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General Rendulic

Garmisch, 6 May 1947

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Topic: Russian Command.

The 13th Russian Cavalry Division in combat
at KOZEL'SK (9 to 11 October 1941)
cf. German Army maps H 55/ J 53, and
Z 55/ a 53.

Our reconnaissance, as well as the course of events during the fighting at KOZEL'SK, and especially the statements of Russian prisoners captured in that engagement, furnished us fairly accurate intelligence concerning the quality of the 13th Russian Cavalry Division. The following pages have been based on that intelligence.

Reinforced by one rifle regiment (three battalions), the 13th Russian Cavalry Division* reached the LIKHVIN area (German Army Map X 55/Y 53, square 7 of 55) during the morning of 8 October with its reconnaissance battalion, one cavalry regiment, and division headquarters. Some of those elements had marched, others had been moved up by rail. The main body of the division arrived during the evening of 8 October, while the rifle regiment did not reach its destination until noon of 9 October.

About the terrain, the division commander merely knew that near PEREMYSHL' a bridge with a gross load carrying capacity of 30 tons led over the OKA River, and that only very weak bridges led across the ZHIZDRA River, which generally was about one meter deep.

On the morning of 8 October, the division commander received the following order (approximately reconstructed on the basis of events and PW statements):

*The division consisted of one reconnaissance battalion, four cavalry regiments, one motorized battalion, one armored battalion, one artillery regiment (nine batteries), one company of engineers, as well as supply troops.

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1. Enemy situation as shown on appended sketch.
2. Own [Russian] forces on UGRA and SHANYA Rivers prevent further enemy advance; left wing at junction of OKA and UGRA west of KALUGA.

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- North and east of BRYANSK bitter fighting against attacking enemy forces.
3. The 13th Cavalry Division, reinforced by one rifle regiment, will advance through KOZEL'SK, and disrupt communications and supply lines of enemy forces advancing toward UGRA and SHANYA Rivers.

The division commander decided to attack and defeat the enemy reported on the advance toward KOZEL'SK, and subsequently push on in a northwesterly direction, perhaps by way of MERESHCHOVS. For the time being, he planned the execution as follows: The attack would get under way after arrival of the rifle regiment. The tank battalion and the motorized battalion were to cross the river by way of the bridge at PEREMYSHL', and go into action from that point. He did not anticipate that the German forces, which were estimated at less than one division, would advance beyond KOZEL'SK in the face of the reinforced Russian cavalry division.

The reconnaissance battalion was directed to advance through KOZEL'SK, and reconnoiter the march route of the enemy forces that were reported on the move from SUKHINICHI to KOZEL'SK. The motorized battalion, which was arriving at that very moment, and the tank battalion, which had detrained at the railway station south of LIKHVIN, were sent toward PEREMYSHL' with

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the order to hold the bridge at that place, and to be ready to join in any action that might take place in the south.

Toward noon of 8 October, elements of the reconnaissance battalion encountered superior German bicycle troops at the KOZEL'SK railway station, and were forced back to the east bank. Some elements took evasive action in a southerly direction, and continued their reconnaissance. German advance troops had moved into KOZEL'SK. An officer patrol reported that a long enemy column was marching along the highway to KOZEL'SK, and by noon had reached the vicinity of FROLOVKA. The tank and motorized battalions had reached PEREMYSHL'. Late in the afternoon, German forces felt their way toward the town. During the evening, the two most advanced [Russian] regiments and six batteries reached the woods east of KOZEL'SK. After dark, the two regiments dismounted, moved up to the east bank of the ZHIZDRA River near KOZEL'SK under cover of elements of the reconnaissance battalion that were in position at that point, and dug in. The batteries moved into position. During the night, several attempts of German patrols to cross the ZHIZDRA were repulsed.

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On the morning of 9 October, the division commander personally reconnoitered the situation from the edge of the woods, and noted that the enemy was building fortifications around KOZEL'SK and to the north and south, and that from the northern and southern edges of the town -- which was located in a river bend that extended far to the east -- excellent possibilities existed for a flanking movement against the entire river area in the north and south. Such a flanking movement could have become extremely dangerous

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in the event of an attack. He therefore decided to take KOZEL'SK in a coup de main with the bulk of the two cavalry regiments, before the enemy would be able to fortify his positions more thoroughly. He discussed everything on the spot with the two regimental commanders. The attack was scheduled for 1200 on that very day, because he believed the meal hour to be the most opportune time for taking the enemy by surprise.

During the forenoon of 9 October reports were received that weak German forces had attacked PEREMYSHL' during the morning. The attack had been repulsed in a counterthrust by the tank battalion. However, the enemy had knocked out seven Russian tanks.

At 1200 sharp, the Russian batteries delivered a very short but concentrated burst of fire on the identified German positions around KOZEL'SK, after which the two regiments launched the attack. They succeeded in crossing the ZHIZDRA at numerous points, and in penetrating into the German positions and the town. The German artillery soon opened barrage fire, however, and prevented the advance of additional Russian forces. Russian cavalrymen that were driven out of the city and the German positions by local enemy reserves, again returned to the east bank of the river. A few cavalry troops lost half of their men. From that time on, the trenches east of KOZEL'SK and the adjoining tracts of woodland were subjected to even more concentrated artillery fire than before.

The rifle regiment had to detrain east of LIKHVIN, because the PESKOVAT-KOYE railway station had been demolished that morning by a German bombing raid. Detraining operations were completed by noon, and the regiment proceeded into the woods east of KOZEL'SK.

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The division commander decided to conduct the attack on the morning of 11 October as follows: The rifle regiment was to attack north of KOZEL'SK, with the main effort at LUBNY, while three dismounted cavalry regiments were to attack south of KOZEL'SK, with the main effort at GABINO. Weak elements of the latter regiments were to remain opposite KOZEL'SK; the town proper was not to be attacked, but only neutralized by fire in order to eliminate the flanking threat. A mounted cavalry regiment was to reach DOL, and there keep itself ready to advance against the flank and rear of the enemy on orders of the division. The forces at PEREMYSHL' were not to attack for the time being, because it had been ascertained that the enemy forces there were, at least equally strong, if not stronger.

During the night of 9 - 10 October, a battalion of the rifle regiment moved into position on the east bank, adjacent to the cavalry positions. At the same time, the regrouping at and south of KOZEL'SK was partly in progress.

On 10 October, comparative quiet reigned on both sides. Continued reconnaissance, aided by local inhabitants, revealed that the enemy had infantry reserves at LUBNY, south of FROLOVKA, and at LAVROVSKAYA.

The cavalry division attacked early on 11 October. Under cover of well-placed machine-gun and heavy-weapons fire, the division succeeded in fording the river and in gaining a foothold on the west bank. Flanking fire from KOZEL'SK was felt only in the immediate vicinity of the town. The enemy positions were not/^{very} densely occupied, but the concentrated enemy artillery fire caused heavy losses from the very beginning. Numerous houses and gardens facilitated the approach toward the German lines. Toward 0800, the enemy positions were successfully penetrated at several points, and finally the main part of the enemy forces on both sides of KOZEL'SK was

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dislodged. The enemy, however, established himself on the slopes; only a few squads stubbornly hung on to their old positions. While the troops were engaged in disposing of those enemy forces, and just as the division made out the order for the cavalry regiment to attack, the Germans launched their counterattack from the north and west. The Russian troops were unable to resist that assault. Offering bitter resistance, they withdrew again to the east bank. The cavalry regiment was driven back.

Losses were heavy. Some of the cavalry troops had dwindled to nine men.

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That very evening, the division received orders to move on to TULA.

Critique of the Russian Command.

The division commander made many grave mistakes, which were responsible for the failure of his mission and ultimately resulted in a serious defeat. Those mistakes no doubt were largely due to insufficient training. Typical was the helplessness in the face of the problem as a whole -- a helplessness that precluded arrival at any decision showing genuine initiative and adaptation to the situation. The decision to execute the coup de main against KOZEL'SK on 9 October, which perhaps revealed some initiative, was everything but justified. It showed a complete failure to appreciate the situation, and is incomprehensible.

The first and greatest mistake was the decision to attack the enemy at KOZEL'SK at all. To be sure, the mission of the cavalry division would have become considerably easier, had the enemy been defeated and eliminated at KOZEL'SK. But was the division commander justified in counting on that possibility? Certainly not in the manner in which he planned the attack. Had his plans been drawn up in a different manner, the probability of inflicting defeat on the German forces no doubt would have been greater, but

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In view of the fact that south of the enemy at KOZEL'SK a huge region was entirely free of Germans, the primary mission, namely the disruption of communications of the enemy forces advancing in the north, in no way called for a prior defeat of the German forces at KOZEL'SK. The enemy forces at KOZEL'SK had to be tied down as much as possible. For that purpose, however, the rifle regiment was available, and -- reinforced by several batteries -- should have been committed on a wide front before the enemy positions on both sides of the town which were known to be only lightly manned. The PEREMYSHL' group should have been attached to the rifle regiment, because that group was too weak to be of value as a motorized force and would have impeded the cavalry division in the execution of its mission, during which it had to utilize primarily the woods with their bad roads. Using the entire cavalry division -- the supply trains/^{of} which should have been cut to the bone, because men and horses could easily live off the countryside (it was shortly after the harvest) -- the division commander had to by-pass KOZEL'SK to the south and reach the woodlands west of SUKHINICHI as his first objective, in order to advance from there to the north against the communications and supply lines of the enemy. Intensive air reconnaissance of the tactical enemy situation should have furnished him the general intelligence for that purpose, and ground reconnaissance could easily have procured supplementary information.

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The cavalry division could have inflicted serious damage on the enemy,

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and would have been difficult to check. Foot troops would have had to conduct extensive encirclement maneuvers, providing the enemy actually had the necessary forces for such operations. And even in that case the division could always have evaded the enemy in those tremendous spaces. Motorized and armored forces would likewise have had serious difficulties in taking the fight to the cavalry division, which could move at will through woods, over poor roads, or cross-country. That enemy, too, could easily have been evaded under existing road conditions. In any event, the division would have drawn superior enemy forces, which in turn would have been lacking at other points. The Russian cavalry of World War I -- an excellent and ably led arm -- would have taken that course.

The Russians only rarely employed cavalry during World War II. The engagement at KOZEL'SK was the first in which I fought against cavalry. I faced that arm only once more, in the summer of 1942, when I fought against a dismounted, battered cavalry guards division. The high standards of leadership of medium and large cavalry units that prevailed in Czarist Russia, seem to have been lost.

The situation at KOZEL'SK, a page from actual conditions of warfare in Russia, proves the great possibilities that exist for the commitment and effective operations of cavalry divisions and corps in the U.S.S.R. Cavalry operating in the rear of noncontiguous front sectors, and particularly in connection with partisan warfare that has been well organized far in advance, can be a dangerous weapon in the wooded Russian terrain with its few roads. The best chances for success in the defense against

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cavalry under those circumstances lie in the employment of cavalry or aviation. In using the air arm, due allowance must be made for the limitations imposed by woodlands and weather conditions. Those points are worthy of **consideration**, just as one must keep informed about whether or not the Soviets are setting up **large numbers** of strong cavalry units.

Now a word about the conduct of the attack at KOZEL'SK. In that instance the division commander failed above all to take full advantage of the superiority, i.e., the mobility, of the cavalry over the foot troops. With the rifle regiment, reinforced by several batteries, he had to attack along the fronts north and south of KOZEL'SK, with his main effort north of the town. At the same time, the entire cavalry division should have swerved south, and attacked the deep flank of the enemy with two or three dismounted regiments. On the outer (west) wing, one or two mounted regiments should have been kept in reserve in such a manner that, come what might, they could at the critical moment be committed on foot in an enveloping movement. The attacks of the cavalry division, the rifle regiment, and the PEREMYSHL' group had to be launched simultaneously. To me personally, such a conduct of operations would certainly have been the most unwelcome. To be sure, there would have been countermeasures even against those tactics, but their elaboration at this point would lead too far afield. It is well to point out, however, that examples of that nature, taken from actual combat situations, furnish the most valuable basis for the study of tactics from the lowest to the highest level.

In conclusion we may state the following: The command of the 13th

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Russian Cavalry Division lacked ability. It completely failed to grasp its mission, and in combat acted contrary to tactical principles. The basic tenets for the leadership of a large cavalry unit were at no time translated into practice.

(Dr. Rendulic)

Enemy Situation 7 October - 1600 to 1700

Overlay for German Army Map 1:300,000 X55/Y53

Scale 1:300,000

