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CROSSING OF THE KERCH STRAITS BY THE
46TH INFANTRY DIVISION FROM THE
CRIMEA TO THE TAMAN PENINSULA ON
1 AND 2 SEPTEMBER 1942.

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The 46 th Inf.Div. crosses the channel of Kerch to the peninsula Taman on 1 and 2 September 1942

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Part I. Mission, Estimate of the Situation, and Decision.

a. Mission.

The Kerch Peninsula was seized by German units about 25 May 1942. Sevastopol fell on 1 July 1942, and the battle for the Crimea ended in a German victory on 5 July 1942.

As early as July 1942, XLII Corps had been ordered to prepare two German divisions to cross from the Crimea to the Taman Peninsula. The situation on the Kerch Peninsula was as follows: LXII Corps with its command post at Novaya Mikhaylovka, protected the coast line along the Black Sea from Feodosiya to Kerch, and continuing along the coast of the Sea of Azov up to the Gulf of Sivash. For this purpose the LXII Corps had available the 46th and 132d Infantry Divisions and the 2d Rumanian Division.

The 46th Infantry Division, though battle-weary since the fighting at Sevastopol, had been rehabilitated, was well organized and constituted one of the best German infantry divisions with its personnel from Upper Franconia and the Sudetenland. This division was assigned the sector which faced the Kerch Straits, the occupation of which necessitated the bending back of both wings along the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Since the departure of the 132d Infantry Division to another theater of operations, the 46th Infantry Division alone remained in this area and was therefore designated to accomplish the crossing of the Kerch Straits. The division commander,

Brigadier General Haccius, was an aggressive and energetic officer. He was killed in action in the Caucasus in the spring of 1943 and buried at Kerch. Weak enemy elements still held out in the stone quarries of Adzhim-Ushkaye (north of Kerch) and their annihilation was only a matter of time. Elsewhere the front was completely quiet. Air activity was very limited on both sides.

b. Estimate of the Situation for the Crossing, and the Decision.

When the order arrived to prepare for the crossing, the Caucasus offensive of Army Group A, under Field Marshal List had been in progress for several weeks. At that time its right wing was advancing from Rostov toward the east and southeast. For the time being the contemplated crossing could not count on any support from this wing. The Russian fleet was lying in port at Novorossisk, Tuapse and Batum. Although this fleet had suffered damage and lost several vessels during the battles at Feodosiya in December 1941 and in January 1942, it was nevertheless strong enough to threaten or prevent a crossing from the Crimea to the Caucasus. Various Russian raids as well as minor landing attempts against the southern and eastern Crimean coast had demonstrated the striking power of the fleet. The Russian naval units which participated in these naval operations were estimated at one battleship, one cruiser, one or two submarines, and several smaller vessels.

At the same time the Germans merely had several Rumanian destroyers, as well as one Italian and one Rumanian submarine in the Black Sea. Because of this disproportionate strength the most favorable strategic plan to effect a landing on the northern coast of the Black Sea, south of Taman or near Anapa had to be abandoned.

A crossing from the Kerch region toward the east or southeast appeared to be the most promising at the moment.

The shortest distance from Yenikalye to the land tongue east of the town was only three miles as was also the distance from Mys Ak-Burnu to the land tongue east-southeast from there. The distance between Kerch and Taman was about fifteen miles. Halfway between Kerch and Taman, approximately in extension of the land tongue (east of Yenikalye), toward the southwest there were two small islands. The distance from the Crimea to these islands was approximately six miles.

The troops could be loaded after dark at the above-mentioned embarkation points, move out to sea, and land.

These advantages, however, also faced difficult tactical problems. The enemy had numerous coastal batteries emplaced along the Kerch Straits, facing west. Ground reconnaissance observed and air reconnaissance verified one battery each south and northeast of Gryaselotchebi, two batteries near Taman, one battery each about five miles southwest of Zaporozhskaya, where the road from Temryuk-Kuchugury ended on the coast, and northeast of the farms about three miles northeast of Pritsenko. Fire from these batteries had been observed on several occasions. Furthermore, photographs indicated that fortifications along the entire coast from Gryaseloychebi to Taman and to Pevneva along both land tongues southeast of Kerch, and east of Yenikalye were undamaged, intact, and apparently occupied. The same was true on one of the two afore-mentioned islands in extension of the land tongue toward the southwest, east of Yenikalye. A landing on the two land tongues southeast of Kerch and east of Yenikalye or on the islands between the land tongues could

only lead to a local success. Even if the landing succeeded the troops would not have freedom of movement and would be forced to fight under unfavorable tactical conditions, tightly squeezed together at points which could be easily sealed off by the enemy. This area was completely uncultivated, without trees, and covered with sand. Thus, it was most vulnerable to both observation and attack by enemy aircraft. Finally the main body of the enemy forces, which were assumed to be deployed on the Taman and Fontalovskaya Peninsulas, would have been alerted by the fighting on the land tongues and islands, and could have prepared themselves to meet the impending attack and subsequently frustrate the German landing forces.

A landing along the steep cliffs west of the farms east of Pritsenko in the vicinity of the reported coastal batteries would have been physically impossible.

The intervention of the enemy Black Sea Fleet had to be anticipated.

Thus, a landing was only possible on the northern coast of the Fontalovskaya Peninsula.

Here the enemy fleet would not be a factor, as no Russian naval forces were reported in the waters of the Sea of Azov.

Aircraft reconnoitered the coastal cliffs north of the farms, east of Pritsenko and near Sovkhoz. Areas for the landing of infantry units were selected. The coast was flat and sandy near Kuchugury and further east near Golubitskaya and Meteorol.

It was established by local inhabitants and from air reconnaissance that the sea north of the Pritsenko - Golubitskaya line was sufficiently shallow for the infantry to wade through the last 110 yards.

The defile between Peresyp' and Temryuk, which was protected by swamps north and northwest of Temryuk was not observed and the condition of the roads in the area was unknown. This defile had to be blocked in order to prevent the enemy from moving reinforcements across in the event of a German tactical success on the Fontalovskaya Peninsula.

Thus, the decision was made to land the main body of the division near Kuchugury, and to detach a reinforced Regimentsgruppe to Golubitskaya for the purpose of conducting a blocking mission.

Since Temryuk had been taken by the right wing of Army Group A on 25 August and since this wing was expected to advance to the Black Sea toward Anapa, it was no longer necessary to carry out the landing at Golubitskaya.

The main body of the division was now to be definitely committed at Kuchugury, while a Regimentsgruppe was to be employed along the coast between the farms (northeast of Pritsenko) and Sovkhoz for a diversionary and containing attack.

Furthermore, a reinforced battalion of the Rumanian 18th Infantry Division was to seize the afore-mentioned enemy-held island southwest of the land tongue, east of Yenikalye.

German naval units in the area finally agreed to mine the Kerch Straits along a line extending from Mys Ak-Burnu to the northwest tip of the land tongue, northwest of Gryaselotchebi, to prevent any intervention of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The mine laying operation was accomplished without incident. Aircraft were assigned to protect the landings. Embarkation ports were located along the northern coast of the Crimea on the Sea of Azov

between Tarkhan and Lyakhovka.

c. Assembly of Crossing Equipment and Time Schedule for the Attack.

Once the necessary orders had been issued, lively activity began both in headquarters and among the troops, especially those of the 46th Infantry Division.

The greatest difficulty was encountered in assembling naval and engineer crossing equipment. ICT's, Siebel Ferries, engineer landing craft and assault boats were made available, a total of about 80 vessels.

The naval vessels reached their destination along the sea route from Constanta, Rumania, by way of Odessa, Yalta and Kerch, without encountering any interference from the enemy fleet. The engineer craft were transported overland to Genichesk on the Sea of Azov; there, they were assembled, made seaworthy and committed.

By 20 August 1942, the corps reported that all preparations had been completed and that it was ready for the attack.

The order to attack was issued on 30 August.

The operations were launched on 1 September.