these missions and forced road construction as the Soviet forces advanced.

Table 2—4. Soviet 300th Rifle Division Composition

1049th Rifle Regiment
1051st Rifle Regiment
1053d Rifle Regiment
822d Artillery Regiment
336th Separate Tank Destroyer Battalion
459th Separate Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion
756th Separate Signal Battalion
591st Separate Sapper Battalion
Training battalion

Source: V. Timofeev, "300-ia strelkovaia divisiia v boiakh na mudan'tszianskom napravlenii" [The 300th Rifle Division in combat on the Mutanchiang direction], *Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal* [Military history journal], August 1978:50.

To cross the mountainous taiga region in march column configuration along two routes, General Cherepanov formed his division into two echelons, with the main body on the left flank. The 1049th Rifle Regiment of Lt. Col. K. V. Panin, on the right, and the 1051st Rifle Regiment of Lt. Col. M. F. Buzhak, on the left, would painstakingly advance through the forests to the Shitouho River. Upon crossing the river, units would deploy in combat formation to continue the advance toward Pamientung. The 1053d Rifle Regiment was in the division second echelon, while the division training battalion was in reserve. The division's forward detachment, consisting of two machine gun companies, a squad of sappers from the 1053d Rifle Regiment, and two SU-76 guns, supported by fire of the 45th Howitzer Artillery Regiment, would move in column formation behind the 1st Rifle Battalion, 1051st Rifle Regiment. The forward detachment's mission was to capture Hill 748.8 and to support seizure of bridgeheads over the Shitouho by elements of the division's main body. Divisional artillery would support the action of the forward detachment against Hill 748.8. After reaching the Shitouho River, a tank company of the 257th Tank Brigade would reinforce the forward detachment, enabling the forward detachment to push rapidly westward toward Pamientung.

To overcome the isolated Japanese units in fortified positions facing the 300th Rifle Division, the division commander organized small assault groups in the lead rifle companies. Each group consisted of a rifle platoon, one or two sapper squads, one or two tanks or self-propelled guns, a squad of antitank rifles, and one or two teams of manpacked flamethrowers. For weeks before the operation began, personnel of the 300th Rifle Division, division staff, and the assault groups had conducted exercises and training over similar terrain, specifically learning how to prepare roads and to conduct operations over such ground.

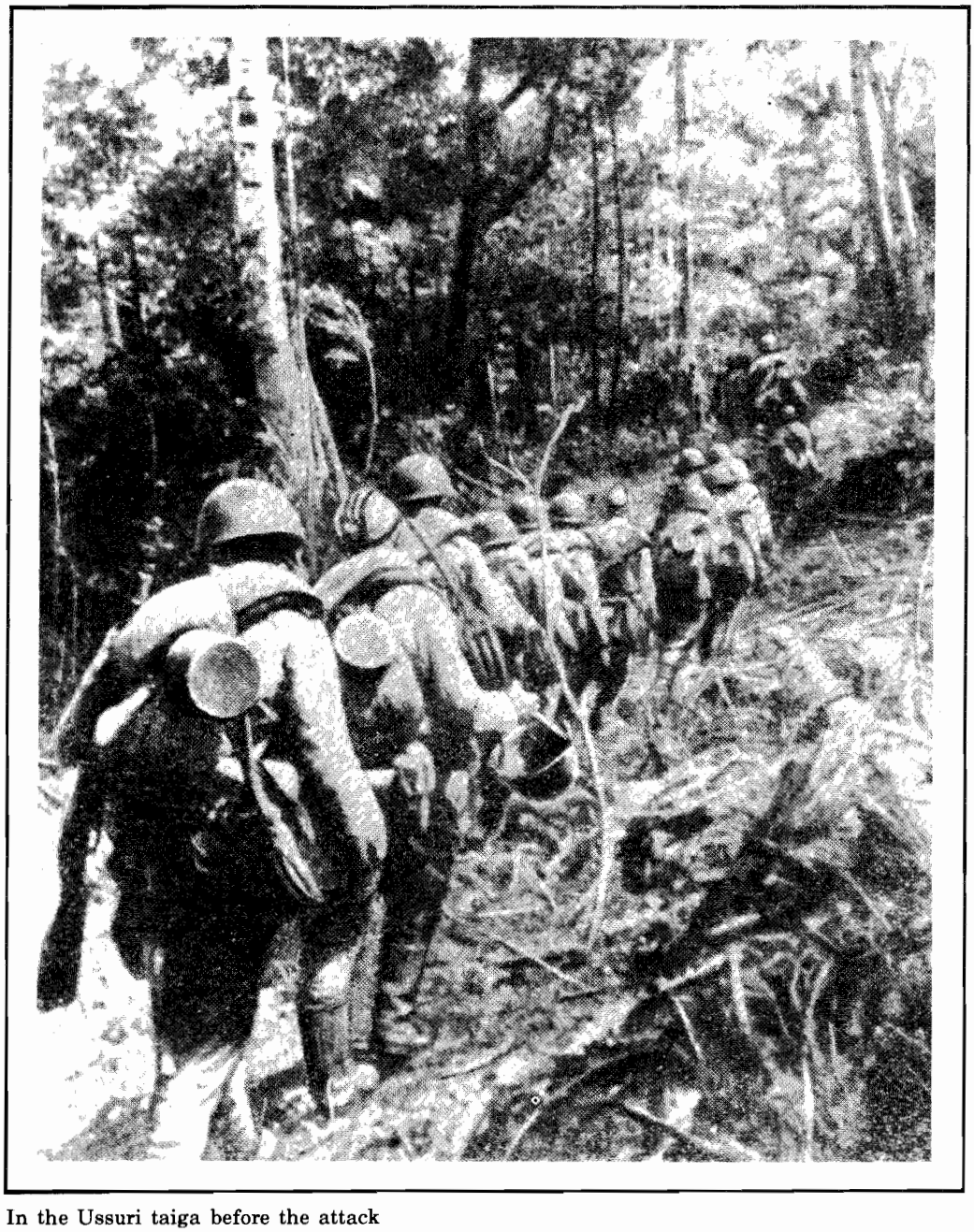
1st Red Banner Army Attack

At 1800 on 8 August, men of the 300th Rifle Division and other 1st Red Banner Army units moved forward and occupied jumping-off positions. As in other sectors of the 1st Far Eastern Front, as nightfall arrived so did the rains, causing apprehension among commanders across the front. General Beloborodov floridly recalled the scene:

> Lightning flashed unexpectedly. Dazzling streaks split the darkening sky in half. Thunder sounded, becoming yet louder. The taiga sounded still more menacing. The downpours approached. Already the first drops resounded on the leaves. We entered the dugouts—and glanced at our watches. There remained sixty minutes until the attack. Should we delay the attack? No, under no circumstances! Indeed the rain will hinder not only us but also the enemy.
>
> How slowly the time passes. But now approaches the long-awaited moment. Without artillery preparation the forward detachments start forward. It was at 0100 far eastern time 9 August 1945. The forces of the army crossed the state boundary.[12]

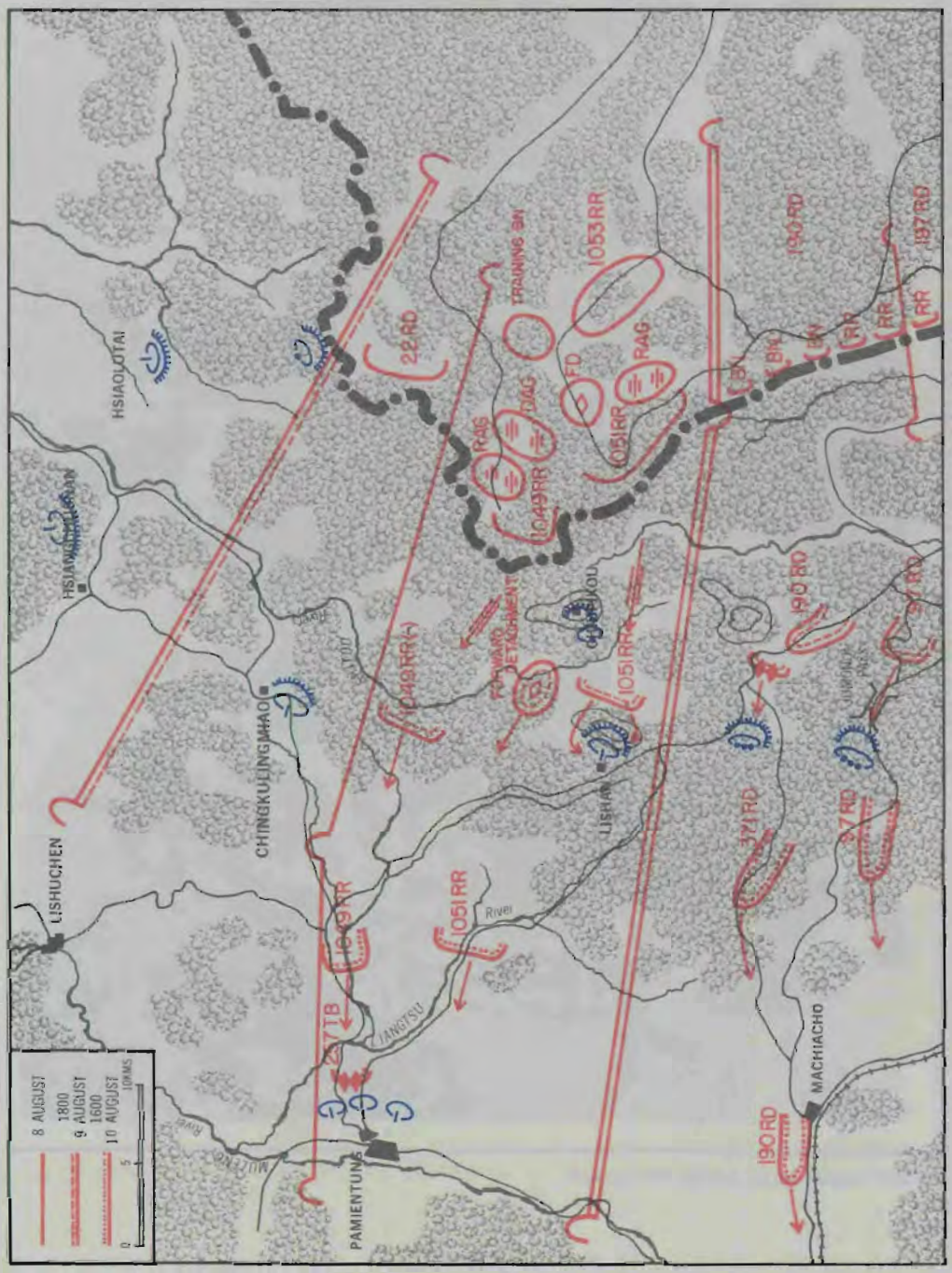
Marshal Meretskov, awaiting the beginning of the attack with General Beloborodov at the command post of 1st Red Banner Army, also recorded his more pragmatic thoughts:

> The assault group of the 1st Far Eastern Front consisting of the 1st Red Banner and 5th Armies was to assault the Japanese after a powerful artillery barrage. But a sudden tropical rainstorm overturned our plans. Torrents of water lashed the troops waiting for the signal to attack. Our artillery was silent. As in the Berlin Operation we intended to begin the attack in the middle of the night in the blinding light of searchlights. And now the driving rain had spoilt everything and a way out had to be found.
>
> It was already 0100 hours. We could wait no longer. At the time I was at General Beloborodov's Command Post. A word of command and the mass of men and equipment would go into action. Should I order the gunners to open fire? It was too late to ask for weather forecasts or to gather any other additional information. I had to decide and decide immediately, taking into account the objective data at my disposal. That meant that not a second was to be lost in deliberations. I gave the command and troops lunged forward without an artillery barrage. Advance units gained control of road centres and broke into villages sowing panic among the Japanese. The surprise factor played its part. Taking advantage of the downpour and the pitch-dark night our troops broke into the fortified areas catching the Japanese unawares. Nothing could stop our men now.[13]



In the Ussuri taiga before the attack

At 0100 on 9 August forces of the 1st Red Banner Army attacked into the forests with first echelon divisions advancing in column formation, each column led by the task-organized regimental forward detachment (see map 2—1). In the 300th Rifle Division sector, each of the two regimental columns



Map 2—1. 1st Red Banner Army Operations, 9—10 August 1945

was led by a rifle battalion with five T-34 tanks, two automatic weapons companies for security, and a platoon of sappers. The tanks, placed at the head of each column, knocked down trees and saplings as they advanced. The infantry, in turn, gathered the trees, and the sappers worked them into a crude, though serviceable, corduroy road five meters wide. Follow-on units widened the path to seven meters and ultimately improved it enough for two-way traffic. The four engineer battalions of the army road detachment improved the road, built bridges as necessary in each division's sector, regulated traffic, and directed the forward movement of the army's second echelon.

Three to five kilometers behind the regimental forward detachments marched the first segment of the regimental main column consisting of rifle, engineer, artillery, and specialized units task-organized for mutual support. Other segments followed at intervals of four to five and one-half kilometers. Each succeeding segment further improved the road and evacuated vehicles that had bogged down in the mud and undergrowth. Altogether the 300th Rifle Division constructed more than eleven kilometers of tree, brush, and twig corduroy road as it marched.[14] Other first echelon divisions of 1st Red Banner Army accomplished similar feats over slightly shorter distances.

During the darkness of early morning hours, the two regimental columns slowly edged their way through the heavy forest, virtually undetected by the sole Japanese outpost at Chiupikou. By dawn, the main regimental force followed under gray, rain-laden skies. Shortly after dawn, elements of the 1051st Rifle Regiment surprised and overpowered the small Japanese outpost at Chiupikou. The remainder of the column moved westward, literally chopping its way toward the Shitouho River. By day's end, the 1051st Rifle Regiment had secured crossings on the Shitouho just southwest of Hill 748.8, and the 1049th Rifle Regiment had advanced across the slope of Mount Tiershiyihao and had put two rifle battalions across the Shitouho River. The 3d Battalion of the 1049th Rifle Regiment, on the order of Lieutenant Colonel Panin, remained in the rear to help construct a road over which the regimental artillery and rear services would advance. Both regiments thus advanced four to five kilometers on the first day of the offensive, liquidating the token Japanese force along the immediate border.

But if Japanese resistance was nil, the taiga was another matter. Despite elaborately planned road construction efforts, soil, vegetation, and rain combined to plague the 300th Rifle Division. Division artillery, division supply trains, and attached units stuck fast in the mud the first day of the advance. To solve this serious problem, General Cherepanov ordered the 1053d Rifle Regiment of Lt. Col. K. A. Malkov, the training battalion, the 3d Battalion, 1049th Rifle Regiment, and two sapper battalions to improve the road so that it could be used for transporting artillery and vital supplies forward. These efforts to improve road communications paid off. By the morning of the tenth, the division's forward detachment, the 257th Tank

Brigade, moved into position on the west bank of the Shitouho River, waiting to receive the expected order to begin the exploitation to Pamientung. Other division units prepared to follow.

For the Japanese, events on 9 August were as dreary as the weather. The chief of staff of the 126th Infantry Division, Col. Masashi Tanaka, wrote from his fortified position at Panchiehho:

> The night of 8—9 August, moonless and drizzling without a letup, was filled with an air of ghastliness at Panchiehho, when all of a sudden at midnight a strange light was seen and the drone of aircraft heard to the south. Soon thereafter enemy aircraft were sighted crossing the Soviet-Manchurian border. At about the same time several shots were heard from the direction of our border lookout positions; telephone communication with them was completely disrupted.[15]

The Japanese garrison commander at Panchiehho reported the incidents to the division intelligence liaison officer at Pingyang and learned of other Soviet attacks along the entire 126th Infantry Division front. At division headquarters in Pamientung, the division intelligence officer awoke at midnight to the sound of enemy aircraft. Shortly thereafter, both the Pingyang and Pamientung sectors reported attacks by an "overwhelmingly superior enemy."[16] The intelligence officer transmitted this information to 5th Army headquarters and to his division commander, who was at the commanders' conference at army headquarters. In the Pamientung sector the commander of the 1st Battalion, 277th Regiment, sighted enemy aircraft flying westward shortly before dawn and immediately ordered his forces to prepare their defenses, destroy bridges, and barricade roads. At 1000 on 9 August the Lishan garrison notified the battalion commander that the Chiupikou unit (twenty men) had been annihilated by the enemy just before daybreak. The enemy, though, had not yet reached Lishan.[17]

By 0300 on 9 August, 5th Army, aware that an attack was in progress, issued orders to subordinate divisions. The 126th Infantry Division was to

> occupy established positions extending from Jumonji Pass to Shangchihtun (through Lishan and Panchiehho) in an effort to delay the enemy advance and to facilitate the movement of the 135th Division toward Linkou. The main force will hold established positions in the vicinity of Tzuhsingtun, west of Pamientung and will destroy the enemy fighting power by resisting in our defensive positions disposed in depth.[18]

At that time Japanese 5th Army attached one battery of the 31st Independent Antitank Battalion and one battery of the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Battalion to the 126th Infantry Division.[19] Upon receiving his orders, the 126th Division commander left Yehho by motor car for Pamientung.

By the evening of the ninth, reports to 126th Infantry Division headquarters were painting a fragmented, but gloomy picture. In the Pingyang sector, the Chiungshan observation unit had been annihilated in the early morning hours, as was a similar position at Heilingshan. By nightfall Soviet troops were massing east of Panchiehho in estimated division strength. In view of the threat to his position, the garrison commander evacuated his forces at midnight and withdrew to Pingyangchen, arriving there at 0900 on the tenth. Instead of finding relief and regrouping at Pingyangchen, the Japanese commander confronted two Soviet columns, one following him from Panchiehho and one advancing from Hsiaolutai toward the west side of Pingyangchen.[20]

In the Pamientung sector on the evening of 9 August, the garrisons at Chingkulingmiao and Lishan reported no Soviet activity, though men and machines could be heard approaching their positions from the east and southeast. What the Japanese heard were the advancing forces of the 300th Rifle Division, then completing their movement through the forests adjacent to the Shitouho River.

On the right flank, the 22d Rifle Division slowly pushed toward Chingkulingmiao, while farther east, divisions of the 59th Rifle Corps advanced into the heart of the Pingyang defense zone. At 0500 on the tenth, lead elements of the 1049th and 1051st Rifle Regiments emerged from their bridgeheads on the Shitouho River and entered the final eight to ten kilometers of forest separating them from the more open country east of Pamientung. Japanese opposition was still not yet apparent. To hasten the advance, the forward detachment of the division (257th Tank Brigade of Lt. Col. G. S. Anishchik) moved into the vanguard and led the movement forward, hoping to bypass Japanese strongpoints. To help it accomplish its mission as forward detachment of the 26th Rifle Corps, General Beloborodov reinforced the brigade's twenty-five tanks with a battery of self-propelled guns, an automatic weapons company, and a sapper platoon.[21] During the morning, the reinforced 257th Tank Brigade moved westward north of Hill 748.8 into the valley of the Liangtzu Ho and then proceeded northwest along the river toward Pamientung. The 1052d Rifle Regiment followed in its wake and engaged the Japanese strongpoint at Lishan at 0800. To the north, the 1049th Rifle Regiment moved westward out of the Shitouho Valley, south of the Japanese positions at Chingkulingmiao—positions the 22d Rifle Division now confronted in its advance westward. Farther south, the Soviet 5th Army's 190th Rifle Division of 5th Army, on its march toward Machiacho Station, ran into the Japanese platoon (of the 277th Infantry Regiment) holding the encampment at Jumonji Pass. The Soviets set fire to the Japanese barracks at 1000, but the fire spread into the brush and temporarily halted the Soviet advance. Eventually, Soviet infantry outflanked and assaulted the Japanese positions under the cover of tank fire. After suffering heavy losses, the Japanese commander, Second Lieutenant Kawakami, withdrew his platoon northwest, through the forests, toward Pamientung.[22] At the same time, the 1051st Rifle Regiment began a careful

reduction of the Japanese reinforced company at Lishan. The Soviets first infiltrated and surrounded the garrison and then poured on heavy observed artillery fire. In the afternoon, the 1051st Rifle Regiment assaulted Japanese defensive field positions. By evening almost all the Japanese, including the commander, were dead, and the position was in Soviet hands.[23]

Throughout 10 August, the Japanese company at Chingkulingmiao successfully defended its positions (well disposed over difficult terrain), against lead elements of the Soviet 22d Rifle Division. Late in the day, however, Soviet troops from the 1049th Rifle Regiment of the 300th Rifle Division threatened Japanese withdrawal routes from the south, and 22d Rifle Division forces began infiltrating the Japanese position. The Japanese garrison commander withdrew his company on a mountain path back to positions east of Pamientung, where it arrived on the eleventh and there rejoined the rest of the battalion.[24]

Tank advance with mounted infantry

Meanwhile, the 257th Tank Brigade (reinforced) rapidly drove on toward Pamientung, leaving Soviet infantry to deal with bypassed Japanese positions. At 1600, four kilometers northeast of the city, the tank brigade encountered prepared Japanese positions defended by two companies of the 1st Battalion, 277th Regiment, plus one company of the 126th Infantry Division's Raiding Battalion. Lacking antitank weapons, the Japanese

desperately resorted to suicide tactics: raiding company troops threw themselves bodily at the Soviet tanks. "Each individual of the main body of the 1st Company of the Raiding Battalion armed himself with explosives and rushed the enemy tanks. Although minor damage was inflicted on a majority of them [the tanks], the explosives were not of sufficient strength (three to seven kilograms) to halt the tanks."[25]

The Soviet 257th Tank Brigade commander had support from the 78th Assault Aviation Regiment. While aircraft pounded Japanese troop and artillery positions, Soviet artillery and tanks added their direct fire. By 2000 on 10 August, lead elements of the 300th Rifle Division and 22d Rifle Division of 26th Rifle Corps arrived to support the 257th Tank Brigade in its attack. Soviet forces now engaged the Japanese forces on three sides, and Japanese units began withdrawing across the bridge westward toward the division main defensive line at Tzuhsingtun. Pressuring the Japanese, the 257th Tank Brigade, reinforced by the 1051st Rifle Regiment of 300th Rifle Division, attacked the northern defenses of the city at 2100, broke through, and secured the bridge over the Muleng River and the railroad station in the northern sector of Pamientung. Early on the morning of 11 August, a simultaneous attack by Soviet forces on the eastern and southern defenses of the city finally crushed Japanese defenses. By noon, the Japanese garrison had been destroyed, with 400 Japanese killed in the struggle. Though the hard, lengthy fighting undoubtedly claimed significant Soviet casualties as well, the Japanese claim of only two Soviet tanks destroyed and seven disabled illustrates the Japanese inability to check Soviet armor advances.[26] On the morning of 11 August, while the final battle for Pamientung was in progress, General Beloborodov dispatched the 257th Tank Brigade westward to pursue Japanese forces.

The success of the 26th Rifle Corps, in general, and the 300th Rifle Division, in particular, was paralleled by similar successes in other sectors. While the 257th Tank Brigade led 26th Rifle Corps toward Pamientung, the 75th Tank Brigade performed a similar mission for 59th Rifle Corps, advancing to secure first Lishuchen and then Linkou. General Maksimov's forces on the right wing of 1st Red Banner Army overcame Japanese defensive positions west of Lake Khanka and threatened the Japanese Mishan Fortified Region from the south.

Conclusions

The operations of 1st Red Banner Army and, especially, the 300th Rifle Division were notable, although not necessarily because of the armed resistance they overcame. In fact, Japanese resistance throughout the sector was slight and disorganized. The Soviet achievement resulted from the Japanese assessment that the likelihood of a major Soviet attack in the seemingly impassable terrain of the region was minimal. Thus, the Japanese placed the bulk of their defenses along the conventional avenues of

approach, in the more trafficable area west of Lake Khanka. Elsewhere in the area, the Japanese deployed small outposts to detect and block the light Soviet forces they expected to meet. What distinguished the Soviet effort was the successful introduction of large forces through such a region. The Soviets succeeded by careful operational planning, by tailoring their forces, and by enormous engineering feats, feats the light and immobile Japanese outpost defenses were powerless to prevent.

General Beloborodov's decision to attack in a single echelon brought maximum pressure to bear along the entire Japanese front. The Soviets used every possible axis of advance and where axes did not exist, they built new ones. Lacking depth, the Japanese defense fell victim to that single echelon Soviet attack. Attacked everywhere simultaneously, the Japanese could defend nowhere successfully. Once the Soviets pierced the thin Japanese defensive crust, victory was assured. Mobile forward detachments began active pursuit, which the Japanese failed to halt until the Soviets were on the outskirts of Mutanchiang.

The Soviets achieved victory by close coordination (*vzaimodeistvie*) of forces at the lowest levels and by carefully tailoring units. The cooperation of tanks, infantry, and sappers down to company level was essential in order to build the vital roads stretching through the forests along the border. This close cooperation of tanks, infantry, and artillery in the forward detachments permitted those units to begin exploitation early and to sustain the exploitation to great depths. Detailed planning and implementation of signal procedures and unit movement control insured that each march element of the advancing army had a proper mixture of combat elements.

As in other areas of Manchuria, a major factor in the achievement of Soviet victory was the basic Japanese tendency to underestimate Soviet military capabilities. As a result, in just fifty hours of battle, 1st Red Banner Army secured the line of the Muleng River by overcoming defenses that Japanese planners had expected to hold much longer. The stage was set for the army's advance toward the main Japanese defensive position and the critical city of Mutanchiang.

Notes

1. A. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii" [In the hills of Manchuria], *VIZh*, December 1980:30.
2. *IVMV*, 2:203.
3. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 30.
4. Japanese defenses described in JM 154, 250—53.
5. Ibid., 251.
6. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 31—33; Beloborodov, *Skvoz ogon i taigu* [Through the fire and taiga] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1969), 14—16.
7. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 34—35.

8. *IVMV*, 2:205; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 107, states that 1st Red Banner Army planned no artillery preparation. Meretskov in *Serving the People* implies that the army was going to use searchlights to supplement an artillery preparation (as in the Berlin operation). No other accounts support this claim.
9. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 92, gives tank and SP gun strength as 410. V. Ezhakov, "Boevoe primenenie," 78, claims that strength was 402.
10. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 129.
11. Details on the 300th Rifle Division operations found in V. Timofeev, "300-ia strelkovaia diviziia v boyakh na Mudan'tsyanskom napravlenii" [The 300th Rifle Division in Battles on the Mutanchiang direction], *VIZh*, August 1978:50—55.
12. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 21.
13. Meretskov, *Serving the People*, 15—16.
14. Khrenov, "Wartime Operations," 87—88; *IVMV*, 2:227—28; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 205—7, all describe the road-building feat.
15. JM 154, 253—54.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 257.
18. Ibid., 182.
19. Ibid., 183.
20. Ibid., 255—56. In heavy fighting at Pingyangchen on the tenth, the Japanese battalion commander and most of his officers were killed. After dark the remnants of the force broke through Soviet lines and scattered westward and northward into the hills. Of the 850 Japanese engaged at Pingyangchen, 650 were killed or wounded.
21. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 216.
22. JM 154, 257—58.
23. Ibid., 186, 258; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 216.
24. JM 154, 258—59.
25. Ibid., 259; Timofeev, "300-ia strelkovaia," 53; Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," *VIZh*, January 1981:45; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 216—17.
26. JM 154, 259, claims Japanese losses were 700, of which 500 were killed. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 217, states that 400 Japanese died in the action.

Army Operations in Swampy Lowlands

3

Terrain

Among the most unpleasant realities Soviet planners faced in contemplating operations in eastern Manchuria was the fact that avenues of approach into the region not obstructed by mountains were obstructed instead by swamps and marshes. Indeed, it seemed as if all solid land rose and fell precipitously, while all flat ground consumed in its watery depths any men or equipment that attempted to cross it.

Missions and Tasks

Such was the case in the region immediately north of Lake Khanka, a region extending about 200 kilometers from north to south, over which the 1st Far Eastern Front directed 35th Army to operate. In concept, the task assigned to 35th Army was simple: advance westward north of Lake Khanka in order to secure the Japanese fortified region at Mishan, isolate and destroy the fortified region at Hutou, and ultimately, advance on Poli, thus protecting the right flank of the 1st Far Eastern Front. The problem in the execution of that assigned task rested in the adverse geographical conditions 35th Army would have to encounter.

Geographically, the area over which 35th Army would operate was primarily swamps and marshy lowlands, punctuated in places by low hills protruding from the marshes. This region was bounded on the south by Lake Khanka, on the east by the Sungacha and Ussuri rivers, and on the north by the Wanta Shan (mountains), running from northeast to southwest along the right flank of the army sector. In the eastern portion of the spongy region, a few sparsely wooded hills rose fifty to eighty meters above the swamps, while in the west, similar hills proliferated in number and reached heights of 400 meters. The Muleng River, running from southwest to northeast into the Ussuri River, drained the region. In the western portion of the region, one could exit from the lowlands and travel up the valley of the Muleng via Chihsi and Linkou into the eastern Manchurian hills, or northwest across the Wanta Shan from Mishan to Poli. Swamps hindered movement in places along both of these exit routes.

Japanese Defenses

The Japanese had constructed two major fortified regions to defend the area and to prevent Soviet passage through it. The Hutou Fortified Region rested on the hills scattered north of the confluence of the Muleng and Ussuri rivers. The reinforced concrete positions at and north of Hutou were a formidable obstacle, blocking the road from the Ussuri via Hulin to Mishan. The guns in these positions also threatened the Soviet Trans-Siberian railroad line running parallel across the Ussuri River at Iman. The second fortified region extended south and east of Mishan on the hills north of Lake Khanka. The combination of natural and man-made obstacles made the task of 35th Army challenging. Marshal Meretskov noted, "It is hard to say what was more difficult for 35th Army: to assault fortified areas or to negotiate places where there was more water than land and where the men waded waist-deep for tens of kilometers at a stretch."[1]

The Japanese 5th Army assigned responsibility for the defense of the region to the 135th Infantry Division of General Yoichi Hitomi, with headquarters at Tungan, and to the 15th Border Guard Unit at Hutou. Because of the extensive area it had to defend, the subordinate units of the 135th Infantry Division were widely scattered (see table 3—1).

Table 3—1. Japanese 135th Infantry Division Composition

368th Infantry Regiment
369th Infantry Regiment
370th Infantry Regiment
135th Artillery Regiment
135th Engineer Battalion
Raiding battalion
20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment (1 battery)

Source: U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 154: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 275—76.

The 368th Infantry Regiment, with headquarters at Hulin, had two battalions there and two others working on fortifications in the Chihsing main line of resistance, north of Mutanchiang. The 369th Infantry Regiment had its headquarters and main body at Tungan, one battalion at Chihsing, two companies at Paoching, and a smaller element at Jaoho on the Ussuri River north of the Wanta Shan. The main body of the 370th Infantry Regiment and its headquarters were at Linkou, while one battalion was at Chihsing. The support units of the division were at Tungan, except for the engineer battalion and two batteries of the artillery regiment, which were preparing field works at Chihsing, and the raiding battalion located near Linkou.[2]

The 135th Infantry Division manned scattered outposts on the border, in sectors north and south of Hutou and adjacent to the northwestern shores of Lake Khanka. North of Hutou, a company-size element of the 369th Infantry Regiment manned fortified positions at Jaoho, on the Ussuri River, while a platoon-size force from the 368th Infantry Regiment occupied Tumuho, upriver from Jaoho. South of Hutou a platoon of the 368th Infantry Regiment covered a seventy-kilometer expanse of the Ussuri and Sungacha rivers. East of Lake Khanka, a company of the 368th Infantry Regiment garrisoned a series of four small fortified outposts at, and south of, Tachiao. These outposts consisted of five to ten log emplacements, firing trenches, and communication trenches. Farther to the rear, the division had constructed a forward defensive line at Mashan, twenty kilometers east of Linkou. The division's main defensive position, at Chihsing, formed the northern sector of the 5th Army main line of resistance.[3]

The 15th Border Guard Unit, numbering four infantry companies, two artillery companies, and one engineer platoon, totaling about 1,500 men, defended the Hutou Fortified Region, one of the strongest Japanese fortified regions in Manchuria. Seven kilometers long and ten kilometers deep, the region consisted of nineteen reinforced concrete fortifications and eight log forts, numerous armored firing positions, minefields, barbed wire entanglements, and an obstacle network. Armament of the region consisted of a 410-mm howitzer, 100-mm guns, and automatic weapons.[4]

Other permanent fortified regions in the 135th Infantry Division zone were at Hulin and Mishan. The smaller Hulin Fortified Region comprised twenty-three permanent fortified positions, defending the Hutou-Mishan road fifty kilometers from the border. The larger Mishan Fortified Region surrounded the town of Mishan and had outer works extending southwards toward Lake Khanka.

The operational plan of the 135th Infantry Division, in the event of war with the Soviet Union, followed the directives of Japanese 5th Army. The division would establish an advanced position at Mashan and a main defensive line at Chihsing, with emphasis on defense in depth along the Linkou-Chihsing road. One infantry battalion, an artillery battery, and an engineer element would occupy the Mashan position. These forces would inflict as much damage as possible on the enemy without becoming decisively engaged. Manning the Chihsing line, eight infantry battalions, with artillery and engineer support, would constitute the division's main body. Three battalions of Manchurian troops at Mashan would constitute the division reserve. Border garrisons would hold their positions, if possible, to exact as high a toll as they could on the Soviets. Failing in that, they would try to exhaust the enemy strength by guerrilla warfare.[5]

The approximately 20,000 men of the 135th Infantry Division and 15th Border Guard Unit, with Manchurian assistance, defended the border to a considerable depth, with forces concentrated in a narrow strip along the

Hutou-Mishan-Linkou road, the main trafficable artery and high speed avenue of approach. Additional reinforcements for the Japanese theoretically could come from the 1st Manchurian Infantry Division at Poli, though that unit was of questionable political and military reliability (an accurate assessment, as events would prove).

Operational Planning

The task of the Soviet 35th Army was to overcome this Japanese force in prepared positions at Hutou and Mishan and to prevent the Japanese 135th Infantry Division from interfering with the advance of 1st Red Banner Army on 35th Army's left flank. The exact mission Marshal Meretskov assigned to General N. D. Zakhvatayev, 35th Army commander, was:

> To cover the railroad and highway in the sector Guberovo-Spassk with part of the forces; with the main force, make the main thrust from the region southwest of Lesozavodsk into the flank and rear of the Hutou Fortified Region and secure it. Subsequently, develop the offensive in the direction of Poli and, in cooperation with 1st Red Banner Army, destroy enemy defensive groups and secure from the north the operations of the main shock group of the front.[6]

Specifically, the front commander directed General Zakhvatayev to envelop Hutou from the south in order to isolate it completely.

To accomplish the mission, 35th Army had under its operational control three rifle divisions (264th, 66th, and 363d) and two fortified regions (109th and 8th Field). The 1st Far Eastern Front provided artillery, tank, and engineer support suited to the 35th Army's mission and the terrain over which it would operate. Because much of the terrain was not well suited for armor operations, the army received in attachment only those tanks necessary for infantry support, a total of two tank brigades. The necessity to reduce several heavily fortified regions, however, prompted 1st Far Eastern Front to attach heavy artillery support to 35th Army in the form of ten artillery battalions. This created an army artillery group to reduce Hutou, three tank destroyer battalions to form a tank destroyer artillery group, and two guards mortar battalions to form a rocket artillery group (see table 3—2).[7] An additional engineer battalion supplemented divisional engineer units to help cope with problems of passage through marshy regions and to provide sapper units to assist in reducing the fortified regions.

The final plan of General Zakhvatayev echoed the mission Marshal Meretskov had assigned him.[8] He deployed his army in single echelon formation and arranged to take advantage of the weakest portion of the Japanese defenses, the region across the Sungacha River from Pavlo-Federovka. Here, he deployed the 363d Rifle Division under command of Col. S. D. Pechenenko and the 66th Rifle Division of Col. F. K. Nesterov,

each supported by one tank brigade (the 125th and 209th Tank Brigades, respectively) to conduct the main attack. The 215th Army Gun Artillery Brigade, the 54th Mortar Brigade, and the 62d Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade would support the two divisions. Using a two-echelon formation, each division would attack across the Sungacha River in approximately eight- to ten-kilometer sectors. The actual crossing of each division would occur on two regimental axes of advance, each in a zone of three kilometers. Reconnaissance groups from the division reconnaissance battalions would reconnoiter crossing sites, and border guard detachments and advanced battalions from each first echelon rifle regiment would secure them. In order to cross the major water obstacle (forty to sixty meters wide and seven to eight meters deep), each division received twenty-five A-3 boats to supplement handmade rafts used by each soldier. The 31st Pontoon Bridge Battalion would later install twelve- and thirty-ton bridges to allow heavier equipment to cross.

Table 3—2. Soviet 35th Army Composition

264th Rifle Division
66th Rifle Division
363d Rifle Division
109th Fortified Region
8th Field Fortified Region
125th Tank Brigade
209th Tank Brigade
215th Army Gun Artillery Brigade
224th High Powered Howitzer Artillery Brigade, 4 battalions (24 x 203mm)
62d Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade, 3 regiments (6 batteries)
54th Mortar Brigade (division support)
67th Guards Mortar Regiment
13th Separate Armored Train Regiment (2 trains)
9th Separate Armored Train Regiment (2 trains)
1647th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
43d Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
110th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
355th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
280th Separate Engineer Battalion

Weapons:

205 tanks and self-propelled guns
955 guns and mortars

Source: M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 401.

Adjacent to the winding, unfordable river were extensive swampy regions stretching twelve to fifteen kilometers inland on both banks. Dense vines covered the river banks and the many inlets and channels that criss-crossed the approaches to the river. Therefore, before the attack, engineers prepared crossing sites by putting down fascine matting and building gravel roads over the swampy terrain throughout the army sector.[9]

Regimental and divisional artillery groups would support the ground forces with a three-stage artillery operation. Before the river crossing, a fifteen-minute artillery preparation would soften up Japanese defenses on the far bank. While the crossing was in progress, artillery would fire consecutive concentrations during a one-hour preparation. For six to nine hours after the crossing, artillery would fire in support of the infantry as it penetrated deeper into the Japanese defenses. An army long-range artillery group and a guards mortar (rocket artillery) group would reinforce the preparation.[10]

Having forced the Sungacha River barrier, the two rifle divisions would then clear Japanese units from the western bank of the river and advance on a Tachiao-Peilingtsi-Paishihshen axis, ultimately to cut the road and rail line between Hulin and Mishan. Then the divisions would join with the 264th Rifle Division advancing from Hutou in order to destroy the Japanese at Mishan.

Simultaneously with the operations of the main attack group, the 264th Rifle Division of Maj. Gen. V. L. Vinogradov and the 109th Fortified Region would cross the Ussuri River in a two-kilometer sector west of Iman to isolate (and then reduce) the Hutou Fortified Region and to advance down the Hutou-Hulin road to join forces with the main attack group. An army artillery group, including subgroups for destruction missions and counter-battery fire, would support the 264th Rifle Division's attack. The artillery destruction group contained the 224th High Powered Howitzer Artillery Brigade armed with twenty-four 203-mm howitzers.[11] As in the case of the main attack group, advanced battalions would initiate the attack. To insure maximum surprise, the advanced battalions of both the main and supporting attack groups would commence their operations during darkness.

The 35th Army prepared for the attack with the utmost secrecy. Engineers worked on the jumping-off positions during darkness, often hindered by summer rains and high water. Nevertheless, by the end of July, they had constructed more than forty-six kilometers of trenches and had built nine command and observation posts and 100 artillery firing emplacements. Two corduroy roads, on which troops could deploy forward, were laid for twenty kilometers across the swamp. To conceal the work from Japanese eyes, engineers built screening fences and placed overhead camouflage nets over open areas.[12]

Throughout the preparation period, reconnaissance was carried out only from specially equipped hidden observation points. All units except border guards and fortified regions maintained complete radio silence. During the last three days before the attack, regimental, battalion, and company commanders personally reconnoitered the forward area. On the evening of 8 August, on an oral order from General Zakhvatayev and his representatives in other sectors of the front, 35th Army forces marched through pouring rain in order to occupy jumping-off positions and to prepare for the river crossing.

Late that evening, the three divisions of 35th Army settled into their jumping-off positions and awaited the order to advance. The 363d Rifle Division, on the army's left flank, deployed on a six-kilometer front with the 404th Rifle Regiment of Maj. G. N. Golub on the right and the 395th Rifle Regiment of Lt. Col. N. A. Martynov on the left.[13] Across the river in the darkness lay the 363d Rifle Division's objectives, the four fortified villages of Tachiao, Maly Huangkang, Maly Nangan, and Taiyangkang. The first three villages ran north to south across the 363d Rifle Division's front. The fourth was between Maly Nangan and the eastern shore of Lake Khanka. Each village contained five to ten log bunkers, machine gun positions, and barbed wire. In addition, Maly Huangkang had a thirty-six-meter high observation tower topped with an armored cupola. A company of the Japanese 368th Infantry Regiment stationed at Tachiao had squad- and platoon-size elements in each of the fortified villages.

The 404th Rifle Regiment would cross the Sungacha River with its 1st and 3d Rifle Battalions in first echelon, traverse the swamps to capture Maly Huangkang, and take Tachiao by the end of the day. The 2d Rifle Battalion, advancing behind the first echelon battalions, would prepare to flank the strongholds, if that proved necessary. The 395th Rifle Regiment would cross the river on the 404th Rifle Regiment's left to secure Maly Nangan and take Taiyangkang by the end of the day. The 488th Rifle Regiment of Maj. M. L. Grudinin would follow behind the 404th Rifle Regiment and prepare for employment on the right flank of the 404th in order to exploit success northwest of Tachiao.

The 66th Rifle Division, in a six-kilometer sector on the right flank of the 363d Rifle Division, deployed the 341st Rifle Regiment of Lieutenant Colonel Pavlenko on the left and the 33d Rifle Regiment of Major Tsarev on the right, with its third rifle regiment in second echelon.[14] The 66th Rifle Division would advance across the Sungacha River, reduce Japanese border posts, and advance on Tachiao from the east in coordination with the 404th Rifle Regiment of the 363d Rifle Division. After securing Tachiao, the division would advance north toward Peilingtsi and begin the exploitation to cut the Hulin-Mishan road. The 125th and 209th Tank Brigades assembled in the rear area in order to follow the rifle divisions after means for crossing the Sungacha had become available.

35th Army Attack

As midnight passed, the troops sat in their jumping-off positions in a heavy downpour (see map 3—1). At 0100 on 9 August, small groups from the 57th Border Guards Detachment forced the Sungacha and Ussuri rivers on boats and cutters equipped with muffled motors. As the artillery preparation began, they seized the small Japanese border posts along the river, securing the last post by 0200.[15]

Reconnaissance teams from the rifle divisions followed hard on the heels of the border troops. Two reconnaissance groups from the 118th Separate Reconnaissance Company of the 363d Rifle Division pushed inland to reconnoiter the Japanese positions at Maly Huangkang. At 0215, after artillery fire had lifted, the four advanced battalions of the two rifle divisions secured bridgeheads on the western bank of the river. The Japanese did not resist. The army engineers then installed pontoon bridges, and between 0700 and 0800, the men and equipment of the first echelon rifle regiments completed troop concentrations on the western bank of the Sungacha and prepared to move across the swamps toward the Japanese strongpoints. Steady rains made movement through the swamps almost impossible. So, the army commander formed detachments to build trails for column routes forward: three engineer battalions and three rifle battalions prepared trails in the 363d Rifle Division sector; one engineer battalion and two rifle battalions did likewise in the 66th Rifle Division sector.[16]

Taking advantage of the work of these trail detachments, the 341st Rifle Regiment and 33d Rifle Regiment of Colonel Nesterov's 66th Rifle Division made good progress. Meeting no enemy resistance, they traversed the swamps and, at 2000 on 9 August, reached a line two kilometers northeast of Tachiao. After digging in to await the arrival of the 363d Rifle Division, they dispatched reconnaissance units toward Peilingtsi. While the 66th Rifle Division moved forward unhindered by the Japanese, the 363d Rifle Division ran into heavy opposition.

Throughout the morning, the 363d Rifle Division's first echelon regiments pushed westward through waist-deep swamps, laboriously carrying machine guns and mortars on their backs in order to keep them dry. Soviet artillery pounded Japanese positions to their front. By late morning the sun appeared, and the weather became hot and humid, thus adding to the misery of the troops. About noon the 1st Rifle Battalion, 404th Rifle Regiment, under Capt. N. I. Vodolazkin reached solid ground just east of Maly Huangkang and deployed to attack the strongpoint there. The 2d Rifle Battalion of Capt. I. G. Lyalyikin provided support for the attack. Five pillboxes connected by trenches and covered by barbed wire defended Maly Huangkang. The armored tower dominated the low-lying landscape.[17]

At 1300, as Soviet artillery lifted its fire to avoid hitting its own troops, Captain Vodolazkin's battalion began the assault with two companies on line. Japanese small arms and machine gun fire pinned down the advancing infantry, and fire from the elevated armored cupola and pillboxes drove the Soviet troops back. It was apparent to Vodolazkin that only direct fire artillery could reduce the strongpoint. Regimental and divisional artillery, however, was mired in the swamps to the rear, and only the efforts of infantrymen pulling the guns brought the necessary artillery forward to support the attack. By 1500 on 9 August, four 76-mm guns of the 501st Artillery Regiment and a battery of the 187th Separate Tank Destroyer Battalion were in position to shell the Japanese fortifications. The 404th Rifle Regiment flamethrower company assembled, ready to support the 1st and 3d Rifle Battalions when they resumed their attacks. After a fifteen-minute indirect fire artillery preparation from concealed positions, the Soviet infantry advanced. The artillery preparation, however, had done little damage to the steel and concrete Japanese emplacements, and once again the infantry assault failed. Now the Soviet artillery relocated and took the emplacements under direct fire from open positions. The bombardment continued from 1500 to 1800. Finally, a gun crew of the 501st Artillery Regiment destroyed the tower and armored cupola with an armor-piercing shell. By 1800, fire had slackened, and the Soviets destroyed Japanese emplacements one by one. The 1st and 3d Rifle Battalions inched forward under cover of the artillery fire, and when that fire halted, they rushed the Japanese positions from three sides. By 1900, Maly Huangkang had fallen into the 404th Rifle Regiment's hands. Meanwhile, the 395th Rifle Regiment to the south had secured Maly Nangan and had advanced westward toward Taiyangkang.

By dusk on 9 August, the 404th Rifle Regiment, with the 468th Separate Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion and the 501st Artillery Regiment, had advanced to a position two to three kilometers south and southwest of Tachiao. The 395th Rifle Regiment, with the 472d Mortar Regiment and 187th Separate Tank Destroyer Battalion, had cleared Taiyangkang of Japanese and had reached positions three kilometers northwest of that village. Ten tanks of the 125th Tank Brigade had reached Maly Huangkang, and the remainder of the unit had begun crossing the Sungacha River.[18] By the evening of the ninth, the 66th Rifle Division and 363d Rifle Division had overcome both the swamps and Japanese resistance to secure all of their objectives except Tachiao, which they nevertheless still threatened from the south and northeast.

Farther north, the 264th Rifle Division, 109th Fortified Region, and 8th Field Fortified Region opened their attack on Hutou at 0100. The Soviets began with a fifteen-minute artillery strike on Hutou, followed by a methodical fire on the Hutou fortified positions. The Japanese responded with "a hurricane of fire" on Soviet positions at Iman and at the important

Trans-Siberian Railroad bridge over a tributary of the Ussuri, just northeast of Iman. The Soviets answered by sending forty-nine IL-4 bombers, escorted by fifty fighters, in a two-hour air strike against Japanese positions at Hutou.[19]

Under cover of the artillery fire, the 1056th Rifle Regiment and the 1060th Rifle Regiment of the 264th Rifle Division sent advanced battalions across the Ussuri River opposite Iman. By 1100 on 9 August, the advanced battalion of the 1060th Rifle Regiment had secured a lodgment on the west bank of the river north of Hutou, while the 1056th Rifle Regiment advanced battalion had secured a lodgment just south of Hutou. By nightfall, regimental main forces had advanced to secure Japanese positions at *Krepost'* (fortress), south of Hutou. Farther south, the 5th Rifle Company of the 1058th Rifle Regiment, with two companies of the 109th Fortified Region and one company of the 8th Field Fortified Region, had crossed the river and had advanced to the Youeya railroad station southwest of Hutou, thus cutting the Hutou-Hulin rail line.[20]

On 10 August, Soviet 35th Army forces continued to advance in both sectors. The 264th Rifle Division engaged in particularly hard fighting for Hutou. While the 1058th Rifle Regiment struggled for the southern approaches to the city, the 1056th Rifle Regiment, with units of the 109th Fortified Region, battled for the wharf and riverside section just east of Hutou city. After repelling several Japanese counterattacks, the 1058th and 1056th Rifle Regiments launched a coordinated assault on the city from three sides. By evening on 10 August, the wharf area and city proper were in Soviet hands. Still, the Hutou Fortified Region north and northwest of the city and several Japanese strongpoints south of the city continued to offer strong resistance, whereupon General Zakhvatayev ordered the 1056th Rifle Regiment and 109th Fortified Region, with heavy artillery support, to isolate and reduce the fortified positions, while the remaining forces of 35th Army began an advance westward toward Hulin (see case study 5, "Reduction of a Fortified Region").

On the tenth, while the 264th Rifle Division fought for possession of Hutou, the 66th and 363d Rifle Divisions attempted to develop the offensive toward Mishan via Tachiao and Peilingtsi. The forward detachment that the army had formed to lead the advance consisted of the 3d Tank Battalion, 125th Tank Brigade, with machine gunners riding on the tanks, the 473d Separate Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion, and a rifle battalion from the 33d Rifle Regiment of the 66th Rifle Division. This forward detachment's mission was to cut the Hulin-Mishan rail line by the evening of 11 August. The remainder of the 125th Tank Brigade, with the 468th Separate Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion, was supposed to lead the advance of the 363d Rifle Division.[21]

Though the Japanese retreated rapidly along what few roads there were, and offered little resistance, the swampy terrain in the region created tremendous problems for advancing Soviet units, particularly because the trails and roads could not support heavy equipment. On General Zakhvatayev's orders, each rifle regiment formed a road and bridge construction detachment to build and improve routes of advance. Each detachment consisted of a rifle battalion and one to three engineer battalions. In addition, army detailed the 11th Pontoon Bridge Brigade and an engineer battalion to work with the lead regiment of 66th Rifle Division. It also assigned the 50th Separate Engineer Battalion to work with the 488th Rifle Regiment, leading the advance of the 363d Rifle Division. Units of both the 209th and 125th Tank Brigades (minus the 3d Battalion, 125th Tank Brigade) also became involved with road work.

This road work and the poor trafficability in the region caused not only a delay in operations but also an acute army-wide fuel shortage. On 9 August the army overcame the deficiency by shipping fuel forward ten kilometers in jerry cans. The next day, tractors towed fuel-laden pontoon sections across the swamp.[22] The combination of the fuel shortage and terrain difficulties ultimately forced the 35th to curtail the use of tanks in the 66th Rifle Division and 363d Rifle Division sectors. Even without the tanks, by the evening of 10 August, advanced units of the 66th and 363d Rifle Divisions were approaching Peilingtsi, although slightly behind schedule.

The Soviet attack on 9 August had clearly caught the Japanese by surprise. Lieutenant General Hitomi, 135th Infantry Division commander, and Col. Takeshi Nishiwaki, commander of the 15th Border Guard Unit, received word of the attack at 5th Army headquarters at Yehho at 0300. General Hitomi initially ordered his troops to delay the Soviets along the border in order to buy time to establish a defense at Chihsing on the 5th Army's main line of resistance and at Mashan. These positions were to cover withdrawal of 135th Infantry Division units from the forward area. After telephoning the orders to division headquarters at Tungan, the two commanders departed at 0600 by rail to rejoin their units.[23]

Reaching Tungan twelve hours later, General Hitomi reviewed the tactical situation and found that all border posts along the Sungacha and Ussuri rivers were under attack and that communications with most units had been lost. Because the Soviet attack had also isolated Hutou, Colonel Nishiwaki could not rejoin his command. General Hitomi then issued new orders calling for all units in the division that could do so to withdraw to the Chihsing and Mashan areas. The 15th Border Guard Unit would hold its positions in accordance with 5th Army orders. At midnight, General Hitomi and his headquarters departed by vehicle toward Poli, arriving there fourteen hours later.[24] From this point on, General Hitomi concerned himself with the division's withdrawal to Chihsing and, ultimately, to Mutanchiang.

Units remaining on the border were left to their own devices. Elements of the 368th Infantry Regiment withdrew from Hulin at midnight on the ninth and traveled on foot across the Wanta Shan, ultimately to Linkou. Forces at Tungan and Feite retreated on the ninth to Poli.[25] Units on the immediate border that had not already been annihilated in fighting on 9 August continued resisting the Soviet advance. Actually, only these forces and remnants of the Japanese force at Hulin and Tungan offered any further resistance to the subsequent advance of the Soviet 35th Army.

On 11 August, Soviet 35th Army forces continued their advance against slackened Japanese resistance. Now the terrain posed the paramount difficulty for the advancing units. At 1100 on 11 August, the army forward detachment captured Peilingtsi, at which point the fuel shortage halted its advance. That fuel shortage and impassable terrain forced the 35th Army commander to withdraw the bulk of his tank forces. The 209th Tank Brigade reverted to front reserve at 2000 on 10 August, while the 125th Tank Brigade (less one battalion) returned to Pavlo-Federovka. The 35th Army loaded the 125th Tank Brigade on rail cars and shipped it from Shmakovka Station to Mishchurin Rog. The brigade then traveled by road to rejoin the 363d Rifle Division at Mishan.[26] Meanwhile, on the morning of 12 August, the 363d Rifle Division, having captured Paishihshan the previous day, was redirected northward to Hulin to join the 264th Rifle Division advancing from Hutou. At 1300 on 12 August, lead elements of 35th Army's forward detachment, with four tanks and six self-propelled guns, entered Mishan, even though their main force elements were still thirty to thirty-five kilometers to the rear. Late on the thirteenth, elements of 66th Rifle Division entered Tungan and the next day, in coordination with the 363d Rifle Division, occupied the Mishan Fortified Region, now largely abandoned by the Japanese. The 35th Army thus accomplished its primary mission. The 1058th Rifle Regiment of the 264th Rifle Division, with the 109th Fortified Region, later continued the reduction of Hutou, while the 66th and 363d Rifle Divisions continued their pursuit of Japanese forces to Poli and Linkou.

Conclusions

Because the Japanese offered little resistance after the small Japanese border posts had fallen, 35th Army's operations were more notable for overcoming major terrain obstacles, such as the swamps and flooded ground west of the Sungacha River, than for overcoming Japanese defenses, except in the Hutou area. The operation demonstrated that forces with artillery and limited armor support could operate in such a region if those forces had adequate engineer support and if they were properly trained and task organized. The 35th Army had attached significant engineer support to each subordinate rifle division and had required each division to devote a considerable proportion of its strength to road building and maintenance. Soviet unit commanders imaginatively used field expedients to help

overcome the fuel shortage and terrain problems. Yet, even careful planning and imaginative execution could not forestall the 35th Army commander's decision to abandon the use of the two tank brigades in such terrain. Ultimately, the geographical barriers so impeded Soviet operations that the army's main force was a day late in cutting the road from Hulin to Mishan, although it met no significant Japanese resistance. But even that delay was academic, because the Japanese had already withdrawn from the area, and by 10 August, 264th Rifle Division operations had already isolated Hutou. The 35th Army accomplished its overall mission and, in doing so, left as an operational legacy a series of lessons learned about operations in swampy, flooded terrain.

Notes

1. Meretskov, *Serving the People*, 344.
2. JM 154, 275—76, 183; U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 155: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Russia - on Northern and Western Fronts of Manchuria and in Northern Korea (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 266 (hereafter cited as JM 155). The 135th Infantry Division strength was 14,228 men.
3. JM 154, 276, 281.
4. S. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia nastupatel'naia operatsiia v usloviiakh dal'nevostochnogo teatra voennykh deistvii" [An army offensive operation in the conditions of the Far Eastern Theater of Military Operations], *VIZh*, August 1978:44; JM 155, 266; Zenkoku Kōtōkai [National Hutou Society], ed., *SoMan kōkkyō Kōtō yōsai no senki* [The Soviet Manchurian border: The battle record of the Hutou Fortress] (Tokyo: Zenkoku Kōtōkai jimukyōku, 1977) (hereafter cited as *SoMan kōkkyō*).
5. JM 154, 276—77.
6. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 94.
7. M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 401. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 94, states that 15th Army tank and SP gun strength was 166. Ezhakov, "Boevoe primenenie," 79, places it at 205. The Vnotchenko figure does not include the 209th Tank Brigade transferred in the middle of the operation to front control.
8. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 44—45; Pechenenko, "363-ia strelkovaia diviziia v boyakh na Mishan'skom napravlenii" [The 363d Rifle Division in battles on the Mishan direction], *VIZh*, July 1975:41.
9. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 45.
10. Sidorov, "Boevoe," 16; Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 45; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 107.
11. Sidorov, "Boevoe," 20.
12. Pechenenko, "363-ia," 41.
13. Details of 363d Rifle Division deployment and operations from Pechenenko, "363-ia," 39—46.
14. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 45.
15. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 203.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 204; Pechenenko, "363-ia," 43—44.
18. Pechenenko, "363-ia," 44.

19. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 204.
20. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 46.
21. Ibid., 47.
22. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 213—14.
23. JM 154, 181—82, 285.
24. Ibid., 284—89.
25. Ibid., 301.
26. Krupchenko, *Sovetskie*, 321; Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 47.

Set Piece Battle

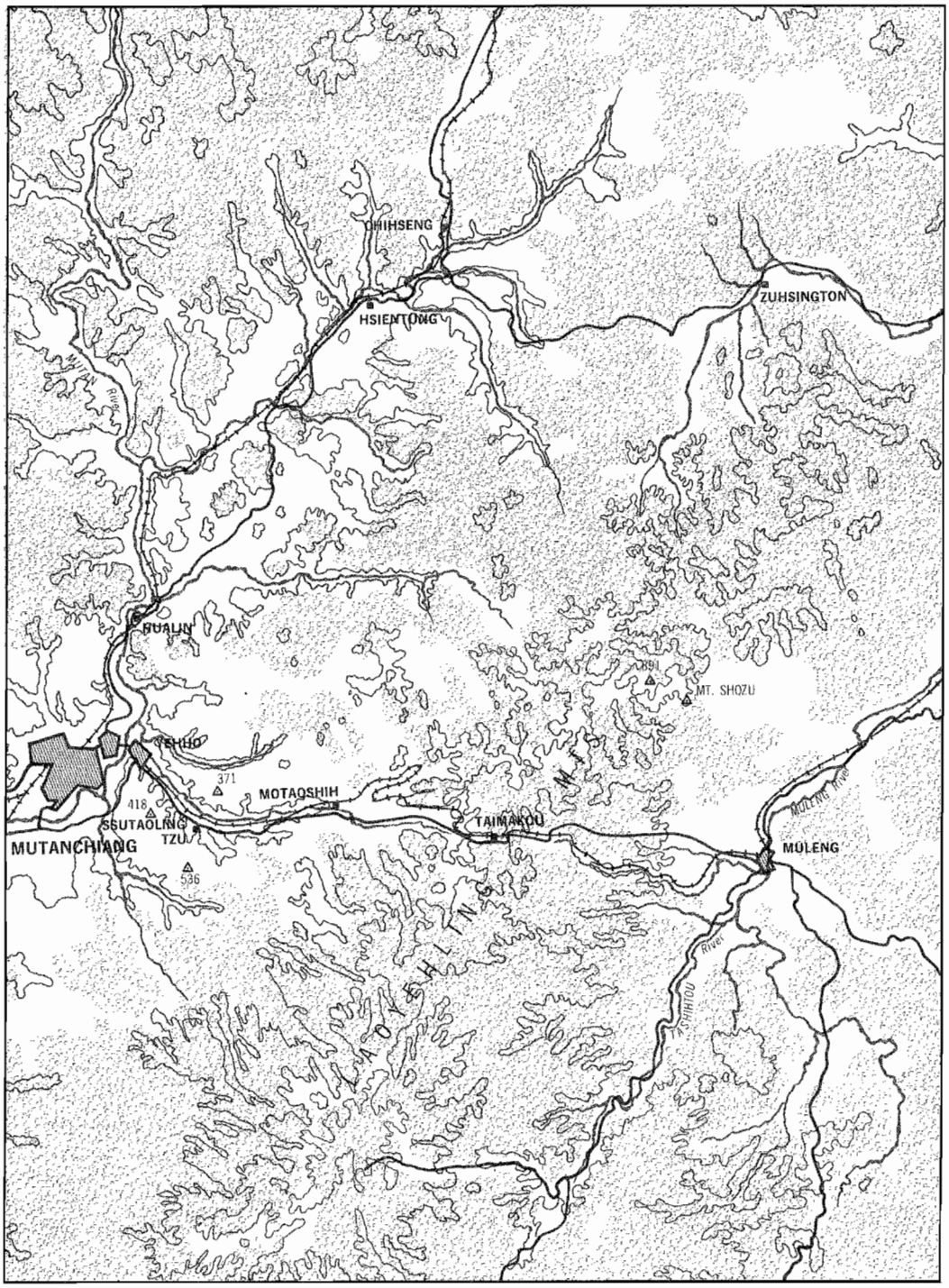
4

The Setting

The rapid and successful Soviet penetration of Japanese defenses in eastern Manchuria did not necessarily seal the fate of the defending Japanese forces. What ultimately decided the issue was the battle of Mutanchiang, one of the few set piece battles fought during the Soviet Manchurian offensive. The battle of Mutanchiang was a series of engagements from 12 to 16 August conducted on two axes converging on the city of Mutanchiang and culminating with the Soviet seizure of the city.

That Mutanchiang was a major objective of Soviet forces was natural. Not only was the city built astride the main road and rail line running into central Manchuria from the east, but it was also headquarters for the Japanese First Area Army. In addition, the 5th Army Headquarters was nearby at Yehho, across the Mutan River from Mutanchiang. Mutanchiang itself occupied a strategic location on the west bank of the Mutan River at the junction of roads leading westward from Suifenho and Muleng, southwest from Pamientung, and south from Linkou (see map 4—1). Any withdrawal of Japanese forces in eastern Manchuria from Jaoho to Suifenho had to pass through the city. East of Mutanchiang, the Laoyehling Mountains rose to heights of from 700 to almost 1,100 meters. Running due north and south, this mountain range, which any enemy force would have to cross, provided the city a protective barrier.

The Japanese realized the strategic significance of Mutanchiang. In their original plans they had anchored their defenses on the mountains east of the city. Behind the first two defensive lines on the border and at the Muleng River, the Japanese 5th Army had constructed a third line (the main line of resistance) along the crests of the Laoyehling Mountains. Here, the three forward Japanese divisions (135th, 126th, and 124th Infantry Divisions) had prepared field fortifications and had garrisoned a large segment of their forces nearby. The actual defensive line extended from the Mutan River north of Hualin, eastward past Chihsing (135th Infantry Division sector) to Tzuhsingtun (126th Infantry Division sector), and south along the crest of the mountains to a point fifteen kilometers south of the



Map 4—1. The Approaches to Mutanchiang

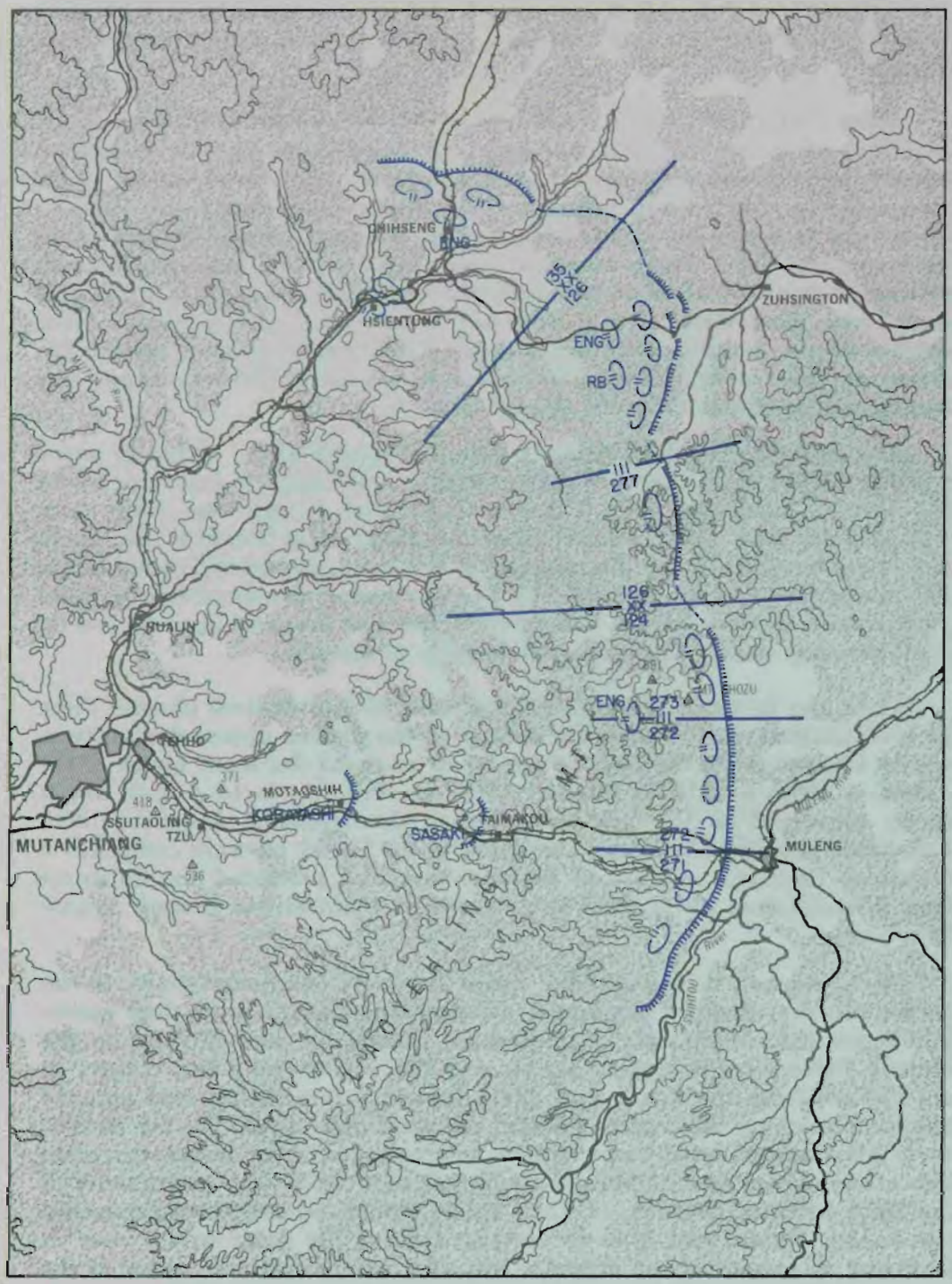
Muleng to Mutanchiang road (124th Infantry Division sector). Although during June and July, 5th Army units had done considerable work building field fortifications at these locations, that work was still in progress in August.

When hostilities broke out on 9 August, 5th Army ordered its subordinate divisions to occupy those newly constructed positions and to prepare to defend them in accordance with existing plans.[1] Those contingency plans envisioned a stiff forward defense of the border fortified regions, followed by a fighting withdrawal of division forward elements back to the 5th Army defensive line. The plan presupposed that any Soviet advance would occur primarily along avenues of approach the Japanese assessed as trafficable and, hence, most likely to be used by any invader. If their hypothesis proved correct, Japanese forward units could delay the Soviets long enough for 5th Army to erect a formidable defensive line east of Mutanchiang. The Japanese hypothesis, however, proved false.

The Soviets launched their attack in strength along virtually every possible avenue of approach, without regard to trafficability. Japanese border garrisons fell quickly, and the hasty withdrawal of Japanese main units was chaotic. As a result, the Japanese 5th Army units occupied their main defensive lines literally in the presence of advancing Soviet forces and never had the chance to reorganize. The Soviets forced the Japanese to fight continuous battles along the border, on the distant approaches to Mutanchiang, and in the immediate vicinity of the city.

Thus, the battle of Mutanchiang occurred in two distinct phases. From 12 to 14 August, in two separate sectors on the distant approaches (fifty to eighty kilometers) to the city, Soviet forces engaged the main forces of the Japanese 126th and 124th Infantry Divisions. From 14 to 16 August Soviet forces converged on the city and attacked the defending Japanese 126th and 135th Infantry Divisions. The speed of the Soviet advance compelled a disjointed Japanese defense of Mutanchiang and precluded the Japanese from consolidating all of their forces for their planned coordinated defense of the city.

By 11 August, throughout the entire Japanese 5th Army sector, Soviet forces had overwhelmed the border defenses and pushed more than eighty kilometers into Manchuria. Pamientung, Lishuchen, and Muleng on the Muleng River were in Soviet hands, and the Soviets were fast closing in on Mishan from the south and east. Japanese forces that had escaped annihilation along the border streamed rearward in disorder. The 5th Army's three divisions followed army orders and occupied their designated main line of resistance east of Mutanchiang (see map 4—2). The commander of the 135th Infantry Division, Lt. Gen. Yoichi Hitomi, whose forces garrisoned the Jaoho, Hutou, and Mishan sectors, ordered his units in the rear at Chihsing to prepare those defenses. He then ordered the remainder of the division at Linkou, Tungan, and Hulin to withdraw as quickly as possible to Chihsing.[2]



Map 4—2. Japanese Defenses of Mutanchiang, 9 August 1945

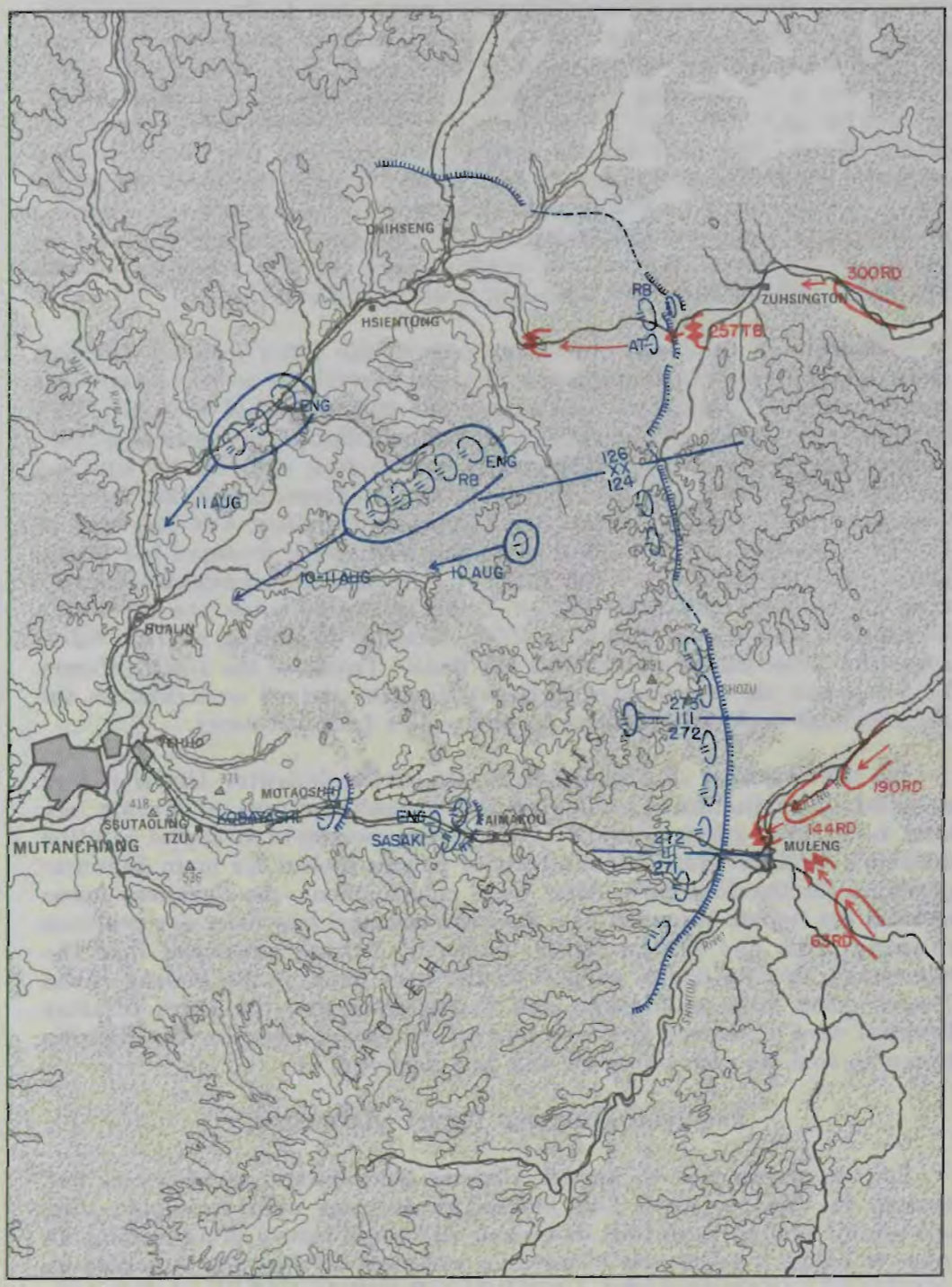
A battalion of the 370th Infantry Regiment and a Manchurian battalion were left at Mashan to defend high-speed routes into Linkou from the east. Similarly, a battalion of the 369th Infantry Regiment remained at Tungan to cover the Japanese withdrawal. On the evening of 10 August, 5th Army revised the order, directing that 135th Infantry Division units instead deploy at Yehho and join the 126th Infantry Division in the defense of Mutanchiang.[3] The next day the raiding battalion and one battalion each from the 368th Infantry Regiment and 370th Infantry Regiment arrived at Yehho and occupied defensive positions northwest of the city. The arrival of additional withdrawing 135th Infantry Division units was expected on the twelfth. In short, because of Soviet pressure, 5th Army had abandoned any idea of defending in the Chihsing main line of resistance.

Likewise, on the tenth, 5th Army ordered the 126th Infantry Division to withdraw from the Pamientung area to Yehho, but to leave sufficient forces in the Tzuhsingtun area to cover the withdrawal of both the 126th and the 135th Infantry Divisions.[4] The 126th Infantry Division commander ordered Lieutenant Yamagishi to defend Tzuhsingtun and Hill 792 with the 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment; the 3d Battalion, 277th Infantry Regiment; one company of the 31st Antitank Battalion; and one-third of the 1st Company of the raiding battalion. Yamagishi deployed his forces, placing the 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment, the antitank company, and the raiding battalion west of Tzuhsingtun to cover the division's withdrawal and the 3d Battalion, 277th Infantry Regiment, on Hill 792 to cover the 124th Infantry Division's left flank.[5] Troops of the 126th Infantry Division and its commander, General Nomizo, arrived in Yehho on the eleventh and deployed according to new orders from 5th Army.

By the morning of the eleventh, the 124th Infantry Division had occupied its main line of resistance (MLR) positions west of Muleng (see map 4—3). Even as survivors from the Soviet onslaught straggled into the division's defensive line, Soviet advanced patrols probed the main Japanese positions for the first time. After their redeployment, the Japanese forces awaited the Soviets' advance. The Japanese occupied new defensive positions running from the Mutan River, north of Yehho, eastward into the mountains, arching south, parallel to the west bank of the Muleng River. The covering units at Mashan and Tzuhsingtun and the 124th Infantry Division west of Muleng first encountered the Soviet advance. The fighting began as soon as each Japanese unit had deployed.

1st Red Banner Army Advance

On the morning of 11 August, General Beloborodov, whose forces had secured the Muleng River line, ordered those same units to exploit their success by moving northwest to Linkou and southwest to Mutanchiang. In order to insure a rapid rate of advance sufficient to deny the Japanese an opportunity to regroup and to establish a firm defense, a forward detachment that would lead each rifle corps advance formed around the tank



Map 4—3. Situation, 11 August

brigades attached to the army. Hence, Lt. Col. L. D. Krupetskoi's 75th Tank Brigade spearheaded the 59th Rifle Corps advance, while the 257th Tank Brigade led the march of 26th Rifle Corps. By the afternoon of 11 August, the tank brigades had crossed the Muleng River and plunged deep into the Japanese rear areas. Lead rifle divisions prepared to follow the forward detachments in march column. Other army units would follow after they had completed passage of the makeshift corduroy roads, now thoroughly ground up by traffic through the Border Mountains.

The 75th Tank Brigade, reinforced by an automatic weapons company of the 254th Rifle Regiment mounted on the tanks and self-propelled guns, marched from Lishuchen toward Linkou via Mashan. The 39th Rifle Division trailed behind. General Beloborodov specifically ordered the tank brigade to cut the rail line at Linkou in order to isolate remaining elements of the Japanese 135th Infantry Division, which were then withdrawing by rail from the Mishan area.[6] At 0600 on 12 August, the 75th Tank Brigade, while approaching Mashan, encountered a Japanese battalion of the 370th Infantry Regiment and a Manchurian battalion in defensive positions behind the Hsia Muleng Ho. Although heavy rains had swollen the river and flooded its banks, the bridge across seemed to be intact. As the lead tank attempted to cross the bridge, both bridge and tank exploded, victims of Japanese mines. The tank brigade laid down heavy suppressive fire on Japanese positions while sappers worked frantically to repair the bridge. At this time, the 39th Rifle Division commander, Maj. Gen. V. A. Semenov, arrived at Mashan to supervise operations against the Japanese force.[7]

In order to avoid being outflanked, the Japanese forces had occupied positions on the north bank of the river overlooking the bridge. Dug in on the southern slope of a series of hills one kilometer northeast of Mashan Station, other Japanese troops were able to cover the left flank of the main defensive position. At 1100 on 12 August, under cover of artillery fire, the Soviet 75th Tank Brigade moved to new positions in order to engage the Japanese left. Two hours later a battalion of the 50th Rifle Regiment, 39th Rifle Division, with support from the tank brigade, routed the Japanese in the hills east of Mashan. At 1800 the 1st Battalion, 50th Rifle Regiment, and the 75th Tank Brigade intercepted, surrounded, and destroyed a Japanese battalion withdrawing west along the railroad to Mashan.

The battle for Mashan continued into the evening, when Japanese forces counterattacked the Soviets, only to be driven off in the direction of Tutao. Meanwhile, the 254th Rifle Regiment, having completed repair of the bridge across the Hsia Muleng Ho, crossed the river and drove off the remaining Japanese defenders. Having cleared the Linkou road of Japanese covering units, the 75th Tank Brigade moved on Linkou, with the 39th Rifle Division bringing up the rear. At 0700 on 13 August, the lead elements of the 75th Tank Brigade entered Linkou, and several hours later the remainder of the brigade and the 39th Rifle Division followed. The Japanese defenders had burned important buildings in the city and had left behind small suicide

squads (in Russian *smertniks*) to harass the Soviets. Most of the Japanese defenders withdrew southward toward Mutanchiang and northward into the mountains.[8]

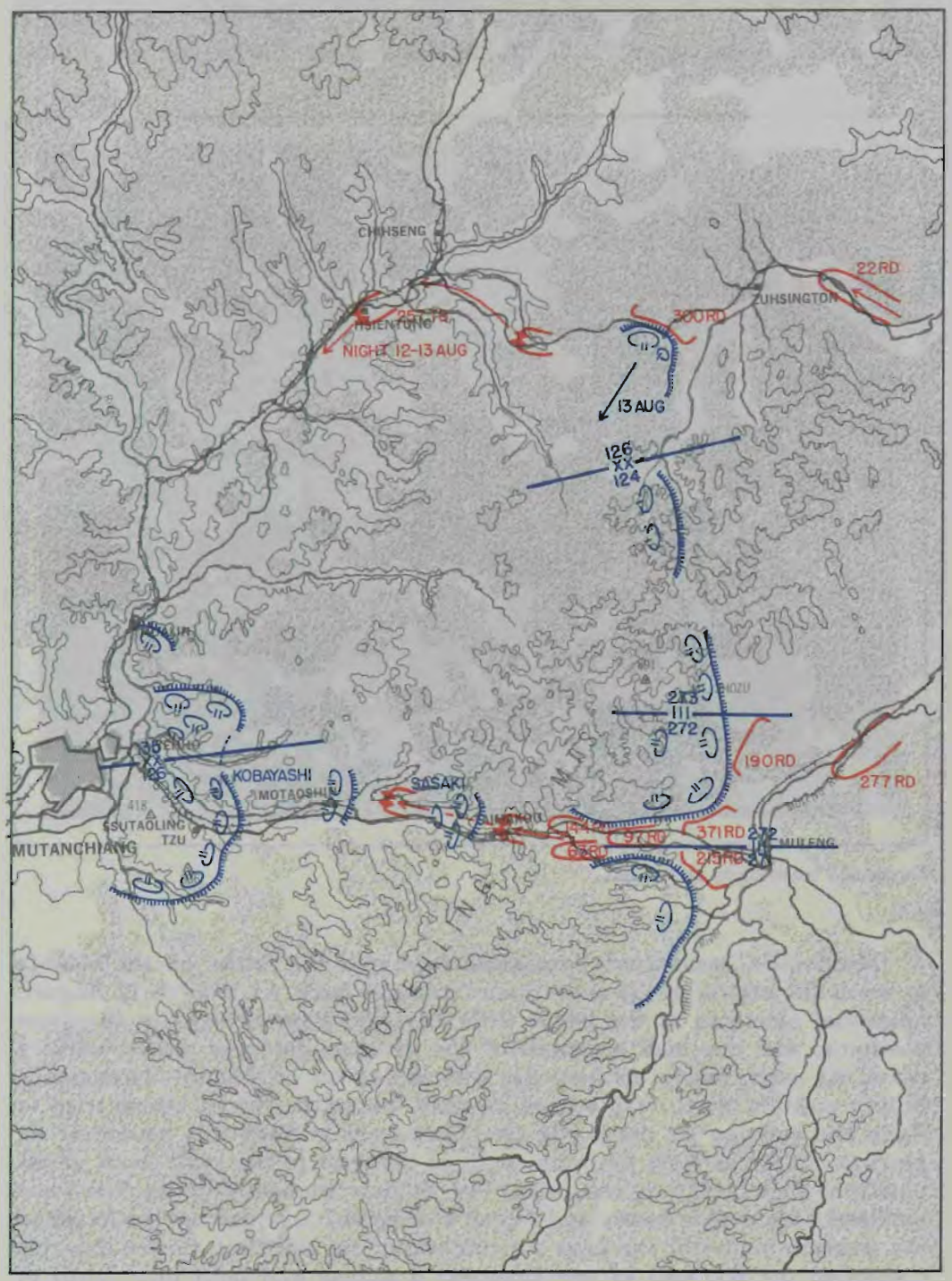
The Japanese, according to General Beloborodov, left covering forces on routes they considered likely for the Soviet advance from Linkou. "On the routes of withdrawal—groups of *smertniks*, which day and night fired on the columns of our forces, perpetrated diversionary acts and fell upon our rear and transport units."[9] Heavy rains also hindered Soviet operations.

> The situation became more complicated when the only road to Mutanchiang, crossing forested mountain regions, was broken up and washed away by continuous rains. Movement of auto transport was hampered. By-passes and corduroy sections of road had to be built in many sectors.[10]

The absence of trafficable routes ruled out parallel pursuit of the Japanese and, on the thirteenth, dictated that the 59th Rifle Corps forces continue the march southward toward Mutanchiang in a single, long column led by a forward detachment.

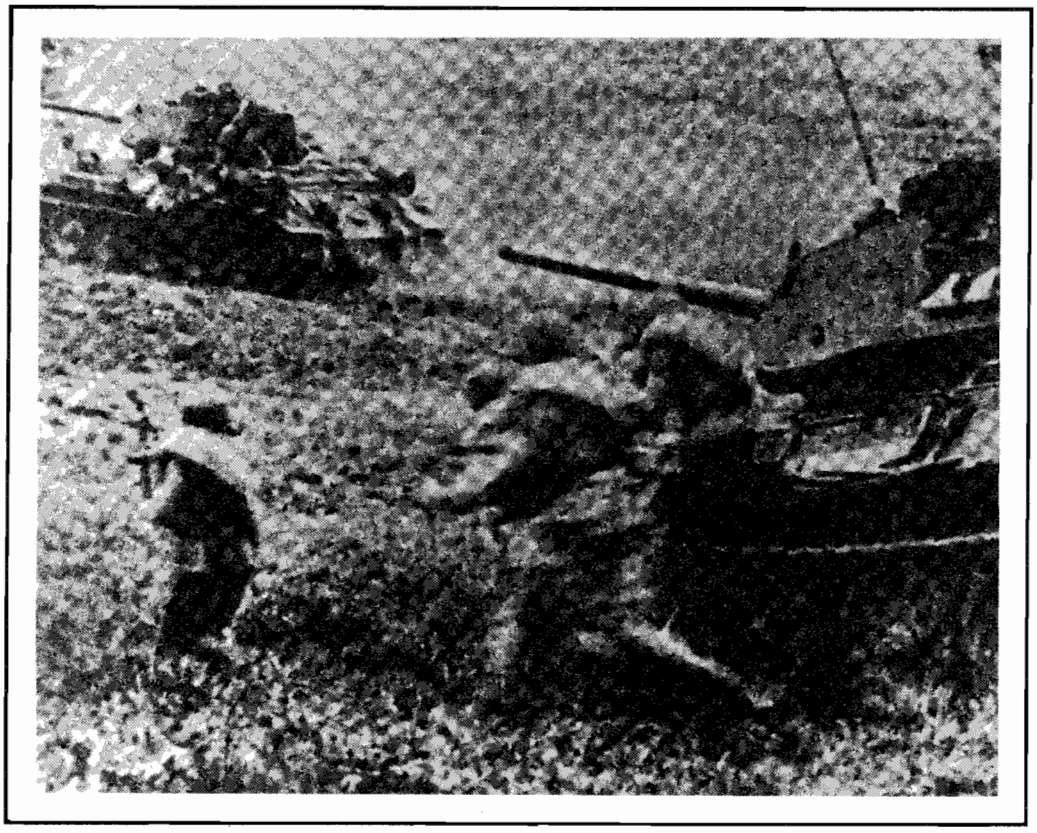
While the 59th Rifle Corps secured Linkou, the 26th Rifle Corps's 257th Tank Brigade moved westward from Pamientung toward the railroad station of Hsientung. The tank brigade's mission was to overcome enemy opposition and reach Mutanchiang by the evening of 12 August (see map 4—4). At Tzuhsingtun the tank brigade met Lieutenant Yamagishi's battalion of the 279th Infantry Regiment, reinforced by a company of antitank guns posted on a hill overlooking the road. Japanese accounts relate their unsuccessful attempt to halt the Soviet tanks, which, after a one-hour fight, bypassed their position and headed westward.[11] In fact, the Japanese antitank and infantry took their toll on Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik's tank brigade. According to a detailed Soviet account:

> Having crossed a ravine, the tanks neared Koutsykho [Tzuhsingtun]. The road widened somewhat, but nevertheless only two machines could pass through side by side, almost joined together. We could clearly see wooden peasant huts when explosions began to sound. Japanese antitank guns opened fire from the heights. The column stopped to return the fire. Finding detours, the tankers penetrated into the depth of the strongpoint and battle boiled. On the heights; among the tangle of trenches, pillboxes, dugouts, and artillery positions; over the precipices; and before the inaccessible grades bellowed tank motors; Japanese guns often struck, and the grass huts and grass blazed. The battle lasted for more than an hour, perhaps the bloodiest since the beginning of combat. Finally the enemy faltered, hundreds of his retreating soldiers littered the slopes of the hills and valley of marshy streams. The tanks . . . pursued the fugitives. The victory was achieved at a dear price. Senior Lieutenant Dmitriev and Lieutenant Bezrukov, reconnaissance platoon leader Demin and Sergeant Zotov of the automatic weapons company died heroes' deaths. Many received serious wounds.[12]



Map 4—4. Situation, 12 August

This fighting and the arduous road march combined to reduce significantly the tank strength of the brigade from its original full TO&E authorization of sixty-five tanks. After the battle, the brigade raced on toward Hsientung.



Tanks and infantry in an assault

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Yamagishi regrouped his forces on the heights to await the arrival of the main Soviet infantry force. At 1000 on 12 August, advanced elements of the 300th Rifle Division approached the Japanese positions, and the lead regiment of the division deployed under artillery cover. At noon, heavy artillery fire was falling on Lieutenant Yamagishi's hilltop position north of the road. Shortly thereafter, Soviet troops tried to flank the position on the north, but Yamagishi stopped this maneuver by moving his forces from the hills south of the road to the right flank of his position, then north of the road. The Soviets immediately shifted their artillery fires to this sector and forced Yamagishi to withdraw his forces to the western slopes of the hills for protection. At nightfall, Soviet infantry controlled the left rear of the Japanese positions and both hills north of the road were in the hands of the 300th Rifle Division. All Japanese counterattacks to regain the hills during the evening of the twelfth failed.

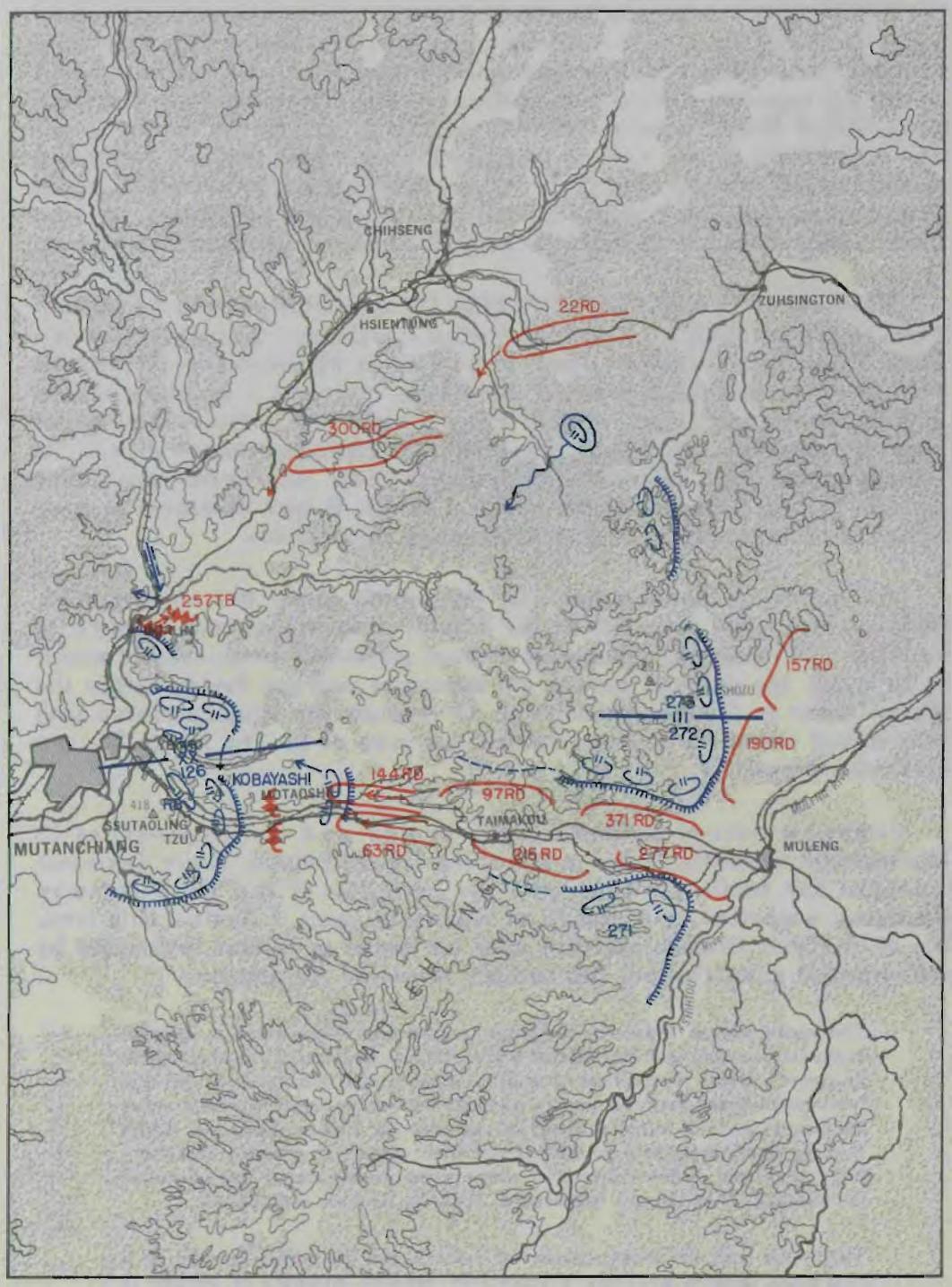
Outflanked and in danger of encirclement, the Japanese withdrew into the forests south of the road before daybreak on the thirteenth. They had lost 400 of 650 men, four antitank guns, two battalion guns, and three machine guns.[13] The next day Lieutenant Yamagishi's small force marched across the mountains southwest to Mutanchiang. Two days later it arrived northeast of Yehho, only to find Mutanchiang invested by Soviet forces. The detachment headed toward Tungchingching, where it finally surrended to the Soviets on the twentieth. After smashing Japanese positions at Tzuhsingtun, the 300th Rifle Division pushed on toward Hsientung, with the 22d Rifle Division stretched out behind it on the road from Pamientung.

While on 12 August the 300th Rifle Division battled with Lieutenant Yamagishi's covering force at Tzuhsingtun, Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik's 257th Tank Brigade raced to gain a foothold at Mutanchiang. At 0900 on 12 August, the brigade approached Hsientung, overcame a Japanese outpost in a one-hour engagement, and, at 1900, occupied the railroad station and Japanese logistics depot that supported the Chihsing defensive line. At Hsientung the tank brigade also destroyed forty warehouses and found enough fuel to refill its almost dry fuel tanks. It also destroyed a troop train full of Japanese soldiers en route south from Linkou.

The battle at Tzuhsingtun and the march along the marshy road, however, had taken their toll on the brigade, reducing its tank strength to nineteen.[14] Nevertheless, Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik continued his march south along the railroad toward an important railroad bridge across the Mutan River at Hualin. At 0500 on 13 August, the brigade roared into Hualin and seized the railroad station (see map 4—5). The bridge lay two kilometers beyond.

Japanese forces defending the bridge and the approaches to Mutanchiang were dug in just south of the Hualin Station. Major Takikawa defended the battle position with one battalion of the 370th Infantry Regiment, supported by a section of regimental guns.[15] Against this force, the 257th Tank Brigade attacked with ten tanks in column, supported by self-propelled guns. General Beloborodov recounted the action:

> The tanks rushed towards the bridge, and, when they neared it, a large explosion sounded; and the railroad bridge fell into the river. From the heights Japanese artillery struck, tens of machine guns rattled from roadside culverts, from camouflaged foxholes rose up soldiers in greenish tunics, stooping under the heavy loads of mines and explosives, running toward the tanks. Soviet soldiers struck them with pointblank fire from automatic weapons, and flung hand grenades. Bursts of tank machine guns mowed down the *smertniks* [kamikazes]. They did not retreat until virtually all were slaughtered.
>
> Two hours later the tanks repeated the attack. But the enemy brought up a new detachment of *smertniks* supported by artillery. Attempts by sappers to clear new paths through the minefields were unsuccessful, one could not approach them because of the brutal fire.[16]



Map 4—5. Situation, 13 August

The Japanese frustration over their inability to destroy the Soviet T-34* tanks in the engagement is recalled in this account:

> Our artillery laid fire on the enemy tanks in the rear in order to obstruct the repair of tanks (while our close quarter teams attacked the tanks from the roadside). However even though the enemy tanks were hit, since the projectiles were not armor piercing, the actual damage was practically nil. . . . The enemy calmly repaired his tanks on a spot exposed to us. His behavior was arrogant and insolent in the face of our impotence. His tanks remained along the road in column, and avoided the swampy ground nearby. Some of the tank crews were observed to consist of female as well as male soldiers.[17]

At 1800 Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik again ordered his tanks into Hualin, where they occupied a defensive line in a settlement by the station. By mid-evening the tank brigade clearly could not hold the station against Japanese pressure, so it withdrew under heavy fire to a hill a kilometer north of Hualin and established defensive positions along the steep banks of a stream leading to the Mutan River. The sharp encounter at Hualin reduced the tank strength of the 257th Tank Brigade to seven tanks.[18]

Although they halted the 257th Tank Brigade, the Japanese suffered a major tactical reverse in the process. On the morning of the thirteenth, General Hitomi, the 135th Infantry Division commander, entrained at Linkou for Mutanchiang with elements of the 370th Infantry Regiment and a battalion of the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment. Aware of Soviet troops in the region, the general planned to fight his way through them, if necessary. At 2010 the trains arrived in Hualin to find the railroad bridge blown up in accordance with First Area Army orders. Simultaneously, the 257th Tank Brigade attacked the trains, destroying them and many of the Japanese troops aboard. The effect of the attack is evident from Japanese sources:

> Our troops quickly got off the train and endeavored to engage the tanks, but were thrown into great confusion. Some were killed by tank shells, some sought cover in the forest, and others jumped into the Mutanchiang River and attempted to swim across it. General Hitomi, accompanied by some of his officers and men, narrowly escaped danger and took shelter in a mountain side along the right bank of the river.[19]

Hitomi later made his way to Mutanchiang, where he assumed command of the shattered remnants of his division. In the attack on the trains, the Soviets claimed to have killed 900 Japanese soldiers and destroyed six locomotives, twenty-four guns, thirty vehicles, thirty train cars with ammunition, 800 rifles, and 100 machine guns.[20]

*Reminiscent of U.S. Task Force Smith's problems in the opening phases of the Korean War.

After midnight, Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik, with his brigade reduced to seven tanks, awaited reinforcements that would enable his depleted forces to resume the attack. Reinforcements arrived the next morning. The 300th Rifle Division and 22d Rifle Division, strung out along the muddy road from Pamientung, dispatched two self-propelled artillery battalions (twenty-five guns) and drove their infantry mercilessly to link up with the hard pressed tank brigade.[21] From the north, the 59th Rifle Corps ordered the 75th Tank Brigade to move south along the railroad from Linkou to Hualin. After the tank brigade had overcome small Japanese units at Chushan and Santoa-hetsi (thirty-five kilometers north of Hualin), only the deteriorated, rain-soaked roads hindered the brigade's progress. By morning, 1st Red Banner Army would have sufficient forces at Hualin to conduct a major assault on the Japanese defensive lines covering the northern approaches to Mutanchiang proper.

5th Army forces on the road to Mutanchiang

5th Army Advance

From 12 to 14 August, as the 1st Red Banner Army swept forward from Pamientung and Lishuchen through Linkou and Tzuhsingtun to Hualin, the Soviet 5th Army attacked the Japanese 124th Infantry Division east of Mutanchiang. General Shiina's defensive position on a twenty-five-kilometer front extended from north to south in the mountains west of the Muleng River. The 273d Infantry Regiment, minus one battalion, and the 272d Infantry Regiment, minus one company, defended the sixteen-kilometer sector north of the Muleng-Mutanchiang road (the northern and central defensive sectors, respectively). The 271st Infantry Regiment, minus one battalion, defended the remaining eight-kilometer sector (southern defensive

sector) south of the road. A battalion of division artillery supported each of the infantry regiments, while a battery of the 1st Independent Heavy Artillery and the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment, minus two batteries, gave support from positions in the rear of the central sector (see map 4—3).[22]

In order to reinforce the critical sector defending the road from Muleng to Mutanchiang, the 5th Army commander created a special detachment under Colonel Sasaki, commander of the 1st Engineer Command, and attached it to the 124th Infantry Division. The Sasaki detachment, consisting of the 1st Battalion, 368th Infantry Regiment, and 1st Battalion, 370th Infantry Regiment, from the 135th Infantry Division, deployed along the road east of Taimakou to intercept the advancing Soviet mechanized units.[23] On the evening of the eleventh, General Shiina moved his headquarters to Mount Shozu, behind the central sector unit, in order to coordinate the impending action. Japanese intelligence reports that evening estimated the opposing Soviet force at two divisions, composed chiefly of mechanized units, with more reinforcements approaching from Suifenho.

That Japanese assessment was accurate. On the night of 11—12 August, forward elements of the 97th and 144th Rifle Divisions, led by tank brigades, crossed the Muleng River and secured the town of Muleng. Behind them the 215th, 190th, and 371st Rifle Divisions followed in column along the road from Hsiachengtsu to Muleng, with the 363d Rifle Division approaching Muleng from the southwest. The remainder of 5th Army stretched out in long march column formation from Machiacho Station to Suiyang.

Marshal Meretskov, anxious to speed the movement of General Krylov's army to Mutanchiang, ordered Krylov to assemble a "strong" army forward detachment to advance straight down the road to Mutanchiang and rupture the Japanese defenses in one blow. Krylov designated the 76th Tank Brigade as the forward detachment; it was reinforced by the 478th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment and two rifle battalions with automatic weapons.[24]

At dawn on the twelfth, while Soviet artillery pounded Japanese positions north and south of the road, the 76th Tank Brigade launched its attack against the right flank of the Japanese 272d Infantry Regiment in the central sector (see map 4—4). Japanese heavy and medium artillery halted Soviet infantry supporting the advance of the 76th Tank Brigade. The tank brigade itself met very heavy resistance near Plivuchi Station, where the Japanese 272d Infantry Regiment had launched battalion-size counterattacks supported by artillery, mortars, and artillery fired from two armored trains. The 76th Tank Brigade repelled the counterattack, but could not move forward. In order to restore the momentum of the attack, General Krylov reinforced the tank brigade with the 785th Rifle Regiment of the 144th Rifle Division and two battalions of the 233d Rifle Regiment of the 97th Rifle Division, as well as with additional tanks and self-propelled guns. Following a thirty-minute artillery preparation, the Soviets finally broke through the

Japanese defenses on a four-kilometer sector and then continued their advance to the outskirts of Taimakou.[25] All day the fighting raged: Japanese artillery pounded the narrow Soviet penetration corridor, and continual infantry counterattacks tried to seal the Soviet breakthrough.

With the central defensive sector broken and Soviet forces approaching Taimakou, the Japanese 5th Army commander formed yet another stopgap unit. This time a 1,000-man battalion, composed of students from the Reserve Officers Candidate Training Unit at Shitou and the Intendance Reserve Officers Candidate Training Unit, and one battery of the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment were placed under Colonel Kobayashi, commander of the 3d Field Fortification Unit, and positioned at Motaoshih in order to block the road to Mutanchiang.[26] By the evening of the twelfth, Soviet forces of the reinforced 76th Tank Brigade, which had overcome the Sasaki detachment at Taimakou and had reached Motaoshih, engaged Kobayashi's ersatz detachment.

Japanese 5th Army postwar accounts downplay the effectiveness of all Japanese resistance and regard the 124th Infantry Division positions as irrevocably split asunder on the twelfth. The 124th Infantry Division accounts, however, credit the division with greater success, particularly for the defense of the main road to Mutanchiang. Soviet versions confirm the success of the Russian drive along the road, but also verify 124th Infantry Division claims of heavy resistance and bitter fighting as Soviet units beat off desperate Japanese counterattacks.[27]

Throughout 13 August Soviet forces engaged in heavy fighting (see map 4—5). The 63d and the 144th Rifle Divisions, led by tanks and self-propelled guns, widened the initial breakthrough corridor along the road to five to seven kilometers. They also penetrated to a depth of thirty kilometers, despite constant Japanese counterattacks from platoon to battalion strength and constant shellfire from Japanese artillery and mortar batteries. During the course of this fighting, Colonel Kobayashi was killed, and by 1200 on 13 August his detachment had been destroyed. Some survivors of the Japanese unit retreated to defenses east of Yehho, while others stayed behind to conduct guerrilla warfare in the Soviet rear areas.[28] By nightfall on the thirteenth, lead Soviet elements had secured the pass across the Laoyehling Mountains and confronted the main Japanese defensive lines east of Yehho.

As Soviet units overran the center of the Japanese 124th Infantry Division defenses, the remainder of the division struggled to maintain its defenses. By 0900 on 13 August, General Shiina received a report from his central sector unit stating, "Because of the difficulty of holding our positions, the regiment will launch a counterattack with regimental colors in the lead. This is perhaps the last report from our regiment [272d] to the division."[29]

General Shiina responded by ordering the regiment to fight to the death. Because his other sectors were not, as yet, hard pressed, he also rejected any idea of withdrawal. Consequently, the 272d Infantry Regiment fought under heavy pressure throughout the day. During the afternoon and evening, while the Soviet 63d and 144th Rifle Divisions approached the outskirts of Yehho, other Soviet divisions pressured the Japanese from north and south of the main road.

The 97th and 371st Rifle Divisions struck the southern flank of the Japanese 272d Infantry Regiment, while the 215th and 277th Rifle Divisions attacked the left flank of the 271st Infantry Regiment. Simultaneously, the 190th and 157th Rifle Divisions frontally assaulted the 272d Infantry Regiment's positions with concentrated artillery support. Early the next day, the Soviet 190th Rifle Division attacked the Japanese left sector (273d Infantry Regiment) while the 97th and 371st Rifle Divisions launched offensives against the central sector from the south, forcing the 272d Infantry Regiment to withdraw to the southern foothills of Mount Shozu. At 0900, General Shiina again moved his command post, this time ten kilometers to the rear of Mount Shozu. Shortly thereafter, Soviet rocket and artillery fire almost obliterated the top of Mount Shozu. A coordinated Soviet assault on the summit, covered by intense artillery fire, finally overwhelmed the stubborn Japanese defenders. The commanders of the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment and the Mutanchiang Heavy Artillery Regiment and most of their men were killed by the onslaught, and their guns destroyed.[30] General Shiina lost communications with his remaining units. His last formal order to his units read:

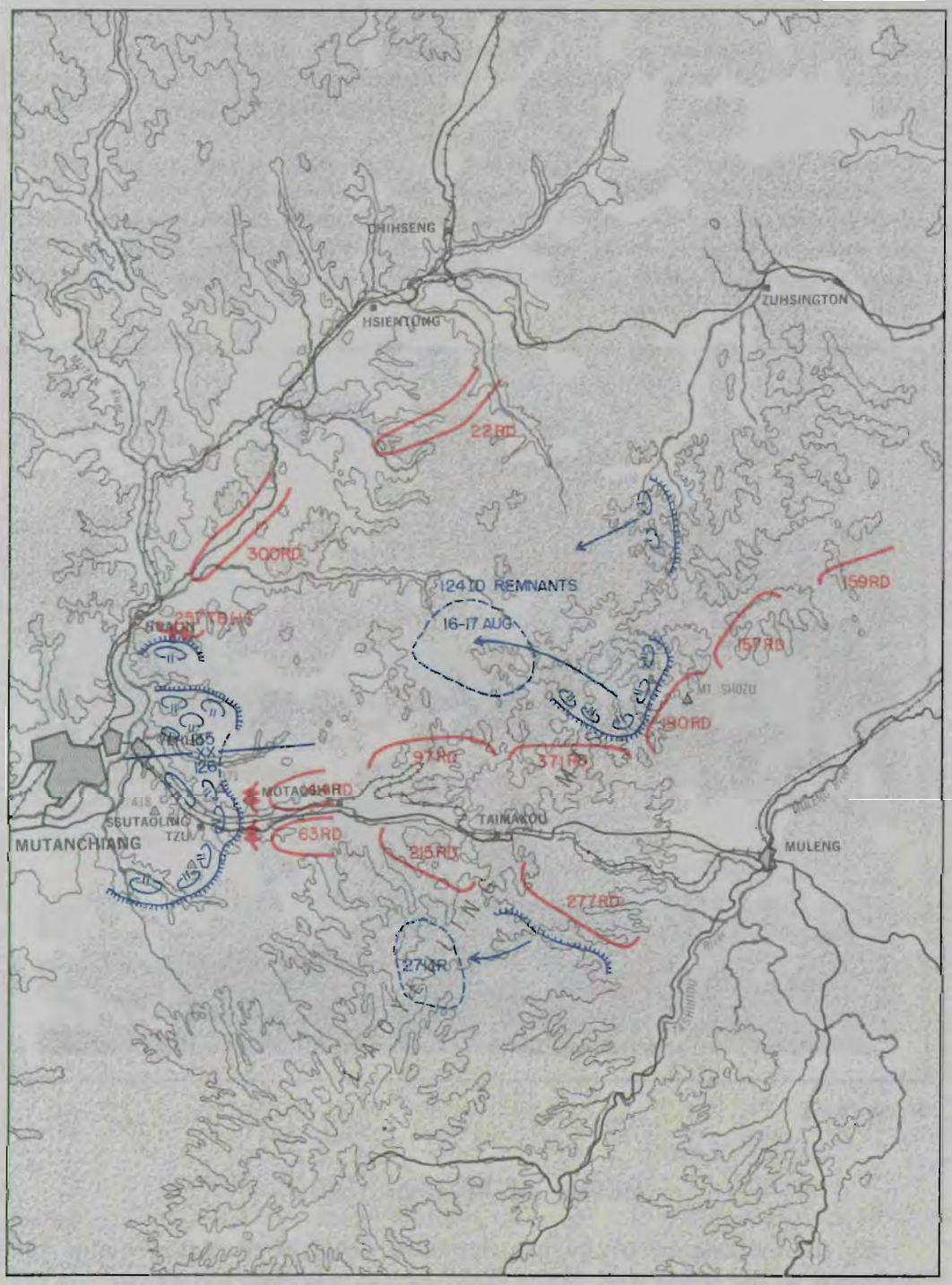
> All personnel of the division, with firm determination to die in honor, shall repeatedly carry out raiding tactics under cover of darkness, and will smash the enemy's combat strength bit by bit. To this end all units will carry out tenacious attacks, according to the following procedures:
>
> The main target of attack will be the enemy located along the Mutanchiang road.
>
> Units north of the road will charge and break through the enemy line to the south; those south of the road will charge and break through to the north. Each will advance to the hilly zone of the opposite side. In the daytime they will endeavor to seek cover and conceal their movements and intentions as much as possible. During the ensuing night they will return and repeat the same action.
>
> In attacking, adjoining units will maintain close contact and exercise utmost care to avoid engagements among themselves.
>
> Movement towards the sector west of Taimakou will be prohibited.
>
> The raiding tactics stipulated in these instructions will be carried out beginning on the night of 15 August.[31]

Organized resistance by the 124th Infantry Division sputtered out after the night of the fourteenth. Thereafter, the unit could only harass Soviet columns marching westward toward Mutanchiang and keep Soviet divisions occupied with security and clearing operations north and south of the road. After receiving, by radio, word of the Imperial cease-fire, the remnants of the division, still under General Shiina's supervision, on the night of the fifteenth ceased raiding operations and tried to withdraw to the southwest. After a lengthy assembly period, at 0300 on the eighteenth, the division broke through the endless columns of Soviet troops, trucks, and tanks on the highway between Taimakou and Motaoshih. Separate groups of Japanese continued to cross the road during the next evening as well. Then the division moved through the mountains toward the Ningan area, where, on 22 August, after the Kwantung Army's surrender, it, too, surrendered to Soviet forces.

After the collapse of the 124th Infantry Division's resistance, Soviet 5th Army units secured their lines of communication (see map 4—6). They also redeployed sufficient forces to penetrate Japanese defenses east of Mutanchiang in coordination with 1st Red Banner Army's attack on Mutanchiang from the north. The 144th Rifle Division, 65th Rifle Corps (reinforced by the 218th Tank Brigade and 395th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment), and the 63d Rifle Division, 72d Rifle Corps (with the 210th Tank Brigade and 479th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment), continued to fight against the Japanese defenses east of Mutanchiang. The 97th, 371st, and 190th Rifle Divisions of the 65th Rifle Corps battled with remnants of the 124th Infantry Division north of the Muleng-Mutanchiang road. The 215th and the 277th Rifle Divisions of the 72d Rifle Corps advanced against remnants of the Japanese 271st Infantry Regiment south of the road.

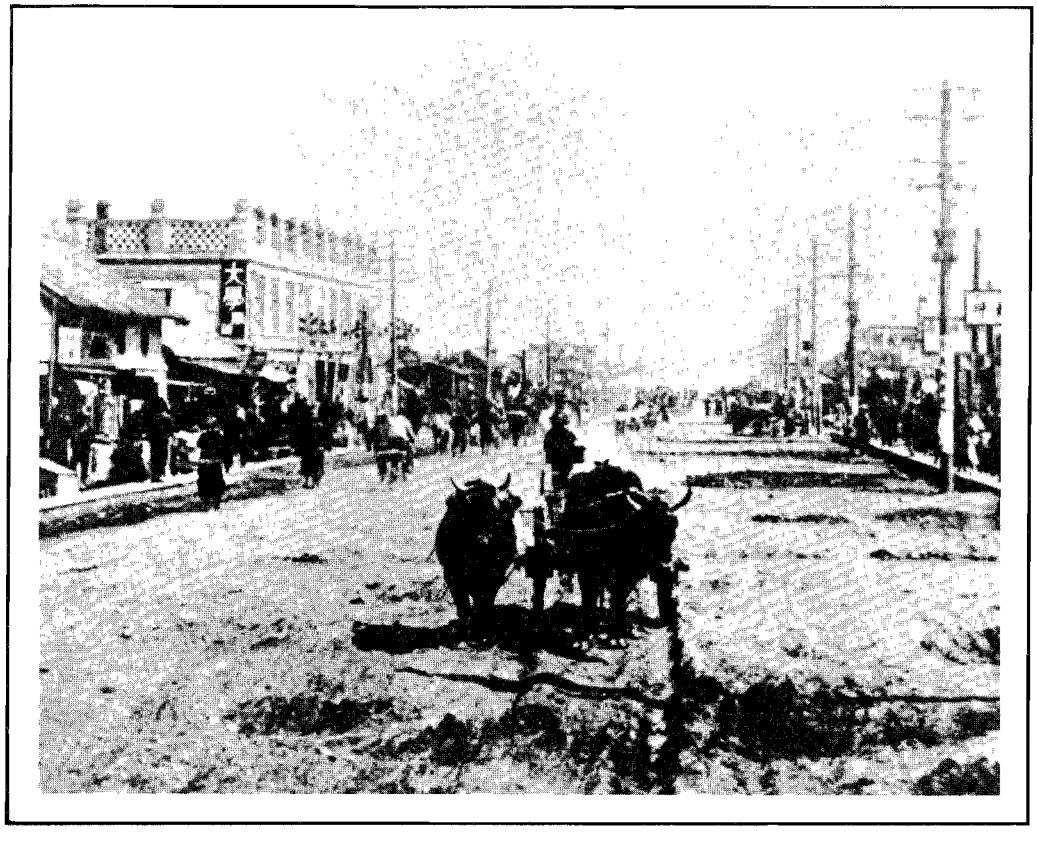
The 215th Rifle Division operated ten kilometers southwest of Motaoshih Station; the 277th Rifle Division, twenty-five kilometers southwest of Muleng. The 45th Rifle Corps, together with the 159th Rifle Division, covered the right flank of the army from Machiacho to Hsiachengtsu, while the 157th and 184th Rifle Divisions marched forward on the road from Suiyang. On the morning of 15 August, the 84th Cavalry (horse) Division, in front reserve at Muleng, received orders to advance into the mountains southwest of Muleng, then along the Tashihtou Valley, and through the Laoyehling Mountains toward Ningan. A separate detachment of the division, with a small number of tanks, traveled south of Muleng to establish contact with 25th Army at Taipenchang.[32]

By 15 August, Soviet 5th Army had crossed the Laoyehling Mountains and had crushed the Japanese 124th Infantry Division, denying the Japanese the opportunity they had expected to conduct an orderly withdrawal to Mutanchiang. In doing so, however, the distance the army had traveled, the terrain over which it fought, and the resistance of the 124th Infantry



Map 4—6. Situation, 14 August

Division all prevented the Soviets from bringing overwhelming power to bear on the Japanese Mutanchiang defenses. The 5th Army was stretched out over 100 kilometers, with the bulk of its force deployed on the flanks as security against the remnants of the Japanese 124th Division. Although lead elements of 5th Army had crossed the Laoyehling Mountains well ahead of schedule, Japanese resistance scattered 5th Army's forces. Moreover, a substantial Japanese force remained at Mutanchiang. Because of 5th Army's problems, Marshal Meretskov ordered the front mobile group, the 10th Mechanized Corps, to fight in the 25th Army sector, further south, where prospects for early success looked better.[33] These decisions made, the 5th Army prepared to assist 1st Red Banner Army in overcoming the Japanese defenses at Mutanchiang.



Mutanchiang

Battle of Mutanchiang

By the evening of 13 August, Japanese defenses at Mutanchiang had coalesced to the point that Major Takikawa's battalion temporarily halted Soviet units of 1st Red Banner Army at Hualin (see map 4—6). Meanwhile, Soviet 5th Army forces, having overcome the Motaoshih defense, approached

the eastern defenses of Mutanchiang. The Japanese 126th and 135th Infantry Divisions deployed in accordance with a 5th Army order issued at 1200 on 11 August, calling for the 126th to occupy positions east and southeast of the city, with three regiments on line.[34] The 277th Infantry Regiment (minus two battalions) dug in south of Yingchitun, facing south. The 278th (minus one battalion) occupied a hill south of the freight depot, facing southeast, and the 279th (minus one battalion) occupied Ssutaoling and Hill 371 north of the highway, with its forces facing eastward. The division artillery regiment, with one heavy field artillery battery, deployed west of Ssutaoling, to cover with fire the approaches to Ssutaoling and Hill 371. Men from the combined raiding battalions of the 126th and 135th Infantry Divisions deployed in foxholes along the road from Ssutaoling to Yehho. Their mission was to interdict Soviet traffic. Almost all trenches were completed by the evening of the thirteenth.

The Japanese 135th Infantry Division occupied two sectors northeast of Mutanchiang and covered the approaches to Yehho from Hualin. Supported by a battalion of divisional artillery, the 370th Infantry Regiment (minus two battalions) defended the left sector. A battalion of the 369th Infantry Regiment, backed by one battalion of the 368th Infantry Regiment and a company of engineers, occupied the right sector. Major Takikawa's battalion, 370th Infantry Regiment, in an attempt to cover the 135th Infantry Division's construction of defenses farther to the rear, engaged the Soviet 257th Tank Brigade at Hualin. Firing and communications trenches had been finished by the evening of 13 August, but the positions were not totally connected. Furthermore, the Japanese lacked barbed wire and antitank obstacles and had only negligible artillery support. The 126th Division, for example, had twenty guns; the 135th, only ten. A handful of light tanks were available for support.

On the morning of 14 August, the 257th Tank Brigade of 1st Red Banner Army received reinforcements from 26th Rifle Corps (see map 4—6). Two self-propelled artillery battalions, acting as the forward detachments of the 300th Rifle Division and 22d Rifle Division (whose main elements were still en route from Tzuhsingtun), raced forward and joined the depleted 257th Tank Brigade. Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik then renewed his attacks on Hualin Station. The previous day's fighting had sapped Japanese strength and morale. Especially debilitating to Japanese morale was the Soviet ability, even during the night, to evacuate successfully tanks that had been damaged the previous day.*[35]

On the afternoon of the fourteenth, repeated Soviet attacks against Major Takikawa's battalion drove the Japanese away from Hualin Station at a cost of three Soviet tanks. The Japanese, however, still held advanced positions north of Tzumeiholo.

*Throughout the campaign, the Soviets evacuated and repaired tanks quickly.

The right sector of the Japanese 135th Infantry Division defense was quiet throughout the fourteenth because General Beloborodov did not have enough forces to overwhelm the Japanese positions. Until such forces were available, his 1st Red Banner Army's leading elements could only nibble away at the Japanese defenses.

By the evening of the fourteenth, only the 257th Tank Brigade and the two self-propelled artillery battalions of the 22d and 300th Rifle Divisions had reached Hualin. The rifle regiments of the 300th and 22d Rifle Divisions remained strung out over the forty kilometers of road northeast to Tzuhsingtun, while other 26th Rifle Corps units busily constructed and maintained roads even farther to the rear. It was a similar tale for the 59th Rifle Corps, whose lead elements were approaching Chihsing, but whose divisions were also strung out far to the rear.

In addition, with such a limited force, 1st Red Banner Army could not maneuver against the Japanese because of the terrain obstacles. The composition of the Soviet force (primarily tanks and self-propelled guns) prevented maneuver off the roads into the marshy, boggy woods and fields. Because the Japanese also had destroyed the bridge spanning the Mutan River at Hualin, the Soviets could not cross the river until sufficient reinforcements were available to conduct an assault crossing. The only remaining bridge was at Yehho, still well behind the main Japanese defenses.

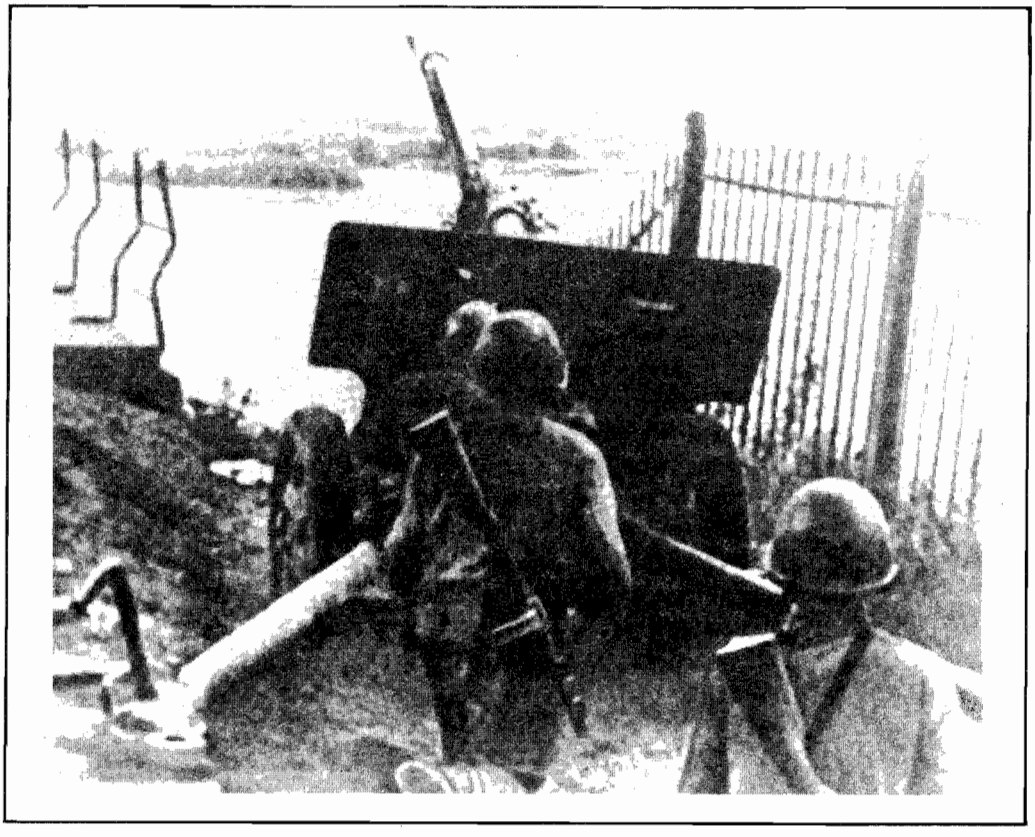
General Beloborodov ordered the 257th Tank Brigade to fix the Japanese defense, while his remaining forces closed on Hualin. Meanwhile, he planned to envelop Japanese defenses by developing operations on both sides of the river.

On the morning of 15 August, while the 257th Tank Brigade continued engaging the Japanese, the main force of the 300th and 22d Rifle Divisions and 77th Tank Brigade, along with the headquarters of General Skvortsev's 26th Rifle Corps, reached Hualin (see map 4—7). Skvortsev immediately prepared for a two-pronged offensive to commence on the afternoon of the fifteenth.[36]

The 22d Rifle Division would force the Mutan River at Huashulintsin, ten kilometers north of Mutanchiang, and then strike the city from the northwest. Because of a lack of bridging equipment, no armor could accompany the 22d Rifle Division. The 300th Rifle Division and 257th Tank Brigade would attack the Japanese defenses along the Hualin-Yehho road shortly after noon.

The 1049th Rifle Regiment and the division's training battalion, supported by an SU-76 self-propelled gun battalion of the 22d Rifle Division, made the main thrust on the right flank in order to capture Tzumeiholo, attack across the Mutan River near Yehho, and then advance into eastern Mutanchiang. The 1051st Rifle Regiment, with a self-propelled battalion and

the 257th Tank Brigade, made a supporting attack on the left flank toward Yehho Station in order to cross the Mutan River near the recently destroyed bridge and then to advance into the southeastern portion of the city. The 52d Mortar Brigade and 54th Guards Mortar Regiment provided fire support. These combined attacks pushed Major Takikawa's battalion back to a stream north of Tzumeiholo, and the Soviets overran most of the battalion position, although not Takikawa's headquarters.



1st Red Banner Army artillery firing across the Mutanchiang River

A major battle erupted for remaining Japanese positions north of the stream and main Japanese defenses south of the stream.[37] The Soviet 77th Tank Brigade joined the battle in support of the 300th Rifle Division. From his command post, General Beloborodov did not like the slow progress he saw:

> The report of General Skvortsev was not pleasing. On the main axis the division of Cherepanov [300th Rifle Division] advanced slowly. The road from Hualin Station to Yehho Station was mined, and tanks advanced with difficulty. All was not going well with the crossing of General Svirs' Division [22d Rifle Division] in the vicinity of the destroyed bridge. Thus, we decided Konstantin Petrovich Kazakov [Chief of Army Artillery] would remain here

> and assist with the corps artillery, Maksim Nikolaevich Safonov [Chief of Engineer Forces] would go to the river crossing, and I would go to the 300th Rifle Division—to Cherepanov.
>
> Fornilii Georgievich Cherepanov was in a difficult position. His division was striking the main blow, but his forces were small. The order said, "300th Rifle Division . . . " and so on. But in reality? One regiment was still on the march. The second regiment—of Mikhail Frolovich Buzhak—was deployed facing east to cover the division's left flank. It turns out that only the 1049th Rifle Regiment of Lieutenant Colonel Konstantin Vasil'evich Panin, with supporting tanks, attacked south towards Yehho.[38]

Thus, the piecemeal Soviet attacks failed to achieve the overall objective. The 1st Red Banner Army had yet to establish contact with the 65th Rifle Corps of 5th Army, advancing on Yehho from the east. Until contact was made, the 300th Rifle Division would continue to have difficulty advancing.

Under heavy fire, General Beloborodov made his way to General Cherepanov's forward observation point, where he found the general seriously wounded. So Beloborodov put Colonel Lubiagin, the deputy corps commander, in charge and joined Lieutenant Colonel Panin at the command post of the 1049th Rifle Regiment, just north of Tzumeiholo. Beloborodov later described the price he paid for his advance toward Yehho Station:

> The mountain road from Nan'chatsi south was literally crammed with *Smertniki* [Kamikazes]. There were groups of them even midst the minefields. The rifle battalions of Captains E. N. Baibus, D. I. Sindiashkin, and I. P. Artemenko advanced together with tanks; and our sappers fearlessly advanced forward creating paths through the mine fields under heavy artillery and machine gun fire of the enemy, simultaneously destroying *Smertniki* in hand to hand combat.[39]

By nightfall on the fifteenth, lead elements of the 300th Rifle Division, 257th Tank Brigade, and 77th Tank Brigade had consolidated their gains along the stream north of Tzumeiholo, five kilometers short of their assigned objective. Beloborodov returned to his headquarters and learned that the 22d Rifle Division, less its artillery and heavy equipment, had successfully crossed the Mutan River. By evening, its lead regiments, the 211th and 246th Rifle Regiments, were only four to five kilometers north of Mutanchiang. The division's reconnaissance units had actually penetrated into the outskirts of the city, where Japanese defenses were very weak. The 22d Rifle Division, however, lacked artillery and tanks to exploit its momentary advantage. To support the division, Beloborodov decided to launch a coordinated attack on both sides of the river on the morning of 16 August. After a partial artillery preparation, the full 300th and 22d Rifle Divisions would attack, supported by additional armor and artillery units just arrived on the battlefield.

While 1st Red Banner Army forces struck southward from Hualin on 14 and 15 August, 5th Army continued to attack the eastern approaches to Mutanchiang (see map 4—6). By the evening of 13 August, the 144th Rifle Division (with the 218th Tank Brigade and 395th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment) and the 63d Rifle Division (with the 210th Tank Brigade and 479th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment) were just two kilometers east of Ssutaoling and three kilometers southeast of Hill 371. The 144th Rifle Division deployed north of the road, and the 63d Rifle Division took positions south of the road. From these locations, an assault could be mounted upon the Japanese 279th Infantry Regiment's positions.

At 1100 on 14 August, Soviet artillery opened fire on Japanese artillery positions to the north of Ssutaoling Hill in order to neutralize Japanese batteries. Two hours later the Soviets shifted their concentrated fire to the hill itself. Elements of the 218th Tank Brigade, reinforced by infantry, then assaulted the 3d Battalion's (279th Infantry Regiment) field fortifications, which formed a salient southeast of Hill 371. By 1500 the Japanese defenders had been annihilated. Shortly thereafter, troops of the 144th Rifle Division occupied Hill 371, although during the night, they had to repulse several desperate Japanese counterattacks. Meanwhile, the 210th Tank Brigade and 63d Rifle Division contested the 279th Infantry Regiment's main forces for Ssutaoling Hill. Initial Soviet attempts to seize the hill failed, but after a four-hour artillery barrage had destroyed or disorganized Japanese positions on its summit, the Soviet 226th Rifle Regiment finally seized the crest.[40] By evening, Ssutaoling Hill was in Soviet hands, although Ssutaoling village remained Japanese. Japanese heavy artillery also shelled the Soviet hill positions, claiming the destruction of sixteen Soviet tanks. During the night, suicide squads from the 126th Infantry Division's raiding battalion attempted to breach Soviet defenses, but "because the enemy's [Soviet] security measures around his newly won positions were very effective," this attempt failed.[41] A subsequent counterattack by the 279th Infantry Regiment also ended in failure.

On the night of 14 August, the Soviets consolidated their newly won positions on the heights for new attacks against the Japanese the next morning (see map 4—7). From 0800 to 1600 on the fifteenth, Soviet artillery and tanks blasted Japanese artillery positions, knocking out all but one of the twenty-four Japanese artillery pieces, as well as destroying all four Japanese tanks and antitank guns. During the fierce bombardment, the 63d Rifle Division renewed its attack, this time striking the 278th Infantry Regiment south of Ssutaoling. The 63d forced the Japanese regiment to withdraw and cut its communications with division headquarters. Soviet tanks also reached 126th Infantry Division headquarters, where "a squad of firemen from the transport unit, each armed with a 15 kilogram explosive, attacked the leading five tanks in a suicide charge, one tank per man, and successfully demolished all five tanks."[42] Shaken, the Soviet 210th Tank Brigade withdrew to Ssutaoling to regroup. With Soviet tanks attacking division headquarters and with all divisional artillery destroyed, the 126th

Division commander consulted his chief of staff and, at 1800, ordered his division to prepare for a "final charge."[43] In early evening, however, a lull descended over the battlefield, enabling the Japanese to postpone such a desperate measure.

The unexpectedly strong resistance of the Japanese 126th Division east of Mutanchiang caused Marshal Meretskov to amend 5th Army's mission. Rather than battering itself against Mutanchiang, the army would sidestep the city to the south, leaving only a portion of its force to cooperate with 1st Red Banner Army and reduce the fanatic Japanese defense of the city. Orders issued at 1645 on 15 August accordingly directed 5th Army to turn the Japanese south flank and advance via Ningan to Kirin and Changchun.[44] A strong forward detachment of the 210th and 218th Tank Brigades of 5th Army led the advance.

On the morning of the sixteenth, the 65th Rifle Corps attacked Mutanchiang from the east and southeast, while the 26th Rifle Corps, 1st Red Banner Army, attacked from the northwest and northeast. The 26th Rifle Corps was to secure Yehho and put its infantry across the Mutan River into Mutanchiang. After clearing Yehho, the 257th and 77th Tank Brigades, attached to the 26th Rifle Corps, were to continue southwestward to provide armor support for 65th Rifle Corps, 5th Army.

Meanwhile, General Beloborodov completed his dispositions for a final assault on Japanese 135th Infantry Division positions, set for 0700 on the sixteenth.[46] East of the Mutan River, the 300th Rifle Division, supported by the 257th and 77th Tank Brigades, would advance to Yehho. The 1049th Rifle Regiment would advance on the right flank, the 1051st Rifle Regiment on the left. The 1053d Rifle Regiment in second echelon would attempt to cross the Mutan River north of Yehho. On the west bank of the Mutan River the 22d Rifle Division, after having consolidated its forces during the night, would attack Mutanchiang from the north and northwest, with the 246th and 211th Rifle Regiments in division first echelon.

Facing impending disaster, Japanese 5th Army reassessed its forces. The day before, First Area Army commander, Gen. Kita Seiichi had authorized 5th Army to withdraw to Tunhua or Hengtaohotzu, if its position at Mutanchiang became untenable.[47] With the situation rapidly deteriorating, Lt. Gen. Noritsume Shimizu, 5th Army commander, issued orders at 1200 on 15 August to begin a general withdrawal to Hengtaohotzu after midnight.[48]

According to the plan, the 126th Infantry Division would move back on the road south of Yehho, across the Mutan River, to positions west of the city. The 135th Infantry Division would withdraw north of Yehho across the Mutan River to positions northwest of the city. The Shihtou Reserve Officers Candidate Unit would cover the withdrawal from its positions east of Yehho to the hills south of the main road from Muleng. Although orders

from the two divisions to all subordinate units echoed the substance of the withdrawal orders, those units were still engaged in heavy contact and never received such orders. So the 278th Infantry Regiment, 126th Infantry Division, and Major Takikawa's battalion, 135th Infantry Division, were left to fend for themselves against the Soviet offensive.

The 126th Infantry Division withdrew at 2300 on 15 August, and by 0800, all units except the isolated 278th Infantry Regiment had crossed the Hsingling bridge. The 135th Infantry Division had withdrawn by dawn, leaving only Takikawa's battalion to resist the Soviet advance.

At 0700 on 16 August, the final Soviet assault on Mutanchiang[49] smashed through Takikawa's battalion defenses, and the 300th Rifle Division and 257th and 77th Tank Brigades moved on Yehho Station. Rocket artillery volleys struck the Japanese rear areas and ignited ammunition warehouses. The few survivors of the Takikawa Battalion straggled from the battlefield in groups of two's and three's. By 0900 Lieutenant Colonel Panin's 1049th Rifle Regiment had secured Yehho Station. The 77th Tank Brigade's tanks raced toward the Mutan River bridge, only to find the bridge in ruins. Because the Japanese had destroyed all three bridges, Beloborodov ordered his two tank brigades to attack south along the east bank of the river, while his infantry prepared to cross the river by rafts, logs, small boats, and other improvised means. These attempts by the 1051st Rifle Regiment to cross the river were unsuccessful because of Japanese artillery and small arms fire from the far bank.

Also at 0900, the 22d Rifle Division plunged into Mutanchiang from the northwest. After having completed their final concentration in jumping-off positions at 0600, the 211th Rifle Regiment, 22d Rifle Division, began its attack at 0900, entered Mutanchiang from the northwest, and reached the railroad station. This attack surprised the Japanese rear elements defending the Mutan River and forced their withdrawal. At 0920, the 246th Rifle Regiment entered the northern side of the city along the rail line. Soon all three regiments of Colonel Lubiagin's 300th Rifle Division had crossed the river and were into the city. Using fishing boats, the 1049th Rifle Regiment also crossed the Mutan River at 1100, while farther north the second echelon of the 1053d Rifle Regiment crossed on improvised rafts south of Tzumeiholo. Shortly thereafter, Lieutenant Colonel Buzhak's 1051st Rifle Regiment crossed the river south of the 1049th Rifle Regiment.

By 1300, the Japanese rear guard had abandoned the city under pressure from the east by the 1049th Rifle Regiment, from the south by the 1051st Rifle Regiment, and from the northwest by the 211th Rifle Regiment. Scattered groups of diehard Japanese fought to the end in cellars and basements of demolished buildings within the city. The 300th Rifle Division cleared the southwestern part of the city by late afternoon, while the 22d Rifle Division took all day to reach the western side of the city.

As the 300th Rifle Division crossed the Mutan River into the city, the 257th and 77th Tank Brigades moved south and joined the 144th Rifle Division of 65th Rifle Corps (5th Army). Together these units secured Yehhoshan (three kilometers south of Mutanchiang) and seized an undestroyed bridge, which provided passage into the southeastern sector of Mutanchiang. At 1000 on 16 August, Maj. Gen. Perekrestov's 65th Rifle Corps, 5th Army, completed the destruction of Japanese units east and southeast of Yehho, as his units enveloped and destroyed the Japanese 278th Infantry Regiment. By 1200 the survivors of the regiment had assembled under the regimental colors:

> The regimental commander, Colonel Hajima Yamanaka respectfully bowed to the east, burned the regimental colors, rallied the assembled men, and led a last charge toward the south. Then together with Major Ueda, the 3rd Battalion Commander, he committed hara-kiri in the presence of the enemy.[50]

Conclusions

The battle for Mutanchiang ended with the 278th Infantry Regiment's destruction and the withdrawal of Japanese covering units from the city. Japanese forces, harassed by Soviet frontal aviation, withdrew to Hengtaohotzu. The 1st Red Banner Army consolidated its forces to strike westward toward Harbin, while 5th Army turned south toward Ningan and Kirin.

During the four days of combat, three Japanese divisions were forced back 150—180 kilometers and suffered heavy casualties. The speed of the Soviet advance, in particular that of 1st Red Banner Army, disrupted the original Japanese plans to defend from a main line of resistance well east of Mutanchiang. It also caused the Japanese to fragment their forces because they had to leave behind detachments to cover the withdrawal of their main elements. The Soviets consistently mangled and then bypassed these detachments. The Japanese divisions ultimately found themselves defending at Mutanchiang, in considerably reduced strength, along truncated defensive positions.

The only Japanese division that managed to occupy its main line of resistance (the 124th) was crushed as soon as the Soviets could muster sufficient forces against it. Although the speed of the Soviet advance allowed rapid movement forward and preempted the Japanese forward defenses, it also eroded the combat strength of Soviet forward units. Hence, by the time 1st Red Banner Army arrived at Mutanchiang, General Beloborodov lamented the limited strength of those elements available on the battlefield.

On 13 and 14 August, for instance, the Soviets had only a reinforced tank brigade available to battle the Japanese, the major reason the Japanese halted the brigade at Hualin. On the fifteenth, only three or four rifle regiments and a tank brigade were available for combat, again a force insufficient to overcome determined Japanese defenses. Only on the sixteenth

could Beloborodov muster sufficient strength to overcome the Japanese defenses. By that time the Japanese already had withdrawn major portions of their troops. A similar situation occurred in Soviet 5th Army sector. Although lead units of 5th Army reached the approaches to Mutanchiang on the evening of the thirteenth, the bulk of the army's strength remained on the flanks of the penetration or strung out to the rear, desperately trying to catch up with the vanguard of the army. Only by the evening of the fifteenth were sufficient Soviet 5th Army forces at hand to break the Japanese defenses and continue the drive southwest toward Ningan.

Despite these limitations, Japanese forces suffered heavy casualties. The 126th Infantry Division admitted 2,050 killed; the 135th, 3,000 killed; and 5th Army reported total casualties of 20,000 men out of 60,000 engaged, plus the loss of eighty-six guns and eighteen mortars. First Area Army acknowledged another 5,000 battlefield casualties from its engaged units.[51] These figures appear more realistic than Soviet claims of 40,000 Japanese dead at Mutanchiang alone.[52] Both Japanese 5th Army and First Area Army claimed to have inflicted 7,000—10,000 Soviet casualties.[53] The Japanese might have underestimated the damage they inflicted in light of Soviet reports of 32,000 dead in the entire campaign.[54] A large portion of the Soviet casualties occurred in the bitter fighting for Mutanchiang.

Despite the tenacious Japanese defense and the hindering terrain of Manchuria, Soviet forces accomplished their objectives ahead of schedule. They preempted Japanese attempts to create a strong contiguous defensive line around Mutanchiang and secured Mutanchiang eight days into the offensive, ten days ahead of schedule. Soviet success was the result of audacious and rapid advance over terrain the Japanese thought impassable. That rapid advance never lost momentum and almost paralyzed the Japanese command structure. The Japanese military's only consolation was the determined, even suicidal, discipline of units that followed orders unhesitatingly and sacrificed themselves for what was already a lost cause.

Notes

1. Complete Japanese 5th Army plans appear in JM 154, 181—83.
2. JM 154, 288—89.
3. Ibid., 200.
4. Ibid., 199.
5. Ibid., 260, 263.
6. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 42.
7. Ibid., 43; JM 154, 286.
8. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 43—44, 49—50.
9. Ibid., 50.
10. Ibid.
11. JM 154, 260, 199.

12. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46.
13. JM 154, 199, 260—61.
14. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46.
15. JM 154, 207, 292—94.
16. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46.
17. JM 154, 193.
18. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 218; Krupchenko, *Sovetskie*, 322, claims the 257th Tank Brigade lost six tanks destroyed and thirty-five men killed on 13 August. More detailed accounts of the day's action at Hualin are in Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 45—48, and Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46—47.
19. JM 154, 200—201, 278, 297—99.
20. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 46; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 218.
21. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46.
22. JM 154, 235, map 2, map 4.
23. Ibid., 190, 195, map 4.
24. Ezhakov, "Boevoe primenenie," 80; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 220.
25. Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 443—44; JM 154, 236—38.
26. JM 154, 196—97, map 4.
27. For impressions of the fighting, see Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 220—21; JM 154, 195—97, 236—38.
28. JM 154, 204—5.
29. Ibid., 236.
30. Ibid., 238—39; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 446; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 256—57.
31. JM 154, 240.
32. The 5th Army dispositions on 15 August are from Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 256—57; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 446.
33. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 221—22.
34. JM 154, 202—4, 263—66, map 1.
35. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46—47; JM 154, 293—95, map 1.
36. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 48; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 253; Timofeev, "300-ia," 53—54.
37. JM 154, 208, 286—97.
38. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 48.
39. Ibid., 48—49.
40. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 224—54; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 446; JM 154, 205—6, 266—68.
41. JM 154, 268.
42. Ibid., 269.
43. Ibid., 270.
44. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 255.
45. Ibid., 259.
46. The 1st Red Banner Army plan details appear in Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 68—69; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 256; the 300th Rifle Division plan, in Timofeev, "300-ia," 53—54.
47. JM 154, 67, 210.

48. Ibid., 211.

49. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 69—72; Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 48—51; Timofeev, "300-ia," 54—55; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 258—59; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 447.

50. JM 154, 272—73.

51. Ibid., 69, 215, 273, 302. Various portions of this source cite total casualties in the campaign, the majority of which were suffered at Mutanchiang.

52. *IVMV*, 2:244.

53. JM 154, 69, 215.

54. I. Bagramian, ed., *Istoriia voin i voennogo iskusstva* [History of war and military art] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1970), 353.

Reduction of a Fortified Region

5

Hutou: Strategic Significance

Hutou was an isolated, but strategically important, link in Japanese defenses in eastern Manchuria. Its high ground provided good observation points from which to watch rail traffic on the Soviet Far Eastern Railroad. Because this rail line was the only one between Khabarovsk and Vladivostok, it would assume critical strategic importance in the event hostilities should erupt in the Far East. Moreover, the high ground just north of Hutou City controlled access to the only east-west railroad and road capable of handling heavy vehicle and rail traffic on the northern approaches to Mishan. Whoever controlled these heights controlled the avenues of approach in eastern Manchuria, because the surrounding terrain was mainly swamp and bog.

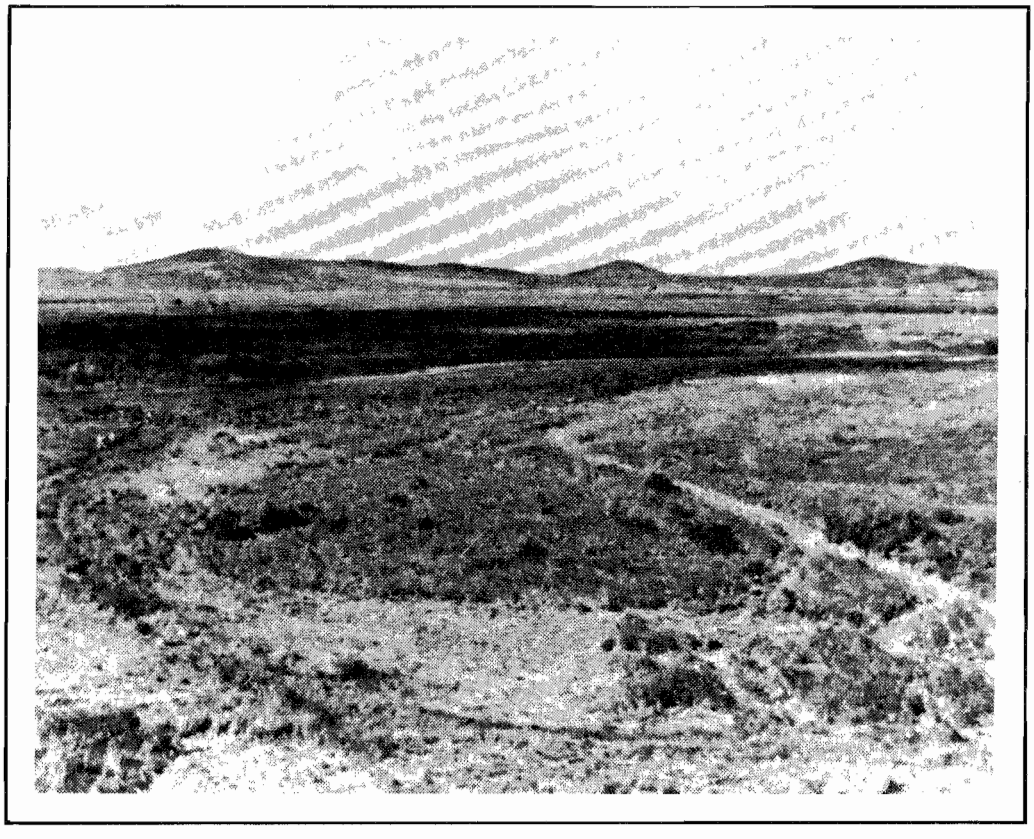
Japanese Forces

The Japanese had begun construction of fortified positions at Hutou in 1933, in part because the Soviets had erected fortifications of their own at Iman, across the Ussuri River from Hutou (see map 5—1). To man the fortifications, the Japanese assigned the 4th Border Guard Unit (BGU), which had about 7,000 personnel organized into four infantry battalions of three rifle companies each; one artillery regiment consisting of two batteries of twenty-four guns; and one engineer battalion.

In accordance with the Kwantung Army's fortification policy for border defense, construction units and conscripted native labor built the permanent ferro-concrete emplacements along the high ground dominating the strategic avenues of approach.[1] The Kwantung Army's strategic assessment of terrain dictated the Hutou fortress's isolated and exposed position, so army planners tried to insure that the fortress itself would be almost impregnable. They designated Hutou a "special" category of fortress.[2] This meant that it had concrete walls and roofs up to three meters thick, was impervious to artillery fire, and was able to withstand a direct hit by a one-ton bomb.*

*The only other Japanese fortifications to enjoy a "special" designation were sections of the Hailar positions in western Manchuria.

The Japanese constructed the Hutou complex without dead space. They designed the fire pattern to blanket the 300 meters ahead of defensive obstacles and relied on oblique and flanking fire from adjacent units rather than on frontal fire to cover the dead spaces. One battalion or, in special cases, one company manned individual fortified positions. A company's frontage and depth was 600 to 1,000 meters. Battalion sectors were generally 1,200 to 2,000 meters in width and depth.[3]

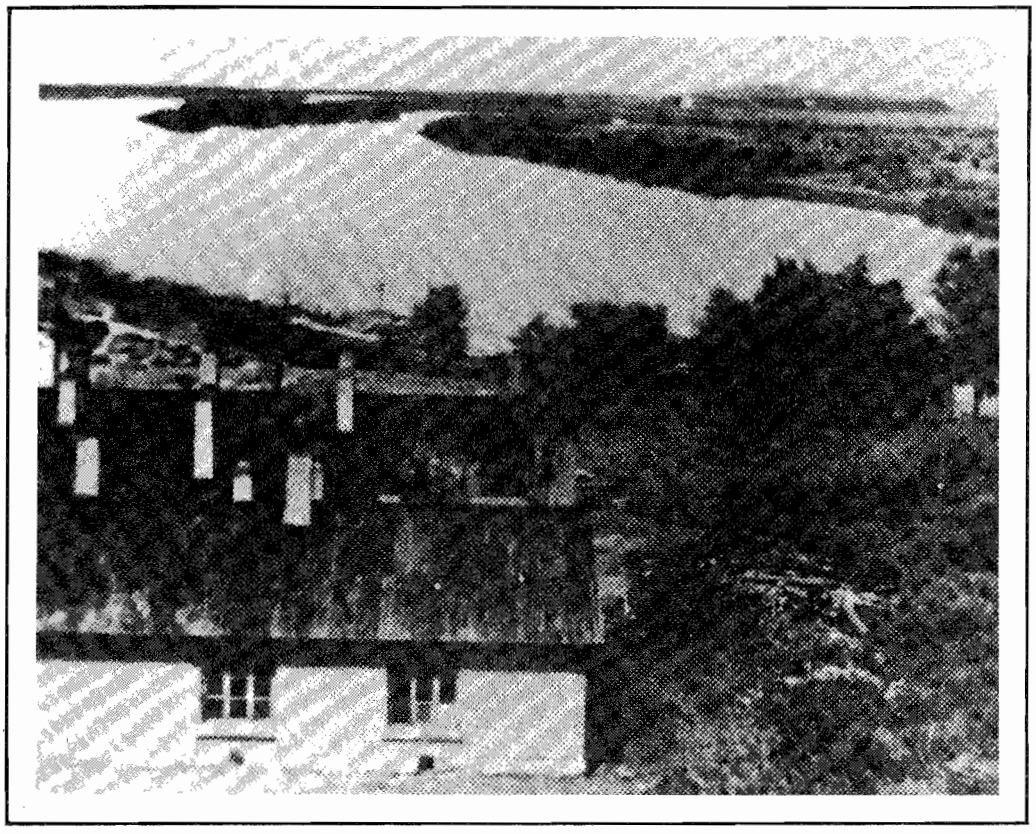


Hutou Fortified Region from the south

The completed Hutou forts had above-ground entrances, exits, observation posts, artillery and machine gun apertures, sally ports for local counterattacks, and weather observation posts. Underground were the communications system, living quarters, baths, water and supplies, generators, a communications room, and provisions. As mentioned, three-meter-thick concrete protected the key sections.

This fortress and the extensive Japanese fortification system in eastern Manchuria resembled a Manchurian Maginot Line. Like the Maginot Line planners, the Japanese did not expect the forts to hold back an enemy attack. Instead, the defenders would hold their positions and subsequently

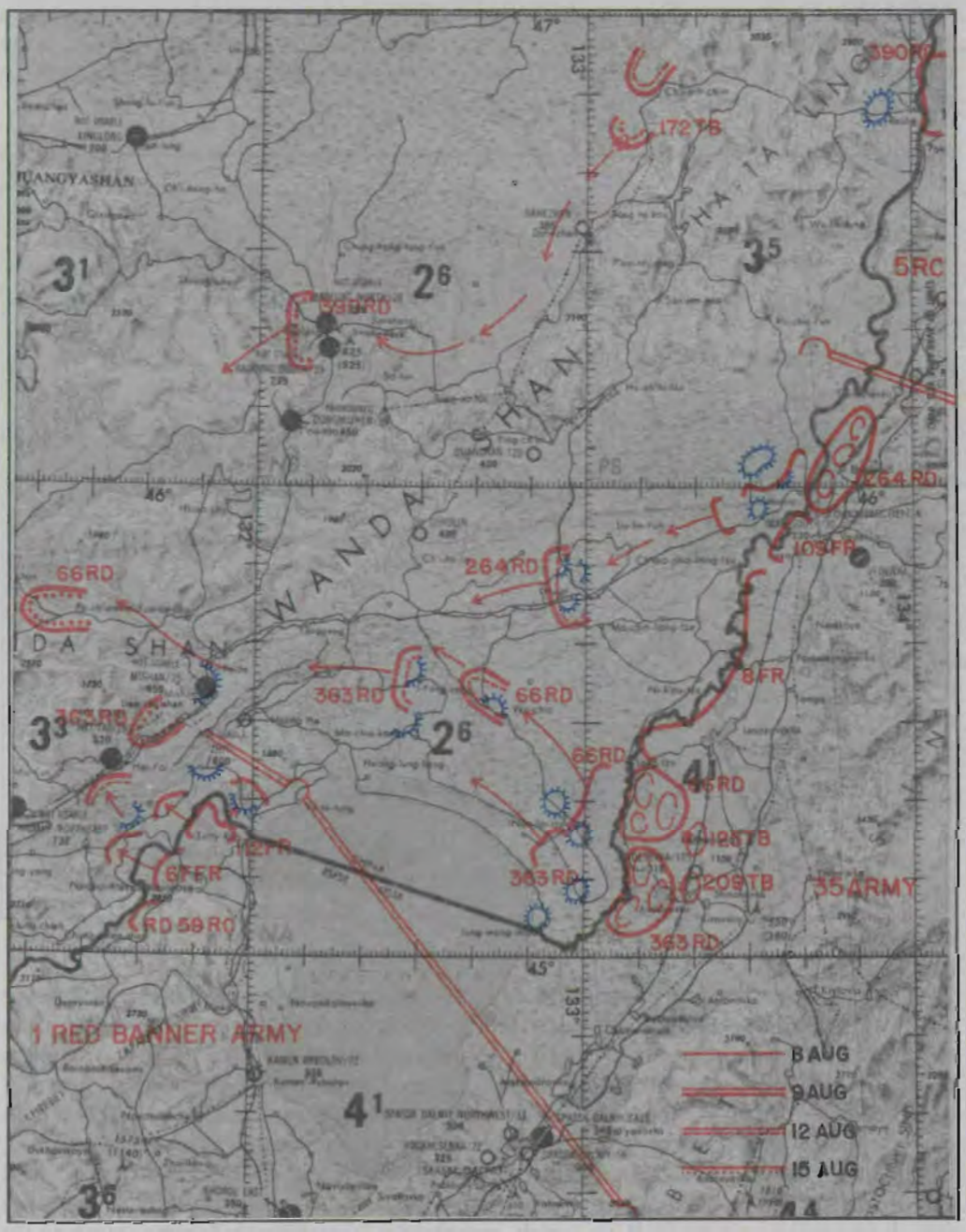
threaten the rear of the hostile invader, while friendly mobile forces prepared to counterattack. Also like the Maginot Line concept, the Japanese Manchurian defense designers assumed that certain types of terrain were impassable by large numbers of troops and equipment. Such thinking characterized Japanese defensive concepts.



Looking northeast from Hutou

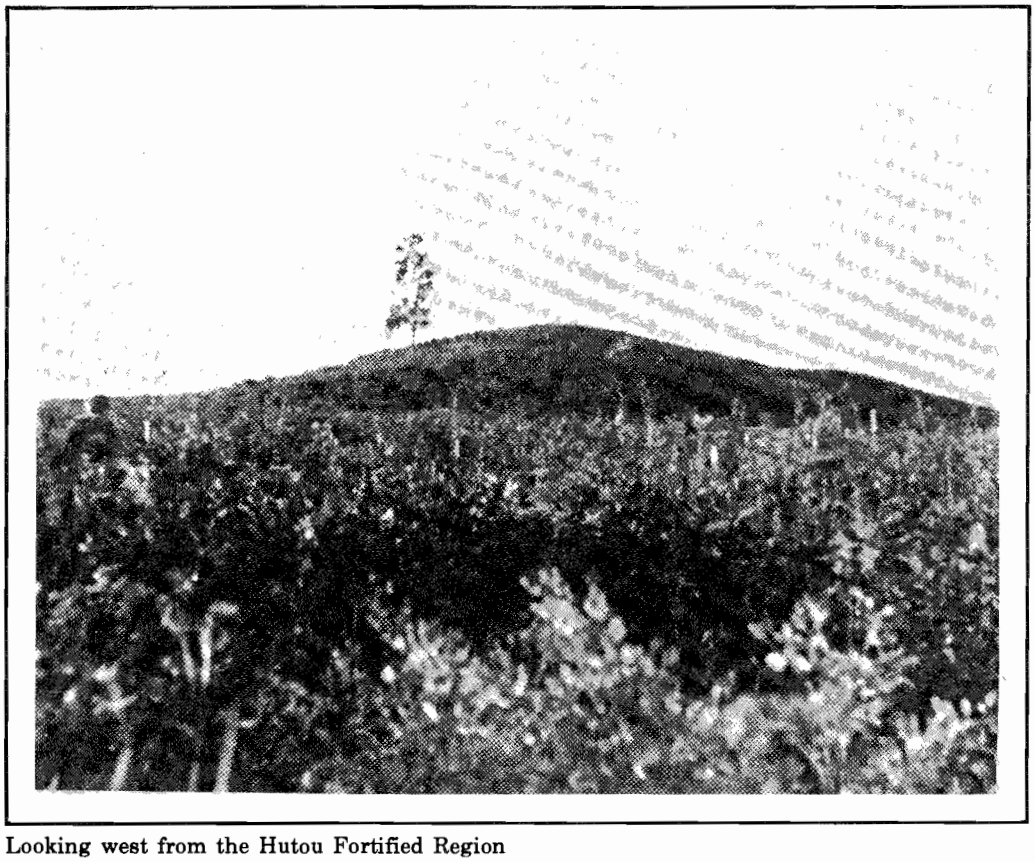
The Hutou fortifications were on an approximately 8,000-meter frontage and a 6,000-meter depth. The 4th BGU Table of Equipment and Organization (TO&E) meshed perfectly with the assigned defensive frontages. Although the unit had only one engineer company, it compensated for this deficiency with two additional artillery companies, which were assigned directly to the garrison. The Japanese had a total of fifty-nine artillery pieces at Hutou, in addition to their eight medium mortars, eighteen antiaircraft guns, and ten antiaircraft machine guns. They divided the fortress into three districts for defensive responsibilities, each garrisoned by four infantry companies and an artillery unit, respectively.

Although the Hutou garrison enjoyed a surplus of men and equipment in relation to its mission, garrison life there was especially hard. The physical isolation and severe climatic conditions made life bleak. High humidity in



Map 5—1. Japanese and Soviet Positions on the Eve of the Attack

the underground forts rusted weapons, spoiled food, and proved unhealthy for the troops stationed there. The forts lacked soundproofing, so every noise reverberated throughout the fortress. There was no air circulation equipment, although vents and exhausts for gases and human waste did exist. The Kwantung Army declared the fortress a restricted area and identification was required to enter the zone, which began just north of Hutou City. When local trains neared Hutou, conductors or guards pulled curtains over the windows so the passengers could not see the fortifications. From 1941 on, local authorities censored all mail and photographs. Hutou was a bleak tour of duty.



Looking west from the Hutou Fortified Region

The Japanese were unable to maintain the high personnel and equipment standards of the 4th BGU because of vast personnel transfers as units in Manchuria were transferred to the Pacific fighting fronts. In February 1945, 4th BGU personnel served as cadre and fillers for the newly organized 122d Infantry Division. Their equipment was also shifted, in particular antiaircraft artillery and antiaircraft machine guns. In order to maintain this strategically important fortification system (not to mention justifying the huge sum of money expended in constructing the forts) the Kwantung Army, on 20 July 1945, used the remaining members of the disbanded 4th

BGU as a nucleus for the new 15th BGU, supplemented by 600 additional troops who had been called up during the July 1945 general mobilization. The 15th BGU had approximately 1,400 officers and men (see table 5—1).

Table 5—1. Japanese 15th Border Guard Unit Strength

Authorized TO&E	Actual TO&E	Frontage/Depth
12 infantry companies 3 artillery batteries 4 artillery companies 1 engineer company	4 infantry companies 2 artillery companies 1 engineer platoon (4)	8,000/6,000 meters

Even these units were not up to authorized TO&E strength. One infantry support company was equipped with obsolete 37-mm antitank guns, and there were thirteen artillery pieces in the artillery companies. Also attached to the fortress were noncombatants like the Hutou Army Hospital, commanded by a major with a staff of 40—50 attached military personnel, 500 Japanese civilians and dependents, and 200 Koreans. In short, the 15th BGU was hopelessly understrength and had only twenty days to prepare itself before the Soviet forces struck it.

Like the other fortified areas along the eastern Manchurian border, the Hutou garrison, as an advanced unit, would use its defenses to check the Soviet advance and thus allow the 135th Infantry Division time to conduct its retrograde movement to the redoubt area. Volunteers would also raid enemy rear areas to disrupt the Soviet advance.[5] A second mission assigned to the garrison units was the destruction of the key railway bridges of the Soviet Far Eastern Railway, which spanned tributaries of the Ussuri River just north of Iman.

The original Soviet bridge, about 7,500 meters from Hutou, fell easily within the 12,750-meter range of the Japanese Type 30 centimeter (cm) howitzer. Aware of the Japanese construction efforts around Hutou in the late 1930s, the Soviets, in turn, built a detour rail line and a new steel bridge some 17,000 meters from Hutou. In January 1942, to foil the Soviet attempt to prevent artillery interdiction of the key rail artery, the Japanese secretly deployed a monstrous Type 40 cm howitzer capable of hurling a 1,000-kilogram shell more than 21,000 meters. The gun was never test-fired because the Japanese did not want to reveal its presence to the Soviets. Its mission was simple: destroy the Soviet new steel bridge with the first few rounds it fired. This doctrine was consistent with Japanese field artillery practices. In 1943 a 24-cm locomotive gun with a range of more than fifty kilometers also arrived at Hutou. In summary, the Hutou fortress had the twin missions of delaying and interdicting the enemy.

Soviet Forces

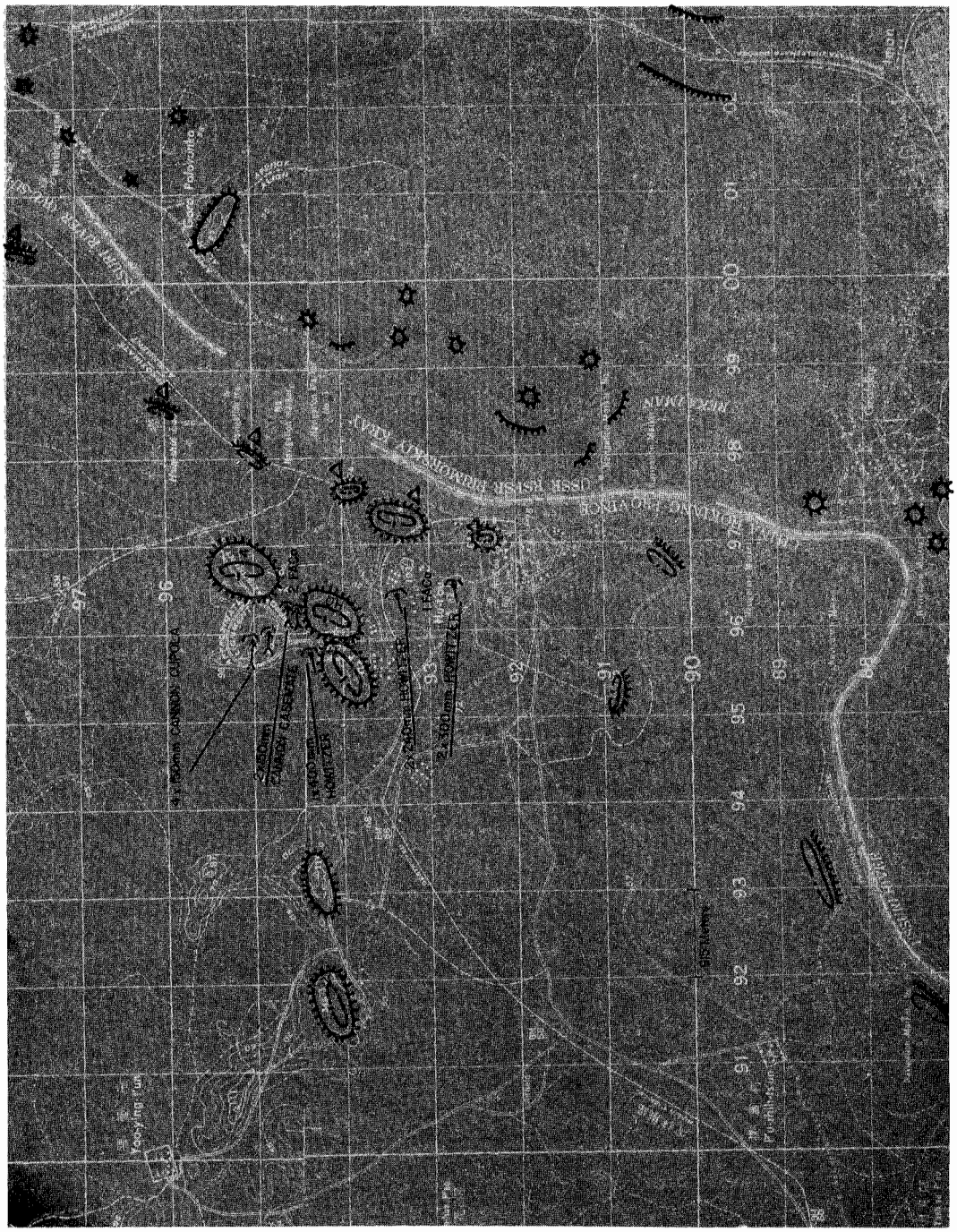
Lt. Gen. N. D. Zakhvatayev, commander of the Soviet 35th Army, controlled Soviet forces opposite Hutou. The 35th Army's mission was to use a portion of its forces to cover the lateral railroad and highway in the area of Guberovo and Spassk and to make the main thrust from the region of Pavlo-Fedorovka on the army's left flank in order to isolate, bypass, and reduce Hutou, while covering the right flank of the 1st Far Eastern Front's main attack farther south (see map 5—2).

The Soviets regarded Hutou as a considerable strongpoint, and they correctly estimated that the Japanese had positioned themselves in a narrow section of the most vulnerable Iman sector and had echeloned their units in great depth along the railroad and highway running from Hutou to Mishan and thence into the interior of Manchuria.[6] The entire Soviet strategy for the Manchurian campaign depended on speed to prevent the Japanese from regrouping or consolidating their forces. For that reason, the Soviets could not afford to get bogged down in a contest for Hutou. Instead, Soviet mobile units would bypass the main Japanese defenses, and specially tasked units would stay behind to reduce the fortress. The Soviets calculated the garrison at Hutou at 3,000 effectives, about double what the Japanese actually had available.

Zakhvatayev concluded that an attack across swampy terrain west of Pavlo-Fedorovka would find the point of weakest Japanese resistance. His main forces would strike from there towards Hulin to cut the railroad between Hulin and Mishan. Subsequently, the 264th Rifle Division and 109th Fortified Region, opposite Hutou, would make an auxiliary thrust to the south of Hutou to destroy the Hutou-Hulin grouping, and then, in cooperation with other units of the 1st Red Banner Army, they would attempt to rout enemy forces at Mishan.[7]

Soviet fortified region units and border guards detachments complemented Soviet 35th Army forces. Opposite Hutou was the 109th Fortified Region, approximately a regiment-size grouping. This fortified region was one of fourteen such entities in the 1st Far Eastern Front area of operations. The unit had the mission of defending about fifty kilometers along the Ussuri River, from about twenty-five kilometers south of Hutou to approximately fifteen kilometers north of the Japanese strongpoint. A comprehensive defensive network of Soviet barbed wire obstacles, antitank ditches, field emplacements, pillboxes, and observation posts dotted the otherwise drab terrain. Broken terrain, cut by numerous sloughs and pockets of marshy ground, characterized the area near both banks of the Ussuri.

Iman City, seven kilometers southeast of Hutou City, was the headquarters of the 57th Border Guards Detachment. According to Japanese records, the 57th had about 2,300 personnel and six gunboats, which their river patrol guards used.



Map 5—2. Overview of 35th Soviet Army Operations

Members of the fortified regions and the border guards detachments had remained in the Soviet Far East throughout the Soviet-German War (22 June 1941—7 May 1945). They had the detailed knowledge of the region that only comes with years of personal observation and experience. Their expertise would greatly benefit the Soviet forces when they crossed the Soviet-Manchurian border, because border guards units would make the initial crossing of the Ussuri and destroy the Japanese outposts that they had watched for so many years. Fortified region and border guards troops would also serve as guides to help the regular Soviet units through otherwise unfamiliar terrain.

Soviet 35th Army Attack

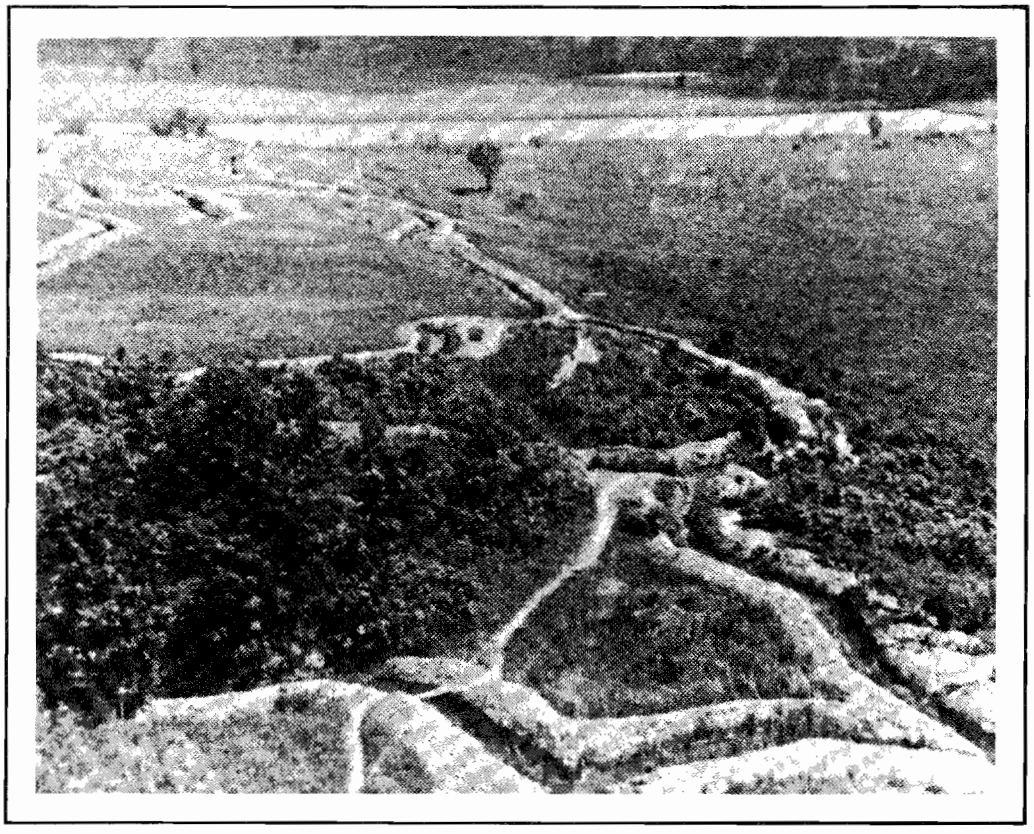
On the evening of the Soviet attack, members of the 15th BGU were conducting routine patrol and observation duties. The unit commander, Col. Nishiwaki Takeshi, was at Yehho, about 320 kilometers southeast of Hutou, attending a 5th Army Headquarters briefing for division, brigade, and associated unit commanders.[8] There had been local indicators of Soviet activity, but higher headquarters dismissed such warnings, apparently because they did not coincide with the Kwantung Army's estimate that a Soviet attack before September was unlikely.

On 5 and 6 August, for example, small Soviet patrols crossed the border about forty kilometers south of Hutou,[9] and on 6 August the BGU headquarters intelligence unit at Hutou reported intercepting a Soviet signal to the effect that the Soviets would soon attack Manchuria.[10] On the afternoon of 8 August, troops patrolling around Hutou's northernmost outpost, about thirty kilometers north of the main defenses, discovered pontoon rafts in the Ussuri River. They assumed that the rafts were debris from a Soviet summer military exercise.

Even after Soviet artillery began to rain down upon the Japanese on 9 August, no one at headquarters believed that they were under attack. They could of course hear the artillery barrage, but the Japanese thought that it was associated with night exercises the Soviets occasionally conducted. Indeed, during June and July 1945, battalions, regiments, and divisions assigned to 35th Army had conducted such exercises on terrain similar to the area of their forthcoming operations.[11]

Exactly when the Soviets opened artillery fire on the Japanese remains uncertain. The Japanese claim that the barrage began shortly after midnight on 9 August, while Soviet accounts set the time at 0100 that day.[12] Thunderstorms had erupted throughout the Maritime Provinces during the evening of 8 August, so the front commander decided to break through the Japanese fortified positions without a prolonged artillery preparation, relying instead on the cover of darkness and the heavy downpour to gain offensive surprise. Artillery preparation was conducted only in the zone of the 35th Army.[13]

Japanese casualties from the shelling were negligible, but the bombardment cut the road, railroad, and communications networks around Hutou in several places. Outposts were unable to contact their headquarters to report Soviet crossings of the Ussuri. At 0100, under the cover of a short artillery preparation, Soviet border guards troops of the 57th Border Detachment in platoon to company strength crossed the Ussuri on cutters with muffled motors or other types of boats throughout the 35th Army zone. In the Hutou area, one such detachment landed north of Hutou and overran and scattered the eighteen Japanese defenders there. At 0200, again under cover of Soviet artillery, the lead elements of the 1058th Rifle Regiment's advanced battalion crossed the Ussuri and, south of Hutou City, annihilated a Japanese outpost that had been covering the southern approaches to the main road and railway to Mishan.[14]



Looking south from Hutou

At 0500 the Soviet artillery fire lifted. The Japanese took advantage of the lull to issue an emergency assembly order and to gather up several hundred dependents near Hutou and take them into the fortress for shelter. One hour later the Soviet artillery bombardment resumed; the temporary respite was a Soviet tactic to confuse the defenders into thinking an attack was imminent, thus forcing them into the open to repulse it. This time

small caliber guns firing from positions on the Ussuri's east bank joined the barrage. Fire was accurate enough to keep Japanese heads down, but casualties were slight. Damage to open field fortifications, unreinforced positions, and roads, however, was extensive.

About 0800 approximately two battalions of Soviet riflemen from the 1056th Rifle Regiment started to cross the Ussuri south of Hutou City, while smaller, diversionary crossings occurred east of the city. By 1100 the Soviets had succeeded in establishing a firm bridgehead north and south of the city, despite suffering heavy casualties from two Japanese mortar crews.*[15] Nevertheless, the Soviets had avoided a costly frontal attack on Hutou by moving to outflank the main fortress and to envelop the position.

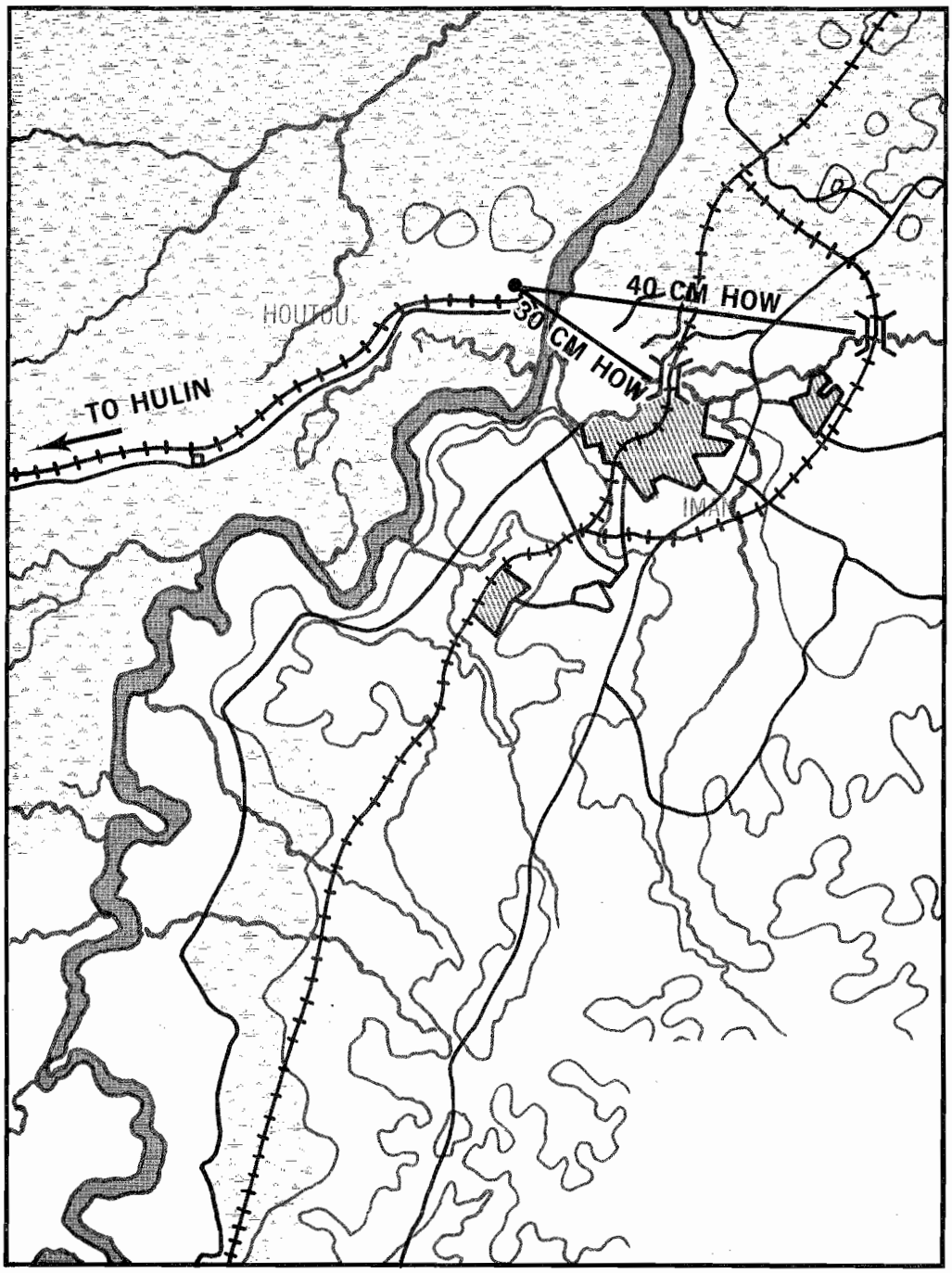
During this entire time, the Japanese artillery had remained silent and had not returned Soviet fire. The Japanese had heavy artillery available, but a lack of trained artillerymen hampered getting the guns into action. Moreover, the artillery commander, Capt. Oki Masao, had to do double duty as fortress commander. The guns consequently were not used to best effect during the early stage of the battle. Because the railway gun had not fired a single shot in anger against the Soviets, 5th Army Headquarters ordered it pulled back to Mishan shortly after dawn.

Captain Oki did not know whether this was a localized Soviet attack or the vanguard of a Soviet invasion, because communications with other friendly units had been disrupted, and the fortress commander was absent and unable to provide any guidance. Oki was not alone in his confusion: Kwantung Army Headquarters waited until 0600 on 9 August (five to six hours after the commencement of the Soviet invasion) before issuing orders to its subordinate units to destroy the invaders in accordance with respective operational plans.[16]

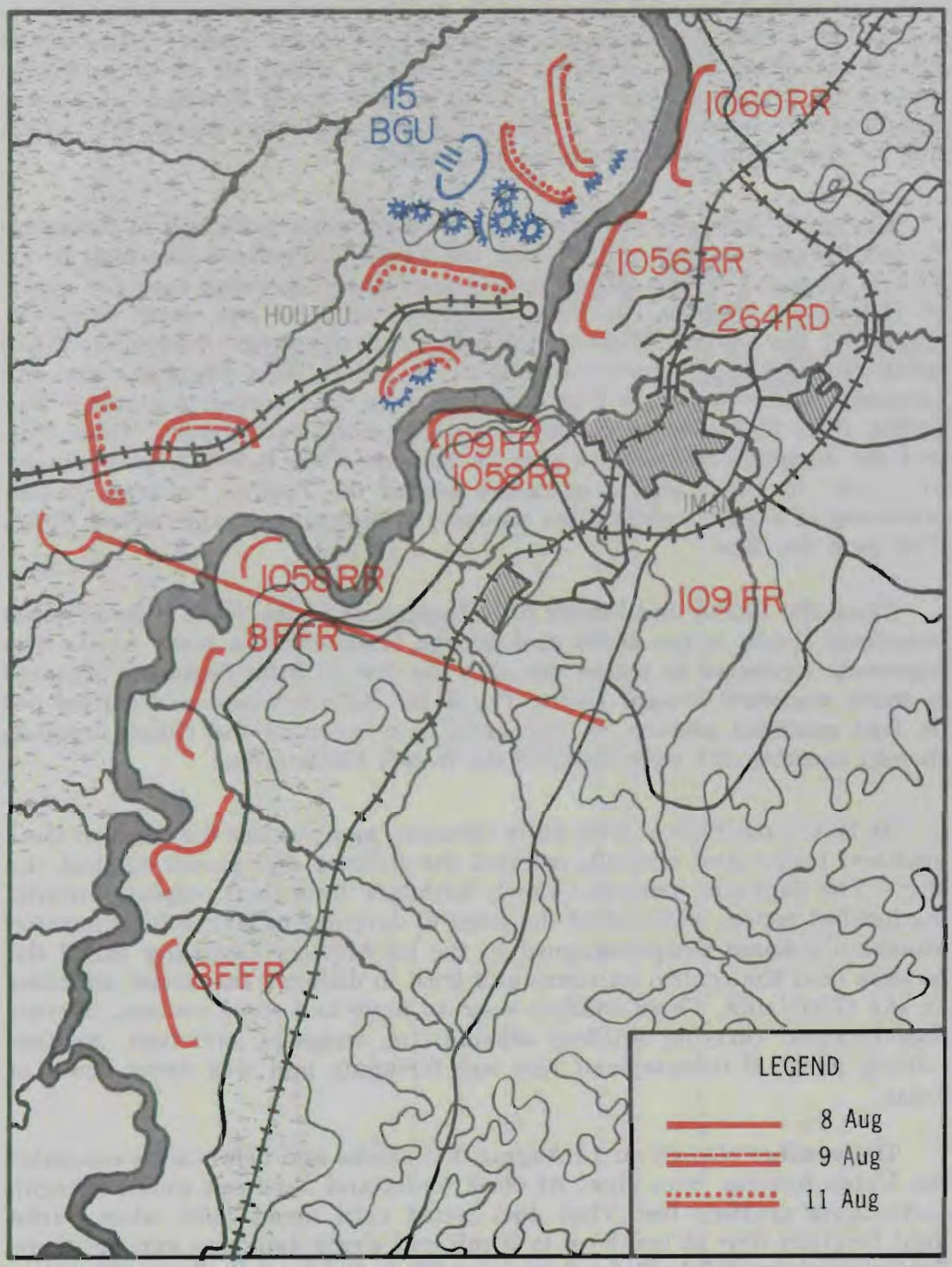
Not until 1100 did the acting commander of the 15th BGU authorize his artillery to return Soviet fire. At that time he ordered BGU forces to counterattack Soviet troops on the Ussuri's west bank and his artillery to suppress Soviet positions and artillery batteries.[17] The 40-cm howitzer then fired at the Iman railway bridge, while the 15-cm guns hit at Soviet artillery batteries opposite Hutou Station (see map 5—3). These specific targets had long been plotted on firing tables and had their meteorological data computed, so the initial rounds were very accurate. The one-ton projectiles hit the Iman bridge and, according to Japanese sources, temporarily closed it to rail traffic.[18]

The Soviets retaliated with a renewed artillery barrage directed against the now revealed Japanese artillery positions. An aviation force consisting of forty-nine IL-14 bombers, provided cover by fifty fighters, mounted a two-hour bombing raid on the defensive works, particularly the Japanese

*According to Soviet accounts, one battalion made the river crossing.



Map 5—3. Japanese Artillery Coverage at Hutou



Map 5—4. Soviet Attack on Hutou

artillery batteries. Russian artillery fire was especially violent because there were ten battalions of a Soviet army artillery group in place in order to destroy the permanent emplacements at Hutou.[19] Soviet artillery concentrated on the Japanese 40-cm howitzer and scored a direct hit on the concrete embrasure protecting the gun. Altogether, the 40-cm howitzer would fire seventy-four rounds before a direct hit and explosion inside the cupola destroyed the gun and its crew on 12 August.

Under the artillery and air cover, Soviet troops continued to cross the Ussuri during the day and expand the Soviet bridgehead (see map 5—4). Troops from the 1056th Rifle Regiment continued crossing east and south of Hutou and overran two small Japanese outposts just south of Hutou (called by the Soviets *Krepost* [fortress]). Two composite companies of the 109th Fortified Region, one company of the 1058th Rifle Regiment, and one company of the 8th Field Fortified Area were also across the river.[20] The 1056th Rifle Regiment began slowly moving northward toward Hutou City and the Japanese observation post at Rinkodai. The 1058th Rifle Regiment and 109th Fortified Region advanced toward the Yuehya Railroad Station southwest of the city, while other elements of the regiment approached Hutou City from the west.

Thus, the 1058th and 1056th Rifle Regiments of the 264th Rifle Division enveloped Hutou to the south and cut the Hutou-Mishan road. As the two regiments advanced to secure the city, the 1060th Rifle Regiment prepared to move westward toward Hulin. The 264th Rifle Division had carried out its first essential mission by bypassing and isolating the Hutou complex, thereby securing the right flank of the front's battle group.

At Hutou the Soviet 264th Rifle Division, again under the cover of their artillery, tanks, and aircraft, isolated the fortress and moved against the city.[21] The Japanese defenders slowly withdrew from their outposts towards the fortified region, while using the cover of darkness to launch local counter-attacks. Japanese troops assigned to the 2d Artillery Company exited the fortress near the central entrance and tried to dislodge the Soviet attackers on the river bank. These soldiers seem to have had some success, because they returned carrying artillery ammunition, weapons, and food. Another raiding party of infantrymen was less fortunate and was never heard of again.

The weather cleared on 10 August, but smoke and debris soon concealed the Hutou fortress from view. At 0630 Soviet and Japanese gunners began exchanging artillery fire. That duel lasted until about 1100, when Soviet light bombers flew at low level to bomb and strafe Japanese gun positions. Soviet bombers did inflict heavy casualties and destroyed one Japanese artillery piece. The aircraft were able to bomb with impunity because the Japanese had no antiaircraft artillery or machine guns to defend themselves against air attack.

The Soviets launched the main attack against Hutou City from the south, with diversionary attacks to the north and center of the fortress. The intent was to secure the city and thrust into the Japanese fortified zone north of Hutou. The 1056th Rifle Regiment and machine gun battalions of the 109th Fortified Region engaged in heavy fighting to capture the Hutou piers just east of the town.[22] The 1058th Rifle Regiment attacked the southern suburbs in an attempt to sweep through the city to the north and split the defenders

Hutou dock area

in two. Soviet troops managed to reach the defenses of 1st Company, 15th BGU, before a Japanese counterattack and hand-to-hand fighting drove them back south. By nightfall the Soviets, in spite of two Japanese counterattacks, had been able to seize the town of Hutou. They had less success against the fortifications adjacent to the city.[23] Indicative of the hard fighting, a captured Soviet lieutenant told the Japanese that he had had almost no sleep for three days and nights.[24]

To reduce the Japanese fortifications the Soviets formed assault groups from the attached combat engineer battalion and the forward rifle companies of the division's first echelon battalions (see map 5—5). These assault groups would infiltrate and reduce the Japanese positions. The division assault groups consisted of a rifle platoon with a field engineer and an antitank squad, one or two tanks or self-propelled artillery mounts, two machine gun squads, and two manpack flamethrower crews.* Obstacle clearing groups included three or four machine gunners and three or four combat engineers equipped with mine detectors, prodders, two bangalore torpedoes, clippers, and compasses. Each first echelon rifle company had two such groups.[25] One Japanese account refers to "infiltration attacks," which were probably the Soviet assault and obstacle clearing groups working themselves into position for night attacks.

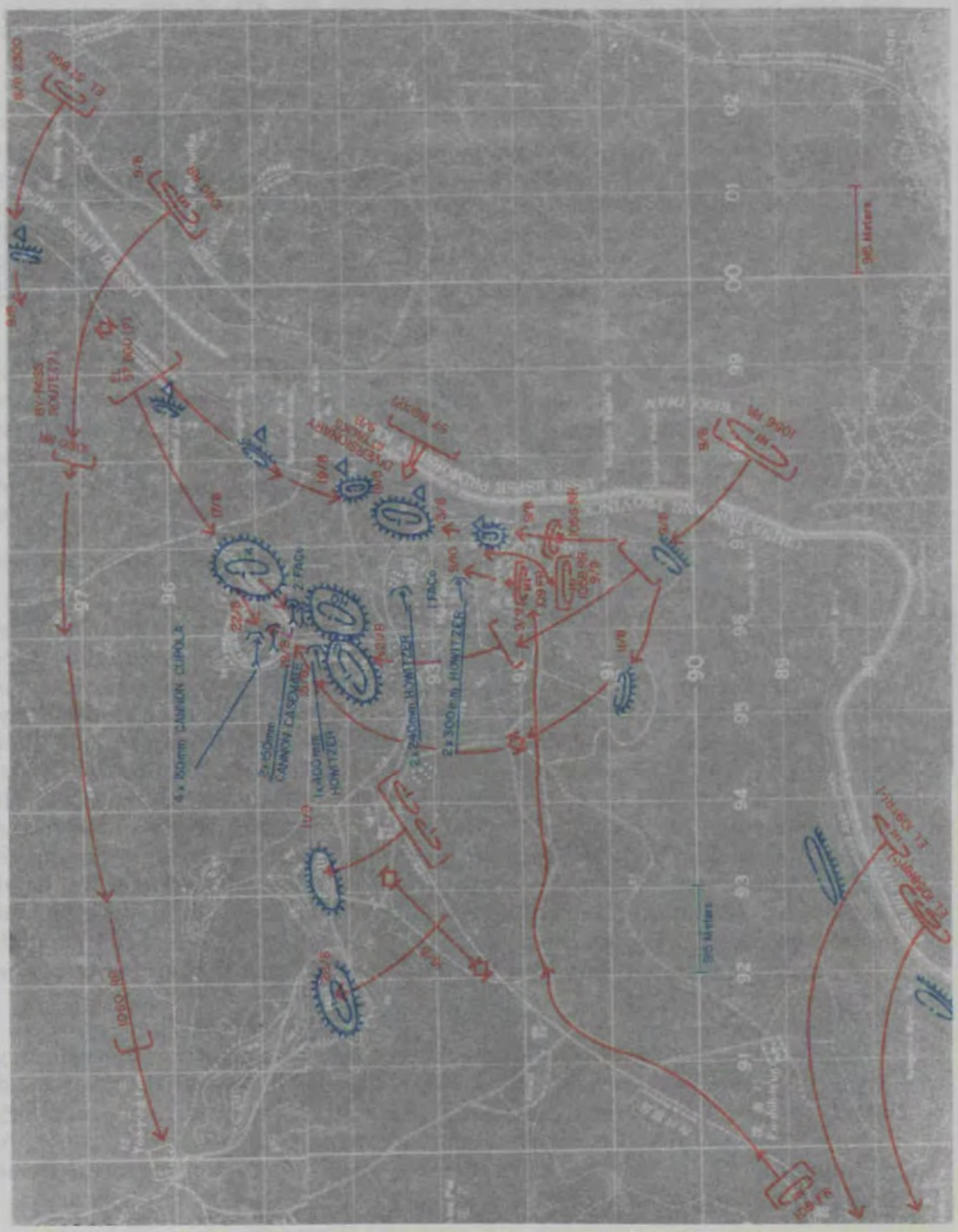
That evening, after the Soviet capture of Hutou City, a fierce Soviet artillery barrage raked the Japanese defenders in the fortified areas. The Soviets followed up the bombardment with a three-pronged attack by units from the 1056th Rifle Regiment, 1058th Rifle Regiment, and 109th Fortified Region. In this situation the Soviets relied on the forward battalions to penetrate the fortified areas. Taking advantage of darkness to conceal their movements and to attain surprise, they tried to seal off or destroy key strongpoints within the fortified areas by dawn.[26] The direct assaults on the night of the tenth failed.

After their failure to cut the fortress in half with a single offensive thrust, the Soviets became more cautious. The 35th Army commander ordered the 1056th Rifle Regiment and 109th Fortified Region to destroy "methodically individual fortifications."[27] The 1058th Rifle Regiment joined the 1060th in the army advance toward Hulin and Mishan. Soviet artillery and bombers pulverized the Japanese positions. This bombardment was so terrifying that the Japanese could not leave their underground positions to fight back. On the morning of this saturation fire, Soviet rifle units, accompanied by tanks (probably assault guns), again infiltrated Japanese defenses.

Assault groups overran the observation post for the central Japanese defenses. After destroying that pocket of resistance, they attempted to identify and bypass the strongest centers of Japanese defenses, leaving those for the rifle regiments to reduce.[28] Meanwhile, other Soviet units swung northwest around the fortifications.

At mid-morning two Soviet rifle companies working their way from the south to the north stormed Hill 119 and annihilated a platoon-size Japanese force defending that high ground. About the same time, a Japanese outpost manned by eighteen soldiers and flanking the southern approaches to Hutou from Hill 90 was overrun and the defenders listed as missing in action.

*A Soviet rifle division contained a separate self-propelled (SP) artillery battalion (thirteen SU-76s).



Map 5—5. Soviet Reduction of the Hutou Fortress

These small unit actions were characteristic of the Soviets' systematic isolation and reduction of the fortress. They were not spectacular operations, but they achieved their purpose of dividing the fortress and blinding its eyes.

That afternoon the 2d Artillery Company's 30-cm gun position, located just south of Hill 103, came under attack by approximately three rifle companies. The Japanese managed to destroy their own guns before they had to withdraw. Matters got worse for the Japanese. Following up the capture of Hill 119, the Soviets surrounded the heights and cut off all contact between 2d Company, 15th BGU, and the main fortress. The 2d Infantry Company existed in isolation and would fight on until 26 August before succumbing to the Soviet onslaught.

The Soviets spent 12 August consolidating their gains and using their newly won high ground to spot for their artillery. Soviet forward observers atop Hills 90 and 119 called down accurate artillery fire on the Japanese defenders. Japanese artillery was unable to return the fire because the Soviet spotters were adjacent to them in dead spaces. As their artillery pummeled the Japanese, the Soviets made preparations for their next major assault on the fortress.

On 13 August Soviet artillery, tanks, and infantry launched a concentrated assault on the very center of the Hutou fortress and on the only Japanese observation post (Rinkodai) remaining on the high ground overlooking the Ussuri. With assault groups leading the way, Soviet riflemen and tanks struck the fortress from the west, or rear, approach. First, they overran a Japanese outpost on the northeast side of the fortress and then sent infantry and tanks to drive a wedge from the west. Simultaneously, to the east, Soviet troops took the summits in the 3d Infantry Company, 15th BGU, defensive sector, despite Japanese counterattacks and hand grenade battles. From this high ground the Soviets dispatched assault groups to infiltrate the Japanese fortifications. After locating the exhaust vents of the fortress, Soviet combat engineers poured gasoline into the vents and ignited the fuel. Garrison members sheltered underground were asphyxiated. This practice became a standard Soviet tactic to drive the Japanese to the surface.

During this fighting, one of the Soviet tanks supporting the infantry apparently scored a direct hit on a 15-cm gun belonging to the nearby 2d Battery of the 2d Artillery Company. Assault teams and heavy artillery destroyed thirty Japanese weapons emplacements in a single day, probably 13 August.[29] The 109th Fortified Region units conducted many of these combined arms attacks.

The Japanese platoon occupying the summit at Rinkodai, the high ground just above the fortress observation post, had been waging a bitter four-day struggle. The fifty men had been fighting since the evening of 9

August. Finally on the thirteenth, the Soviets dislodged the defenders, but the Japanese regrouped and attacked up the slope. Their counterattack surprised the Soviets and swept them from the heights. The Soviets, in turn, drove the Japanese from the high ground, and the positions changed hands several times as nearby Japanese observers with binoculars witnessed grenade exchanges and hand-to-hand combat. Soviet numbers spelled victory, and waving a huge red flag, Soviet infantrymen stormed the heights and drove away the Japanese. That night, however, a twenty-two-year-old probational officer led a final sword-swinging counterattack against the Soviets. He was killed by a hand grenade, and the rest of his men perished. The central outpost was now completely in Soviet hands.

The Soviets continued to proceed methodically. After a rainstorm on 14 August, a Soviet infantry battalion surrounded the remaining Japanese outpost near Hill 103, called Ostraia (Sharp) by the Soviets. The Japanese defenders slipped away during the night and contacted friendly units. With the fall of the last Japanese observation post, the Soviets had effectively blinded Japanese artillery. The surviving artillerymen were therefore divided into antitank suicide squads and "special" (read "suicide") attack units.[30]

The Japanese defenders never received word of the emperor's radio broadcast ending hostilities, and the fighting continued as it had on previous days. Under overcast skies and rain, the Soviets tried to overrun the remaining Japanese 15-cm artillery piece in the 2d Artillery Company's sector. Grenades and point-blank artillery fire forced the Soviet attackers to withdraw. That night about fifteen Soviet medium tanks attacked the Japanese outpost protecting the entrance to the main underground fortress just north of Hill 103. The tanks shelled the entrance for about one hour before withdrawing.*

In a downpour on 16 August, the struggle for the central heights, Ostraia, continued. Farther west, Soviet tanks appeared that day, and about thirty attacked the 2d Infantry Company atop Hill 145. The company commander, a second lieutenant, had about 180 men—100 infantry and the rest a 37-mm antitank squad. The 37-mm was obsolete and worthless against Soviet T-34 tanks, as shells just ricocheted off the Soviet armor plating. The Japanese second lieutenant led repeated counterattacks against the Soviet tanks, but the net result was to get himself and most of his men killed in the hopeless struggle. By the end of the sixteenth, after a three-day struggle, the Soviets secured Ostraia, but only after the central heights had changed

*These tanks may have come from the 3d Battalion, 125th Tank Brigade, which had originally tried to spearhead the Soviet advance across the swampy Sungacha Valley. Finding it impossible to move in the marshes, this brigade and the 209th Tank Brigade were pulled back into reserve on 10 August. The 125th, less the 3d Battalion, later appeared at Mishan.[31] The apparent lack of coordinated effort in support of the 15 August night attack supports the theory that these tanks came from units not originally attached to the 264th Rifle Division or to the 109th Fortified Region. These two units seem to have operated together, probably because of the extensive training they had undergone just before the invasion.

hands nine times.[32] The hilltop did hold out for another eleven days, but the Soviets surrounded and occupied the hill above the underground fort on 20 August. The Japanese survivors, after a last-ditch attempt to break out on 26 August, committed suicide with hand grenades and explosives near the underground entrance.[33]

The defense was now degenerating into a cat-and-mouse game. Soviet engineers and infantrymen held most of the ground underneath which the Japanese tenaciously held scattered fortified points. The Soviets searched for exhaust vents, and if they discovered one, poured gasoline into it and ignited the fluid. Carbon monoxide levels in the underground vaults reached dangerous proportions, and some garrison members and their dependents became violently ill.

As desperate as their situtation was, the Japanese had no intention of giving up. They demonstrated this dramatically on 17 August when the Soviets sent a five-man delegation comprising captured Japanese into the fortress under a white flag. The delegation reported in bright sunlight to a Japanese first lieutenant and informed him that Japan had surrendered unconditionally two days earlier. The officer departed; when he returned, he told the delegation that Japanese soldiers could never surrender.* To punctuate his point, he suddenly drew his sword and beheaded one member of the surrender delegation.

The Soviets immediately pounded the Japanese positions with artillery and bomber attacks. Then Soviet assault groups led rifle companies in an attack against Hill 114, occupied by the 3d Infantry Company. Heavy fighting developed over the control of this summit. By nightfall the Soviets had already occupied the highest ground around Hill 114 and had brought in field artillery to fire directly into Japanese defensive positions. The Japanese counterattacked and once even seized the Soviet gun pits, but the superior Soviet strength drove the desperate defenders back. The Soviets then positioned self-propelled guns, rocket launchers, and other weapons previously unobserved by the Japanese near the slope of Hill 114. Their combined artillery bombardment, again coupled with air strikes, made it impossible for the Japanese defenders to leave their underground positions to defend the heights. Under this massive covering fire, Soviet riflemen took all of Hill 114 and then repositioned their own artillery weapons on the summit.[34]

That same day, the 4th Infantry Company, 15th BGU, defending the northernmost sector of the fortress and protecting the northern flank of the 2d Artillery Company's gun positions, was overrun. The 4th had held what the Soviets called Severnyi Gorodok (Northern Village) against Soviet attacks on 13 and 14 August. These company- and platoon-size Soviet attacks were

*According to the revised 1941 version of the Japanese Articles of War, troops who surrendered uninjured risked court-martial punishment. The Soviets were also impressed by the incident and later described it as a wholesale massacre in which "prisoners were chopped up by the sabres of Japanese officers."[35]

most likely probes designed to fix the Japanese defenders and defenses for the main attack. With only about half his original 150 effectives still alive, the Japanese company commander had to abandon the northern salient and lead his survivors to the main Japanese fortifications. Most of the men, however, were killed or captured during their attempted escape. The company commander later died during captivity in the USSR.[36]

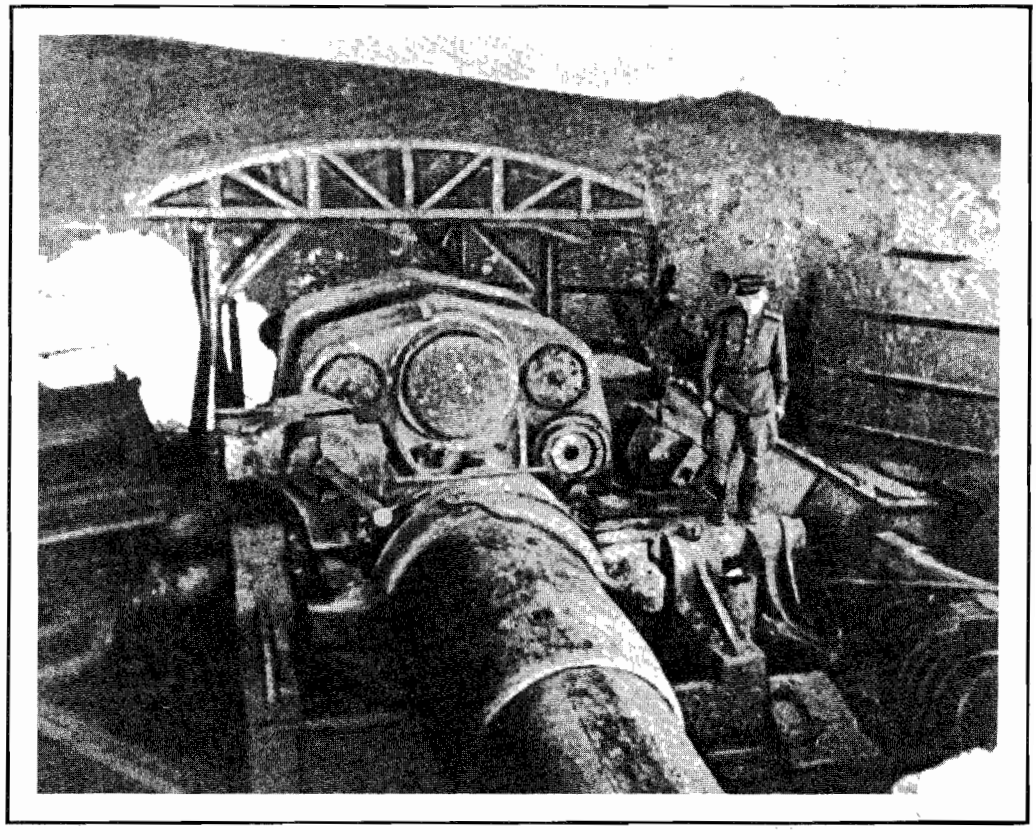
Around 2200 on 17 August, the Soviets succeeded in surrounding the 2d Artillery Company's positions. During this fighting, one Japanese 15-cm cannon gun turret was destroyed when its companion gun accidently hit it while attempting to fire point-blank into the Soviet attackers. At dawn on 18 August, the Soviets launched a large-scale assault on the positions of the 2d Artillery. A Soviet rifle battalion, probably from the 1056th Rifle Regiment, supported by self-propelled guns, tanks, and the 97th Separate Artillery Battalion of the 109th Fortified Region, resumed its attack on the positions. Covered by the tank and self-propelled direct fire, as well as by the direct fire of the 97th's guns, Soviet infantrymen tried to break into the underground vaults and destroy the gun turrets within. A vicious struggle ensued in which the Japanese were reduced to firing blank cartridges into the onrushing Soviet troops. Not willing to squander manpower to achieve the inevitable, the Soviets withdrew. During the seventeenth the Soviets brought up two batteries of 203-mm guns to help reduce the fortified positions by direct fire. In all, thirty-four high powered guns joined in the reduction effort.[37]

The next day the Soviets continued their attacks, but the Japanese judged that Soviet losses on the eighteenth must have been considerable, because the Soviets did not press their attacks with any great enthusiasm. Artillery and aircraft pounded the remaining Japanese pockets of resistance, and "heavy tanks" (probably assault guns) reached the main entrance to the underground complex, where Soviet riflemen and machine gunners exchanged grenades and small arms fire with the Japanese defenders. Enemy shelling finally destroyed a portion of the thick concrete roof between the 2d Artillery Company and the command post. Communications were severed, and the passageway turned into a small lake because of a steady downpour through the gaping hole in the roof. The Soviets now controlled all the top ground, and the Japanese scurried below, trying to strike back at their tormentors.

The fighting, for all intents, was over. On the night of the nineteenth, after Soviet probes against the central Japanese positions, several Japanese blew themselves to pieces to avoid the disgrace of being captured alive. Others were cut down by Soviet machine gunners as they tried to escape what had been transformed into a big underground tomb.

A few Japanese survivors watched as the Soviets collected Soviet dead in broad daylight on 20 August, apparently unconcerned that the Japanese were still prowling in the bowels of the forts. That night small parties of Japanese tried to escape. Some were successful, but most were not.

The Soviets proceeded methodically to finish off the Japanese still underground, including 600 noncombatants. The Japanese allege that the Soviets used some form of gas to eliminate these last pockets of resistance. Only on 22 August, following still more air strikes and artillery barrages, did the 109th Fortified Region finally declare that it had seized the center of Japanese resistance.[38]



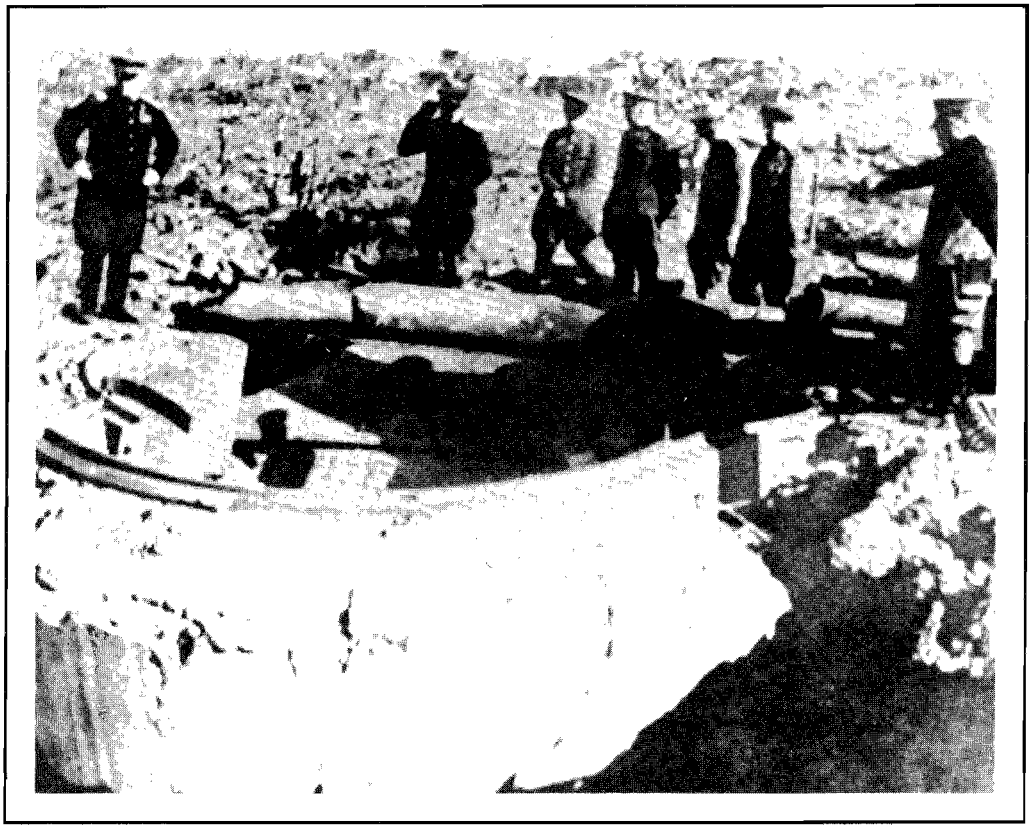
Captured Japanese heavy artillery piece at Hutou

Conclusions

The Japanese garrison at Hutou fought with stoic valor, but, despite their efforts, the result was a foregone conclusion. What the Soviets did, reducing the Hutou fortress, is not therefore the paramount consideration. How the Soviets took the fortress is important. The battle at Hutou provides an insight into Soviet tactics against a fortified strongpoint, and there is every reason to believe that they would employ similar tactics, should the need arise in a conventional war.

The Soviet troops who participated in the reduction of the Hutou fortress complex were well trained and thoroughly rehearsed for the operation. Their training exercises conducted just before the invasion conditioned the

Japanese defenders to the sound of Soviet artillery fire. When that artillery fire was turned on the Japanese, they were uncertain whether it was the start of a shooting war or of an overexuberant local Soviet commander showing off. That initial confusion added to the Soviets' tactical surprise.



Marshal Meretskov examines a Japanese strongpoint at Hutou

While the Soviet troops may have been well rehearsed, that did not mean their operations were stereotyped. Flexibility existed throughout the Manchurian operations. The use of artillery, for instance, illustrates how the Soviets tailored their forces to meet operational requirements. The Hutou attackers received more artillery support than the southern wing of 35th Army, because Hutou was a fortified area. Conversely, they received less armor support than other 35th Army sectors, because they were not expected to make a rapid advance. Theirs was to be a systematic destruction of an enemy position fortified in width and depth. At Hutou the artillery performed its job by disrupting and isolating the Japanese defenders and covering Soviet assault groups. The assault groups represent another aspect of Soviet task organization, which tailored specific units for specific missions. Throughout the Hutou fighting, Soviet tactics were highly refined and characteristic of Soviet tactics employed during the entire Manchurian campaign.

There were no massed frontal assaults or wave-type attacks. Soviet infantrymen flanked, enveloped, encircled, isolated, and then destroyed Japanese strongpoints. The Soviets were extremely frugal with their own lives, but lavish with artillery and air support for their Hutou operation. Sheer Soviet manpower did not take Hutou. Soviet combined arms forces worked well together during the fighting. As soon as the infantry identified significant Japanese targets, Soviet air, artillery, or self-propelled assault guns would bring fire to bear on those targets. The infantry also showed its initiative by skillful infiltration tactics, usually conducted at night, which isolated Japanese strongpoints at a cost of minimum Soviet casualties. The infiltrators also became spotters and observers to identify lucrative targets for their other combined arms to overcome. The Soviets also took advantage of the cover of darkness to position troops and weapons for early morning surprise assaults against Japanese fortifications. It is true that the Japanese opposition was inferior in every respect to its Soviet opponents. But the Soviets were able to accomplish all their objectives at Hutou in a relatively rapid manner without expending vast quantities of human lives. Soviet commanders appear to have judged the Japanese military situation accurately and conducted their operations with the skill and precision that only years of command instill.

Notes

1. U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Studies on Manchuria, vol. 11, pt. 2: *Small Wars and Border Problems* (Tokyo, 1956), 21.
2. Ibid. See also Yamanishi Sakae, "TōManshu Kōtō yōsai no gekitō" [Eastern Manchuria: The fierce battle of the Hutou Fortress], *Rekishi to Jinbutsu*, August 1979:99—100. In August 1945, Yamanishi was a second lieutenant in command of an outpost of the Hutou fortress.
3. Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 102.
4. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 122. Also see Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 100.
5. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 122.
6. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 42.
7. Ibid.; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 94.
8. Bōeichō Bōei Kenshūjō Senshishitsu [Japan Self Defense Forces, National Defense College Military History Department], ed., *Senshi sōsho: Kantōgun* (2) [Military history series: The Kwantung Army, vol. 2] (Tokyo: Asagumo shinbunsha, 1974), 482.
9. Kusachi Teigō, *Sonohi, Kantōgun wa* [That day, the Kwantung Army] (Tokyo: Miyakawa shobo, 1967), 97.
10. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 148.
11. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 137—42.
12. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 137, 152.
13. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 45.
14. Ibid., 46; *SoMan kōkkyō*.
15. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 46; Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 99.
16. Bōeichō, *Senshi Sōsho*, 395.
17. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 167; Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 101—2.

18. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 139; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 204.
19. *IVMV*, 232.
20. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 46.
21. Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 102.
22. *IVMV*, 25.
23. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 213.
24. *SoMan kōkkyō*.
25. I. Tret'iak, "Organizatsiia i vedenie nastupatel'nogo boia" [The organization and conduct of offensive battle], *VIZh*, July 1980:2.
26. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 213.
27. Ibid.
28. *IVMV*, 232.
29. Ibid.
30. *SoMan kōkkyō*.
31. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 47, nn. 12 and 13.
32. *SoMan kōkkyō*; Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 106—7.
33. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 253.
34. Ibid., 285.
35. Ibid., 263.
36. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 174.
37. Ibid.
38. *IVMV*, 252.

Army Operations in Arid Mountains

6

Situation in Western Manchuria

Japanese defensive planning in Manchuria recognized geographical realities and combat experiences in the region. Accordingly, Japanese force deployment in western Manchuria reflected a terrain assessment and regional history. The major geographical feature in western Manchuria is the Grand Khingan Mountain range, the traditional barrier to invasion of Manchuria from the west. A second feature, the vast expanse of desert and steppe land west of the Grand Khingans, reinforces the defensive value of the Grand Khingans themselves. Any force invading from the west would first have to cross this extensive desert waste, then traverse the formidable Grand Khingan Mountains.

Japanese consideration of these geographical factors, as well as analysis of the historical record, led them to two conclusions. First, the Grand Khingan Mountains, though of moderate height and ruggedness, formed an imposing barrier: because of the waterless expanses lying before the mountain range, the only feasible avenues of advance through the mountains were the passes parallel to the rail lines that crossed the mountains from Halung-Arshaan to Solun and from Yakoshih to Pokotu. Second, Japanese experience in the 1930s in general, and the battle of Khalkhin-Gol (Japanese name, Nomonhan) in particular, indicated roughly the size force the Soviets could deploy against western Manchuria. During the so-called Khalkhin-Gol incident in August 1939 the Soviets had deployed more than 50,000 men into eastern Mongolia, about the maximum number that the water resources and transportation network of the region could sustain. In 1945 the Japanese believed the Soviets could deploy about the same number into eastern Mongolia. They conceded that the Soviets could field a greater force into areas adjacent to the Trans-Siberian Railroad (against northwestern Manchuria), perhaps as many as 150,000 men. This total invasion force of 150,000 to 200,000 men would require, however, the total use of the terrain and the transportation network adjacent to northwestern Manchuria. But, as previously noted, the Japanese had concluded that invading forces could only operate along two major avenues of approach.

Japanese forces deployed accordingly. They constructed strong fortifications along the two major avenues of approach through the Grand Khingan Mountains and stationed at least one infantry division in each of the fortified regions. They expected these forces to delay and perhaps even successfully defend for an extended period against the postulated Soviet threat. Since the Japanese strategy depended on the attrition of Soviet forces, that attrition should have been greatest in the easily defensible regions of western Manchuria.

As they had in 1939, the Japanese again in 1945 underestimated Soviet logistical and combat capabilities. The Soviets ultimately deployed more than 350,000 men into eastern Mongolia and unleashed them against the Japanese along ten axes of advance. Thus, a defense that the Japanese perceived as adequate became in essence an open flank and the real Achilles' heel of the overall Japanese defensive network in Manchuria.

In the eyes of Soviet planners the most critical sector of operations against western Manchuria was extreme eastern Mongolia, the salient around Tamsag-Bulag that pointed like a dagger toward the interior of Manchuria. The eastern end of the salient was the closest point to central Manchuria where Soviet forces could deploy. The salient, however, directly faced one of the two heavily defended avenues of approach through the Grand Khingan Mountains, the route from Halung-Arshaan to Solun. Into this sector the Soviets deployed three armies. Two of the armies (6th Guards Tank Army and 39th Army), acting as a shock group, would spearhead the advance. These two armies would advance rapidly, bypass the Japanese permanent defenses, and penetrate quickly into central Manchuria before the surprised Japanese could halt them. Surprise was paramount and would more than compensate for potential Japanese resistance and the hindrances of the rugged terrain. Surprise plus a rapid advance in the west would secure victory for the Soviets in Manchuria as a whole.

Missions and Tasks

The Soviet Far East Command assigned responsibility for operations against western Manchuria to the Trans-Baikal Front of Marshal Rodion Ya. Malinovsky. A High Command directive of 5 July 1945 ordered the front to "strike the main blow with a force of three combined arms armies and one tank army to envelop the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region from the south in the general direction of Changchun."[1] The immediate mission of the front was to smash the defending enemy, cross the Grand Khingan Mountains, and then to secure with main front forces a line from Dabanshan through Lupei to Solun by the fifteenth day of the operation. By the tenth day of the operation, the 6th Guards Tank Army, operating in the general direction of Changchun, would force the Grand Khingan Mountains, defend the passes through the mountains, and hold them

against enemy reserves until the arrival of the follow-on combined arms armies. Then, the main forces of the front would secure the Chihfeng-Mukden-Shantoiakou-Changchun-Chalantun line.

Marshal Malinovsky's concept of the operation required

> an impetuous approach to the mountains, rapid seizure of the passes and exit from the mountains by tank and motorized infantry who would forestall the possibility of enemy reserves approaching the Khingans from the depths of Manchuria and facilitate the advance of our infantry. Success in the operation demanded surprise and great swiftness of action.[2]

Malinovsky designated the 39th, 53d, and 17th Armies and the 6th Guards Tank Army to make the front main attack. The 39th Army, 17th Army, and 6th Guards Tank Army would be in first echelon; the 53d Army, in second echelon. The 39th Army and 6th Guards Tank Army would attack from the Mongolian salient east of Tamsag-Bulag. In a visit to 39th Army headquarters on 12 July, Malinovsky spelled out the specific task of 39th Army. It was to

> deliver its main attack from the region southwest of Halung-Arshaan in the general direction of Solun. Having enveloped the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region from the south, the army had the immediate mission of arriving on the line of the Urlengui-Gol River [Urgen Gol—a depth of 60 kilometers]. Subsequently, by decisive blows, [it was to] cut the path of retreat to the southeast of the enemy Solun troop concentration and, by the 15th day of the operation, secure the Solun region [a depth of 300—350 kilometers].[3]

In addition, the army would attack with a force of not less than two rifle divisions on a secondary axis toward Hailar and would cooperate with 36th Army to prevent Japanese forces at Hailar from supporting those at Solun. A third force of one rifle division would attack the right (northern) flank of the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region. To accomplish this mission, the 39th Army commander, General I. I. Lyudnikov had three rifle corps of nine rifle divisions, two tank brigades, one tank division, and numerous attached supporting units. The army mustered a total strength of 502 tanks and self-propelled guns and 2,708 guns and mortars (see table 6—1).[4]

General Lyudnikov's 39th Army occupied the easternmost portion of the Outer Mongolian Tamsag-Bulag salient. Directly to the east of his forces loomed the central sector of the Grand Khingan Mountains and the pass through the mountains running northwest to southeast from Handagai to Wuchakou. South of the pass, the mountains ranged in heights of from 1,200 to 1,400 meters, 200 to 300 meters above the elevation from which the army launched its attack. These mountains, which extended to a depth of 100 kilometers east to west, offered good visibility, because trees existed only near springs and in the valleys that traversed the mountains. North of the main pass, the mountains rose higher (1,800 meters) and the mountainous region was wider (200 kilometers). Soil conditions and scattered

wooded areas made movement in this sector, especially during rainy periods, virtually impossible. Gullies, narrow valleys, and defiles intersected the entire mountain massif.

Table 6—1. Soviet 39th Army Composition

- 39th Army: Col. Gen. I. I. Lyudnikov
  - 5th Guards Rifle Corps: Lt. Gen. I. S. Bezugly
    - 17th Guards Rifle Division
    - 19th Guards Rifle Division
    - 91st Guards Rifle Division
  - 94th Rifle Corps: Maj. Gen. I. I. Popov
    - 124th Rifle Division
    - 221st Rifle Division
    - 358th Rifle Division
  - 113th Rifle Corps: Lt. Gen. N. N. Oleshev
    - 192d Rifle Division
    - 262d Rifle Division
    - 338th Rifle Division
  - 61st Tank Division
  - 44th Tank Brigade
  - 206th Tank Brigade
  - 735th SP Artillery Regiment
  - 927th SP Artillery Regiment
  - 1197th SP Artillery Regiment
  - 5th Artillery Breakthrough Corps: Maj. Gen. L. N. Alekseev
    - 3d Guards Artillery Breakthrough Division
      - 8th Guards Howitzer Artillery Brigade
      - 22d Guards Gun Artillery Brigade
      - 99th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade
      - 43d Mortar Brigade
      - 50th Heavy Mortar Brigade
      - 14th Guards Mortar Brigade
    - 6th Guards Artillery Breakthrough Division
      - 29th Guards Gun Artillery Brigade
      - 69th Light Artillery Brigade
      - 87th Heavy Howitzer Brigade
      - 134th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
      - 4th Mortar Brigade
      - 10th Guards Mortar Brigade
    - 139th Gun Artillery Brigade
    - 55th Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade
    - 390th Gun Artillery Regiment
    - 1142d Gun Artillery Regiment
    - 1143d Gun Artillery Regiment
    - 629th Artillery Regiment
    - 610th Tank Destroyer Regiment

555th Mortar Regiment
24th Guards Mortar Brigade
34th Guards Mortar Regiment
46th Guards Mortar Regiment
64th Guards Mortar Regiment
14th Antiaircraft Artillery Division
    715th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
    718th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
    721st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
    2013th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
621st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
63d Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
32d Engineer Sapper Brigade

Weapons:

502 tanks and SP guns
2,708 guns and mortars

Source: M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 399—400.

Japanese Defenses

The narrow pass from Handagai to Wuchakou was traversed by a rail line and a road that ran throughout its length. The Taoerh Ho flowed through the pass, forming an obstacle to lateral movement, especially in flood stage. The only road in the entire region suitable to support military operations was the Handagai-Wuchakou-Solun road. Formidable as these natural obstacles were, the primary obstacles to movement through the pass were numerous and substantial fortifications and defensive field positions the Japanese had erected. Around Iruse, Arshaan, and Wuchakou, the Japanese constructed defensive emplacements consisting of pillboxes, earthen dugouts, trenches, and, in the Wuchakou area, reinforced concrete field fortifications. A line of entrenchments covered the railroad toward south of Arshaan, and additional field works covered the road junction south of Handagai. West of the road in the hills adjacent to the border, the Japanese built observation posts and occasional field works manned by units ranging in size from squad to full battalion. A second line of field positions to the west of Wangyemiao was incomplete in August 1945. In short, an extensive and elaborate fortification system defended the main avenue of approach into central Manchuria from Outer Mongolia.

The Japanese 107th Infantry Division of Lt. Gen. Abe Koichi, with headquarters at Wuchakou, manned these fortifications and positions along the rail line to Wangyemiao (see table 6—2). The 107th Infantry Division was

subordinate to 44th Army, whose mission was to cover enemy invasion routes into western Manchuria from Handagai to the south. To accomplish its mission, the 44th Army deployed its 107th Infantry Division in the Handagai-Wangyemiao sector, its 117th Infantry Division farther to the rear at Paichengtzu, and its 63d Infantry Division to the south at Tungliao. The 2d Raiding Battalion stationed at Wangyemiao would support the 107th Infantry Division.[5]

Table 6—2. Japanese 107th Infantry Division Composition

107th Infantry Division

90th Infantry Regiment
177th Infantry Regiment
178th Infantry Regiment
107th Artillery Regiment
107th Engineer Regiment
107th Transportation Regiment
107th Signal Regiment
107th Reconnaissance Company

Source: Ōta Hisaō, *Dai 107 shidan shi: Saigō made tatakatta Kantōgun* [The history of the 107th Division: The Kwantung Army that resisted to the last] (Tokyo: Taiseidō Shoten Shuppanbu, 1979), 14, 24, 26, 72, 76—79.

Soviet Operational Planning

By July 1945, the 44th Army had completed its plans that called for conduct of a defense by small units in the border regions and a slow, delaying operation by army main forces into central Manchuria. Ultimately, army forces would withdraw into the defenses of the redoubt area around Tunghua in southeastern Manchuria. The 44th Army specifically ordered the 107th Infantry Division to

> secure the prepared positions in the vicinities of Wuchakou and Hsingan (Wangyemiao), and the rest of the commands will secure the key traffic points along the Ssupingchieh-Taonan Railroad and the Liaoyuan-Tungliao Railroad and check the enemy advance at these positions. Positions will be organized at key traffic points; guerrilla warfare will be carried out with these positions as the bases of areas of approximately 20 kilometers radius. If the enemy detours around these positions, he will be attacked in the rear.[6]

The 107th Infantry Division placed two regiments (90th and 177th) in positions to defend the critical route from Handagai to Wuchakou. The 1st Battalion, 90th Infantry Regiment, defended Iruse, with its outposts

covering Handagai and the areas west of Iruse along the Mongolian border. The 2d Battalion, 90th Infantry Regiment, defended a string of company-size outposts west of Arshaan and manned fortifications around Arshaan proper and the railroad tunnel to the south. The 3d Battalion, 90th Infantry Regiment, and the three battalions of the 177th Infantry Regiment defended positions ringing Wuchakou and the heavily fortified emplacements in the immediate vicinity of the city. The raiding battalion of the 107th Infantry Division, formed only in July, was also stationed at Wuchakou. The 178th Infantry Regiment occupied positions at Solun, Wangyemiao, and other points along the rail line between those major towns.[7] The 44th Army's 2d Raiding Battalion at Wangyemiao and the Manchurian 2d Cavalry Division, headquartered at Solun, provided additional support for the 107th Infantry Division.

Although the 107th Infantry Division had adequate manpower, its weaponry was deficient. In June 1945 Imperial General Headquarters had requisitioned half of its antitank guns for use in the defense of Japan and had also reduced the equipment of the artillery regiment. Yet, given the nature of fixed defenses in the region adjacent to the Mongolian border and Japanese faith in terrain as an effective barrier to Soviet attack, the Japanese 44th Army felt its position to be relatively secure in August 1945. As one staff officer stated, "In the immediate vicinity of the 44th Army border, there were absolutely no indications of a large concentration of troops even immediately prior to Soviet Russia's entry into the war."[8]

Having received his army's mission from Marshal Malinovsky, General Lyudnikov planned his operations in light of the terrain and Japanese deployments. Lyudnikov's ultimate aim was to attack swiftly in order to deny the Japanese the opportunity to regroup and construct a broader defensive line. He also wanted to avoid a costly direct attack on the heavily fortified Japanese defenses in the Grand Khingan passes. To accomplish these ambitious goals, 39th Army would attempt to sustain an advance of fifty to sixty kilometers per day, which would enable the army to move forward in tandem with 6th Guards Tank Army advancing on its right. Such a pace would insure that on the seventh day of the operation the 39th Army would be around the defended pass and able to secure a line from Solun to Hailahai.

The final 39th Army plan called for a two-stage army operation of six to seven days' duration to accomplish the missions spelled out in the Trans-Baikal Front plan.[9] During the first stage, 39th Army would bypass the forward Japanese defenses and cross the Grand Khingan Mountains. The main attack force would march south and east via Dzurkin Harul and Boto Nela to reach a line of Tiikhonera-Kakusupera, while the secondary attack force would reach Ulan Koragan, Bain Chaumiao, and Tappi Bancha. The first stage was scheduled to last four days. In the second stage, the Army would attack Solun and Hailar to destroy Japanese forces in those regions. The second stage would last two to three days.

General Lyudnikov's army operational formation was designed to achieve these objectives rapidly. The army formed in a single echelon of three rifle corps abreast. On the main attack axis (against Solun), the 61st Tank Division led the attack as the mobile group of the army. The 113th Rifle Corps of Lt. Gen. N. N. Oleshev and 5th Guards Rifle Corps of Lt. Gen. I. S. Bezugly followed the tank division on a front forty-five kilometers wide. Each of the corps had a reinforced tank brigade attached for use as a corps forward detachment. A divisional forward detachment consisting of

Trans-Baikal Front troops move forward into jumping-off positions

a rifle battalion on trucks, a self-propelled artillery battalion, an antitank battalion, an artillery battalion, and two guards mortar battalions* led the advance of each first echelon rifle division. The division forward detachments led the offensive, followed by the tank brigades (corps forward detachments) and the two rifle divisions (in corps first echelon). The remaining rifle division in each corps second echelon brought up the rear. All units of the army advanced in march column formation.[10]

*Soviet term for multiple rocket launcher units.

On the secondary attack axis (against Hailar), the 94th Rifle Corps of Maj. Gen. I. I. Popov placed both of its rifle divisions in first echelon. The 124th Rifle Division of 94th Rifle Corps, in army reserve, deployed directly against the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region to support the army's main attack.

The Trans-Baikal Front provided considerable armor and artillery support to 39th Army so that it could advance rapidly yet simultaneously provide the firepower necessary to reduce Japanese defensive strongholds. The 39th Army routinely deployed its armored units in the first echelon at virtually every level of command. Soviet forces were bypassing the major Japanese defenses, so the army did not need to mass its artillery fires or create regimental, division, or corps artillery groups. Instead, it allocated artillery to the corps and divisions on the basis of one artillery penetration division and one guards mortar regiment per each corps on the main attack axis, a concentration of more than 2,000 guns and mortars in the main attack sector.[11]

Most of the artillery moved in column formation, integrated within and following the division and corps march columns. The difficult terrain restricted column movement, especially of heavy equipment, and much of the artillery lagged well behind the advancing tanks and infantry. This meant that the army would conduct no systematic artillery preparation preceding the attack. Instead the artillery would be used to fire on-call missions to support the forward movement of the corps' forward detachments.

One fighter aviation division, minus one regiment, of the 12th Air Army would provide air support for 39th Army. On the first day of the operation, aviation would bomb Solun, Hailar, and the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region and Japanese airfields.[12] Each corps also received heavy engineer support in order to prepare and maintain the almost nonexistent road network, to overcome the Grand Khingan Mountains and water obstacles east of the mountains, and to assist in reducing Japanese fortified positions (see table 6—3).

On 2 August, Marshal Malinovsky visited 39th Army headquarters, approved General Lyudnikov's plan, and ordered 39th Army to move forward into its concentration area. That evening, army units began the 120—130-kilometer march. The 113th Rifle Corps, with its attached units, marched forward in two columns and deployed at 0600 on 4 August near Ara Bulagin Obo. The 5th Guards Rifle Corps marched in three columns and occupied its concentration area east of the 113th Rifle Corps at 0600 on 5 August. The 94th Rifle Corps (minus the 124th Rifle Division) concentrated in the region of Herempte Nur at 0600 on 3 August, while the 124th Rifle Division deployed into positions near Derkin Tragan Obo at

0600 on 5 August. Other army units completed their redeployment by nightfall on 6 August. All units used their time during the long march forward to conduct training and to practice water discipline.[13]

Table 6—3. Allocation of Support Units to 39th Army Subordinate Units

113th Rifle Corps
- 206th Tank Brigade
- 69th Light Artillery Brigade
- 134th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
- 87th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade
- 29th Gun Artillery Brigade
- 4th Mortar Brigade
- 10th Guards Mortar Brigade
- One regiment light antiaircraft artillery
- 203d Engineer-Sapper Battalion

TOTAL: 860 guns and mortars
112 tanks and self-propelled guns

5th Guards Rifle Corps
- 44th Tank Brigade
- 8th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
- 99th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade
- 22d Gun Artillery Brigade
- 50th Heavy Mortar Brigade
- 43d Mortar Brigade
- 14th Guards Mortar Brigade
- 65th Guards Mortar Regiment
- One regiment light antiaircraft artillery
- 230th Engineer-Sapper Battalion

TOTAL: 830 guns and mortars
119 tanks and self-propelled guns

61st Tank Division
164 tanks

94th Rifle Corps
- 1142d Gun Artillery Regiment
- 390th Gun Artillery Regiment
- 629th Gun Artillery Regiment
- 610th Antitank Regiment
- 46th Guards Mortar Regiment
- 228th Engineer-Sapper Battalion

TOTAL: 508 guns and mortars
47 tanks and self-propelled guns

Army Artillery Group

139th Army Gun Artillery Brigade
1143d Gun Artillery Regiment
55th Antitank Brigade (minus one regiment)
621st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
63d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion

TOTAL: 224 guns and mortars

Artillery Reserve
164 guns and mortars

Tank Reserve
13 tanks and self-propelled guns

Engineer Reserve
One pontoon bridge battalion
One engineer-sapper battalion

TOTAL: 2,586 guns and mortars
455 tanks and self-propelled guns

Source: I. I. Lyudnikov, *Cherez bol'shoi khingan* [Across the Grand Khingan] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1967), 51—52; I. I. Lyudnikov, *Doroga dlinoiu v zhizn* [The long road in life] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1969), 168.

Late on the evening of 8 August all units occupied jumping-off positions along the border in readiness for the attack. The advance across the border would occur two hours after the receipt from front headquarters of the code word *Molniia* (lightning). At 2100 on 8 August Gen. M. V. Zakharov, chief of staff of the Trans-Baikal Front, notified 39th Army of the H-hour for the attack and gave precise instructions concerning the initial hours of the attack. The 39th Army units would initiate the attack with a time-phased commitment of its units. Reconnaissance detachments and forward detachments of rifle divisions and road regulators* would cross the border at 0005 on 9 August. The main force of the army would begin its advance toward the border at 0430, and aviation units would begin flying their missions at 0530. Radio networks would go on the air at daylight, but only if other means of communication were unavailable. Subunits were to report their progress to army and front every four hours, beginning at 0600 on the ninth.[14]

*Used to control vehicle and march column flow.

On the night of 8 August, latest reconnaissance indicated only small Japanese outposts on the border; Japanese units appeared unaware of impending hostilities. Unlike other areas of Manchuria, in the 39th Army sector the weather was clear, and conditions for opening the attack were excellent.

Soviet units cross the Manchurian border (probably 39th Army)

39th Army Attack

At H-hour, without any artillery or aviation preparation, the forces of 39th Army crossed the border into Manchuria (see map 6—1). The army forward detachment (61st Tank Division) and corps forward detachments preceded the main advance by twenty to thirty kilometers. Reconnaissance units and forward detachments from each first echelon rifle division moved fifteen to thirty kilometers in front of the advancing rifle corps. A rifle regiment led the march column of each rifle division as a divisional advanced guard. Attached artillery marched in parallel columns, ready to provide artillery support for the infantry columns. Simultaneously with the advance of the main force, aviation units struck Japanese military facilities at Solun, Wangyemiao, and Hailar.

Despite the difficult terrain and general lack of roads, progress on the first day of the attack was spectacular. The complete absence of Japanese resistance and clear weather compensated for the problems terrain imposed on the columns. General Lyudnikov noted:

> The day turned out sunny and clear. From the observation point on Mount Salkhit we could distinctly see how the tank division and tank brigades moved forward decisively. We could see the command posts of corps commanders Bezugly and Oleshev and their deployed forces. For more than an hour I watched the columns of the forces. Soldiers, tanks, and guns passed through the hills hidden in the thick and high grass, again appearing on the slopes. And then the sun rose. Figures of people, military vehicles, and the contours of the hills opened before us as if on morning maneuvers.[15]

Throughout the first day, virtually all units moved in march column, covering more territory by the end of the day than the original plan envisioned. On the Solun axis the 61st Tank Division covered 100 kilometers and, by day's end, had secured crossing sites over the Urgen Gol at Boto Nela. The forward detachments of the 113th Rifle Corps and 5th Guards Rifle Corps advanced seventy-five kilometers to the Sel'dzin Gol, near Dzurkin Harul, and to the west bank of the Urgen Gol, north of Boto Nela. The lead elements of both rifle corps trailed twenty-five kilometers behind the forward detachments.

Despite the good weather, terrain and weather conditions forced some adjustments in the combat formation by the end of the first day. In the rough terrain the tracked vehicles of the rifle divisions' forward detachments far outstripped the march rate of the wheeled vehicles, which carried supplies and ammunition. The heat of day and rough terrain took their toll on fuel consumption. To correct the problem, corps commanders tried to create new divisional forward detachments made up of the three self-propelled artillery battalions from the corps' rifle divisions. Fuel shortages in the divisions, however, stymied this innovation. Finally, by pooling all available fuel, a second forward detachment was formed from one self-propelled battery taken from each rifle division.[16] The men of the advancing divisions also suffered from the elements, according to General Lyudnikov:

> Under the blazing sun the soldiers went from hill to hill, rejoicing at the breath of each breeze. Upwards and downwards—to them the hills were without end, and they concealed the distances. On topographical maps the contours of every height and depression were absent. The corps commanders, Generals Bezugly and Oleshev, reported that the forces moved forward as planned, without delay. This was affirmed by every vehicle speedometer. 50 kilometers on the speedometer—as many as the infantry covered in a day. And it was still distant to the planned objective line on the map. Thus we shortened our rest stops. We began to regard as special the "Manchurian" kilometer.
>
> The soldiers went on. On the march we scattered separated combat groups of Japanese covering the ravines and passes and destroyed fortified points of the enemy. The sun burned unmercifully. The temperature during the day reached 35 degrees [centigrade]. The doctors became alarmed lest heat stroke occur. There was little water. Life-giving moisture was dear to every throat. The soldiers knew that as soon as you snatched at the water

bottle, your thirst was stronger. The soldiers endured. The vehicles could not stand it—boiling water seethed in the radiators, motors overheated. That was why we had a reserve of water—primarily for equipment.

Finally, before the columns of forces loomed the Grand Khingans. In the mountains there was silence. By every sign we reached them before the Japanese. We must immediately storm them.[17]

Soviet tanks crossing the Grand Khingans

Events confirmed the fears of Soviet doctors. Despite the intensive training that the army had conducted in desert operations during its long march across eastern Mongolia into assembly and jumping-off positions, the sun took its toll. Each day between thirty and forty men in each division suffered heat stroke. The water bottles the men carried were inadequate for such harsh conditions, for they were too fragile and liable to break under any blow. Eventually, 30 to 40 percent of the troops lacked necessary water reserves.[18] In spite of these handicaps, the 113th and 5th Guards Rifle Corps reached the Grand Khingan Mountains by the end of the first day. Japanese resistance was negligible. One more day's march and the mountains would be behind them; the Japanese fortified regions would be bypassed.

While the main body of 39th Army struggled across the Grand Khingan Mountains south of Wuchakou, the 94th Rifle Corps, on the morning of 9 August, advanced northeastward into Manchuria, past the 1939 Khalkhin-Gol battlefield. The 221st and 358th Rifle Divisions, marching in column formation, covered more than forty kilometers, while their forward detachments overcame small Japanese machine gun units and Manchurian cavalry units and secured crossings over the Hui Gol, 100 kilometers southwest of Hailar.[19] As the 94th Rifle Corps marched towards Hailar, the 124th Rifle Division simultaneously took up positions south of the Khalkhin-Gol and prepared to strike the northern portion of the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region on the following day. Reconnaissance patrols from the division crossed the border and engaged the Japanese at several points along the border west of Arshaan and Wuchakou.

First word of the Soviet attack came to 44th Army at 0200 on 9 August, when Japanese Third Area Army reported the bombing of major cities, including Hailar and Wangyemiao. The 44th Army declared a state of emergency and at 0300 implemented the wartime defense plan. At 0500 a telephone report from the chief of staff of the 107th Infantry Division confirmed the Soviet attack and indicated that the 107th Infantry Division realized the dilemma it faced:

> The enemy strength on the Arshaan Front is approximately one rifle division with tanks, and is gradually increasing. Scores of enemy tanks are crossing the border in the sector south of Sankuoshan and are making a detour around the rear of the division. The enemy radio, located in front of our positions, transmitted an order to attack and advance as soon as preparations are completed. The division considers this to be an earnest attack by the Soviet Army and will smash the enemy in front of its position.[20]

This was an accurate assessment of both the intention of the Soviet 124th Rifle Division to attack the main Japanese fortified positions and the Soviet intent to bypass with the bulk of its forces the fortified region to the south. The problem for the Japanese was how to defend against this multiple threat. The 44th Army ordered its divisions in the rear area (117th and 63d) to undertake defensive measures, but could do little to assist the beleaguered 107th Infantry Division. The following day, in accordance with Third Area Army instructions, 44th Army ordered the 107th Infantry Division to:

> check the enemy advance at its [the 107th's] present position, then destroy the Paichengtzu-Arshaan Line, Hsinganling Tunnel and other technical objects to obstruct his advance, and then redeploy to the vicinity of Hsinking [Changchun] as soon as possible [to] be placed under the command of the Thirtieth Army commander.[21]

Late on the tenth, the Soviets cut telephone communications between the 107th Infantry Division and 44th Army, and henceforth the 107th's activities were unclear to higher headquarters. What is clear from Soviet

accounts is that the 107th Infantry Division resisted vigorously in the fortified region and along the rail line to Solun and Wangyemiao. The bulk of the division disengaged after those battles and fought delaying, harassing actions against the Soviets well after the other Japanese forces had capitulated.

From 10 to 12 August, Soviet columns struggled across the Grand Khingan Mountains south of Wuchakou, meeting little armed resistance but considerable geographical resistance in the region. At least the weather cooperated with Soviet forces during the first few days of the offensive. Only on 9 August was the heat a burden. The 35° C of that day gave way to temperatures between 19° and 22° C on subsequent days. From 9 to 12 August it was generally clear, with only short periods of drizzle. Only after the fifteenth, when heavy rains began, did severe weather dramatically interfere with Soviet operations. During their passage of the Grand Khingans, Soviet forces moved in multiple columns along valleys or ravines. Dry soil conditions in the mountains permitted fairly rapid movement along four or five parallel tracks. After having crossed the mountains, units faced a virgin black soil region where similar column movement was impossible without sapper support. Sappers built and maintained roads by laying thick beds of gravel over the soft black soil, but it was a very time- and labor-consuming task.[22]

Water barriers also proved to be a problem. The Sel'zhin Gol and Siaburutan Gol rivers, west of the Grand Khingans, were totally dry and passable by August, although dry swamps on their banks proved difficult for wheeled vehicles to negotiate. The bed of the Urgen Gol was half full of water (8 meters wide, 2.1 meters deep) and required the engineers to build six bridges across it.

Passage of the Grand Khingans required enormous fuel consumption. As mentioned, heat was a factor as vehicles and tanks used 50 percent more fuel than usual. More important were the detours, false starts, and general difficulty involved in finding and staying on the proper route. Maps proved particularly unreliable, according to General Lyudnikov:

> Roads in these regions . . . were few in number and even unmarked, gorges and swamps were incorrect [on maps]. All of this to a considerable degree hindered the orientation and movement of the columns. Thus in one of our divisions the route of movement was determined by a map. In the end the unit ended up in a labyrinth of blind mountain valleys which were not shown on the map. Then an officer from the army staff in a PO-2 aircraft found the division and put it on the correct route.[23]

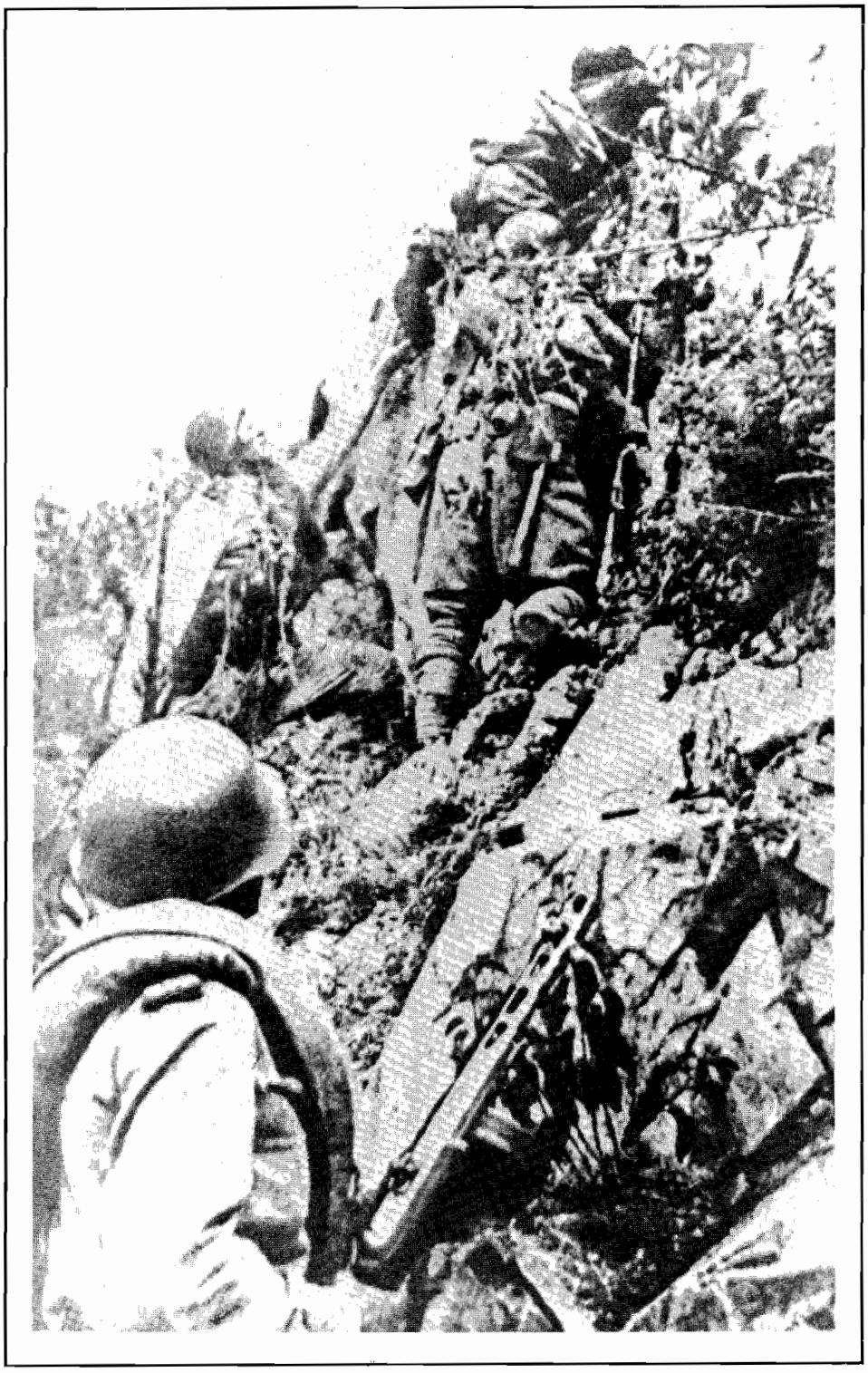
The division to which General Lyudnikov referred was Maj. Gen. L. G. Basanets's 192d Rifle Division, which had been lost in the rugged mountains for two days during the crossing. It obviously ended up in second echelon.

For all of the difficulties entailed in crossing the tractless mountains, Soviet 5th Guards and 113th Rifle Corps, with the 61st Tank Division in the vanguard, had gained the Japanese flank and rear by 12 August. The road to Solun and Wangyemiao was open, and the Japanese, with no combat troops available, could do very little to counter the threat. The Japanese 107th Infantry Division riveted its attention to its front and right flank, where the 124th Rifle Division and elements of 94th Rifle Corps were increasing their pressure on Japanese positions.

With the assistant commander of 39th Army, Lt. Gen. G. K. Kozlov, present, the 94th Rifle Corps brushed aside small Japanese border detachments and pushed on towards Hailar. By the evening of the eleventh, the main body of the corps had arrived just south of Bualuto (twelve kilometers northeast of Dunda-Khana), while the forward detachment had penetrated to the southern approaches to Hailar. With Hailar firmly invested and bypassed by 36th Army, the services of the 94th Rifle Corps were no longer needed, so the two divisions of the corps received new missions.[24] Maj. Gen. V. N. Kushnarenko's 221st Rifle Division was to sweep eastward through minor passes in the Grand Khingans through the valleys of the Taehrssu and Taehrchi rivers and across the Tagan-Dabe Pass toward Lusun Tsihi. The division would then turn south along the Choer Ho to cut communications linking Japanese forces at Hailar, Pokotu, and Wangyemiao. The 358th Rifle Division would turn south towards the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region to assist the 124th Rifle Division in reducing the primary Japanese fortified region.

While 39th Army forces carried out its envelopment of the Japanese fortified region, the 124th Rifle Division plunged directly into the fortified region on 10 August and engaged elements of the Japanese 90th Infantry Regiment, 107th Infantry Division. That morning Col. D. M. Lelekov's 622d Rifle Regiment crossed the Khalkhin-Gol between Handagai and Iruse and attacked Japanese outposts north of the river.

The following small unit action offers a good example of Soviet tactics. A Japanese position, manned by nine men from the 1st Company, 1st Battalion, 90th Infantry Regiment, defended a four-embrasure machine gun pillbox northwest of Mount Mana Ula. The pillbox, located on a hilltop, had external machine gun positions and external trenches around the hilltop and was encircled by barbed wire. The Japanese defenders were armed with two machine guns, grenades, and nine rifles. Colonel Lelekov enveloped the outpost with a battalion on the northwest and one on the southeast. While direct fire artillery (three 76-mm and 45-mm guns) engaged the outpost from the southeast, a group of submachine gunners with grenades formed an assault group to strike the pillbox from the front. Every fifth man carried an overcoat and cloak-tent in order to surmount the barbed wire. In addition, the regiment's antitank rifle company used direct fire on the pillboxes in order to permit the assault group to get into position. The guns opened fire from the south and southeast to distract the



Troops climbing a spur of the Grand Khingans

Japanese defenders and to allow the assault group to attack from the southwest with minimum casualties. A salvo from the guns was the signal to storm the pillbox. The assault group advanced, firing its weapons as the Japanese turned their attention to the artillery fire. When the assault group moved through the barbed wire and approached the trenches, the Japanese turned their fire on them—but too late. The assault group took the position in hand-to-hand fighting, an example of subsequent actions in the fortified region. The Japanese fought to the last man, while the Soviets claimed a loss of only four wounded.[25] The Soviets' emphasis on firepower and movement to conserve manpower was typical of their reduction of Japanese positions.

Throughout 10 and 11 August, the 124th Rifle Division penetrated deeper into the fortified region, systematically reducing Japanese outposts one after the other. After briefly turning north to sweep the Japanese out of Handagai, the division pushed on to Iruse and Arshaan on 12 August. That evening the Japanese counterattacked from the northeast and southeast of Arshaan, but the 124th Rifle Division drove them off and continued southeast towards Wuchakou. The overall Soviet objective was to catch the Japanese 107th Infantry Division between the advancing pincers of the 124th Infantry Division and elements of the 5th Guards Rifle Corps about to move into Solun from the southwest.

On 12 August the lead elements of the Soviet 5th Guards Rifle Corps and 113th Rifle Corps completed their eastward march, north of and along the Wulan Ho, and emerged from the hills just southwest of Solun and Tepossi. An advance element of 5th Guards Rifle Corps struck the railroad at Hailahai and met and destroyed a train traveling south from Solun and carrying a battalion of Japanese troops. Though the path to Solun was open, unforeseen terrain difficulties forced the 5th Guards Rifle Corps to regroup in order to concentrate enough forces to take the city. The valley of the Wulan Ho and other rivers covering the approaches to both Solun and the rail line proved more difficult to traverse than the valleys of the Grand Khingans. Vehicles sank into the swampy valley floors, and rocky crags along the valley sides often restricted movement. These conditions slowed units and forced them into single columns. Overworked sappers fell behind in their road labor, so whole combat units had to join in the task of laying gravel roads capable of supporting the weight of the vehicles. The Soviets used all sorts of improvised means to create roads. Guards mortar units even used their launching ramps as road surface. Tractor teams combined to tow the guns and heavy equipment through the muck. Groups of tractors were left at each bottleneck to facilitate movement of the next unit. Even the repaired roads, however, deteriorated after supporting only the passage of the lead elements of each unit. Subsequent units had to build new bypasses. This stretched the length of march columns to tens of kilometers. Artillery units, in particular, suffered because they had to detach their vehicles to assist the advancing infantry.[26]

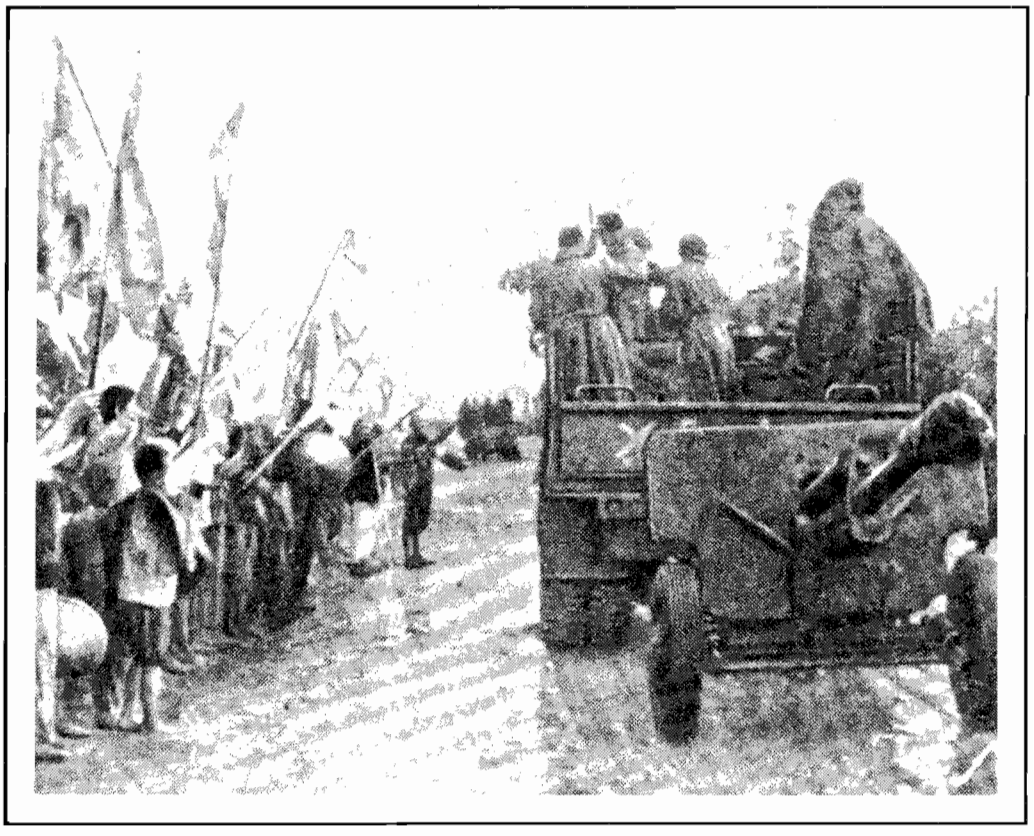
Nevertheless, forward elements still maintained an advance rate of forty kilometers per day. Tank units and tractors carrying infantry managed rates of from fifty to eighty kilometers per day.

On the afternoon of 12 August, 5th Guards Rifle Corps consolidated its position southwest of Solun and moved on the city with one of its corps forward detachments (44th Tank Brigade) and its lead rifle divisions (19th and 17th). The 19th Rifle Division sought to cut the rail line west of Solun, while the 44th Tank Brigade and the 17th Rifle Division struck at Solun and the stretch of rail line to the south. That evening, after an artillery and aviation preparation, 5th Guards Rifle Corps troops occupied a major portion of the city. Japanese units from the 107th Infantry Division (probably the 178th Infantry Regiment) and the 2d Manchurian Cavalry Division launched repeated, unsuccessful counterattacks on the evening of the twelfth and into the thirteenth before both units fell back into the hills northeast of the city.[27] On the thirteenth, Soviet forces moved south from Solun along the rail line to Tepossi.

On the same day, the second 5th Guards Rifle Corps forward detachment, the 735th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment with the 45th Artillery Regiment (one battalion), the 7th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the 508th Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion approached Tepossi from the west. As they entered the town, they intercepted a Japanese vehicular column withdrawing from Solun, drove off the Japanese, and captured sorely needed fuel supplies.[28] After joining Soviet troops arriving from Solun, the 735th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment continued its pursuit south along the rail line from Tepossi.

While 5th Guards Rifle Corps units cleared Tepossi, the 44th Tank Brigade and 17th Rifle Division finished securing Solun by taking the railroad station at 1000 on 13 August. The 19th Guards Rifle Division, led by the 61st Guards Rifle Regiment and 508th Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion, advanced westward from Solun toward Chinyinkou station. En route they engaged yet another unit of the Japanese 107th Infantry Division and forced it to retreat north of the rail line.[29] Now Japanese units along the railroad were caught in a pincer between the 19th Rifle Division of 5th Guards Rifle Corps west of Solun and the Soviet 124th Rifle Division near Wuchakou. The 124th Rifle Division on 12 and 13 August passed through Wuchakou, bypassed and encircled the Japanese fortified positions outside the city, and advanced eastward along the railroad to Hsikou. Threatened from east and west after two days of heavy fighting, remaining units of the Japanese 90th and 177th Infantry Regiments, 107th Infantry Division, on 15 August withdrew northeast into the mountains, where they regrouped and, for a time, counterattacked against the Soviet forces.

While the 5th Guards Rifle Corps took Solun and cut off the Japanese 107th Infantry Division, the 61st Tank Division and 113th Rifle Corps continued their march eastward along the Wulan Ho Valley through Hailahai and Kueiliuho toward Wangyemiao. A fuel shortage and very poor road conditions forced 39th Army to rely increasingly on forward detachments to maintain the forward momentum of the army. Main army forces lagged far behind. To insure close control over operations, General Lyudnikov ordered the commanders and staff of corps, divisions, and regiments to stay within ten kilometers of their forces' main bodies.[30]



Soviet 39th Army troops entering Wangyemiao

On the fourteenth, the 44th Tank Brigade, with elements of the 17th Rifle Division, repelled yet another Japanese counterattack six kilometers northwest of Solun, and other 5th Guards Rifle Corps units repulsed similar counterattacks south of Solun. The pincer of the 124th Rifle Division and 19th Rifle Division continued closing the corridor on the railroad west of Solun, while lead elements of the 61st Tank Division and 113th Rifle Corps engaged Japanese units northwest of Wangyemiao. By the fifteenth,

advanced elements of 39th Army had secured Wangyemiao. During the next two days, the main forces of 5th Guards Rifle Corps and 113th Rifle Corps entered the city.[31]

With Solun and Wangyemiao in Soviet hands, the envelopment of the Japanese Halung-Arshaan-Wuchakou Fortified Region was complete. The Soviets cut the withdrawal routes of the Japanese 107th Infantry Division and prevented them from joining other Japanese forces in central Manchuria. The pressure of the 124th Rifle Division advancing directly against the fortified region combined with the effects of the envelopment to force the 107th Infantry Division to withdraw slowly northeastward across the mountains, where it ultimately ran into Soviet forces of the 221st Rifle Division emerging from their long trek through the Grand Khingans.

While the main force of 39th Army completed the envelopment of the Japanese 107th Infantry Division, the 94th Rifle Corps continued operations along two divergent axes. Before splitting his forces, Maj. Gen. I. I. Popov, the corps commander, received the surrender of General Houlin, commander of the Manchukuoan 10th Military District, along with 1,000 Manchukuoan cavalrymen.[32] The Soviet 36th Army had driven General Houlin's force out of Hailar, and the retreating Manchurians had run into the 94th Rifle Corps advancing from the south.

Next, the 358th Rifle Division of 94th Rifle Corps headed due south towards the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region, where it arrived on 14 August to assist the 124th Rifle Division in reducing remaining Japanese strongpoints. The 221st Rifle Division passed eastward over the Grand Khingan Mountains, then turned south along the valley of the Choer Ho. After the fifteenth, the division cut the route of withdrawal of the 107th Infantry Division and, ultimately, on 30 August, accepted the surrender of the Japanese 107th Infantry Division at Chailai, fifty kilometers southwest of Tsitsihar.[33]

Conclusions

By 15 August, 39th Army had enveloped, bypassed, and reduced the mighty Halung-Arshaan Fortified Zone and secured Wangyemiao. It accomplished in six days what planners had expected to take nearly three times as long. Concentration alone for the attack required prodigious feats in order to overcome significant logistical and terrain problems. The attack plan itself was imaginative because it played upon the erroneous assumptions of Japanese planners that the Soviets must directly overcome Japanese defenses on the only "feasible" avenue of approach into western Manchuria. In fact, however, the 39th Army gave only passing attention to that approach, assigning the task of mastering it to only one rifle division. The bulk of 39th Army created its own avenues of approach by crossing the tractless region south of the Japanese fortified region and by sending a smaller force circling to the north and east of the fortified region. This

successful, though difficult, maneuver left the Japanese 107th Infantry Division dangling in mid-air, isolated from supporting Japanese units, and unable to conduct an orderly withdrawal to main Japanese defensive positions to the rear. Finally, 107th Infantry Division withdrew northeast to wage a lone, futile struggle with peripheral Soviet units.

The attack of 39th Army was somewhat similar to that of 6th Guards Tank Army. Though its objectives were not as deep, it did cross terrain similar to that traversed by 6th Guards Tank Army. As did 6th Guards Tank Army, it relied on armor to spearhead its advance and to impart momentum to the advance of the entire army. Like 6th Guards Tank Army, it ultimately experienced fuel problems and had to rely on small task-organized forward detachments to maintain the momentum of the advance. Unlike 6th Guards Tank Army, 39th Army was encumbered with a preponderance of infantry units and, thus, constantly faced the problem of coordinating rates of advance between tanks and infantry. The 39th Army used a variety of innovations to maintain a proper balance of the two ingredients, at least in its forward elements. Also unlike the unopposed advance of 6th Guards Tank Army, the advance of 39th Army encountered fierce Japanese resistance. Artful maneuver, however, and an ability to project significant forces into the rear area of the Japanese defenses overcame that opposition without significant Soviet losses. In its battles with Japanese units and in its reduction of Japanese fortified points, the army stressed use of firepower rather than manpower to achieve success.

While the deep advance of 39th Army achieved success, it also encountered significant problems. Navigation across the Grand Khingan Mountains was difficult because of inadequate maps and an absence of good reconnaissance, the latter having been sacrificed to maintain surprise. Hence, the 192d Rifle Division was lost in the mountains from 11 to 13 August. The army used artillery with good effect only in the reduction of the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region. Artillery accompanying the main force of the army had difficulty traversing the mountainous region and swampy valleys and, therefore, fell well behind other units. The Army, therefore, could not bring to bear on the Japanese the full weight of its artillery. Also, tank units consumed far more fuel than anticipated in crossing the mountains, so from 12 August on, the army experienced constant fuel shortage. Only the capture of Japanese aviation fuel at Tepossi and fuel delivery by air permitted continuous operations to Wangyemiao.*

The two engineer brigades provided by army were insufficient to handle engineering tasks. The brigade attached to army only at the beginning of operations lagged behind advancing units throughout the operation. Both brigades had insufficient vehicular transport and simply were not able to conduct the extensive engineer reconnaissance necessary in such a region.

*6th Guards Tank Army also used aircraft extensively to deliver fuel.

The broad front of army operations and the great depth of operations also severely taxed the communications system. Lack of transport hindered installation of ground communications lines, and the long distances made radio communication erratic, although army use of aircraft to relay or deliver messages alleviated some of the communications problems.

These difficulties were, in reality, a product of the audacity of the plan itself. Despite the problems, the army, as a whole, achieved a forty-kilometer-per-day rate of advance. The achievements of 39th Army along with those of 6th Guards Tank Army ultimately destroyed Japanese hopes for a successful defense in western Manchuria.

Notes

1. *IVMV*, 2:199.
2. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 85.
3. *IVMV*, 2:202.
4. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 88; Sidorov, "Boevoe," 14.
5. JM 155, 82—84.
6. Ibid., 86.
7. Ōta Hisaō, *Dai 107 shidan shi: Saigō made tatakatta Kantōgun* [The history of the 107th Division: The Kwantung Army that resisted to the last] (Tokyo: Taiseidō Shoten Shuppanbu, 1979), 14, 24, 26, 72, 76—79.
8. JM 155, 100.
9. I. I. Lyudnikov, *Cherez bol'shoi khingan* [Across the Grand Khingan] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1967), 48—49.
10. Ibid., 49.
11. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 104; Sidorov, "Boevoe," 14; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 51.
12. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 113; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 41.
13. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 53—54.
14. Ibid., 55; Lyudnikov, "39-ia armiia v Khingano-Mukdenskoi operatsii" [The 39th Army in the Khingan-Mukden Operation], *VIZh*, October 1965:71; Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 171.
15. Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 171.
16. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 176—77.
17. Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 172.
18. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 58—59.
19. Ibid., 68—69.
20. JM 155, 101—2.
21. Ibid., 104.
22. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 61.
23. Lyudnikov, "39-ia armiia," 73; Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 173.
24. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 69.
25. Ibid., 68—76.

26. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 59—60.
27. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 195; Lyudnikov, "39-ia armiia," 72—73.
28. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 196; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 63—67.
29. Lyudnikov, "39-ia armiia," 73; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 67.
30. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 68.
31. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 196—97.
32. Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 173; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 69—70.
33. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 101.

Forward Detachment Deep Operations

7

Situation in Northwestern Manchuria

Soviet staff officers planning operations in northwestern Manchuria faced problems considerably different from those of their counterparts in other regions. In most areas significant terrain obstacles (deserts, mountains, or swamps) confronted the initial Soviet attack. Yet, once the Soviets had overcome these obstacles, prospects for success were good. In northwest Manchuria, however, the most significant terrain obstacle, the Grand Khingan Mountains, was 300 kilometers from the border. In order to reach the Grand Khingans, an invasion force would first have to traverse the expanse of terrain known as the Barga Plateau. To further complicate matters, the Japanese stationed several regular units in the region to defend fortified positions against an enemy advance across the plateau. Any invasion force had to cross the plateau and secure passes through the Grand Khingans into central Manchuria.

Aside from its vast area, the plateau region contained few major natural obstacles. Bounded on the north by the Argun River, on the south by the Khalkhin-Gol, and on the east by the Grand Khingans, the plateau region formed a salient between Siberia and Outer Mongolia. Occasional buttes, rocky hills, and dry streambeds punctuated the usually flat relief of the plateau. Vegetation was limited to steppe grass and brush. The most important terrain feature was the Hailar Ho, which flowed from east to west across the central portion of the plateau. Along this river ran a major rail line connecting Chita in Siberia with Tsitsihar and Harbin in central Manchuria. The only major road in the region paralleled the rail line. The few major towns in the region were also located along those communications routes: Chalainor and Manchouli, for example, were at the northeast terminus of the railroad, adjacent to the Soviet border. In the heart of the plateau region, located on a river of the same name, was Hailar, the key strategic objective in the region. Farther east, the town of Yakoshih was on the west side of the Grand Khingans, where the rail line and road entered passes through those mountains.

The main northwest to southeast rail line, with its associated road and population centers, was the principal avenue of approach across the plateau to the Grand Khingans. The Soviets had used this approach during their punitive expedition against the Chinese in 1929. Drawing on the historical record, the Japanese placed their defenses on this route.[1] Unlike other areas of Manchuria, however, the plateau had alternate trafficable approaches. Although it lacked a good road network, soil conditions and terrain permitted relatively easy movement of forces along the numerous hard tracks and trails that crisscrossed the plateau. The only obstacles to movement were the swamps along the Argun River, occasional bogs (some dry) along the river beds, and sandy areas primarily south of Hailar toward the Khalkhin-Gol.

The climate of northwestern Manchuria was much dryer than that of other areas of Manchuria. During August, one could expect only occasional showers and thunderstorms. The 30° C daytime average temperature, however, made adequate water supply a major concern for any force operating in the region.

Given the geographical configuration of the northwest and the wide expanse forces would have to cross in order to penetrate into central Manchuria, the Soviets launched only supporting attacks into the region. The aim of these attacks was to occupy the plateau as quickly as possible, secure the Grand Khingan passes, and prevent as many of the Japanese forces as possible from withdrawing to join their comrades to the south. The Soviets sought to secure Hailar by a rapid deep offensive thrust to cut the rail line east of the city and, in so doing, to isolate Japanese forces defending that city and the Chalainor-Manchouli Fortified Region farther west.

Japanese Defenses

The Soviet plan gave serious consideration to the Japanese defenses. The Japanese 4th Separate Army of Lt. Gen. Uemura Mikio, with headquarters at Tsitsihar, was responsible for defending north central and northwestern Manchuria. In order to defend the region northwest of the Grand Khingans, the 4th Separate Army stationed Lt. Gen. Shiozawa Kiyonobu's 119th Infantry Division and the 80th Independent Mixed Brigade at Hailar. The 119th Division was one of the best equipped units of the Kwantung Army. It had almost all its authorized arms and equipment, although it did lack heavy infantry weapons and grenade launchers. As in the case of other divisions, however, the Japanese rated its fighting capacity to be less than that of a prewar standing division. In the event of war, the 119th Infantry Division was to fall back and defend the passes through the Grand Khingan Mountains from Yakoshih to Pokotu.[2] The 80th Independent Mixed Brigade (IMB) defended Hailar and provided smaller forces to garrison Manchouli and the Soviet and Mongolian borders north and south of the city. The 80th IMB contained five infantry battalions, a raiding battalion, an artillery battalion, and support units. Its major defensive position was

the Hailar Fortified Region, a series of five strong centers of resistance around the city. In all but one of these sectors, 80th IMB stationed at least a battalion of infantry with artillery support. An infantry company defended the other position. The 80th IMB assigned two companies to defend fortified positions at Manchouli and Chalainor. A platoon-size force based at Sanho (Soviet name, Dragotsenka) manned outposts on the Manchurian side of the Argun River, while another platoon-size force manned similar outposts to the south on the Mongolian border near Nomonhan (Khalkhin-Gol). Because the 80th IMB numbered only about 6,000 men,[3] auxiliary units assisted the Japanese in their defensive tasks. The Manchurian 10th Military District at Hailar included two cavalry regiments (50th and 51st) and several smaller cavalry units in the immediate Hailar area.[4] Other small Manchurian units were stationed at Manchouli and along the Mongolian border. Lesser regional forces, primarily cavalry, including a few score Russian émigré cossacks, operated in the region northeast of Hailar.

Missions and Tasks

Against these Japanese forces and their auxiliaries in northwest Manchuria, Marshal Malinovsky's Trans-Baikal Front committed the 36th Army of Lt. Gen. A. A. Luchinsky. Issued on 28 June, Malinovsky's orders from the Far East Command tasked the 36th Army to make a secondary attack with the bulk of its forces from the Duroy-Staro Tsurukhaytuy area toward Hailar. The army's immediate mission was to cooperate with a portion of 39th Army in preventing the Japanese from withdrawing into the Grand Khingan Mountains and to crush Japanese forces at Hailar and in the Hailar Fortified Region. Subsequently, the army would cross the Grand Khingan Mountains and take the city of Chalantun.[5]

Malinovsky refined the tasking from the Far East Command and issued 36th Army its orders, directing it to attack decisively to envelop the Hailar Fortified Region from the northeast, to destroy the Japanese at Hailar, and to prevent the Japanese from withdrawing to the Grand Khingan Mountains. The Soviets expected that by the tenth day of the operation, 36th Army would have secured Chalainor, Hailar, and Yakoshih. Malinovsky's order specified the creation of a strong main attack force consisting of the 2d and 86th Rifle Corps (five reinforced rifle divisions) placed on the army's left flank. This main attack formation would attack across the Argun River and secure the Hairukan Mountains, develop the army offensive to seize the northern part of the Hailar Fortified Region, penetrate the fortified region from the northeast, and complete the destruction of Japanese forces, while preventing their withdrawal. An operational group* deployed on the right flank of the army would make a secondary attack: it would penetrate the Chalainor-Manchouli Fortified Region, secure those two cities, pursue the enemy eastward along the railroad, occupy Tsagan Station, and attack Hailar from the west.[6]

*A temporary grouping of forces to operate on a separate axis from main army forces.

Separated from other Trans-Baikal forces by a distance of 100—120 kilometers, 36th Army had a frontage of about 250 kilometers. It would attack along two distinct axes separated from one another by 100 kilometers, but ultimately converging on Hailar.

Operational Planning

To perform these missions, General Luchinsky's army had seven rifle divisions, two rifle corps headquarters, and two fortified regions.[7] Front attached a tank brigade and two tank battalions to permit the army to operate rapidly to the depths of the Japanese defense and sufficient artillery to reduce the fortified regions in its sector. Extensive engineer and bridging support by the front permitted 36th Army to plan an orderly crossing of the Argun River (see table 7—1).

Throughout early July, Luchinsky worked out his operational plans. Soviet estimates of Japanese forces in the region were accurate, but the prohibition on Soviet troops operating within twenty kilometers of the border, in order to preserve surprise, made accurate reconnaissance of Japanese positions difficult. Luchinsky relied primarily on reports from front headquarters and on information obtained from Soviet fortified regions and border detachments stationed on the frontiers. By mid-July, the 36th Army commander had finished work on his plans. Marshals Vasilevsky* and Malinovsky visited General Luchinsky's headquarters, and together they conducted a reconnaissance of the border region from Otpor Station to Staro Tsurukhaytuy. On the basis of that reconnaissance, General Luchinsky's superiors approved his plan.[8]

According to the plan, five rifle divisions and one tank brigade would make the 36th Army's main attack across the Argun River between Duroy and Staro Tsurukhaytuy in the direction of Hailar. Under the control of 2d Rifle Corps and 86th Rifle Corps, this force would envelop Hailar from the northeast, cut Japanese withdrawal routes to Yakoshih, and destroy Japanese units in the Hailar Fortified Region. An operational group of two rifle divisions and two artillery machine gun brigades would penetrate the Chalainor-Manchouli Fortified Region and pursue the retreating Japanese eastward along the rail line to Hailar, there joining the army's main force.[9] A strong forward detachment, organized around the 205th Tank Brigade and commanded by the deputy commander of the 86th Rifle Corps, Maj. Gen. V. A. Burmasov, would lead the main attack on the Hailar axis of advance to secure crossing sites for the army over the Moer Gol by the evening of 9 August (see table 7—2).

*Commander of the Soviet Far East Command.

Table 7—1. Soviet 36th Army Composition

36th Army: Lt. Gen. A. A. Luchinsky
- 2d Rifle Corps: Lt. Gen. A. I. Lopatin
  - 103d Rifle Division
  - 275th Rifle Division
  - 292d Rifle Division
- 86th Rifle Corps: Maj. Gen. C. V. Revunenkov
  - 94th Rifle Division
  - 210th Rifle Division
- Operational Group: Maj. Gen. S. S. Fomenko
  - 293d Rifle Division
  - 298th Rifle Division
  - 31st Fortified Region
  - 32d Fortified Region
- 205th Tank Brigade
- 33d Separate Tank Battalion
- 35th Separate Tank Battalion
- 68th Separate Armored Train
- 69th Separate Armored Train
- 259th Howitzer Artillery Regiment
- 267th Gun Artillery Regiment
- 1233d Gun Artillery Regiment
- 1146th High Powered Howitzer Artillery Regiment
- 1912th Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment
- 32d Guards Mortar Regiment
- 176th Mortar Regiment
- 177th Mortar Regiment
- 190th Mortar Regiment
- 7th Antiaircraft Artillery Division
  - 465th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 474th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 602d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 632d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
- 120th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 405th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 68th Engineer Sapper Brigade

Source: M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 399—400.

Table 7—2. 36th Army Forward Detachment
36th Army Forward Detachment: Maj. Gen. V. A. Burmasov
205th Tank Brigade: Lt. Col. N. A. Kurnosov 152d Rifle Regiment (94th Rifle Division)—on trucks 158th Tank Destroyer Battalion 1st Battalion, 32d Guards Mortar Regiment 97th Light Artillery Regiment 791st SP Artillery Battalion (SU-76), 94th Rifle Division 465th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment 1st Battalion, 176th Mortar Regiment 1st Company, 124th Sapper Battalion

Source: L. N. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda na dal'nem vostoke* [Victory in the Far East] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1971), 178—79.

On the same evening, an advanced element of the forward detachment would secure the railroad bridge across the Hailar River, while two reconnaissance detachments would seize other crossing sites east of Hailar. An army artillery group of seven artillery battalions and two corps of artillery destruction groups provided the firepower to support the crossing of the Argun River and the reduction of Japanese fortified positions. A ten-minute artillery preparation would precede the attack of the operational group against the Chalainor-Manchouli defenses, but in order to guarantee surprise, no preparation would be fired along the Argun River.[10] General Luchinsky also took care to provide the forward detachment sufficient artillery to facilitate its advance deep into the Japanese rear. One bomber aviation division of the 12th Air Army would support the operation with sorties against the Japanese fortified regions, air fields, and troop concentrations.[11] The limited armor resources of the 36th Army were concentrated in one tank brigade and two separate tank battalions. The 205th Tank Brigade provided the nucleus for the army forward detachment. The 33d and 35th Tank Battalions provided infantry support.[12]

The Trans-Baikal Front attached a considerable number of engineer units to 36th Army to perform the important function of covering the forward deployment of the army and preparing approach routes to the border. More important, the augmented engineer units would provide the means for advancing units to cross the Argun River and support the reduction of Japanese fortified positions. The 36th Army received the 68th Army Engineer Sapper Brigade consisting of four engineer-sapper battalions (295th, 296th, 297th, and 298th), the 2d and 17th Separate Motorized Pontoon Bridge Battalions, and the 12th Separate Motorized Pontoon Bridge Regiment. Bridging units would provide direct bridging support to the 2d and 86th Rifle Corps. The 36th Army would concentrate all bridging equipment on the Argun River

by the evening of 8 August. In order to conduct assault crossings before emplacing bridges, front attached to the army a company of American-made DUKWs* assigned to the 653d Large Amphibious Vehicle Battalion.[13]

As in other regions where the Trans-Baikal Front deployed, the absence of water was a potentially serious problem, in particular in the region between the Argun River and Hailar City. Hence, the attached 90th Separate Field Water Supply Company had the job of finding and maintaining water sources and storing any water it found. The unit subdivided into reconnaissance groups of four to six men each under an experienced engineer officer who, with a vehicle and survey equipment, would accompany advancing units in search of water. Unfortunately, lack of good maps and drilling equipment hindered their operations. Water sources and water supply points, when found and set up, were maintained jointly by a battalion of the army engineer-sapper brigade and a company from each rifle corps and from each rifle division sapper battalion. Water points were fifteen to forty kilometers apart in the concentration areas and on the routes of advance.[14]

Luchinsky had two major problems to solve even before his forces could strike at the Japanese. First, he had to deploy his main attack force into the marshy, sandy region west of the Argun River, between Staro Tsurukhaytuy and Duroy. Once in position, he had to move those forces across the 150-meter-wide Argun River. Furthermore, the flood plain of the Argun River was twelve kilometers wide in places, and swampland extended in patches four to five kilometers wide on either side of the river. In order to overcome these obstacles, the 68th Army Engineer-Sapper Brigade built corduroy approach roads to all prospective crossing sites. The lack of trees on the Soviet side of the border forced the engineers, under the personal command of General A. D. Tsirlin, Trans-Baikal Front chief of engineers, to dismantle the wooden houses at Staro Tsurukhaytuy and use that material to construct roads. While the engineers built approach roads twenty to twenty-five kilometers from the river, they also camouflaged the roads and dug foxholes and shelters for tanks and vehicles. With sapper advice, maneuver units themselves accomplished camouflaging tasks in troop concentration areas.[15] All movement of forces into these concentration areas and jumping-off positions was done under cover of night. Moreover, the usual July and August fog complicated the movement. Nevertheless, by the evening of the eighth, all forces with their supporting bridging equipment were in their appointed positions.

Gen. G. V. Revunenkov's 86th Rifle Corps, comprising the 94th and the 210th Rifle Divisions, occupied jumping-off positions between Duroy and Belaya Glinka on the right flank of the main attack sector. The 2d Separate Motorized Pontoon Bridge Battalion, with bridging equipment and thirty boats, provided crossing means for the corps. The 2d Rifle Corps of Gen.

*Light amphibious vehicles.

A. I. Lopatin, composed of the 103d and 292d Rifle Divisions, deployed on the banks of the Argun between Staro Tsurukhaytuy and Belaya Glinka, with the 17th Separate Pontoon Bridge Battalion in support. In addition to its bridges and boats, the battalion also had thirty large amphibious vehicles of the 653d Amphibious Vehicle Battalion attached. The 12th Separate Pontoon Bridge Regiment deployed to the rear of the two advanced rifle corps in order to support passage across the river by army artillery units. The army forward detachment (205th Tank Brigade, reinforced) moved up late on the evening of 8 August with orders to concentrate at Pad Klimechi by 0600 on the following morning. This forward detachment would advance after lead elements of the two rifle corps secured bridgeheads over the Argun River and after bridges were in place. Gen. S. S. Fomenko's operational group of the 293d Rifle Division, 398th Rifle Division, and two artillery machine gun brigades deployed opposite the Japanese Chalainor-Manchouli Fortified Region. The army reserve, the 275th Rifle Division of Col. K. F. Mayorov, occupied positions in the rear of 2d Rifle Corps in readiness to support the advance of that corps.[16]

Each of the deployed rifle corps and rifle divisions created special subunits in order to engage Japanese strongpoints, to block Japanese counterattacks, and to clear obstacles from the path of advancing troops. Rifle divisions created assault groups made up of blockading subgroups and security subgroups. A blockading subgroup contained one or two sapper platoons, while the security subgroup contained one or two rifle platoons, a T-34 tank, and one or two artillery pieces. Each subgroup carried high explosives for demolishing bunkers. Rifle corps, rifle divisions, and rifle regiments also created mobile obstacle detachments of sapper squad to sapper company strength, each equipped with mines. A battalion of the army engineer-sapper brigade equipped with four vehicles and 600 antitank and 600 antipersonnel mines performed the same function at army level. In the operational group sector, for two days before the attack, engineers of the two rifle divisions cleared mines and obstacles from their front. In all, they cut seventeen corridors through the dense obstacle network.[17]

36th Army Attack

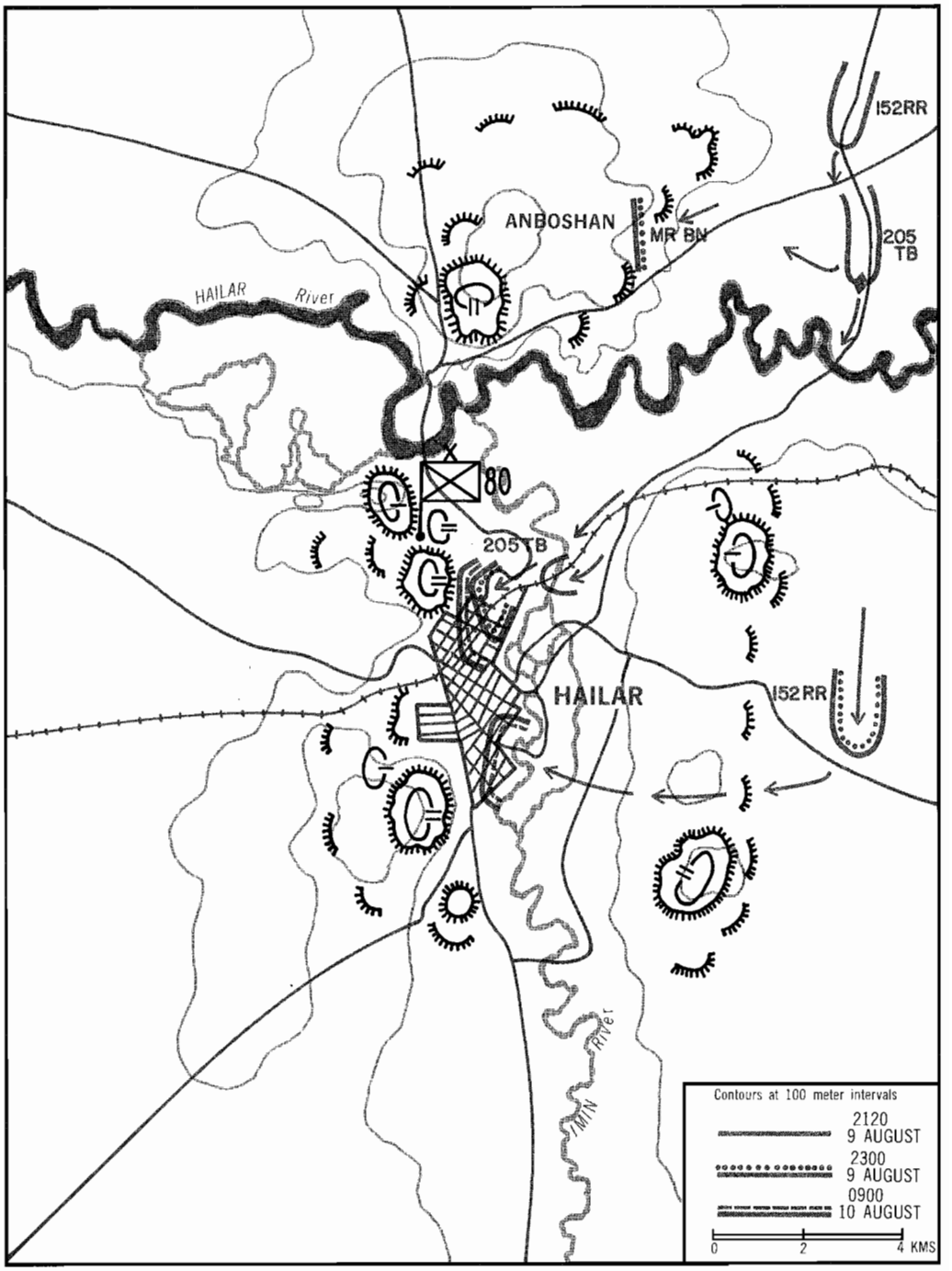
At 0020 on 9 August, along the 36th Army front, border guard assault units and reconnaissance elements of attacking rifle divisions began crossing the Argun River and engaging Japanese outposts on the south bank (see map 7—1). The army artillery group fired an intense ten-minute preparation on Japanese fortified positions in the Chalainor-Manchouli sector in order to cover the advance of General Fomenko's operational group. Along the Argun, in darkness and dense fog, an advanced battalion from each rifle division used boats and rafts to cross, as engineers struggled to complete roads to the river and to bring their bridging equipment forward. Assault units quickly secured the far bank of the river to a depth of one or two kilometers, and at 0200 engineers finished work on approach roads to the river.

One hour later, the 17th Separate Motorized Pontoon Bridge Battalion threw a thirty-ton, thirty-meter-long bridge across the river, while advanced battalions of 2d Rifle Corps made five assault crossings on rafts and boats. On the left flank of 2d Rifle Corps, near Staro Tsurukhaytuy, the 635th Large Amphibious Vehicle Battalion transported two rifle regiments across the river within twenty-five minutes. In accordance with the support plan, engineers then floated five pontoon bridges across the river.* Such efficient bridging permitted the army to complete the crossing of the Argun within a total of thirteen hours.[18] Once the lead elements of 2d and 86th Rifle Corps had crossed the Argun River, the rifle divisions and corps prepared for further movement south in three columns toward Yakoshih and Hailar. A mobile forward detachment led each column.

The central role in the exploitation fell to the army forward detachment. At 0600 the reinforced 205th Tank Brigade moved out of its assembly area at Pad Klimechi and began crossing the Argun River (see map 7—2). Its orders were to lunge forward along the Staro Tsurukhaytuy-Hailar road to secure crossings over the Moer Gol at Touchshan. It was to accomplish this at the same time that the lead detachment crossed the Hailar Ho and secured the railroad bridge into Hailar. The brigade completed crossing the Argun at 1500 and, led by a reinforced tank platoon, struck southward at maximum speed in march formation. Meeting virtually no Japanese opposition, the main body of the 205th Tank Brigade reached Postoianyi Dyor in the Burkhata Valley at 2000 on 9 August. At the same time, its reconnaissance units approached the Moer Gol, where General Luchinsky gave the brigade new instructions to conduct a night attack on Hailar and, if possible, to secure the city and fortified region by the morning of the tenth. The army commander also ordered General Burmasov to "conduct an active reconnaissance to the east to the Mekert Ho and Charote Ho."[19]

Burmasov ordered the advance to continue throughout the night. Word soon arrived from the reconnaissance detachment, which had bypassed Japanese fortifications north of Hailar, that the main rail bridge over the Hailar Ho was intact and defended by only a platoon of Japanese. Burmasov ordered an immediate attack by the forward detachment, and the bridge was in Soviet hands by 2130. The remainder of the 205th Tank Brigade now closed on Hailar. Leaving a motorized rifle battalion to contain Japanese forces on Anbo Shan north of the city, General Burmasov ordered a general night attack on the city and fortified region. He specifically ordered the 205th Tank Brigade "to envelop the center of resistance 'Eastern Hill' and attack Hailar from the northeast, securing the railroad station and workers' settlement, and then the center of the city."[20] The 152d Rifle Regiment with reinforcing units would envelop Hailar from the east and south to secure the southern portion of the city. The 205th Tank Brigade maneuvered into position and launched its attack at 2300, securing both the railroad station

*Two nine-ton, one sixteen-ton, and one thirty-ton within two and one-half hours; one sixty-ton within four hours.



Map 7—2. The 205th Tank Brigade Assault on Hailar, 9—10 August

and the workers' settlement. Heavy Japanese artillery fire from Mount Oboto, ten to twelve kilometers northwest of the city, and from positions overlooking Hailar from the west and southwest, halted any further advance by the tank brigade. Repeated Japanese counterattacks, however, could not drive the brigade out of its newly won positions. Meanwhile, the 152d Rifle Regiment, which was supposed to attack thirty minutes after the 205th Tank Brigade, did not complete its complicated night march until early on the morning of the tenth. Only then did it join the fray, occupying the eastern and southern sectors of Hailar before fierce Japanese resistance stopped it.[21]

Soviet artillery firing on Hailar

Throughout the tenth, the 205th Tank Brigade struggled to maintain its foothold in Hailar against heavy Japanese artillery fire and occasional counterattacks. General Luchinsky ordered the 94th Rifle Division of Maj. Gen. I. V. Zamakhayev to assist the 205th Tank Brigade. In order to effect a speedy relief, he provided vehicles to the division. At 2400 on 10 August the 3d Battalion, 9th Rifle Regiment, 94th Rifle Division, linked up with the beleaguered 205th Tank Brigade.[22]

Conclusions

Thus ended the dramatic march of the 205th Tank Brigade. In less than twelve hours, the brigade had raced 100 kilometers ahead of the army main force and had secured important crossings over the Hailar Ho and a foothold in the city. At the same time, the 2d Rifle Corps had advanced eastward and southward, clearing Japanese forces from Dragotsenka and moving slowly through the mountains toward Nazhikbulak and Yakoshih. The 86th Rifle Corps had followed the 205th Tank Brigade toward Hailar, and General Fomenko's operational group had cleared Manchouli and Chalainor and had advanced eastward toward Tsagan Station and Hailar.

This audacious Soviet attack took Japanese forces by complete surprise. The 36th Army overwhelmed the Manchouli and Chalainor defenders, who had suffered heavy losses and had withdrawn in disorder toward Hailar on the evening of 9 August.[23] The 80th IMB at Hailar, in accordance with 4th Separate Army orders, undertook stoic, though futile, resistance against the 205th Tank Brigade and, later, against the entire weight of the 86th Rifle Corps. The Japanese 4th Separate Army ordered the 119th Infantry Division early on 9 August to withdraw and defend the Wunoehr Fortified Region, which protected the Grand Khingan passes between Yakoshih and Pokotu. Barely escaping the deep thrust of the 205th Tank Brigade, the 119th Infantry Division entrained and left Hailar during the afternoon and evening of the ninth and successfully occupied its defensive positions in the Grand Khingans.[24] Manchurian cavalry forces of the 10th Military District escaped southward, only to run into the advancing columns of the Soviet 94th Rifle Corps.

Thus the audacious deep strike of the 205th Tank Brigade only partially achieved its objectives, for it did not trap all Japanese forces in the Hailar area. Its spectacular marches covered an extensive distance and secured a foothold in Hailar, thus blocking any further movement of Japanese forces eastward. It is unlikely, however, that the 80th IMB would have abandoned its position. Like other Japanese units in fortified regions, its orders specified defense to the last man. In the end, the 80th IMB's defense tied down two full Soviet divisions and a multitude of artillery units. Not until 18 August did the Soviets finally snuff out resistance at Hailar, after Soviet bombers, artillery, and infantry sapper assault units had reduced the zone pillbox-by-pillbox. The Japanese 119th Infantry Division, having escaped eastward, conducted a tenacious four-day defense of the Grand Khingan passes before Soviet forces finally penetrated to Pokotu on the eastern fringe of the mountains.

The 205th Tank Brigade conducted the deepest independent operation by a unit of its size in the Manchurian campaign. Despite the mixed results, its feat illustrates the innovative manner in which the Soviets tailored and

used forward detachments throughout the campaign. That the brigade did not totally succeed in its mission is the result less of its omissions than of the rapid reaction of the 119th Infantry Division during its hurried escape from the advancing Soviet dragnet.

Notes

1. For details see Yu. M. Shchen'kov, "Man'chzhuro-Chzhalainorskaiia operatsiia 1929" [Manchurian-Chalainor Operation 1929], *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia* [Soviet military encyclopedia] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1978), 5:127—28.
2. JM 155, 174—75, 180.
3. Bōeichō, *Senshi sōsho*, 485—86.
4. Ranseikai, ed., *Manshūkokugunshi* [History of the Manchukuoan Army] (Tokyo: Manshukokugun kankōkai, 1970), 785.
5. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 69.
6. *IVMV*, 2:202; A. I. Radzievsky, ed., *Armeiskie operatsii: primery iz opyta Velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* [Army operations: Examples from the experience of the Great Patriotic War] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1977), 101.
7. Zakharov, *Final: istoriko*, 398.
8. A. A. Luchinsky, "Zabaikal'tsy na sopkakh Man'chzhurii" [Trans-Baikal troops in the hills of Manchuria], *VIZh*, August 1971:68.
9. Radzievsky, *Armeiskie*, 104; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 178—79.
10. Sidorov, "Boevoe," 15—17.
11. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 113.
12. Zakharov, *Final: istoriko*, 398.
13. V. Sidorov, "Inzhenernoe obespechenie Nastupleniia 36-i armii v Man'chzhurskoi Operatsii" [Engineer support of the offensive of 36th Army in the Manchurian operation], *VIZh*, April 1978:97.
14. Ibid., 97—98.
15. Ibid.; Luchinsky, "Zabaikal'tsy," 68—69.
16. Luchinsky, "Zabaikal'tsy," 70; Sidorov, "Inzhenernoe," 98; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 179.
17. Sidorov, "Inzhenernoe," 98.
18. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 178—79; Sidorov, "Inzhenernoe," 98—99.
19. Radzievsky, *Armeiskie*, 102; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 179.
20. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 179.
21. *IVMV*, 2:221; Radzievsky, *Armeiskie*, 102; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 180—81.
22. Radzievsky, *Armeiskie*, 102.
23. JM 154, 184.
24. Ibid., 185.

Joint Ground and Riverine Operations

8

Situation in Northeastern Manchuria

While the Trans-Baikal and 1st Far Eastern Fronts conducted major operations against eastern and western Manchuria to destroy the Japanese Kwantung Army, the 2d Far Eastern Front of Gen. M. A. Purkayev launched secondary attacks against Japanese forces in northern Manchuria. These attacks sought to tie down Japanese forces in the northern regions in order to prevent those units from reinforcing the main Japanese formations in the south. Soviet forces of the 2d Far Eastern Front faced formidable terrain obstacles. The most vexing barrier was the extensive river network separating northern Manchuria from the Soviet Maritime Provinces. Furthermore, a wide expanse of marshy terrain bordered these rivers, and mountains blocked passage south from the river and swampy region into central Manchuria.

The 2d Far Eastern Front sector stretched 2,500 kilometers from the northernmost point in Manchuria, north of Blagoveshchensk, southeast and east along the Amur River to Khabarovsk, then south along the Ussuri River to just north of Iman. Along the entire front, Soviet forces faced the imposing Amur and Ussuri rivers, both unfordable and both in the midst of water-inundated flood plains of varying widths.

This front comprised two distinct sectors, each characterized by unique terrain conditions south of the major river obstacles. In the northern half of 2d Far Eastern Front's sector, north and south of Blagoveshchensk, the Amur River had a very narrow flood plain (ten kilometers). Here the land south of the Amur River rose steeply, first into foothills of the Lesser Khingan Mountains (twenty to thirty kilometers in depth) and then into the mountains themselves. The wider (twenty to thirty kilometers) flood plain north of the river, however, presented a major obstacle to the deployment of forces. In the southern sector of 2d Far Eastern Front, west and south of Khabarovsk, were the extensive flood plains of the Amur and Ussuri rivers, stretching 100—125 kilometers south and west of the rivers.

Compounding the difficulties in this sector, the Sungari River and its tributaries with their own flood plains flowed northeastward into the Amur River.

The terrain in the southern sector was a rectangular marshy region bounded on the north by the Amur River, on the east by the Ussuri River, on the south by the Hataling Mountains and Wanta Shan, and on the west by the Lesser Khingan Mountains. This rectangle measured 300 kilometers east to west and 100 kilometers north to south.

It was across this flooded region that Purkayev's 2d Far Eastern Front chose to launch its main offensive, an attack that would have to make optimum use of the limited communication routes of the region. The major transportation artery through the region was the Sungari River, which flowed between the Lesser Khingan Mountains and the Hataling Mountains, northeast across the western half of the swampy rectangle into the Amur River. Most major towns in this area were on the east bank of the Sungari River, the largest being the river ports of Chiamussu, Fuchin, and Tungchiang. A patchwork road network paralleled the east bank, but at times of high water (July and August of each year) the roads were often flooded. Virtually no roads existed farther east into the swamplands that stretched from the Sungari River to the Ussuri River. There were also few trafficable roads in the salient formed by the Amur and Ussuri rivers. The only other population centers, the mining towns of Lienchangkou, Hsingshanchen, Hokang, and Lopei, were nestled in the eastern foothills of the Lesser Khingan Mountains from Chiamussu northward to the Amur River.

The single suitable exit route from this basin into central Manchuria was up the Sungari River to Chiamussu and through the 150-kilometer gap that the Sungari River cut through the mountains to Harbin. Terrain in this 250—300-kilometer stretch of river, swamps, and mountain passes dictated that it be a secondary attack axis. Yet, secondary or not, the Soviets had to master the terrain and overcome the Japanese who defended it.

Japanese Defenses

Japanese forces defending this sector of northern Manchuria were directly subordinate to First Area Army Headquarters. The largest defending unit was Lt. Gen. Izeki Jin's 134th Infantry Division, with headquarters at Chiamussu. Although the bulk of the division's three regiments were stationed at Chiamussu, Hsingshanchen, and Fuchin, respectively, smaller divisional elements manned outposts along the south bank of the Amur River and a series of fortified regions blocking access into the area. Small fortified regions were at Mingshanchen, Tungchiang, Chiehchingkou, and Fuyuan on the south bank of the Amur. Larger, permanent, more

formidable fortifications existed at Fenghsiang, Hsingshanchen, and Fuchin, covering the avenues of approach from Lopei to Chiamussu and up the east bank of the Sungari River.

Thirty kilometers wide and twelve kilometers deep, the Fuchin Fortified Region had two centers of resistance, one adjacent to the city itself and the other on the Wuerhkuli Shan, an imposing rocky hill mass west of the town. At Fuchin a mixed force of 1,200 Japanese and Manchurians manned 156 reinforced concrete and log pillboxes covered by more than fifty kilometers of trenches and antitank obstacles. Japanese forces in Fuchin consisted of the 2d Battalion, 367th Infantry Regiment, 134th Infantry Division; an infantry battalion from the Japanese Sungari River Flotilla; and a security battalion. In addition, the 7th Manchurian Infantry Brigade kept the bulk of its force in the city, with the remainder downriver at Tungchiang. The Japanese 2d Battalion, 366th Infantry Regiment, 134th Infantry Division, manned the Hsingshanchen Fortified Region in the hills just north of Hokang. Japanese forces and their Manchurian auxiliaries, about 25,000 men, covered the approaches to Chiamussu, concentrating their extensive fortifications on the limited number of avenues of approach through the region.[1]

Missions and Tasks

The Soviet 2d Far Eastern Front opposed these Japanese forces. Its overall mission was to attack south and west across the Amur River in order to clear the Sungari River region of Japanese troops and to advance through Chiamussu to Harbin, where it would unite with forces of the 1st Far Eastern Front. Simultaneously, farther north, other front elements would clear the Aihun-Sunwu area, across the Amur River from Blagoveshchensk, and advance toward Tsitsihar to join forces with the Trans-Baikal Front.[2] General Purkayev ordered Lt. Gen. S. K. Mamonov's 15th Army to make the main attack:

> In cooperation with two brigades of the Amur Flotilla, 15th Army will force the Amur River in the region of the mouth of the Sungari River, destroy the enemy defending the Sungarian and Fuchin Fortified Regions, and subsequently advance on Fuchin with the main force on the east bank of the Sungari. Then develop the offensive in the direction of Chiamussu and Harbin. A portion of the army forces will defend a 240 kilometer sector of the front.[3]

In order to accomplish this task, 15th Army had three rifle divisions, one fortified region, and three tank brigades, totaling 1,433 guns and mortars, 18 multiple rocket launchers, and 164 tanks and self-propelled guns (see table 8—1).[4]

Table 8—1. Soviet 15th Army Composition

15th Army: Lt. Gen. S. K. Mamonov
- 34th Rifle Division
- 361st Rifle Division
- 388th Rifle Division
- 4th Fortified Region
- 102d Fortified Region
- 165th Tank Brigade
- 171st Tank Brigade
- 203d Tank Brigade
- 21st Tank Destroyer Brigade
- 52d Gun Artillery Regiment
- 145th Gun Artillery Regiment
- 1120th Gun Artillery Regiment
- 1121st Gun Artillery Regiment
- 1637th Gun Artillery Regiment
- 424th Howitzer Artillery Regiment
- 1632d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment
- 1633d Tank Destroyer Artillery Regiment
- 183d Mortar Regiment
- 470th Mortar Regiment
- 85th Guards Mortar Regiment
- 99th Guards Mortar Regiment
- 73d Antiaircraft Artillery Division
  - 205th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 402d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 430th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
  - 442d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
- 1648th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
- 29th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 46th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 302d Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 505th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
- 10th Pontoon Bridge Brigade
- 21st Motorized Assault Engineer Sapper Brigade
- 101st Separate Engineer Battalion
- 129th Separate Engineer Battalion

Weapons:

- 164 tanks and self-propelled guns
- 1,433 guns and mortars

Source: M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 401—3.

General Purkayev also provided extensive artillery support to 15th Army to assist it in reducing the fortified regions in its sector. An army artillery group consisting of the 52d, 145th, and 1120th Gun Artillery Regiments cooperated with gunboats of the Amur Flotilla to provide suppressive fire on Japanese positions during the actual crossing of the Amur River. Regimental and divisional artillery groups provided reinforcing fires. A total of twelve artillery regiments, one tank destroyer brigade, one antiaircraft artillery division, one antiaircraft artillery regiment, and four antiaircraft artillery battalions supported the subsequent advance of 15th Army.[5] Although rich in artillery, 15th Army received only limited armor assets because of poor road trafficability in the region. Front attached just three tank brigades and four self-propelled artillery battalions, for use as forward detachments to lead the advance of each rifle division and to provide direct fire support to these divisions when they engaged Japanese fortified positions.[6] The 10th Air Army, supporting the operations of the 2d Far Eastern Front, allocated 45 percent of its assets to support the attack of 15th Army.[7]

Because 15th Army needed heavy engineer support in order to cross the Amur River and to reduce several fortified regions, front attached a full motorized assault engineer sapper brigade, two separate engineer battalions, and a pontoon bridge battalion to the army. These units built and improved roads into the army concentration area and upgraded the load-bearing capacity of bridges. Within three months, the engineers constructed 266 kilometers of roadway and repaired another 1,417 kilometers of roads. Army engineers also created three separate river crossing sectors across the Amur River and built up to twenty camouflaged observation posts in each regimental sector along the river.[8]

In order to facilitate crossing the Amur and subsequent operations up the Sungari River, the Soviet Far East Command subordinated the Amur River Flotilla to the commander of the 2d Far Eastern Front. Rear Adm. N. V. Antonov's Amur Flotilla, with headquarters in Khabarovsk, consisted of three brigades of armored cutters, gunboats, and minesweepers stationed on the Amur River, plus several smaller units operating on tributaries of the Amur River, on the Ussuri River, and on Lake Khanka.[9] General Purkayev allocated most of this force to support 15th Army, specifically, the 1st and 2d Brigades of River Ships. He also assigned the 45th Fighter Aviation Regiment and the 10th Separate Aviation Detachment to support 15th Army's operations (see table 8—2).

Mamonov's operational plan was similar in concept to the planning of other army commanders. He selected a main attack axis up the Sungari River, but also sought to bring maximum pressure to bear on the Japanese by using virtually every feasible axis of advance in his sector. The 361st and 388th Rifle Divisions would make the army main attack in the center of the army sector. These two divisions, supported by the 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla, would cross the Amur River in the Leninskoye and

Table 8—2. Amur Flotilla Support for 15th Army

Amur Flotilla: Khabarovsk*: Rear Adm. N. V. Antonov
- 1st Brigade of River Ships: Capt. 1st Rank V. A. Krinov
  - Monitors: *Lenin*, *Krasnyi Vostok*, *Sun Yat Sen*
  - 1st Division of River Minesweepers
  - 1st Detachment of Armored Cutters
  - 5th Detachment of Armored Cutters
  - 1st Detachment of Cutter-Minesweepers
  - 2d Detachment of Cutter-Minesweepers
  - 1st Detachment of Mine-Cutters
  - two floating batteries
- 2d Brigade of River Ships: Capt. 1st Rank L. B. Tankevich
  - Monitors: *Sverdlov*, *Dal'nevostochnyi Komsomolets*
  - 2d Division of River Minesweepers
  - 2d Detachment of Armored Cutters
  - 3d Detachment of Armored Cutters
  - 3d Detachment of Cutter-Minesweepers
  - two floating batteries
- 45th Fighter Aviation Regiment
- 10th Separate Aviation Detachment

*8 August—deployed to Leninskoye (lst Brigade) and Nizhne-Spasskoye (2d Brigade).

Source: V. M. Bagrov and N. F. Sungorkin, *Krasno-znamennaia amurskaia flotiliia* [The Red Banner Amur Flotilla] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1976), 155—57.

Voskresenskoye sectors, respectively. After securing the bridgeheads, the two divisions, led by the 171st Tank Brigade as forward detachment, would occupy Tungchiang, advance up the east bank of the Sungari to Fuchin, and then move southwestward along the river to Chiamussu. The 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla would cooperate with the two divisions and conduct local amphibious operations as necessary in order to compensate for the difficult overland route of the infantry and armor advance. On the army's left, the 2d Brigade of the Amur Flotilla would transport the 630th Rifle Regiment across the river from Nizhne-Spasskoye, so that it could assault Fuyuan and other Japanese strongpoints on the south bank of the Amur as far southwest as the mouth of the Sungari River. On the army's right, the 34th Rifle Division, 203d Tank Brigade, and 102d Fortified Region would, in coordination with the 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla, force the Amur River near Blagoslovennoye. Once across the river, this force would advance southward, reducing Japanese fortified positions between Lopei and Chiamussu. Ultimately, the 34th Rifle Division would join the main body of 15th Army in a coordinated attack on Chiamussu from the north and east, another pincer movement so characteristic of the Manchurian campaign.[10]

Late on the evening of 8 August, ground forces were in their jumping-off positions, and assault units were prepared for transport across the river. To support that assault, the 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla had displaced to Leninskoye; the 2d Brigade, to Nizhne-Spasskoye. General Mamonov established a joint command post for the 15th Army and the Amur Flotilla at Leninskoye. In addition, a floating command post and naval repair base deployed on the Amur River in 15th Army sector.[11] To destroy Japanese outposts on the south bank of the river, the army planned to fire a fifty-minute artillery preparation. Army air assets prepared to cover the rifle units crossing the Amur and to bomb major Japanese fortified positions, troop garrisons, and communications links to the depth of the Japanese defensive zone.

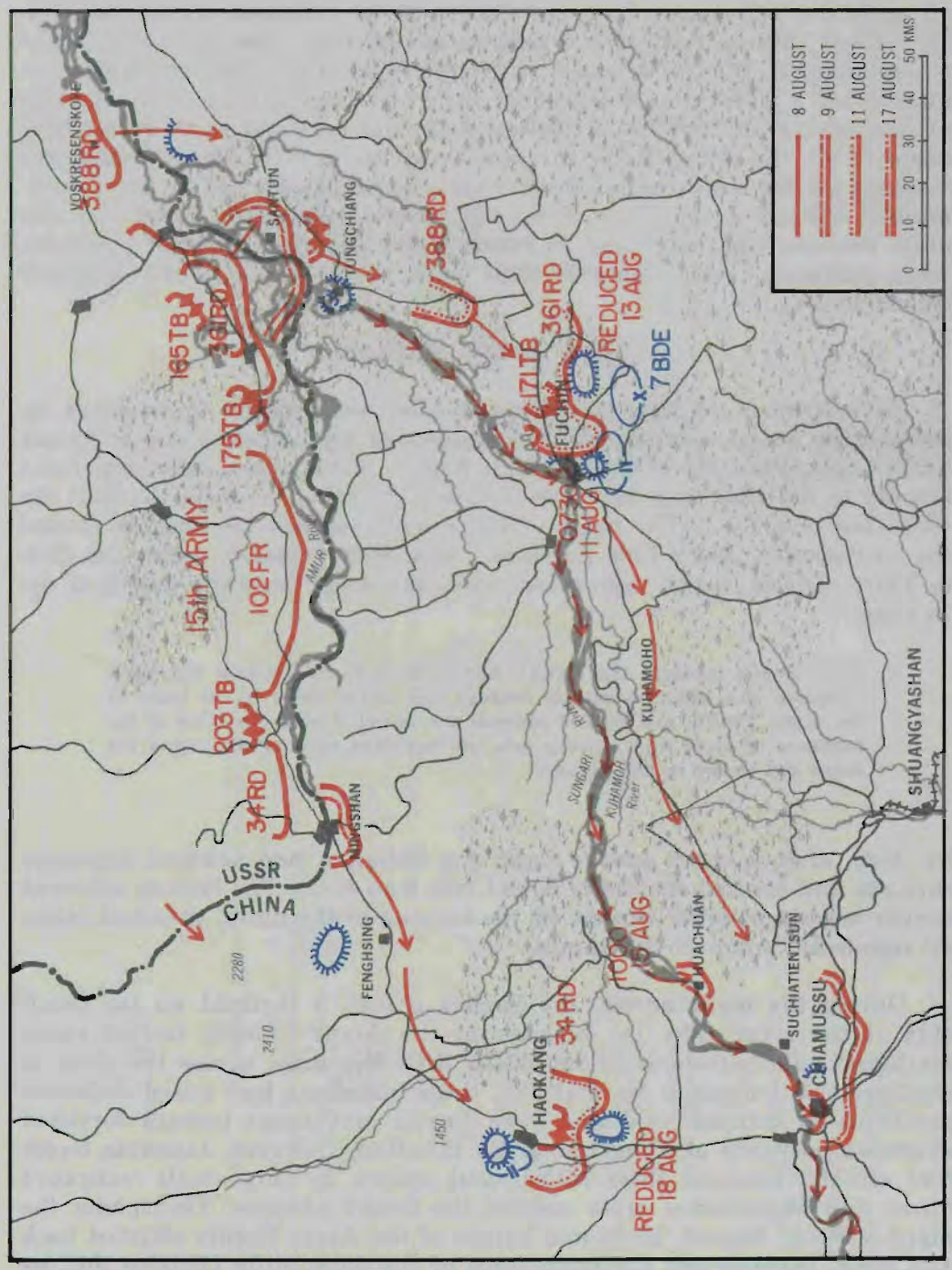
15th Army Attack

At 0100 on 9 August, the forces of 15th Army began their attack by dispatching border guards units, reconnaissance detachments, and advanced battalions across the river by small boat to secure tactically important islands in the river and Japanese outposts guarding the area south of the river (see map 8—1). The boats of the Amur Flotilla's 1st Brigade carried the 2d Battalion, 394th Rifle Regiment, 361st Rifle Division, across the river to Tartar Island, twenty kilometers down the Amur from the mouth of the Sungari.

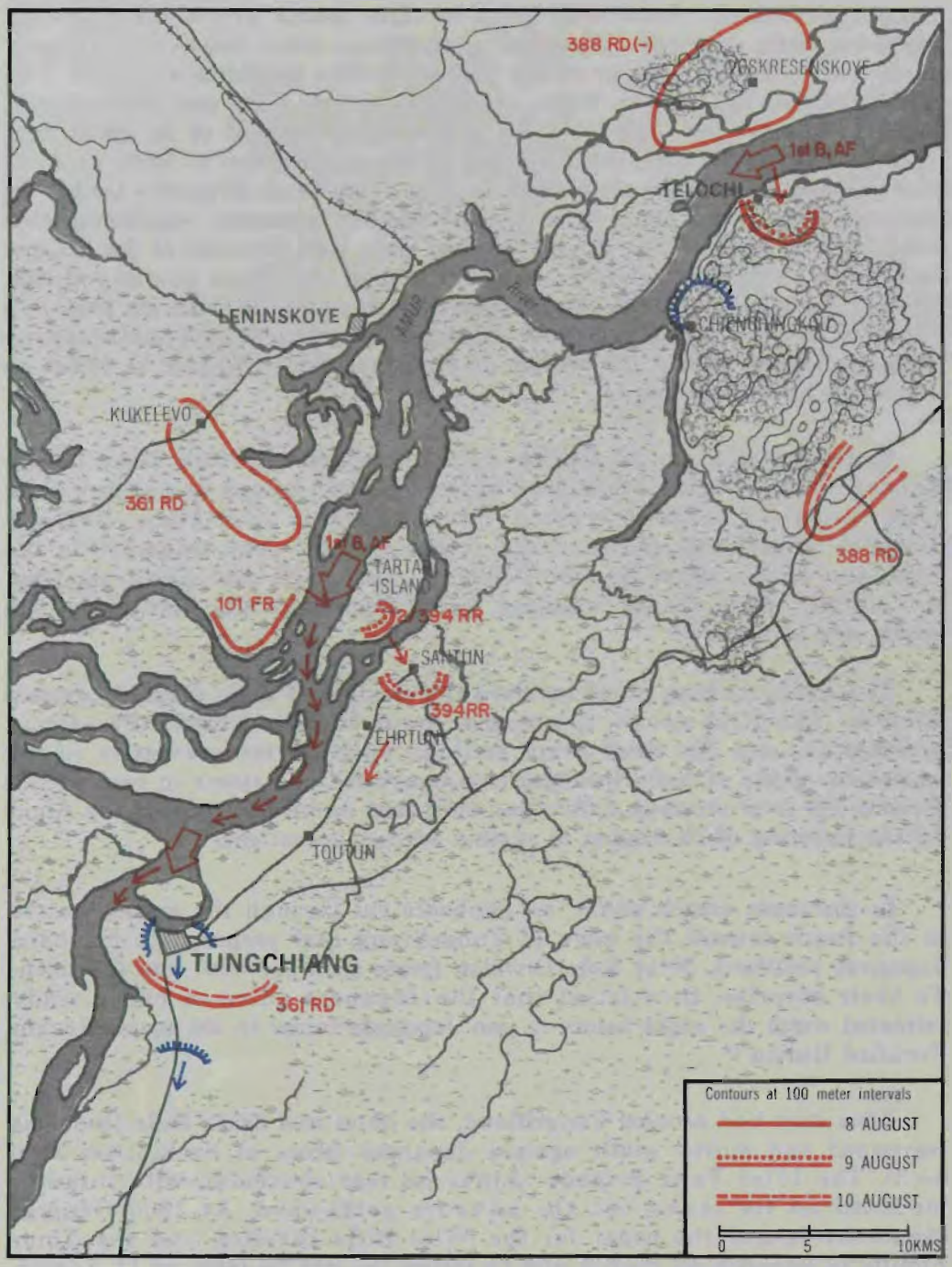
> The soldiers awaited the signal. Red rockets flashed across the pitch darkness. The battalion silently boarded and settled down in the boats of the Amur Flotilla and headed towards the island. Under the cover of the darkness of night and pouring rain the battalion successfully forced the Amur and landed on the island.[12]

By 0800, after a short intense fight, the battalion had subdued Japanese outposts and secured the entire island (see map 8—2). The Soviets achieved similar success in other sectors; by the evening of the ninth, they had taken all significant Amur River islands.

During the main attack, the Soviets gained a foothold on the south side of the river. The 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla ferried three reinforced rifle battalions of the 394th Rifle Regiment across the river to reinforce this lodgment. By nightfall, these battalions had seized Japanese positions at Santun and had even begun movement toward fortified Japanese positions at Tungchiang. By this time, however, Japanese forces had already received their withdrawal orders, so only small rearguard forces and Manchurian units resisted the Soviet advance. Throughout the night of 9—10 August, boats and barges of the Amur Flotilla shuttled back and forth, transporting the main force of the 361st Rifle Division and its rear service units across the river between Santun and Tungchiang. On the 361st Rifle Division's left flank, two rifle regiments of the 388th Rifle Division also crossed to the south bank of the river.[13]



Map 8—1. 15th Army Operations, 9—17 August 1945



Map 8—2. The Assault Across the Amur River, 9—10 August

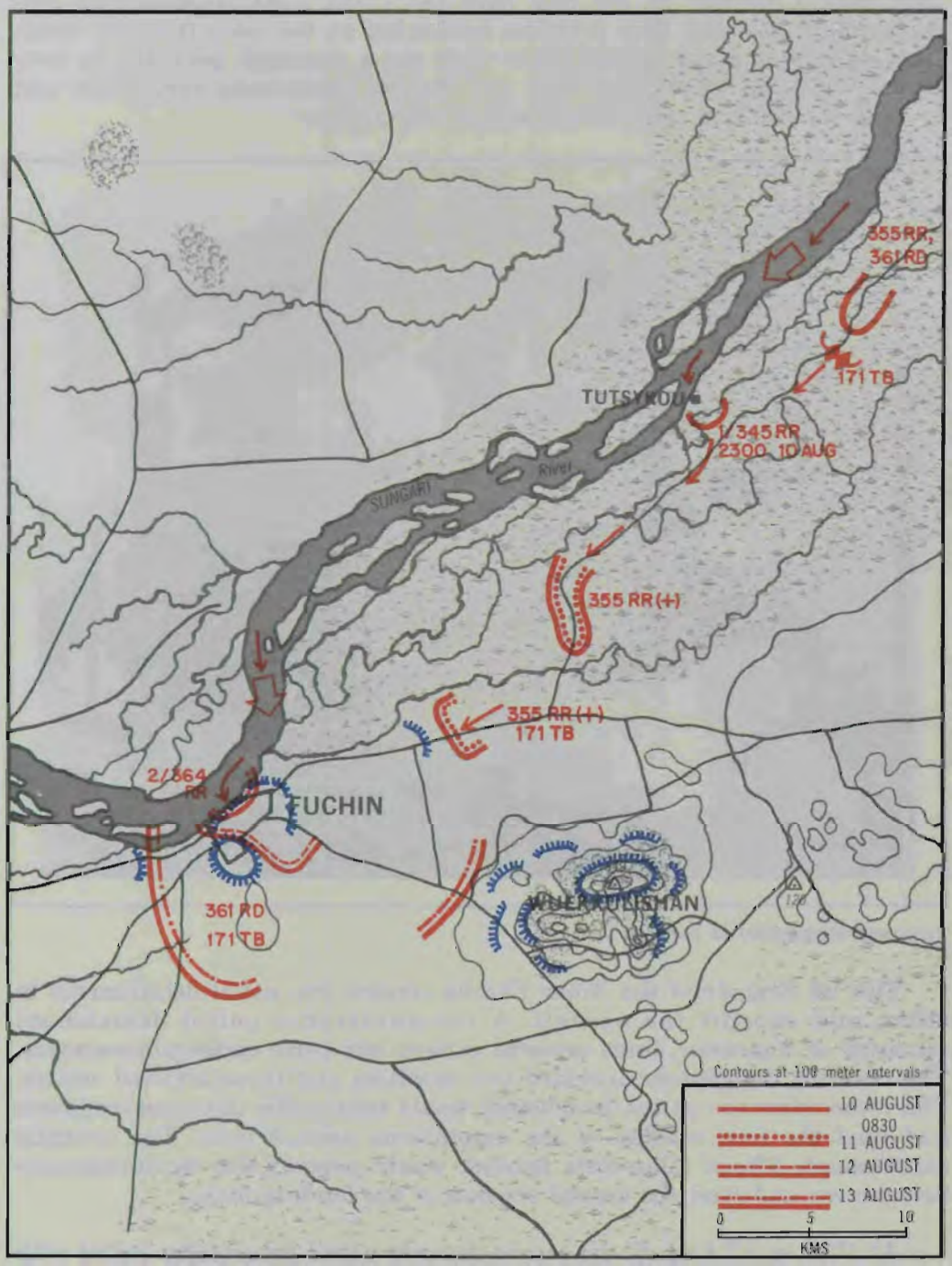
Crossing operations were a major responsibility of the 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla, which used boats to carry troops across the river and sixty-ton rafts supported by three pontoons to carry heavier equipment. Each raft could carry one of the following four combinations: one T-34 and two T-26 tanks, two T-34s, six T-26s, or one T-34 and three trucks. Each run across the river took four to five hours because of the swift river currents. Moreover, the limited rafting assets required two to three days for the passage of a single tank brigade. The 171st Tank Brigade's tanks, for example, took thirty hours to cross, with the rear elements completing their crossing in a total of four days.[14] By that time, lead elements of the brigade were more than 100 kilometers away. Poor road conditions guaranteed that the brigade's rear elements would take days to catch up with the brigade's forward elements. The resulting absence of logistical and maintenance support further limited the ability of the 171st Tank Brigade to fulfill its role of forward detachment.

A general shortage of pontoon units also forced the 15th Army to rely heavily on Amur River commercial steamships and barges to transport men and equipment across the river. The steamships *Astrakhan, Groznyi, Donbass, Kokkinanki, Sormovo,* and others provided extra transport for the fleet, and other steamships, the *Chicherin, Ostrovskii,* and *Kirov,* equipped as hospital ships, carried wounded troops back from the fighting on the south side of the river.

The entire crossing effort involved the creation of three distinct crossing sectors. The first sector comprised Amur Flotilla ships, the second steamships, and the third army pontoon units. A representative of the operations group of army headquarters supervised operations in each sector. Despite the river crossing difficulties, sufficient forces had crossed the Amur by the morning of 10 August to sustain further operations.[15]

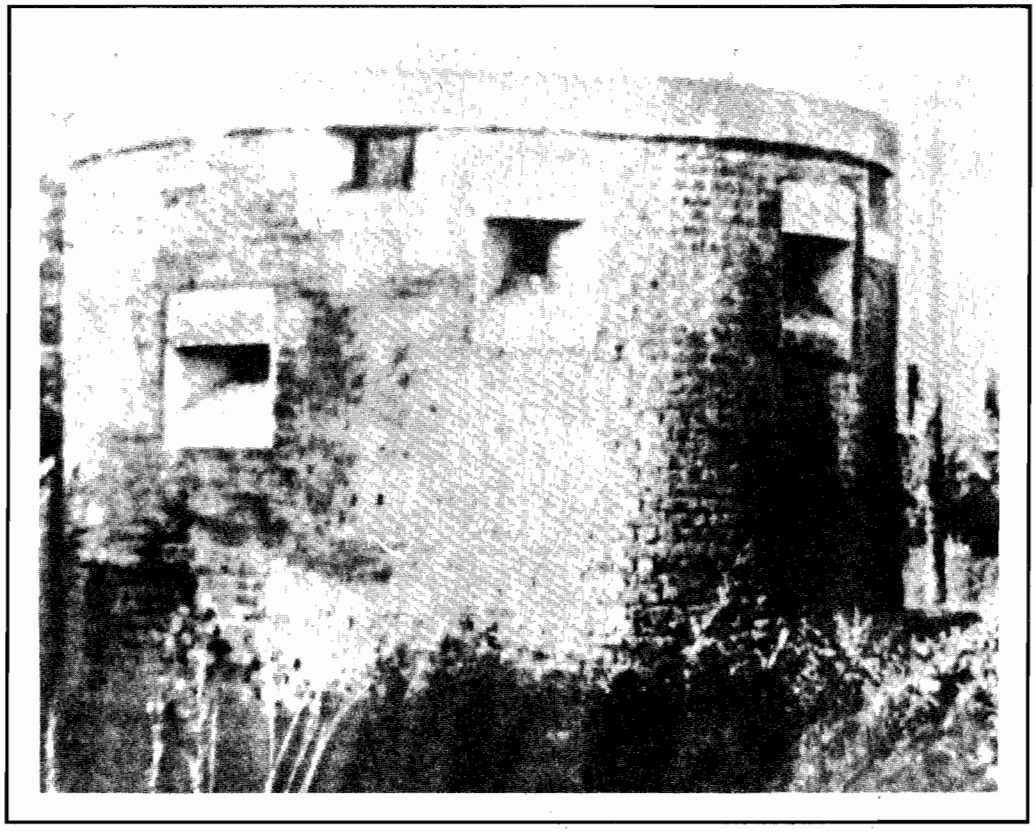
In the main attack sector, as gunboats cut through the murky waters of the Amur toward the town of Tungchiang and prepared to bombard Japanese positions, 361st Rifle Division forces took the road into the town. To their surprise, they found that the Japanese garrison had already retreated south the night before to join Japanese forces in the major Fuchin Fortified Region.[16]

After they had secured Tungchiang, the 361st and 388th Rifle Divisions regrouped and moved south against Japanese forces at Fuchin (see map 8—3). The 171st Tank Brigade (minus its rear elements), with infantry mounted on its tanks, led the advance southward. At 1500 General Mamonov issued the order for the 361st Rifle Division and the Amur Flotilla to advance on Fuchin and to secure the city by 0800 on 11 August. He ordered the 361st Rifle Division and 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla to land two reinforced rifle battalions and an assault rifle company on the right (east) bank of the Sungari near Fuchin. These units would make a



Map 8—3. The Battle of Fuchin, 10—13 August

coordinated assault on the city with the 171st Tank Brigade and lead elements of the 361st Rifle Division advancing on the town from the north. Lack of time made it impossible to work out a thorough plan and to write orders. Thus, all orders were oral, and the few intervening hours were used to train the units in amphibious assault techniques.[17]



Japanese strongpoint at Fuchin

The 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla created two naval detachments to effect and support the assault. A reconnaissance patrol detachment consisted of a monitor, three armored cutters, and three cutter-minesweepers. The covering detachment included two monitors and three armored cutters. The reconnaissance patrol detachment would reconnoiter Japanese positions and land the first echelon of the amphibious assault force. The covering detachment, fifteen kilometers behind, would support the reconnaissance detachment and land the second echelon of the landing force.

At 1630 on 10 August, the reconnaissance patrol detachment sailed with the 3d Battalion, 364th Rifle Regiment, 361st Rifle Division, on board the monitor *Sun Yat Sen*, and with the assault company on the three armored cutters. Carrying the 1st Battalion, 345th Rifle Regiment, the Amur Flotilla covering detachment departed three hours later. During the seventy-kilometer

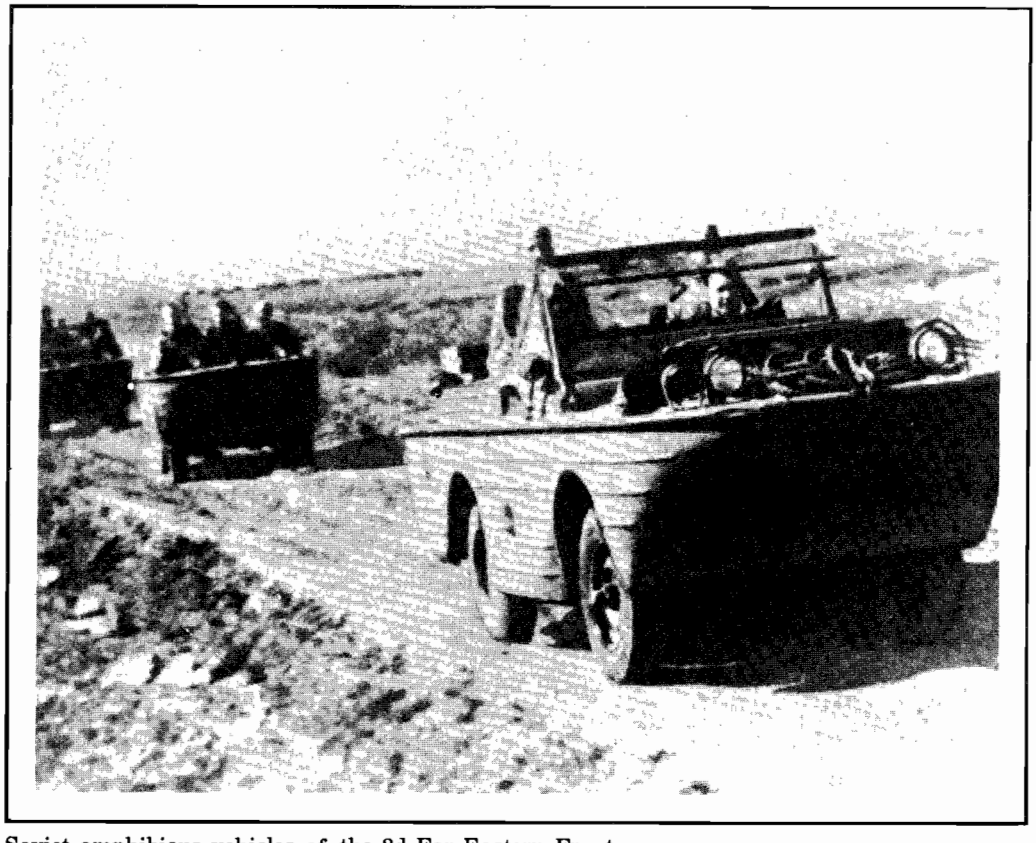
journey upriver, the Soviet ships' lookouts watched for mines and river obstacles. Fortunately for the force, the Japanese, in their hasty withdrawal to Fuchin, did not have time to sow mines or other obstacles in the river.[18]

At 2200 on 10 August, the detachments reached Tutsykou, thirty-seven kilometers north of Fuchin, dropped anchor, and landed the 1st Battalion, 345th Rifle Regiment. The armored cutters set off south to reconnoiter the river channel near Fuchin and the Japanese firing points covering the river. The cutters searched the channel and found it clear of mines. Darkness, however, prevented their discovering the configuration of the Japanese defenses. Also because of darkness, the Japanese in turn failed to detect the cutters, which returned without incident to Tutsykou. Based on this reconnaissance, the landing force commander (361st Rifle Division commander) ordered the 1st Battalion, 345th Rifle Regiment, on shore to join lead elements of the 361st Rifle Division and to approach Fuchin by land.[19] The second battalion and the assault company would conduct an amphibious assault at dawn on the city of Fuchin in coordination with the advancing ground force.

At 0700 on 11 August, the three armored cutters and minesweepers, followed by the monitors, approached Fuchin. Twenty minutes later the cutters opened fire on Japanese positions. The Japanese returned heavy fire with mortars, artillery, and machine guns, but effectiveness was limited because the Japanese lacked weapons larger than 75-mm. The 130-mm guns of the Soviet monitors *Krasnyi Vostok, Lenin,* and *Sun Yat Sen,* and the multiple rocket launchers of the armored cutters systematically silenced the outgunned Japanese firing positions. The monitors destroyed five concrete and twelve wooden pillboxes, six mortar batteries, and several ammunition warehouses, and the armored cutters destroyed another ten firing points with direct naval gunfire. During the one-hour artillery duel, the armored cutters also landed the assault company, and at 0830 the entire 3d Battalion, 364th Rifle Regiment, landed from the monitor *Sun Yat Sen.* These units secured the immediate shoreline and moved toward the city. On the outskirts of the city, the landing party met heavy Japanese fire and counterattacks, which they repelled with the aid of heavy gunfire from the monitors. Only the timely arrival of lead elements of the 171st Tank Brigade and the 361st Rifle Division's ground forces from the north finally broke the determined Japanese resistance. After 0900, the Japanese withdrew into the fortified military settlement in the southwest sector of Fuchin and into the Wuerhkuli Shan Fortified Region, in the hills southeast of the city. Fighting for the fortified camp continued on into the twelfth.

> The Japanese strongly fortified the town, as part of the Fuchin Fortified Region, creating in its outskirts permanent firing positions. In rock buildings they established pillboxes, and around the town they erected metal watchtowers on which, at a height of 20 meters, they built armored cupolas with embrasures for all around firing of heavy machine guns. The town and fortified region was defended by the 2d Battalion of the Sungari Naval Flotilla infantry regiment, the 25th Security Battalion, and other subunits and attachments of Manchurian troops.[20]

Tankers of the 171st Tank Brigade and infantry men of the 361st Rifle Division slowly cleared the town in house-to-house fighting. By noon on 11 August, the 171st Tank Brigade, with a battalion of the 355th Rifle Regiment, 361st Rifle Division, had occupied the center of the city. That night the Japanese launched several unsuccessful counterattacks. New Soviet attacks supported by monitors had only limited success the next day. Finally, on 13 August the main body of the 171st Tank Brigade and 361st Rifle Division arrived in Fuchin to join the fray. By the evening of the thirteenth, Japanese resistance had ended in the city, although Japanese forces continued to hold out on the hilly fortress southeast of town. With Fuchin in Soviet hands, General Mamonov marched on to Chiamussu.



Soviet amphibious vehicles of the 2d Far Eastern Front

While the main attack drove up the Sungari, secondary Soviet attacks plunged forward on the flanks of 15th Army. On 9 August the 34th Rifle Division and 203d Tank Brigade crossed the Amur River on the right flank. The next day they advanced south along the Lopei-Chiamussu road. The 34th Rifle Division left forces behind to blockade the Japanese fortified positions at Fenghsiang, while the main body moved south over water-soaked roads and invested the major fortified position at Hsingshanchen.

Heavy Soviet air and artillery bombardment at Hsingshanchen ultimately forced the Japanese to withdraw into the hills west of the fortified region or south to Chiamussu. By the thirteenth, the advanced elements of 34th Rifle Division had pushed slowly south toward Japanese positions at Lienchiangkou, covering the north bank of the Sungari River across from Chiamussu.[21]

On the army's left, the 630th Rifle Regiment of the 388th Rifle Division cooperated with the 2d Brigade of the Amur Flotilla in order to capture Japanese defenses on the south bank of the Amur River southwest of Khabarovsk.[22] The most important of these Japanese positions was the town of Fuyuan. Destruction of these Japanese garrisons would insure safe, continuous Soviet use of the river. At 0320 on 9 August, the gunship *Proletarii*, the 2d Detachment of Armored Cutters, and the 3d Detachment of Minesweepers left Nizhne-Spasskoye, carrying on their decks the 1st Battalion, 630th Rifle Regiment. The monitors *Sverdlov* and *Dal'nevostochnyi Komsomolets*, and the 3d Detachment of Armored Cutters took up firing positions near Malankin Island in order to support the landing at Fuyuan.

As the amphibious troops and ships approached, the monitors and cutters opened fire on Japanese firing positions of the Fuyuan Fortified Region. Landing parties went ashore near the wharves at the west and east ends of the city. Initially, the unsuspecting Japanese did not resist, but as the 1st Battalion, 630th Rifle Regiment, advanced, Japanese resistance stiffened. Soviet Yak-9 aircraft of the 307th Fighter Aviation Regiment provided air cover until it was clear that no Japanese aircraft would intercede. Closer to the center of the city, two detachments of Soviet sailors went ashore to support the 1st Battalion of the 630th Rifle Regiment. By 0800 Japanese resistance had ceased.

Having secured the city, a portion of the 1st Battalion, 630th Rifle Regiment, remained as a garrison, while the rest of the unit embarked once again aboard ship. This time the 2d Brigade of the Amur Flotilla would move upstream toward the mouth of the Sungari, reducing the three Japanese positions at Chinteli, Otu, and Kaintsi. En route, the brigade picked up the 2d Battalion, 630th Rifle Regiment. When the brigade arrived at Chinteli, at 1000 on 10 August, it found the city already in Soviet hands, having fallen to the crew of an armored cutter and several soldiers who had crossed the river and secured the town on their own initiative the night before. After picking up the 3d Battalion, 630th Rifle Regiment, at the village of Pokrovskoye, the brigade moved on to Otu, only to find it also in Soviet hands. Continuing upriver, the brigade reached Kaintsi at 1925 on 10 August. The monitor *Sverdlov* and three armored cutters landed parties at the mouth of the Kaintsi River, while the monitor *Dal'nevostochnyi Komsomolets* landed a rifle company north of Kaintsi village. Once again most Japanese had already withdrawn from the village on the ninth. The few that remained fled after hearing the first salvo of rockets from the armored cutters.

Thus, by the end of the tenth, the 630th Rifle Regiment and 2d Brigade of the Amur Flotilla had cleared the entire south bank of the Amur of Japanese for 200 kilometers from Khabarovsk to the mouth of the Sungari River. The 2d Brigade of the Amur Flotilla left garrisons behind in each of the towns taken from the Japanese. The brigade also transported the support echelons of 15th Army across the Amur at Leninskoye. Having finished the task by 13 August, the command group of the Amur Flotilla, then en route up the Sungari River to Fuchin, ordered the 2d Brigade to reinforce the 1st Brigade. It also ordered a battalion of gunboats and a detachment of armored cutters from the Ussuri naval force and a battalion of armored cutters, the monitor *Aktivnyi*, and the gunboat *Krasnaya Zvezda* from the Zee-Bureisk Brigade to join the 1st Brigade at Fuchin. This concentrated naval power would compensate for the flooded terrain obstacle that would slow down Soviet ground forces on the south bank of the Sungari.

Faced with the sudden Soviet attack, the Japanese First Area Army, as early as the evening of the ninth ordered the 134th Infantry Division to fall back on Chiamussu and, if necessary, to Fengsang. By the twelfth the bulk of the 134th Infantry Division was at Chiamussu, leaving only a rear guard and Manchurian units to defend in the fortified regions. After the Soviets had taken Fuchin and advanced on Chiamussu, the 134th assigned the defense of Chiamussu to the 7th Manchurian Infantry Brigade and withdrew up the Sungari River to Fengsang.[23]

At Fuchin on the thirteenth, the commanders of the 1st Brigade of the Amur Flotilla and the 361st Rifle Division considered an advance on Chiamussu. High water made the few roads along the south bank of the Sungari treacherous. Maintaining a road for even a limited offensive would take considerable engineer work. Complicating matters, fuel shortages hindered the movement of the 171st Tank Brigade. Facing these problems, the respective commanders selected amphibious operations to secure Chiamussu, specifically a series of landings along the Sungari in order to threaten Japanese withdrawal routes and to facilitate the advance of the division's main force moving overland along the road network south of the river. Rear Adm. N. V. Antonov ordered the 1st and 2d Brigades of the Amur Flotilla to land assault detachments at Chiamussu and to cooperate with ground units of 15th Army in securing Chiamussu by 15 August:

> the 1st Brigade would land one reinforced battalion at Kekhoma [Kuhomo Ho] and Sansinchen [Hsincheng], 85 kilometers and 70 kilometers below Chiamussu, to secure the towns and support the movement of the battalions along the shore and the seizure of Chiamussu. The 2d Brigade would follow the ships of the 1st Brigade and land the 632d Rifle Regiment in the immediate vicinity of Chiamussu.[24]

At 0535 on 14 August, ships of the 1st Brigade, with two battalions of the 349th Rifle Regiment, 361st Rifle Division, and a mixed detachment of the 83d Rifle Regiment, 34th Rifle Division, headed upriver toward the two

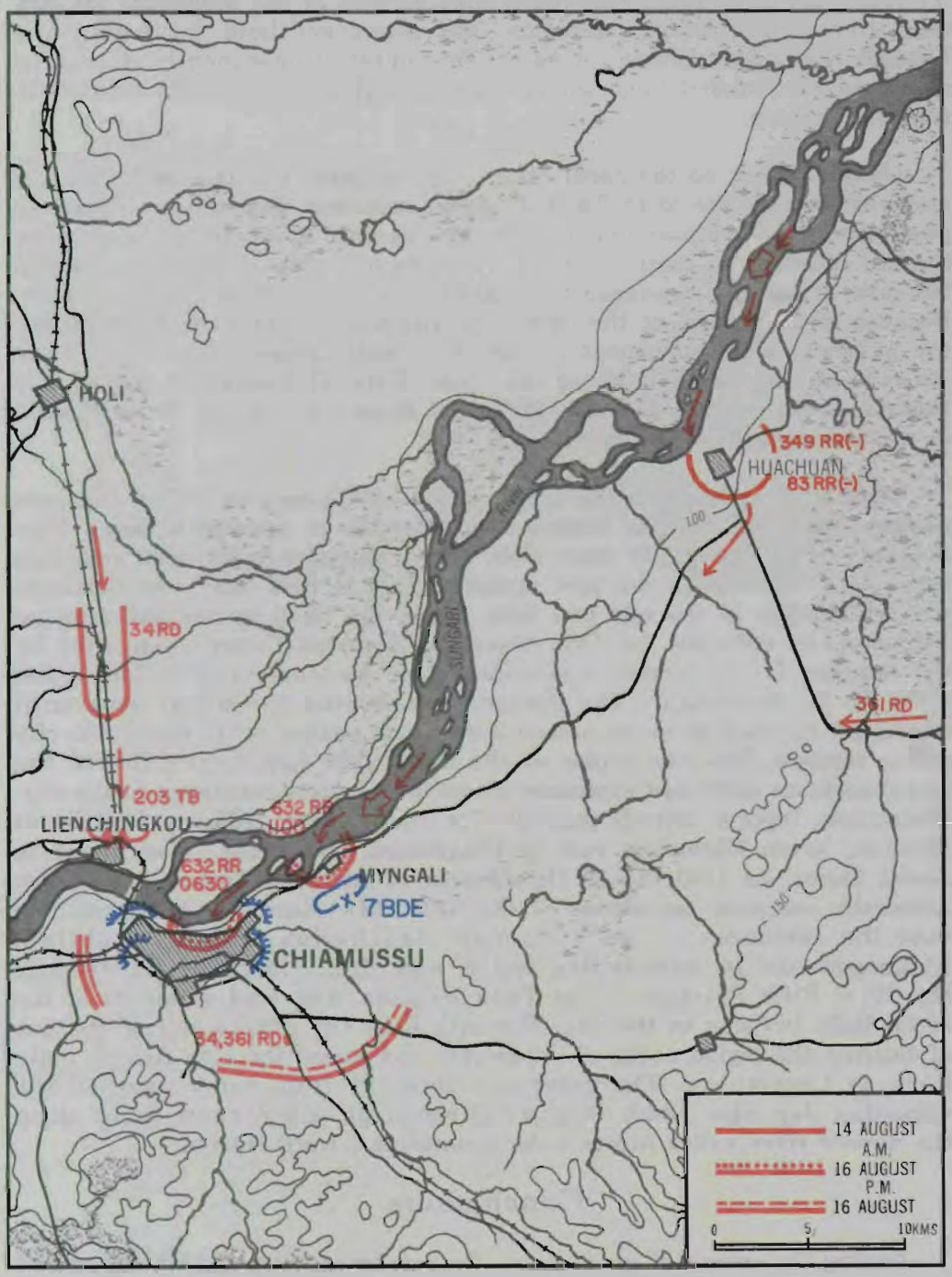
landing sites (see map 8—4). When they arrived at the appointed landing sites, they found that the Japanese had abandoned both, but high water blocked roads from those towns to Chiamussu. Consequently, the ships sailed on and landed their troops at Sustun [Huachuan], forty kilometers from Chiamussu.

On 14 August, on the north bank of the Sungari, the 34th Rifle Division and elements of the 203d Tank Brigade assaulted and secured Japanese positions at Lienchiangkou, across the Sungari River from Chiamussu. Several attempts to cross the river by makeshift rafts proved unsuccessful because of strong Japanese resistance and treacherous river currents. Because of the failure of the 34th Rifle Division to cross the Sungari and the painfully slow movement of the 361st Rifle Division and 171st Tank Brigade on the south bank of the river, General Purkayev, the 2d Far Eastern Front commander, decided on 15 August to use the Amur Flotilla in a direct assault on Chiamussu.

That evening the flotilla's ships moved on Chiamussu.[25] The Japanese released logs and burning barges into the river to attempt to block their movement. Dodging the obstacles, the armored cutters and monitors approached Chiamussu the next morning, only to find that most buildings and warehouses in the city had been put to the torch by the withdrawing Japanese. At 0630 the 1st Detachment of Armored Cutters, supported by the monitor *Lenin*, landed a reconnaissance detachment of sailors under Capt. S. M. Kuznetsov. The detachment secured the wharf area until reinforced by another reconnaissance unit that pushed on to secure the city police station. The remainder of the 632d Rifle Regiment followed the reconnaissance units and overcame scattered Japanese resistance in the city. Meanwhile, reports arrived that the 7th Manchurian Infantry Brigade at Myngali, seven kilometers east of Chiamussu, was ready to surrender to Soviet forces. At 1100 the 3d Detachment of Armored Cutters landed two automatic weapons companies of the 632d Rifle Regiment at Myngali to take the surrender of the 3,500-man Manchurian unit. By nightfall, Chiamussu and its surrounding region were firmly in Soviet hands, with the 361st Rifle Division, 171st Tank Brigade, and lead elements of the 388th Rifle Division in the city. The 34th Rifle Division completed its task of clearing the region north of Chiamussu and joined the 15th Army's main body at Chiamussu. The combined force of 15th Army pursued the retreating Japanese 134th Infantry Division up the Sungari River along the narrow river valley through the mountains toward Harbin.

Conclusions

During the course of seven days, the combined force of 15th Army and the Amur Flotilla had crossed the Amur River and advanced 210 kilometers to Chiamussu, at a rate of thirty kilometers per day over appalling terrain. Within nine days the flotilla had transported 91,000 men, 150 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 413 artillery pieces, along with 3,000 horses and



Map 8—4. The Fall of Chiamussu, 14—16 August

28,000 tons of supplies across the Amur.[27] The ships of the flotilla with amphibious detachments represented the advanced guard of the front and fulfilled the role of forward detachment as well. Operating far ahead of the main force, ships and amphibious forces overcame the exceptional terrain difficulties and generated the high tempo of advance in the region. By timely application of their limited combat power, they maintained pressure on withdrawing Japanese units and, in doing so, secured the key Japanese fortified points in the region. The operations of the Amur Flotilla and 15th Army form a classic case study of joint amphibious operations, operations that successfully overcome extreme terrain obstacles. Much of the operation's success resulted from the close coordination of the flotilla and the ground force and the ability of commanders to adapt to the changing conditions in the area of operations. The initiative of these commanders maintained the momentum of the offensive until its successful conclusion.

Notes

1. Bōeichō, *Senshi sōsho,* 438; JM 154, sketch no. 2, map no. 2, chart 3, gives 134th Infantry Division strength as 14,056 men; S. E. Zakharov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi tikhookeanskii flot* [Red Banner Pacific Ocean Fleet] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1973), 206.
2. *IVMV*, 2:200.
3. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 97.
4. Ibid.
5. Zakharov, *Final: istoriko*, 400; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 109; Sidorov, "Boevoe," 15.
6. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 125; Krupchenko, *Sovetskie*, 320.
7. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 117.
8. Ibid., 132; *IVMV*, 2:208.
9. V. N. Bagrov and N. F. Sungorkin, *Krasno-znamennaia amurskaia flotiliia* (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1976), 155—57.
10. Ibid., 149—50.
11. Ibid., 151.
12. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 230, claims the Soviets overcame light Japanese resistance on Tartar Island. Other sources deny any resistance.
13. Zakharov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi,* 203—4; Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno,* 159—60; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda,* 230.
14. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 231—32.
15. Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno*, 167—68.
16. Zakharov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi*, 203—4; Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno*, 160; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 233, mentions a "two hour bloody struggle" for Tungchiang.
17. Zakharov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi,* 206—7.
18. Ibid.; Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno*, 178—79.
19. Accounts of the assault on Fuchin are found in Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 233—35; Zakharov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi*, 206—10; Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno*, 179—83.
20. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 234.
21. Ibid., 232—33; Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno*, 185.

22. Zakharov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi*, 204—6; Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno*, 161—66.
23. JM 154, 9, 61, 63.
24. Zakharov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi*, 210.
25. Details of the Chiamussu operation are from Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 235; Zakharov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi*, 210—11; Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno*, 185—87.
26. Bagrov and Sungorkin, *Krasno*, 168.

Conclusions

9

Soviet operational and tactical combat in Manchuria evidenced the full maturity of Soviet military theory and practice produced by four years of war. Painstakingly detailed planning and imaginative execution of military operations proved to be the keys to rapid Soviet victory, as these eight case studies testify.

Use of Terrain

Soviet planning for the Manchurian operations required careful analysis of the terrain in the theater of operations, so that Soviet forces could be tailored to take maximum advantage of the terrain. The Soviets acted on the assumption that they could benefit as much by operating over undefended, but tactically hindering, terrain as they could by attacking across defended, but easily passable, terrain, the so-called high speed avenues of approach. Thus, they deployed their forces so they could use all axes of advance into Manchuria, good or bad. The Soviet assumption was correct. The carefully tailored combat units, each with the support necessary to overcome terrain problems, operated successfully on virtually every axis of advance. The 5th Army, with its heavy complement of artillery and armor, overcame strong Japanese fortifications constructed in heavily wooded terrain. The army overcame, isolated, and bypassed fortifications and was able quickly to establish the mobile forward detachments required to drive rapidly into the depths of Japanese defenses. The 1st Red Banner Army tailored its rifle divisions to penetrate twenty kilometers of lightly defended, dense, mountainous forest. The divisions built roads as they advanced, overcame light Japanese resistance, and, in just eighteen hours, emerged into the open Japanese rear area. Despite the nature of the terrain, armor played a crucial role in making this advance possible. North of Lake Khanka, the smaller 35th Army launched two rifle divisions across a relatively broad sector, across a major river, and through miles of marshland. Though armor support of this army faltered, imaginative engineering measures enabled the two rifle divisions to cross the marshes and emerge astride the major Japanese communications route from Mishan to Hutou, deep in the Japanese rear area.

In western Manchuria, the Soviet 39th Army confounded Japanese military planners by thrusting two full rifle corps, led by a tank division and two tank brigades, through the supposedly roadless and impassable Grand Khingan Mountains. While the bulk of the army burst upon the rear of the surprised Japanese force, only one rifle division dealt with the major Japanese fortifications network defending this sector of Manchuria. Along the Sungari River, 15th Army conducted joint operations with the Amur River Naval Flotilla, overcoming more than two hundred kilometers of marshland in a series of amphibious assaults coordinated with the simultaneous advance of a ground force. In all instances, the Soviets formed distinctive armies, some composed of rifle corps and some just of rifle divisions, but all with enough artillery, armor, and engineer support attached. The diversity of the Soviet force was as much a surprise to the Japanese as was its ability to operate over terrain which the Japanese considered impassable.

Surprise

While achieving strategic surprise over the Japanese by use of an elaborate deception plan, the Soviets also achieved operational and tactical surprise. By Soviet definition, one could (and can) achieve surprise by virtue of the location of an attack, by the form of an attack, by one's organization of a force for combat, and by using the cover of darkness and bad weather to mask the attack. The Soviets exploited all of these possibilities. They systematically took advantage of and operated on terrain that the Japanese felt was unsuited for conduct of military operations. Strategically, the Soviets committed the Trans-Baikal Front to a region over which the Japanese believed a front (or even an army) could not operate. Operationally, armies advanced across regions that the Japanese thought only light forces could negotiate. The 39th Army's passage of the Grand Khingans, 1st Red Banner Army's operations in eastern Manchuria, and 35th Army's advance north of Lake Khanka all capitalized on Japanese misconceptions concerning Soviet ability to cross the terrain and to exploit it.

At the tactical level, the examples of surprise were more numerous. Rifle corps and rifle divisions in 5th Army overcame Japanese fortified positions around Suifenho by maneuvering through the dense forests and rugged hills that flanked the fortified positions. The 1st Red Banner Army's divisions penetrated a sector the Japanese had left virtually undefended, as they depended on terrain for security. The 35th Army's divisions likewise managed the swamps north of Lake Khanka, and 15th Army, with naval support, steamed and marched up the Sungari River to Chiamussu. In all of these cases, the Japanese were simply unprepared to deal with such unexpected large-scale attacks, attacks that ripped the initiative from Japanese hands and prevented the Japanese from ever regaining it.

The form of the attack also surprised the Japanese. Expecting frontal Soviet attacks aimed at penetrating and reducing Japanese defenses, the Japanese were unprepared to deal with widespread Soviet use of envelopment and deep exploitations. The tactical envelopment by Soviet 5th Army of Japanese fortifications followed by armor-led deep thrusts toward Mutanchiang, the flanking of the Hutou fortress by 35th Army, and the amphibious envelopments by 15th Army confounded the Japanese. The operational envelopment of Japanese defenses in western Manchuria by the 39th Army preempted and collapsed Japanese defenses in the west.

Flexible Soviet organization for combat broke the stereotyped view the Japanese had of how the Soviets were supposed to fight. Rather than adhering rigidly to a two-echelon operational formation, the Soviets tailored their formations to enemy strength, terrain, and Soviet objectives. While 5th Army formed in two echelons of corps, divisions, and regiments, 1st Red Banner Army organized for combat in a single echelon of rifle corps. The 35th Army attacked in a single echelon of three rifle divisions abreast, as did 15th Army along the Amur River. Both 36th and 39th Armies deployed in a single echelon of rifle corps. Compounding the unsettling effect on the Japanese of varied Soviet echelonment was the fact that the Soviets launched several of their attacks from precombat march column formation (39th Army, for example).

Perhaps the greatest surprise for the Japanese was the Soviet choice of timing for the attack. As early as May 1945, the Soviets had chosen mid-August as the most propitious time for the campaign. (Subsequent events forced the Soviets to attack on 9 August in order to occupy Manchuria before Japan's surrender.) August was the final month of the rainy season when Manchuria usually experienced frequent heavy thunderstorms and heavy flooding. Such weather would make attack conditions difficult, but it would also cover attack preparations and reinforce Japanese complacency. To capitalize further on Japanese surprise from an attack in terrible weather, the Soviets chose to attack at night.

Soviet exploitation of inclement weather and darkness had a devastating effect on the Japanese. Surprise was total, and many Japanese positions fell to the Soviets without a struggle. Initial Japanese defensive lines fell quickly, and the Japanese were never able to recover from the surprise sufficiently to regroup and reestablish defenses. The Soviets have viewed their achievement of surprise and its consequences as one of the most important lessons of the Manchurian campaign.

Maneuver

The Soviets adjusted their operational and tactical techniques to the goal of realizing deep battle and rapid victory. Those techniques were aimed not only at defeating an enemy force, but also at mastering difficult terrain and beating the clock. In many respects the terrain and time requirements

were more imposing problems to overcome than the enemy. All three factors considered together posed a significant challenge for the Soviets. Consequently, while the Soviets used techniques developed during the war in the west, they molded those techniques to the unique theater requirements. Essentially, the Soviets emphasized maneuver at all levels of command, intricate task organization of forces suited to the achievement of precise missions, and time-phased commitment of these forces to battle.

The Soviets maneuvered their forces on a large scale by seeking to envelop Japanese forces at every command level. Tank forces spearheaded almost every enveloping force. At the highest level, the Trans-Baikal and 1st Far Eastern Fronts carried out a strategic envelopment of the entire Kwantung Army. At front, army, corps, and division levels, maneuver was achieved by envelopment. In regions lightly defended by the Japanese, the Soviets initiated envelopment operations by launching forces led by forward detachments deep into the Japanese rear area. The rifle corps of 39th Army used such techniques, as did 36th Army in its advance to Hailar. Where difficult terrain confronted the Soviets (35th Army, 1st Red Banner Army), the Soviets effected the same maneuver at a slower pace. Where Japanese resistance was heavy, such as in 5th Army's sector, assault groups and advanced battalions carried out comparable envelopments of Japanese positions to more limited depths of the defense. Along the Sungari River, amphibious assault units performed the same envelopment function, this time by land and water.

When envelopments succeeded, the Soviets wasted little time in reducing surrounded Japanese forces. Soviet units simply continued their pursuit deep into the Japanese rear areas, usually relying on tank-heavy forward detachments to continue the advance. Throughout Manchuria, Soviet reliance on maneuver produced similar results: the Soviets bypassed, isolated, and later reduced Japanese defensive positions, and the forward momentum of Soviet forces preempted Japanese abilities to construct new defenses. The disjointed and futile efforts of the Kwantung Army high command to stem the Soviet tide reflected the total paralysis of the Japanese command and control system.

Task Organization of Units

In large measure, the Soviet ability to maneuver successfully resulted from the careful task organization of units at every level, so that each could better perform its specific mission. The Soviets created small platoon- or company-size assault groups of infantry, sappers, artillery, and armor to engage specifically identified Japanese strongpoints. These small combined arms entities dealt effectively with Japanese fortified positions during the initial stage of the campaign (5th Army) and during the latter stages, when the Soviets reduced bypassed Japanese fortified regions (Hutou). Soviet advanced battalions were task organized with sapper, armor, and artillery support to enable them to lead the advance of Soviet main force units. Those main forces at division, corps, and army level received support allowing

them to cope with the enemy and terrain in their specific sectors. The divisions of 5th Army differed in composition from divisions operating in 1st Red Banner, 35th, or 15th Armies' sector. Even more important were the division-level attachments of engineer, armor, and self-propelled artillery units.

The best illustration of unit tailoring was the task organization of forward detachments created at every command level in order to initiate the attack or to lead the pursuit. Normally, tank battalions or tank brigades formed the nucleus of forward detachments. The Soviets added to that nucleus motorized infantry, sappers, antiaircraft, antitank, and artillery units, thus creating unique task forces capable of semi-independent operations. At times the terrain and mission dictated the varied size and composition of these detachments. Thus, a tank division became the forward detachment of 39th Army, while 39th Army rifle divisions used their self-propelled battalions as a nucleus for their forward detachments. Some divisions (of 1st Red Banner Army) used rifle battalions reinforced by tanks and sappers as forward detachments. The 205th Tank Brigade of 36th Army and the 257th Tank Brigade of 1st Red Banner Army best illustrate Soviet formation and use of forward detachments. Thus, artful Soviet task organization permitted the Russians to reduce Japanese defenses by a combination of fire and maneuver, rather than by massed infantry assault.*

Throughout the offensive, the Soviets reaped the rewards of successful maneuver by committing these task organized units into combat on a carefully time-phased basis. Soviet 5th Army began its attack with small reconnaissance units, followed by tailored assault groups from the advanced battalions of first echelon rifle divisions. The main force of advanced battalions exploited the gains of the assault groups and were, in turn, followed into battle by main force rifle regiments. The 35th Army led its attack with reconnaissance detachments and border guards units, followed by division advanced battalions and main force regiments. The 1st Red Banner Army crept forward through the forests with small, road-building forward detachments leading the advance of each rifle regiment. Subsequent regimental columns widened the roads and added momentum to the advance. The 39th Army advanced in precombat march formation, with an army forward detachment (tank division) in front, followed in order by rifle corps forward detachments (tank brigades), division forward detachments, and division main force columns.

Such time-phased commitment of forces enabled the Soviets to build up combat power on each axis steadily and to project that power forward into the depths of the Japanese defenses. Rather than overcoming Japanese defenses by wave after wave of advancing troops, the Soviets overcame the defenses by projecting forces forward along hundreds of separate axes, bringing unrelenting pressure to bear on the entire Japanese front, and knifing

*A trend evidenced by Soviet combat in the west since late 1943 and a dominant feature of Soviet combat in 1944 and 1945.

forces into, between, around, and through Japanese forces. In many respects, the Soviet assault resembled infiltration tactics conducted on a massive scale. The resultant intermingling of units and Soviet deep operations on many of the axes caused total confusion among the Japanese defenders.

The operational and tactical techniques evidenced by these eight case studies clearly illustrate the state of Soviet military art in 1945. They reveal an imaginative and flexible Soviet approach to the conduct of combat, a World War II lesson often lost to Western military analysts. The Soviets have ample reason to study their Manchurian campaign, and they do so in immense detail. We should study it as well.

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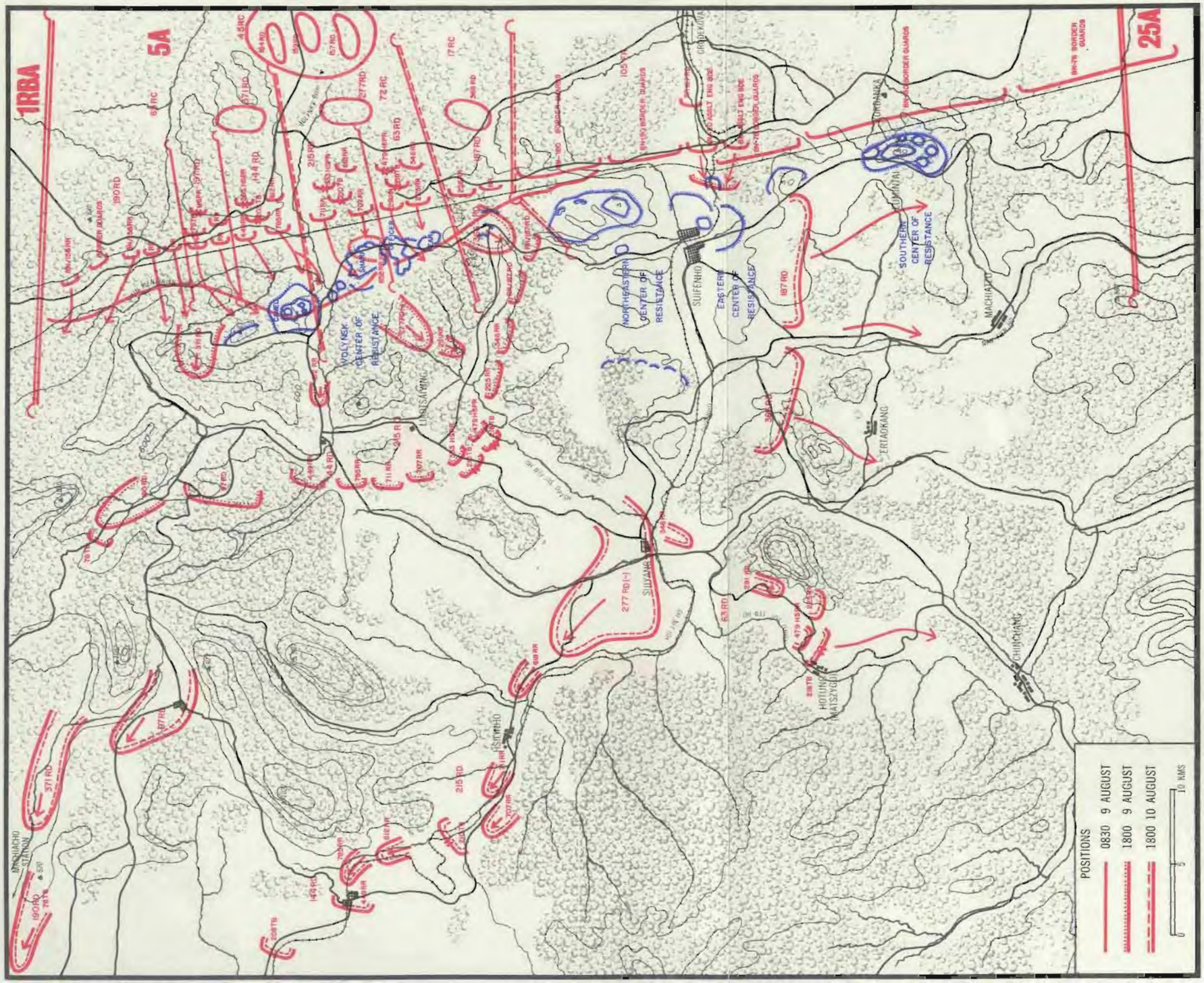
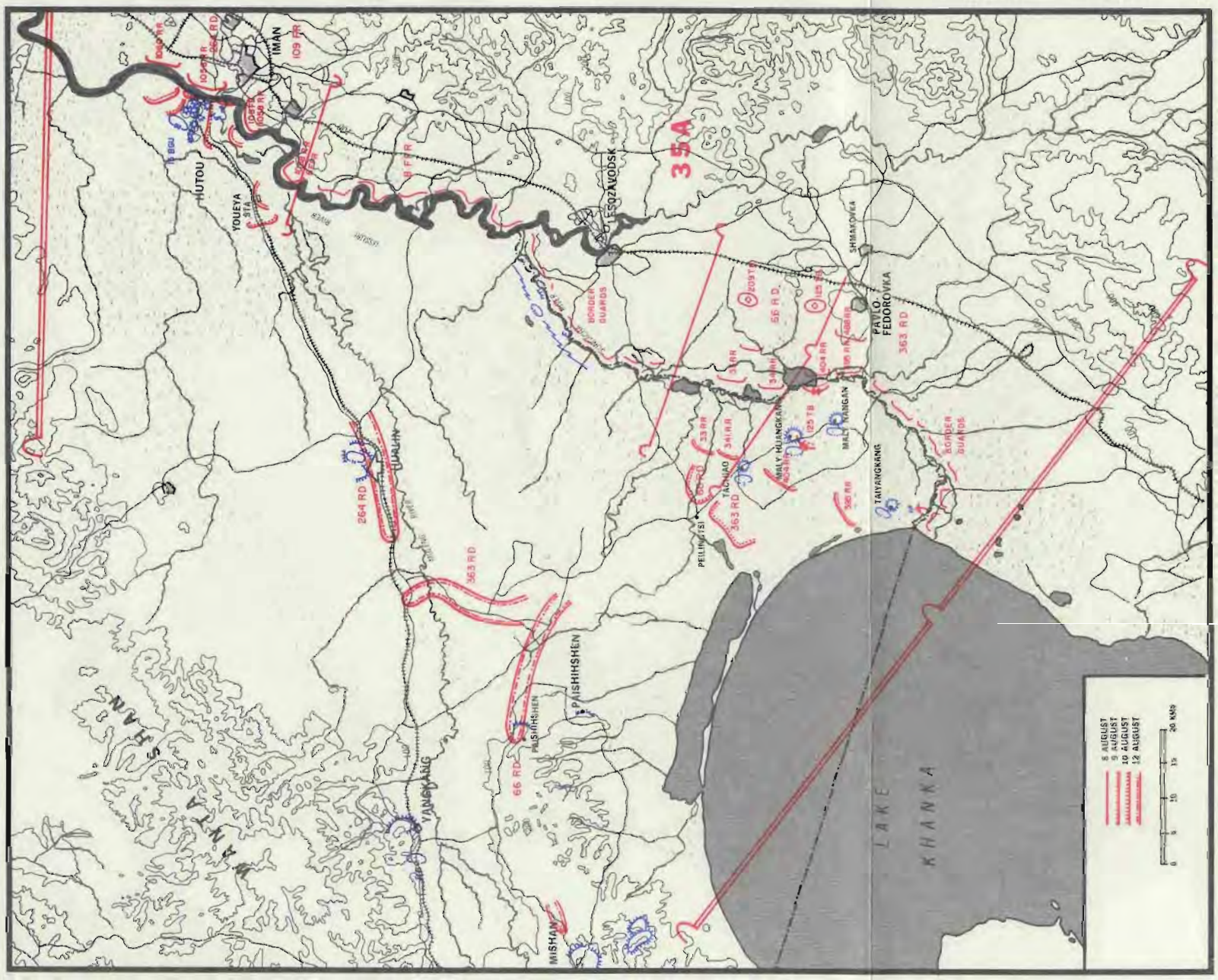
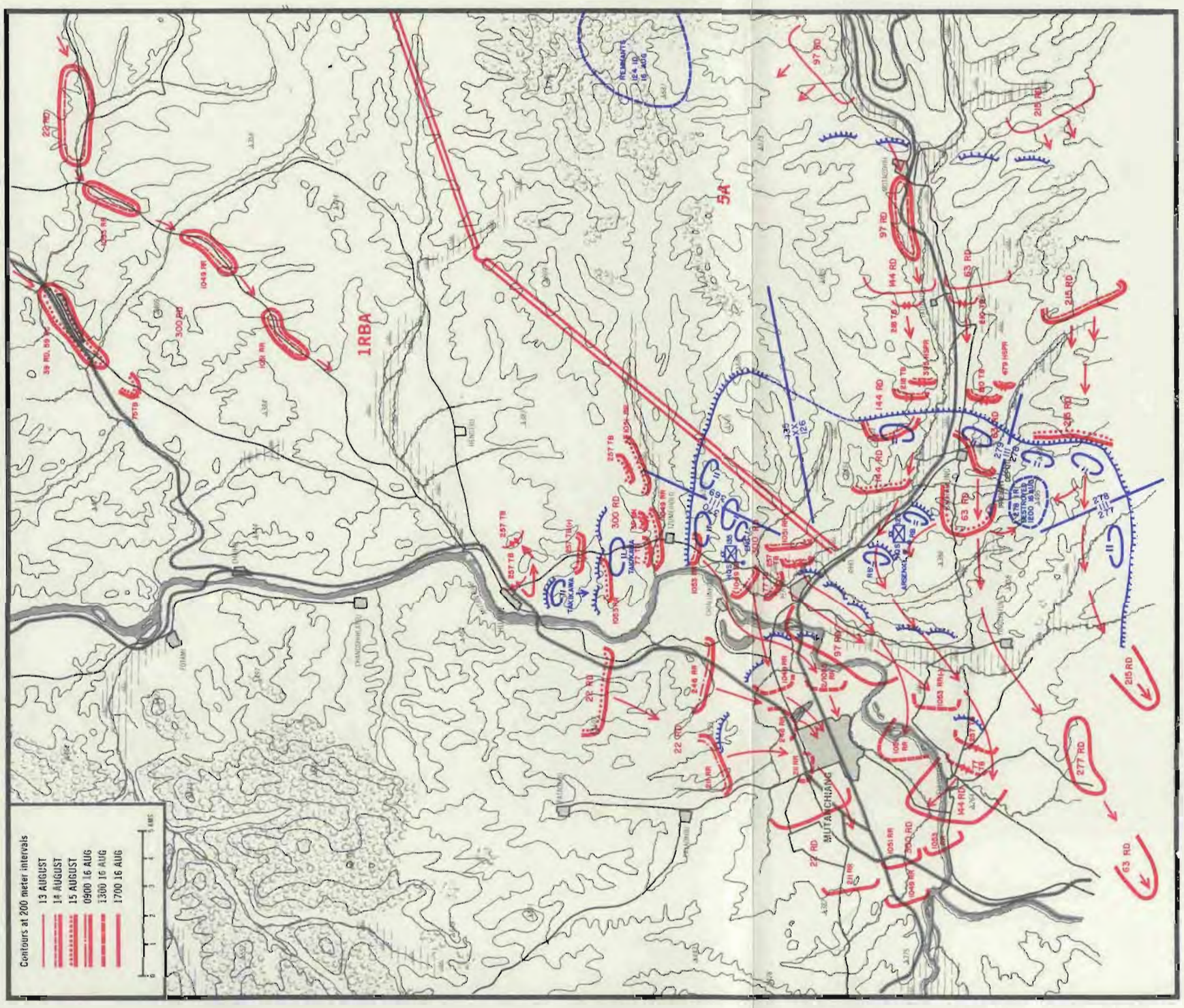


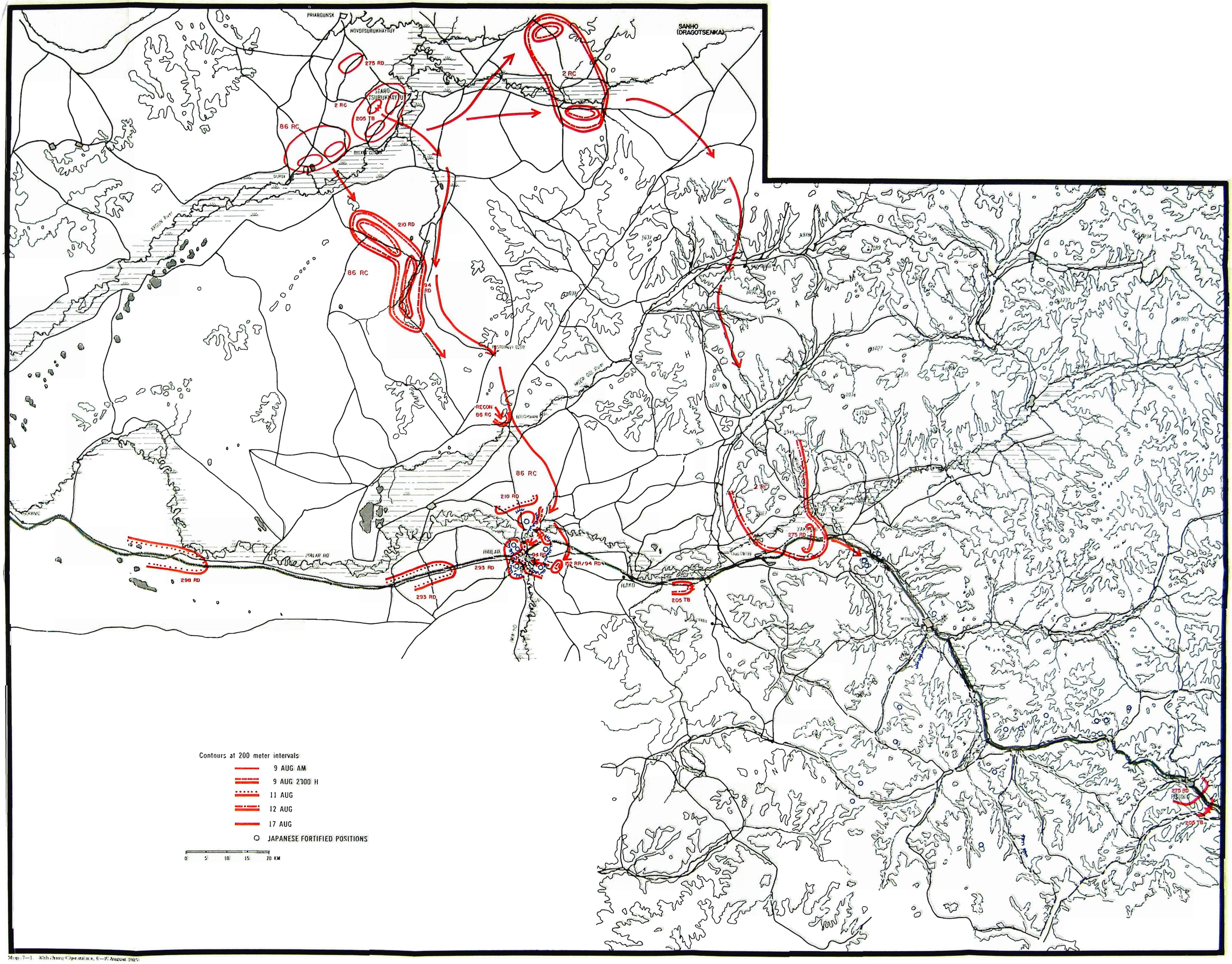
Map 1—3. 5th Army Operations, 9—10 August 1945



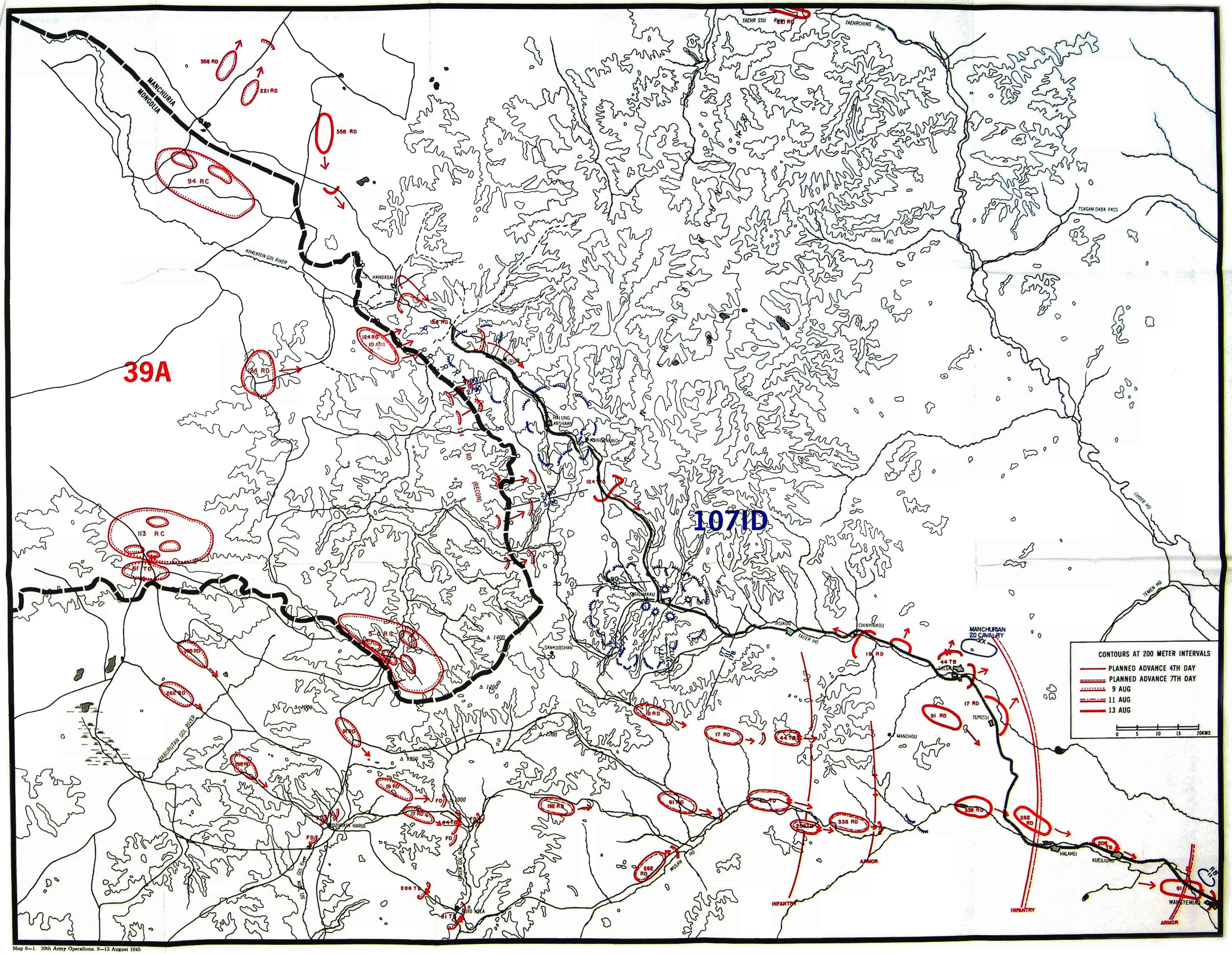
Map 3—1. 35th Army Operations, 8—12 August 1945



Map 4—7. The Fall of Mutanchiang, 14—16 August



Map 7—1. 6th Army Operations, 6—17 August 1945



Map 6—1. 39th Army Operations, 9—13 August 1945

LTC David M. Glantz

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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 the current doctrinal concerns of the Army and publish and distribute the results of such research in a variety of formats to the Active Army and Reserve components.

2. Prepare and present instruction in military history at CGSC and assist other CGSC departments in integrating applicable military history materials into their resident and nonresident instruction.

3. Serve as the TRADOC proponent for the development and coordination of an integrated, progressive program of military history instruction in the TRADOC service school system.

Synopsis of Leavenworth Paper 8

To be successful, a strategic military operation requires careful planning and meticulous execution. History applauds the commander who orchestrates the operation, and major subordinate commanders share in the glory. In reality, however, commanders and soldiers at the operational and tactical levels play an even more critical role in achieving battlefield success. History often accords them little attention.

Practitioners of war must study war at all levels. An understanding of the strategic aspects of military operations is essential in order to provide a context for a more detailed and equally critical understanding of precise operational and tactical techniques. Few officers practice war at the strategic level. The majority wrestle with the myriad of problems associated with implementing those strategic plans.

Leavenworth Paper no. 8, through the medium of detailed case studies, examines the operational and tactical aspects of a major strategic operation—the Soviet offensive in Manchuria in 1945. The case studies, which involve army, corps, division, regimental, and battalion operations, focus on the many problems commanders and soldiers at that level face. Constrained by time, a desperate enemy, rugged terrain, and severe climatic conditions—the realities of war—Soviet commanders devised and implemented techniques that produced victory. This paper highlights those techniques in the knowledge that Soviet theorists have likewise studied them in detail, both historically and in a contemporary context.