

MS # P-020b

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Born: 28 April 1891  
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After training at the Hannover Officer Candidate School in 1910, Karl HOLLIDT received his commission as Lieutenant in the same year. Throughout World War I he served in various staff assignments on the Westfront. During an assignment as regimental adjutant at Giessen in 1919-22, HOLLIDT studied philosophy at the Giessen University, continuing his studies in this subject at the Berlin University in 1930-31. After receiving general staff training, he was given general staff status in 1923. Promoted Generalmajor in 1938, HOLLIDT was assigned to the Westwall in command of the 52 Infantry Division at the beginning of World War II and one month later was transferred to the Fifth Army, also in the Westwall, as chief of staff. Following promotion to Generalleutnant and several short terms as chief of staff at army level and as commander at divisional level, General HOLLIDT was appointed Commander, XVII Infantry Corps in March 1943 and Commander, Sixth Army a month later, both assignments being in Russia. In April 1944 he was placed in the O.H., Officer Reserve and received no further assignment until March 1945, when he was appointed Liaison Officer for relations between Army Group B and civilian authorities. It was during his service on the Russian front that HOLLIDT was promoted General der Infanterie, in 1942, and Generaloberst, in 1943. - Finally he was captured at Elberfeld, Wuppertal, Western Germany, on 18 April 1945.

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Preface

From the multitude of operations and engagements on the eastern theater of war four attacks across river courses will be chosen and presented, which seem to be particularly characteristic of the Russian method. In doing so the author is trying to leave out all accessories and to adhere, as far as possible to objectiveness, "sine ira et studio", in the pursuit of his investigations. Truth cannot be found by means of a one-sided or prejudiced study, but by an impassionate and truthful consideration of the actual events. He will then attempt to find the intentions the methods tentatively hidden behind the manifold happenings, in which not only the lives of hundreds of thousands of soldiers were at stake, but also the existence of two big nations.

Grave doubts arise whether this aim can be reached, for the greatest disadvantage is the absence of any data which might serve as sources. That Russian documents cannot be obtained is obvious, but also German data are completely missing. Documents and described journals, which were kept by German staffs and troops, and from which the general situation as well as minutest details of each single day, of almost every hour, might be reconstructed, lie in the archives of the U.S. Army.

Thus the author can only rely on his own memory, which after the hardships and experiences of seven fateful years, can only be imperfect and a very subjective source of information. Although the broad lines of battles and events stand out clearly in his mind, errors seem inevitable. Many questions might have been clarified and supplemented by discussion with others, but confinement cuts him off from the possibility. The lack of personal freedom, which is the presupposition of any fruitful work, as well as other oppressive personal circumstances must leave their impression on this study.

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Due to the absence of any expedients - the map material has a large scale only, - a scholarly standard could not be reached. If the attempt is made despite all these obstacles, it can only be justified by the fact that a man, who participated in a decisive phase of the eastern war, wishes to make a very small contribution toward the history of this war, and also to honor the memory of the German soldiers, who fought and lost their lives in the East, and at whose nameless graves nobody prays today. They verily do not deserve to be forgotten so soon, nor does it seem just that their sacrifices be misjudged and distorted by a world that can only measure things by its own standard.

I. The past and present importance of river courses.

A study of the history of modern warfare teaches us that natural obstacles, such as mountains with few roads, deserts, swamps, straits and river courses can no longer restrict or even impede the movements of modern forces. Whereas seas and oceans have lost their characteristics as separating elements - they rather unite nations in peace and war times and are excellent fields of operations - river and water courses are still of importance for operations on the ground. This was not even changed during the last generation when the technical conquest of the air extended warfare into this sphere, which deeply influenced warfare on the ground. Water courses as wet obstacles will always delay the advance of the attacker and enable the defending party to go into action under their cover and gain time for decisive operations. For defeated armies river courses can mean complete destruction, unless they succeed in crossing this obstacle in time. Today, as in the past, water courses can become the focal points of the fighting, and commanders as well as engineers will be faced with new problems again and again. Some historical examples may serve to illustrate this fact:

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Prince Eugen's crossing of the Danube and his conquest of Belgrade has become one of the great feats in history. Napoleon I. escaped complete destruction by his desperate crossing of the winterly Beresina "sous la barbe de l'ennemi". Bluecher defeated the French, his pursuers, when they tried to cross the Katzbach. The Prussians put a decisive end to the short campaign against the Danes by their bold crossing of the straits on the island of Alsen.

In World War I the Marne River became the fatal river of the French in 1914. The fighting there was of decisive importance for the war. There was bitter fighting for the Maas and the Aisne and even for the narrow canals, which lasted for months. In the East such names as Narew, Bug and Vistula, in the South and the Danube and the rivers of Upper Italy, recall the memory of decisive battles.

The same holds true of the second world war. Again and again journals of enemy and ally report bold operations across river courses and of daring fighting by all belligerents along the river courses of the extensive theaters of war. No wonder that the soldier will keep the memory of battles around rivers, especially fresh in his mind. The fighting for the Maas, Seine, Loire, Rhone and Rhine in the West as well as for the big rivers in the East will become landmarks in the history of warfare.

The Volga has become the somber, fatal river of the German eastern army. It was there that - visible to the world - the destiny of the German army turned or changed for the worse. -- And now again a river separates two opposing worlds; this time not the Vistula or the Nieman, but the iron curtain along the lovely Elbe River, which once flowed through prosperous German land. The German people has lost its original mission to be a wall and protection against the



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ever advancing East. The entire West must now protect the freedom-loving nations of Europe against Eurasia. "Res venit ad triaries." It may therefore be of some interest to look at some examples of the second world war and see how the Red Army fought for rivers and pushed its vast fronts across defended river courses.

## II. Some military geography of the South Russian theater of war.

### 1. Terrain and climate.

When in the summer of 1941 the German divisions, north of the Black Sea, had crossed the Pruth, which forms the border between Rumania and the Soviet Union in an eastern direction, they found themselves in a terrain and surroundings that were different from those of all the theaters of war in Central and West Europe they had become familiar with until then. As the land shapes man, so warfare and fighting are moulded by its characteristic features. The European is at first struck by the vast expanse of the Russian land and the big forms of the topography. You can travel or march for days, but there will be no change for the eye to rest on but like on the ocean there is ever more expanse. Forests and trees do not seem to exist; big stretches of land are uncultivated and make a dismal impression with their high tistles and weeds. On the other hand one can see immense kolchese fields, which extend for kilometers in length and width, planted with corn, cereals and sunflowers, and interrupted and subdivided only by the low rows of acacia trees and hedges, which are to protect the fields from being dried out by the hot winds. Then there is the steppe region again where no cultivated plants seem to be able to grow. -- Places and settlements seem to be very few; and yet the country is densely populated, for the villages lie mostly hidden in the deeply entrenched valleys and rivers and streams, where there are long chains of villages one after the other. It is there that the farmer can find in summer the life-giving water,

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and some protection at least in winter from the icy gales, which sweep the bare, flat heights for months.

Rains are extremely rare in the summer months. The dry heat and the glaring sun that beats down mercilessly are a severe tax on the marching and fighting troops. The winter, however, brings cold, up to (25 - 35°) below zero, enhanced by the easterlies, which race across the open terrain. Without special winter outfit and equipment war cannot be continued during the winter even in South Russia.

2. Rivers and water courses.

Water courses and channels are mostly narrow and deeply entrenched in the terrain. The margins of the heights along streams and rivers are steep and creviced. The very fertile soil - of a thickness of many meters - has been washed and scoured out along these margins by heavy downpours and melting snow waters, which resulted in the formations of escarps and deep ravines (called "Balka") of various depths and lengths. Because these meet the river bed at right angles, a good, overall view of the heights along the water courses becomes impossible, and defense is rendered difficult. A movement to the flanks of the troops and arms often makes detours through the back part necessary, which takes of much time. To the assaulting party the deep ravines offer many opportunities of assembling troops and material. After a successful crossing the attacker finds cover in the "Balkas" and can push forward into the enemy position. These Balkas often are many kilometers in length with many bends and curves.

The valley floor of the flood plains is of varying width. Sometimes the

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highlands are close to the river, sometimes they lie farther back with an intermediary plain of settlements, fields and gardens. At many places the flood plains have become swamps and are covered with reed and swamp grass. Only the native knows the fords and passages, and at what times the swamps are traversable for individual persons and troops. Over wide stretches strips covered with dense bushes extend close to the river, which, in part, have become moors, and in part, are intersected by small channels. To the assaulting party these flood plains offer excellent opportunity for cover. They facilitate the approach and make the assembly of troops and material an easy job. Since the rivers have not been regulated nor their banks reinforced, it is often not easy for the defending party to employ their arms effectively. The rivers themselves have many bends, the view is bad, and particularly the artillery is greatly restricted in its activity. The defense in the river valley can naturally be observed and dominated from the enemy highlands. Also the defense on the river escarpments and along the margin of the highlands is open to enemy observation, so that an assault can be recognized in time and counteracted. Any traffic between the river bank and the highlands at the rear can be watched during the day, and consequently can only be carried through successfully during the night or when invisibility prevails. Counter-assaults to regain the river bank can likewise be observed by the enemy, and are a good aim for the enemy's artillery and his heavy arms.

### 3. Roads and crossings.

The road net in South Russia was scantily developed during the war, and road construction primitive. Even in the industrial districts of the lower Dnieper and lower Dniester they hardly met Central European requirements. There

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were hardly any roads with a firm base, not even the larger highways were reinforced. Their surface was of the same dark loam as the surrounding terrain. The road surface is levelled by means of primitive machines, and sloped down at the sides, so that the water can run off; there are wide ditches on either side. The rest is done by the sun, which dries the loam into a hard crust, so that the roads can be used by all kinds of troop vehicles, except tracked vehicles.

During the rainy periods, however, these roads are not trafficable, as iron and rubber wheels severely damage the road surface; they are soon turned into a deep morass, which paralyses any kind of traffic. During the German advance entire divisions and also their supplies got hopelessly stuck on these "roads" on rainy days. A heavy fine was imposed by the Soviet government on the use of the roads during the wet periods.

Conditions are not better on the narrower side roads. Traffic becomes particularly difficult, when the roads lead uphill or downhill, or when wide or narrow river courses have to be crossed. Descent may still be possible, but the ascent for horse-drawn or motor vehicles is out of the question - even with four-wheel drive - for they get stuck in the tough mud. If the troops had no towing equipment, they had to wait until the smooth and deeply cut soil becomes dry once more. Great delays must be reckoned with, and European standards no longer apply. To the soldier who fought in Russia the column roads with many ruts, side by side of each other, leading through the fields are a familiar sight and experience. They converge again at a ford or bridge.

The bridges are in most cases constructed of wood. Stone, iron or concrete bridges are extremely rare. The approaches are soon ruined with heavy traffic,

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and must be repaired continuously. Numerous road construction crews, whose steady employment had to be planned ahead a long time, proved an indispensable institution. Without the severest and most accurate traffic discipline of troops and columns and without an experienced traffic regulation, equipped with signal supplies, large troop movements cannot be carried through, for otherwise there will be tie-ups, which will greatly impair the operations under way.

Armored cars and tracked vehicles are not bound to traffic on the roads. They can pick their way by the side of the road across open terrain, but have to return to the road, where rivers have to be crossed or forded.

All marches through unknown terrain have consequently to be based on a most careful road and bridge investigation. Road service crews or units have, for this reason, to be installed at difficult traffic points, which must be equipped with the necessary material and towing machines.

#### 4. The large rivers.

What was said above of the small rivers applies to a higher degree to the large rivers, and especially to the huge rivers of Southern Russia, which roll slowly toward the Black Sea and to the Sea of Azov. Since bridges are extremely rare, local traffic across the rivers is mostly implemented by means of boats and ferries, which cannot be used for the transportation of troops. With few exceptions the German army always had to depend on their own ferries and bridges. The Dniester is the border between Southern Ukraine and Bessarabia. Deeply cut into the hilly terrain it meanders toward the Black Sea. Due to its width of from 200 to 300 meters) it was a considerable obstacle to

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the German advance in 1941. Its eastern bank had been greatly fortified by means of concrete structures and pillboxes. The crossing of the German troops at Dubossari could only be effected after detailed preparations, and a superior artillery - supplied with much ammunition, attacking. -- To the east of the Dniester some small rivers offered certain difficulties to the German army. A number of long and extended lakes and bays made detours northward necessary.

The next big obstacle was the Bug, which has the width of an arm of the sea upstream and downstream beyond Nikolajev. The city itself is a seaport and has big naval workshops. The crossing of the Bug was forced by armored units, which advanced on the eastern bank from the north. There was, at this city, a floating bridge, made of logs during World War I. The Germans constructed a stone railroad bridge to the north of the city, which was destroyed again in the winter of 1943-1944. The Bug and its left tributary, the Ingul, played an important role in February and March 1944, after the heavy losses in the battles on the Dnieper, when this region served as an assembly area, where the units could be re-arranged and time be gained for the renewed fighting. The lower course of the Dnieper, from Zaporoshe to Kherson, stopped the German advance in summer of 1941 for several weeks. It was not before September 1941 that the crossing could be forced at Berislav where the river is about (800 meters) wide, after hard fighting and heavy losses. There was, in the first place, lack of sufficient material to overcome this immense river barrier. The Dnieper is many hundred meters in width, at some points up to (1,500 meters).

Its banks have become moors over wide stretches. In the defensive battle in February 1944 this river was the scene of bitter and hard fighting, which did credit to friend and enemy alike. -- The Ingulez, right tributary of the

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Dnieper, meanders from the industrial district of Krivbi Rog into the region of Kherson. It is a considerable obstacle, especially since its lower course is lined by big swamps on both sides. In the fighting of February 1944 it was, like the Ingul, a great natural obstacle, behind which the defending party could renew its front and offer resistance.

The Don makes a big curve eastward in its course, and thus comes near the largest European river, the Volga (west of Stalingrad). Also the Don has only few crossings, where, naturally, fighting concentrated in 1942/1943. The possession of the Don line northwest of Stalingrad made the breakthrough of the Red Army in the winter of 1942 possible, through the positions of the Germans and their allies northwest of Kalach, an operation, which quickly led to the encirclement of the German army at Stalingrad. -- The lower course of the Don is almost due west, and is likewise lined by wide, swampy lowlands. Considerable German forces, which had been in the south on the Kuban, were forced to retreat northward across the Don at a time when considerable Russian forces had reached the lower course of the Don from Stalingrad.

The Donets, right tributary of the Don, comes from the region of Kharkov, and encloses on the north and east the well-known, rich industrial region of the Ukraine, which is fast developing (Donets Basin). As early as in 1942 there was hard fighting for the Donets near Kharkov and Isyum, and a Russian army was encircled. When the Germans were forced to retreat, German troops offered temporary resistance at the Donets, although the river was frozen for the major part, and had thus lost its importance as an obstacle. At any rate, the Donets is an obstacle which must be taken seriously, since merely the river valley offers great difficulties to the attacker.

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As the course of the campaign showed, not only the huge rivers, as the Dnieper and Don, or the medium-sized rivers, such as the Donets and Ingulez, were of special importance for the implementation of the operations, but also insignificant small rivers and water courses, such as the Tschir and Mius and Oskol, stopped both opponents, and deeply influenced the planning of their operations and engagements. The entire operations of the German new Sixth Army from March 1943 until April 1944 greatly depended on the waterways of Southern Russia.

III. Russian crossing of the Don west of Stalingrad in August 1942, with weak German security (Sketch 1).

1. General situation.

After the successful battle at Kharkov the German Sixth Army under General Paulus had broken through the enemy front in June 1942 near Kharkov, and had defeated the enemy. In sharp pursuit fighting, the army rapidly gained ground eastward. Russian resistance was quickly broken, and the German divisions crossed the Don and entered or invaded Stalingrad. The fighting in and around this city are the outstanding event of the ensuing time. Without consideration of a sufficient security of the deep northern flank the attack had been made in the direction of the Volga.

In the battle for the capture of this city all available forces were sent into action, even from remoter parts of the front. They were all consumed by the "blood mill" of Stalingrad. -- The German VIII Army Corps, which had been entrusted with the protection of the northern flank of the Sixth Army, had not succeeded in repulsing the enemy across the Don in the area of Ostrovski - Kletzkaya, and to reach the Don.



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2. Securing of river by the XVII Army Corps.

On the other hand the corps headquarters of XVII Army Corps, adjoining on the west, with weak German detachments only and without armored tanks, was able to mop up the terrain south of the Don, between Kletskaya and Serafimovitsch, and to capture men and material. For the seizure of the large, fortified bridgehead of Serafimovitsch the Italian Division (mot.) "Celere" had been placed under the command of the Headquarters XVII Army Corps. But in spite of its full combat strength and modern equipment this corps d'elite could not fulfill the hopes placed upon it, due to their lack of experience in the eastern warfare. The Italians showed great courage and much good will. Also with German units, which had come fresh to the front, this lack of fighting experience made itself felt to a high degree, and often led to heavy losses, even defeats. - The Russian bridgehead was taken by German battalions in conjunction with the Italians, in a bold night assault. Against all rules of warfare the attackers broke through the Russian fortifications in march column unexpectedly and without preparatory firing, pushing through to the bridge of Serafimovitsch, which could be destroyed on this side of the river. The Division "Celere" was in charge of the defense on both sides of the city and to the south. As far as could be gauged the Italians would be able to cope with this task. The width of the Don excluded Russian tank attacks, which had caused great losses to the Italians in the preceding battles. It seemed certain that the enemy would not leave unchallenged the long and insufficiently secured northern flank of the Sixth Army, but there did not seem to be any imminent danger of his undertaking some big operation with strong forces. But it seemed certainly to be in the interest of the Russians to withdraw by means of diversion at a different point, as many forces of the Germans from Stalingrad as possible,

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and to engage them locally. With certainty an enemy attack on the flank protection on the Don could be expected, though with restricted aim. Consequently the weak forces of the XVII Army Corps along the Don sector from Kletzkaya to Serafimovitsch prepared for defense. In the sector the Don is about (200 to 300 meters) wide. Apart from the bridge, which was destroyed on one side of Serafimovitsch, there were no other crossings of the river. The river banks were mostly covered with dense underbrush and bushes. To the south of the river the highlands with their steep escarps and a difference in height of about (100 meters) were close to the river. From these heights the view and observation possibilities of the river and far into the enemy region behind were excellent. The latter was chiefly flat steppe with a thin growth of bushes and trees, and certainly not a favorable terrain for the preparation of an attack. Near Serafimovitsch, however, the heights were at some distance from the river. There was, between escarp and river bank, a flood plain covered with clusters of bushes and shrubs, which, due to the absence of a good view, proved to be a serious problem for the defending side. The foremost line of defense was immediately near the river, where the heavy arms of the infantry could control the water level and the bank beyond. This section could be designated as "strong". But there were not enough troops to carry out the order. The defense of the infantry had to be restricted for the occupation of the bases, at a distance of (200 to 300 meters) from each other. This was no defense but rather control of the river. The defense of the artillery was corresponding. The few available batteries had to be placed at great distances from each other for the defense of the individual bases. The excellent observation possibilities were not much good under these circumstances. More favorable were the conditions in the sector of the Italian Division "Celere", for here an

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enemy attack had to be reckoned with soon, so that infantry and artillery could be and would have to be stronger. The defense of this sector was more difficult, too, since the entire Division, inclusive of its artillery, would have to go into action in the flood plain. Despite this the Division was able to have some reserves at the back, so that its defense system, in contrast with the other units of the Corps front, had a certain depth.

3. Russian attack with restricted aim. Crossing at Serafimowitsch.

The commanders of the XVII Army Corps erred in their assumption that the enemy would not be able to attack in the immediate future. He at once entertained vivid patrol activity along the entire Corps front across the river. Nightly combat patrols crossed the river in boats and on pneumatic rafts in order to carry out reconnaissance in forces. Although these could easily be repulsed, the entire front was kept restless and in tension. Occasionally it could be ascertained that the enemy sent agents across the river; nor could traffic of civilians across the river and their return be prevented. In this way he soon had a clear picture of the German forces, their positions and formations. The Russians had found an excellent hiding place in the bushes of the flood plain. There were hardly any signs of them to be detected from the observation points, though they were most active with their artillery and heavy infantry weapons. Any incautious movement of our own troops near the river was met by a fire of mortar shells from positions that could not be made out. -- The German reconnaissance activity across the river was restricted, due to the lack of boats and ferries, which proves very disadvantageous later.

For the protection of Serafimovitsch four Italian battalions were ready for action, to the north and northeast of the city, immediately by the river.

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The Italians had installed themselves for defense in the bush and swamp region of the flood plain. These battalions were attacked in a surprise attack one night after a short preparation of fire, and two battalions were turned out of their positions. The cause of the loss of these positions could not be ascertained clearly. Maybe the Italians attempted to avoid the concentration of fire by the Russians, or maybe the Russians had shown themselves to be superior in night fighting. The fact remains that the Russians had set foot on the south bank of the river at daybreak, and that the Italian battalions had been repulsed. The counterattack of the Italian Division, which was to take place the following morning, for the recapture of the best ground was successful. On the contrary, the enemy continued his attacks from the newly gained bridgehead, and was even able to extend it. The size of the enemy force was about that of one infantry regiment with assigned arms. The Italian battalions suffered greatly in the fire of the Russian artillery, and particularly by the mortar shells, for which they had no equivalent.

A few days later the German positions experienced a night surprise attack (north and northwest of Serafimovitsch). But since the terrain was considerably more open, the attack could be repulsed. More attacks followed, with which the Germans could not cope with, due to their dwindling defense forces. Thus the enemy was able to establish a second bridgehead, which could not be regained. Thus it was only a question of time when the enemy would unite those two bridgeheads and in this may recapture the old bridge of Serafimovitsch. Consequently the German command had no other choice but to give up the Don bend of Serafimovitsch, and to withdraw to a shortened position to the south of the city.

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At the same time the enemy had been successful in crossing the river with insignificant forces at various points of the remaining Corps front, in infiltrating into the German line, and in capturing bridgeheads, insignificant in themselves. These were only extended after some time, when new forces had been added.

The local commanders well recognized the danger which might arise from the small bridgeheads on the two banks of the Don. They had, however, no forces to remove this danger; nor did they receive reinforcements, despite urgent demands to make counterattacks. They had to watch idly the enemy created for himself a starting position, from which he three months later, in November 1942 started on his large-scale breakthrough through the positions of the Germans and their allies, the beginning of the encirclement of Stalingrad.

h. Characteristic features of river crossing by the Russians.

a. The Russian headquarters not only showed great resourcefulness but also an energy worthy of acknowledgement, by trying successfully to turn their retreat with all its demoralizing consequences into an attack again, within a very short time. The attack was well prepared and met the Germans, if not unexpectedly and without preparations, at least surprisingly to a certain degree. The preparations had been well masked, so that there was no indication of an imminent attack. Here again the Russians showed themselves masters of camouflage.

b. The crossing point on the Italian front was well chosen. It was not only the most effective point tactically, but the terrain was most favorable for the implementation of an attack. In the dense bushes of the river

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banks the defense could not be fully developed; moreover, the Russians are extremely experienced and skilful in night fighting as well as in fighting in terrain of which there is no good view. As always, so in this case, the experience was corroborated that it is extremely difficult to throw the Russian infantry out of his field position. He will dig himself in quickly and skilfully, and disappear in the terrain. His earth works are no objective for enemy artillery. His close contact with nature and his insensibility against the enemy's artillery fire make him a tough and skilful individual fighter.

c. As was also experienced later, the Russian headquarters attempted to cross the river at various points and in a broad front, and to form small bridgeheads in the correct assumption that the enemy would not have sufficient forces to recapture them quickly. If they did not cross the river with stronger forces, it was not due to lack of manpower, but they intended to remain in the defensive in this part of the front for the time being. But an effective defensive must, under any circumstances, have bridgeheads on the enemy bank, especially when a future offensive is planned. In the way enemy forces are kept engaged, reconnaissance becomes easier, and preparations for further attacks can be made without any disturbances. This is what the Russians did, rightly judging the situation! The German headquarters, however, did not take into account that matters were coming to a head, and believed that the employment of the Third Rumanian Army in the sector of the XVII Army Corps would be sufficient. It had no faith in the opinion of the General Staff that had no illusions whatever about the allied forces.

d. On the Don, as also on other rivers later on, the Russians omitted the preparatory fire by the artillery. The crossing and the assault took the

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form of a coup de main, and was accompanied by a short, but vigorous and sudden concentration of the artillery. The Russian artillery was superior in numbers to the German one, but its marksmanship was still inferior. It was best supported by the fire of its infantry guns and gunners, who were very numerous and had a large supply of ammunition. Also the rockets (the so-called Stalin organs) were most active, whose morale effect was far greater than their actual effectiveness.

e. For the first time the local German command made the experience that the Russians conducted their attack - apart from the initial surprise - quite systematically and slowly. In view of the weak defense an energetic and rapid attack would have been very successful. But instead there were shorter and longer intervals in the Russian attack, which made it possible for the Germans to take countermeasures as far as possible.

IV. Russian attack across the Mius against the Sixth German Army in July 1943.

(Sketch 2)

Stalingrad had been taken. All bravery of the encircled troops had been in vain and had been consumed in hopeless fighting. Apart from the superior strength of the Russians, the icy winter, hunger and diseases, and lack of the barest necessities had accelerated the breakdown. There is no soldier in the world that will deny his respect for the courage of these men, and that is not impressed by the tragic fate of these troops, who perished in the fulfillment of their duty.

In November 1942 the road was open for the Russians westward into the Ukrainian industrial district and to Rostov. Fragments of the army only

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quickly gathered, and improvised units of all types could occupy the gaps of about (100 kilometers) to the west of the big Don bend in an anchored line, although they could not close it. But the Russians did not make the expected thrust westward, which would have been most effective. They first gave battle to the enemy at Stalingrad; and it was not before 19 December 1942 that they started on a new operation from the north and east against the new German front. This respite enabled the German command to move reinforcements to the fighting front on the Tschir and then on the Donets. Thus it was possible, after the collapse of the Italian and Rumanian fronts, to resist the enemy in delaying action. He incurred heavy, and partly even crushing losses in numerous counter-attacks. By daily stages and in hard fighting the newly arising German Sixth Army gave way to the strong pressure in a westward direction.

1. In February 1943 the Sixth Army fought on the eastern margin of the Ukrainian industrial district in a defensive front, which bordered on the Sea of Azov near Taganrog, the followed the course of the river Mius in a fairly straight line to the region north of Voroshilovgrad as far as the Donets, and then turned toward the west. In hard fighting all attacks of the far superior enemy were beaten off in the open fields as there were no emplacements. A motorized-mechanized corps and a cavallery corps of the Soviets that had broken through the German line were destroyed. The result was that the enemy stopped its mass attacks in the ensuing weeks, and restricted himself to smaller attacks with smaller units (up to the size of a regiment), which could be beaten off everywhere.

During the period of relative calm following now, a defensive front, though on a modest scale, could be built up, which reached a certain power of resistance.



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The units could newly organize the artillery and the heavy infantry weapons could be employed according to a clear plan; and the troops could be prepared for defensive fighting. Obstacles were constructed, and mine fields laid, the communication net improved, in short, all the necessary preparations for a continuous and effective defensive were made. The emplacement was divided into four corps sectors, under each of which there were three to four divisions. But the one large snag was the lack of manpower, since the combat strength had been greatly diminished and not replaced again. Along the Mius front the strength of the infantry was 120 to 150 men per kilometer, and on the left wing, the Donets front, only about 90 men per kilometer.

2. Opinion on the Mius position.

It seems obvious that such scanty forces could not resist a large-scale attack. The battalions and batteries could not be relieved, but were continually exposed to enemy fire; in the intervals they had to push on with the construction of field fortifications. Emplacements were built for combat teams reinforced by heavy machine guns, mortars, and infantry guns. The anti-tank defense was reorganized in accordance with the experiences of the preceding fighting, and was distributed in depth by squads. The disposition and plans in firing of the artillery were made in accordance with the local conditions, splitting up of the fire being sharply counter-acted. In this way readiness for and strength of defense could be enhanced, but the situation remained extremely tense.

There were two factors of weakness without there being the slightest possibility of removing them, these were:

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The divisions had no depth in the defense sectors, and thus had no reserves worth mentioning on hand. March reserves had to be resorted to, which had to be taken out of the front each time. The Army High Command could not reckon only with the aid of an armored infantry division, which was lying far back in the region of Mariupol, for reasons of resoration; the Supreme Command having reserved the right to dispose its release and employment in any case.

Due to the lack of men, the construction of fortifications in the depth of the defense system could not be sufficiently pursued. There were not sufficient emplacements to the rear, which forced the German divisions to fight in the open terrain after the loss of the foremost emplacements. This was to be of grave consequences. The course of the Mius is more than (100 kilometers) in length. It rises in the highlands of Debalzevo and meanders in countless curves southward, in a wide valley basin, into the Gulf of Taganrog. In its center part the river is about (50 to 100 meters) wide. The flat and undulating height on both sides are almost (100 meters) higher. The highlands on the eastern side are somewhat nearer to the river than those on the enemy side. Although this wet obstacle is not very important, it can be considered as a military obstacle, since armored tanks and other heavy weapons need technical aids to be able to cross it. -- There was a wide view of the river and far to the rear into the enemy country due to the good observation possibilities.

The foremost defense line was directly by the river. There was no room for combat outposts. As for depth the defense fortifications reached the highlands, which were naturally exposed to the enemy observation and fire. There were several weak points in this defense line, one of them being the sector west of Kuibischevo, where the highlands recede from the river in a wide

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crescent, enclosing a wide flood plain, covered with grass and bushes, like an arena.

3. The Russians thrust bridgeheads across the Mius (Sketch 2).

The Russians left the German Sixth Army - which had to protect the east front of the Ukrainian industrial district - four months' time before they proceeded to make a large-scale attack. But even these months were filled with small fights of all kinds, raids, reconnaissances in force, with no rest for the men on the front. No large or striking changes seemed to take place on the enemy side. But large movements behind his front suggested his intention to attack. Familiar units were relieved by new ones in the usual way, so that from this fact alone no conclusions could be drawn. The air reconnaissance only reported continuous column traffic, during the night, behind the enemy front. However, the radio intelligence showed signs of the appearance of new corps and divisions behind the front, which were known or had to be considered as attack troops (formations or guards, tank corps, and motorized-mechanized corps). It was also striking that the enemy attempted to ascertain the position of the German mine fields by means of nightly operations, and tried to take more and more German prisoners. The Russians that were taken prisoners by the Germans were ignorant. The activity of the enemy aircraft was normal. Apart from these general signs there were no indications of an immediate Russian attack, nor could the Germans recognize or divine at which point of the line or army front (about 200 kilometers), the attack was likely to take place.

In the first days of July 1943 began the expected attack against the sector of the XVII Army Corps in the region of Kuibishevo, at a point, which was extremely favorable for the first phase of the attack. Although the Mius

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did not contain much water, it was an absolute obstacle. The German defense was in the river valley, in a plain, of which the view was not good, and which was surrounded by the wide curve of the highlands. From this plain westward a wide valley contained the depth of the German position.

Avoiding any development of forces the enemy made his attack across the Mius on a broad front. The night attacks at first appeared to be raids, which could be repulsed in most cases. However, at three points, the enemy succeeded in setting foot on the Muis west bank with relatively weak forces. These points could be sealed off by the local reserves of the Germans. There did not seem to exist any special danger, since the river valley highlands were firmly in German hands. The attacks were not only directed against the XVII Army Corps, but also against the two adjoining army corps. The initial success was not very important, but the German commanders clearly recognized that this was only the beginning of further vigorous fighting. Measures were taken at once to repulse the enemy across the Mius. For this purpose the necessary forces had to be partly taken from the front of the neighboring corps sectors. This required time, which was used by the enemy for the improvement of his initial success at Kuibishevo. The dispatching of troops to the point of penetration affected almost the entire army front. Parts that had remained unattacked had to be weakened without any consideration.

Before the German counterattack at Kuibishevo was carried through in the early morning hours of the second day, the enemy had moved reinforcements on to the west bank of the Mius and extended his bridgehead. The Germans could stop the attack of the Russians with their counterattack, but they were not strong enough to repulse the enemy across the river. It was an unpleasant fact

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that the enemy had been able to extend his bridgehead to the side and to enlarge his bases. At the other point of penetration the enemy kept quiet and made no further attacks. The picture of the situation was roughly the following: In the southern sector of the Corps all attacks had either been beaten off or the points of penetration mopped up; in the central Corps a wide, though not deep breach had been made near Kuibishevo, which could not be mopped up. The northern Corps had likewise reported a vigorous enemy penetration but the enemy had made no further attacks from the ground gained. Thus the enemy had crossed the Mius at several points with weak forces and had broken into the foremost German emplacement. There was, however, no doubt about it that the enemy attacks would concentrate in the center near Kuibishevo where, from the viewpoint of operations as well as position, an attack would be most effective, and for this reason it was probable.

The further course of events quite corresponded and came up to expectations. The Germans succeeded in repulsing the enemy from all his points of penetration, and in regaining the original line. But the enemy continued his attacks at Kuibishevo, his troops being reinforced by new ones all the time from the depth of his front. It still seemed possible that the Germans would be able to hold their emplacements on the heights, - even after the loss of the emplacement immediately by the river -, since these were considerably higher than the valley, and also had been improved to a certain degree. New forces from other parts of the front were called to support the part that had been attacked. -- In the vigorous fighting that now started, the enemy skilfully making use of the big valley basin that extended inland, and of other terrain entrenchments, was able to ascend the heights that lie far back from the Mius.

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He consequently now held observation points, from where his own crossing had been watched, and he also obtained a wide view of the rear part still held by the Germans. In addition he could not move from one bank to the other without German intervention, and had also turned the Germans out of their system of emplacements into a terrain where such fortifications were rare or in their initial stages.

4. Deep Russian penetration into the front of the German Sixth Army.

The Germans were now faced with the question whether, under the circumstances, the time had come for the army reserve (16th Panzer Grenadier Division) to be sent into action. It is always a difficult decision to let the last reserves go as long as there is uncertainty as to whether the enemy is going to attack at another point or not. In addition, an attack of this reserve could only be a frontal one, with little or no prospect of a quick and decisive success. But at any rate, the reserve was moved near the front, so as to have it ready - if the enemy continued his attack - for an attack of the enemy in his flank or at other points, where it might be needed.

The decision did also take not very long. Air reconnaissance had found several bridges the Russians constructed across the Mius, although the ferry traffic had not been given up. At the same time the enemy, protected by a considerable artillery fire, left the extended bridgehead of Kuibishevo with a strong infantry and tanks, ready to attack in a western direction. His objective was evidently the heights 177, which lies at a distance of about (30 kilometers) from the Mius, and which commands the surrounding terrain over a wide range. In spite of the enemy's great numerical superiority (several times the number of the German forces), he was beaten off in hard fighting of several

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days. The losses were heavy, and a great many of the Russian tanks were put out of action. But replenished or new units were sent into action. The losses did not seem to impair the Russian strength in the attack. But losses on the German side could not be replaced. As a result the fighting became more unequal from day to day. In this frontal struggle of attrition the Russians had the greater perseverance. The Russian tanks fought in close cooperation with the infantry, so that there was never a penetration, although a frontal compression. Now the moment had come when the 16th Panzer Grenadier Division could make the counterattack against the unprotected southern flank of the Russian attack wedge. This surprise attack was most successful at first, and ground was rapidly gained. But soon it met with strong resistance, which it could not break off its own bat. There were no tanks on the German side. At all events, the attack relieved the German divisions on the front that had been vigorously and fiercely attacked; the 16th Panzer Grenadier Division itself suffered heavy losses; it also became so closely entangled in a combat of several days with the Russians, that it could not be withdrawn from the fight and moved to other parts of the front to be employed there. Meanwhile the enemy had thrust forward up to (20 kilometers), thus approaching the commanding height 177, the capture of which would have completed the penetration. The thin German defense line, taut to the breaking point, encircled and enclosed the deep Russian penetration force. Now a second counterattack of a few battalions was made which was supported by tanks, against the northern flank of the Russian penetration unit. But this attack failed completely due to the vigorous defense fire of the Russians. Here for the first time the new anti-tank defense brigades appeared, whose position could not be recognized or fought, since the wheat crop was very high. -- But the enemy did not continue either his large-scale attacks, and dug himself in - in the Russian fashion - quickly and skilfully.

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5. German counterattack regains the Mius front (Sketch 3).

After several weeks of bitter fighting there was an interval due to exhaustion of the enemy. It could not be found out whether the Russians were waiting for new forces to arrive or whether difficulties had arisen in their supplies. Perhaps the Russian commanders had heard of the approach of new German divisions, and wanted to wait until these would attack.

At that time, the last days of July, an armored corps, consisting of two armored divisions had been placed at the disposal of the Sixth Army, with the order to repulse the enemy across the Mius and regain the lost positions on the Mius. So as to keep the matter secret and in consequence of the new unloading points of the divisions, the attack was to be placed against the north flank of the enemy's penetration forces. In addition the terrain seemed more favorable for preparations and approach. Careful reconnaissance and detailed discussions followed (several days), for this attack was our last chance to end the fighting favorably. But the surprise could not be kept secret to the end, for the Russians attacked from the air the divisions when they were being unloaded. Moreover, it became clear from statements made by prisoners that the enemy had been well informed about this arrival of new German troops. Greatest haste was necessary to forestall the enemy's countermeasures. At dawn of the first day fixed for the attack the two armored divisions, supported by the artillery, were able to regain some ground in the narrow strip where the attack was made, but this was not decisive. Nor did the expected success come on the second day, although the center of gravity of the attack was shifted and more ammunition was used. Greater success was expected for the third day, since the preceding fighting had provided the Germans with a better idea of



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the enemy's strength and situation. But even this day was unsatisfactory, for little ground was gained at the vertical point of the enemy's wedge. In spite of many doubts and although the divisions were urgently needed at another point the Army Command did not give up their determination to make a fourth attack, but this time not against the flank, but against the head. During the night preceding the fourth day the troops were regrouped, although they had been fighting for three days, and started the attack in the morning, which soon developed into a deep penetration. After the front of the enemy was broken his resistance soon weakened, and was completely broken in two days' further fighting. By sending all available troops into action - even the neighboring corps were ruthlessly deprived of forces - a concentric attack was made against the Mius. The terrain, which the enemy had gained in long fighting of many days, was regained in two days. Slight enemy forces were able to escape across the Mius, but the majority were either destroyed or captured at the bridgehead, though the Russian air force attempted to aid the ground troops by continuous attacking. The number of prisoners was great, and the booty in arms and tanks put out of action - several hundred - considerable. Due to the efforts of the German air force the way was opened for the infantry and tanks.

The July attack of the Russians across the Mius thus ended with a complete defeat. The soldiers of the Sixth Army had gained one of their finest victories against an enemy that was several times as strong. And yet the German commanders could not rejoice, the losses in the Sixth Army had been too heavy - 45,000 men - and could not be replaced in the near future. But despite the greatly reduced combat strength of the divisions the tasks remained the same, and it was well known that the enemy was receiving an ever fresh supply in men and material.

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The further course in the fighting in 1943 showed that these apprehensions were only too well founded.

6. Remarks on Russian attack across the Mius. Its failure as compared with an elastic defense with "retour offensif".

a. In the above the Russian attack across a small river course was described against an enemy, prepared for defense in weak emplacements. It is obvious that in this case the Russians had greatly given up or renounced the elements of surprise. The initial attacks, which had been made with weak forces over a broad front, were more or less only a "feeling one's way" (or pick-up or ascertaining by touch) concerning the enemy front, with the further intention of engaging German forces and deceiving the enemy as to Russian designs. But this method gave the defender time for counter-measures, so that the attacker was faced with ever new problems.

His attacks were slow and systematic, he slowly fought his way through the enemy front. Despite high aims the daily result was slight. Evidently the Russian middle and lower commanders were lacking in sufficient experience and training in the implementation of such attack operations. From captured enemy maps the objectives and sectors of attack of the Russian divisions could be recognized. But these operation plans were too rigid to be maintained in the chequered course of the fighting, a factor, however, which was advantageous for the German defense.

b. The enemy had shown himself master in the judgement and use of the terrain. All points of crossing had been most skilfully chosen. Terrain, where no good view could be obtained, had been preferred for the formation of

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bridgeheads, at points where neither the German artillery nor the air force could reach full effectiveness, and where possible counterattacks could be split up and would break down. So as not to attract the attention of the enemy the first crossing and attacks were made by the old position divisions, whereas the actual attack divisions were still kept back.

c. Also in these fights it became quite clear how closely connected the Russians are with nature, and how much they can stand physically. Night raids were carried through with great skill and confidence, and without any noise. The Russian soldier does not mind crossing a river by swimming and then keeping hidden in a swamp for days without budging. He carries his provisions of several days with him, which consist essentially of wheat grains and sugar. Soldiers of other armies are not likely to live on such rations. This self-sufficiency and physical hardness makes him a remarkable opponent. In addition, there is his indifference against artillery fire and his toughness in defense.

d. The Russian artillery was considerably better than in the preceding year. Its fire was concentrated and was most effective on its objectives. But it neglected the objectives in the rear territories so that troops and column movements behind the German front were not greatly disturbed. There was close cooperation with the infantry, that the latter never missed the necessary support by the artillery.

e. The numerous Russian tanks were employed in close connection with the infantry, and for that reason they resembled rather an accompanying weapon in the fighting described above. Due to the deep formation of the German defense troops the losses in Russian tanks were rather heavy. -- The Russian

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anti-tank defense, however, was of a great strength and fire power. In addition it was quick in action and proved far superior to German tank attacks at times. Quick and skilful in the right use of the terrain the Russian anti-tank defense caused a great deal of trouble to German tank attacks. As to toughness and perseverance in fighting they quite equalled the Russian infantry.

f. On all occasions the Russian engineers were excellent. The ferrying in the daytime as well as during the night was managed without any friction. Moreover, they constructed the bridges across the Mius in a surprisingly short time, and kept up maintenance and repair works undisturbed by, and despite enemy artillery fire and violent attacks from the air. It was surprising to see how quickly they ascertained German mine fields and made passages through them. The Germans finally began to doubt whether such mine fields were really effective and proceeded to lay mine fields also in the depth of the defense position, where tank assault were expected to take place and where there was no danger of premature reconnaissance.

In all it can be said that the Russian Army had made considerable progress in combat practice since the winter of 1942, and it could rightly be assumed that they would continue in this way.

g. A large-scale counterattack against an attacker who has crossed the river is always very dangerous. It is certain that a strong enemy cannot be prevented from crossing a river. But the party in the defensive has to fight for every inch of ground, so that the attacker becomes exhausted and loses time. If it is possible for the commanders of the operation to attack the enemy in such a state of exhaustion and weakness at an effective point, the success can be great. But it will always be difficult to choose the right

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time for such a counterattack, so that a surprise attack can be made. On these factors the success of such an action greatly depends. Another preliminary condition is a thorough knowledge of the enemy and his tactics; and finally the possibility to make the enemy's superiority in the air ineffective, at least for a certain time.

V. Pincer attack by the Russians against the curved front line or salient of the Sixth Army on both sides of the Dnieper in February 1944 (Sketch 4).

1. The German Sixth Army has to face a Russian major attack in an unusual position.

After the loss of the Mius position in September 1943 the Sixth Army, - after violent fighting and repeated counterattacks - , had withdrawn to the lower course of the Dnieper via Melitopol and through the steppe of Nog (Noga-ische Steppe). One division on the east bank, in the bridgehead of Kherson, and two army corps in the bridgehead of Nikopol were able to hold up the enemy in his pursuit, so that the bulk of the army could cross the Dnieper without enemy pressure. There was fierce fighting for these two bridgeheads in the ensuing weeks and months. But the Russians were not able to seize them. The bridgehead of Kherson was evacuated later, according to plan and without losses.

While the Sixth Army managed to hold the Dnieper line and the projecting bridgeheads, the enemy, opposite the German army adjoining on the north, had succeeded in crossing the Dnieper and in forcing the German front to fall back toward the south and southwest. When the commander of the Sixth Army, on January 1, 1944, had to take over the sector of the adjoining army in the north, the front line was a wide arc from the bridgehead of Nikopol to the region north and northwest of Krivoy Rog. The German positions thus formed a wedge, which

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reached deeply into enemy-occupied terrain, and which was divided into two parts by the Dnieper, and whose northern side was entirely unprotected. The defensive strength of the bridgehead had been greatly reduced due to the incessant attacks of the preceding weeks. The situation of the garrison and troops there became more engagered and alarming from day to day. Urgent requests made by the army to evacuate this unfavorable salient in favor of a more shortened and advantageous chord position were rejected by the Supreme Command. Nor could the Supreme Command be convinced by the suggestion that a shortening of the front would mean more reserves, which were so urgently needed. The Sixth Army was thus forced to prepare for the expected large-scale attack by the Russians in the most disadvantageous position possible, again - as so often before - without any reserves. The winter was not very cold, frost alternating with thaw; floating ice was on the Dnieper, whose flood plains were partly covered with ice and partly with mud. The roads were covered with snow drifts, on warmer days slush and water were knee-deep on them. Traffic with motor vehicles was almost impossible, the supply service of the troops being carried on with tracked vehicles and sledes drawn by horses. The troops suffered severely from this rapidly changing and unhealthy weather. It almost seemed impossible that the enemy would make a major attack in such weather, and when the terrain was so impassable. But local attacks were always to be reckoned with. And yet the enemy, at the end of January 1944, proceeded to launch his big winter offensive against the German Sixth Army, based on his multiple superiority in forces and arms, and especially tanks, against which the German army could not set any equivalent. The tank, which can easily traverse the terrain in such frost and slush, weather was enormously superior to the normal infantry units. An army in the defense that can move its wheeled vehicles with the greatest difficulties

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only, not to mention the many breakdowns, must be inferior from the very beginning, to an enemy, who has maneuverable tanks, and who is familiar with the tactics of winter warfare and the peculiarities of climate and terrain.

The German emplacements were by no means improved. Due to the insufficient number of men and the bad weather only few defensive installations could be constructed. There were hardly any dugouts, which provides shelter against artillery fire. The inferiority in numbers did not permit of a distribution in depth. There were no reserves worth mentioning. As to rear installations the construction of a chord position roughly along the Buzuluk sector, had been begun with. Nor could the course of the Dnieper in the wide bridgehead of Nikopol be improved for defense, since manpower was lacking. A thin line of holes (Schuetzenloecher) or dugout on the western highlands of the Dnieper was all. It was moreover obvious, into what difficult situation the army corps - fighting in the bridgehead of Nikopol would get if the enemy would succeed in pushing through from the north, or penetrating into the bridgehead from the rear, thus sealing it off. A glance at the map shows how tempting this position must have been for the Russians. Though, of course, it remained to be seen whether the enemy would know how to use his chances.

Two bridges - near Malaya Iepatiche and at Nikopol - were the connecting links with the bridgehead east of the river, and naturally were the objective of numerous bombing attacks of the enemy. But the traffic across the river had to be maintained by means of ferries.

2. Start of Russian attack to the east of Krivoy Rog, on 30 January 1944, aiming at the encirclement of the Sixth Army.

Throughout the winter the Russians had been extremely active along the

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entire length of the front. Again and again the bridgehead of Nikopol had been attacked and the strength of the Germans weakened in a continuous war of attrition. In the to and fro of the fighting the region of the bridgehead had been more and more confined. But also on the north front there had been repeated penetrations of the enemy, which could all be parried by counter-attacks. When, on 30 January 1944, the enemy had made another deep penetration in the region of Novaya Nikolyevka, the army again believed to be able to beat the enemy off with the aid of reserves from other parts of the front. However, the bad weather and the soaked roads delayed the arrival of these troops at the point of penetration greatly. Characteristic of the weather at that time was that a motorized division on the front could move neither its artillery nor its anti-tank guns.

The Russian tanks, however, did not seem to be at all hampered in their maneuverability; for strong Russian tank forces broke through the front of penetration after a few days, pushing south beyond Sokolovo, and endangering the city of Nikopol and the railroad line leading there. The Russian infantry followed more slowly and at some distance. This gave the German commanders the time and possibility to free the railroad line which leads to Nikopol from the west and to stop a further advance of the enemy toward the south, with the aid of quickly gathered, improvised units.

It was only then, when the Russian breakthrough had happened and the bridgehead of Nikopol was in great danger, that the army was given orders to evacuate the bridgehead. Such an evacuation, however, could not be carried out in such a short time and without preparations. The army was able, though, to free the corps to the north as well as to the south of Nikopol from the



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Russian encirclement. From the point of view of traffic and tactics, it was a noteworthy feat of the troops concerned to break through westward, from the area to the northeast of Nikopol, through the narrow defile near us, that were west of Nikopol. In addition the mass of the vehicles and trains of the troops, that were fighting south of the Dnieper, had to cross the bridge in a northern direction and gain their way out toward the west. The railroad toward west was of inestimable value in this task. It was not only possible to evacuate all hospitals and the wounded, but also most of the supplies from the depots could be placed in safety.

The two corps in the bridgehead, leaving a strong rear guard support behind, crossed the river at Lepaticha and Nikopol. In spite of violent attacks by the enemy from the south and east in the direction of the Dnieper, the German withdrawal and the crossing of the river was carried out according to plan. After the last German troops had crossed the river at Nikopol the bridge was destroyed. This frictionless withdrawal by the Germans was also due to the fact that the actual combat strength of the German formations had dwindled down to mere reserves. -- The crossing at Lepaticha was very difficult, not so much on account of enemy action, but because of the hopeless state of the roads, especially in the Dnieper flood plains near the bridge and the ferries. Not all the heavy vehicles and guns could be secured, nor the entire heavy bridge equipment, since the heavy ponton carriers and special vehicles were drawn in by the mud, and, in particular, could not manage the ascent of the river heights.

3. The Russians cross the Dnieper and push forward toward the Ingulez.

(Sketch 5)

The severe fighting and retreat across the Dnieper lasted until about the

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middle of February 1944. The losses on both sides were considerable, and were increased on the German side in consequence of the bad weather and the impossibility to give the troops some rest or recreation. The troops did more than could be expected of them, but the enemy was ever bothering them. Fighting had to be resumed as soon as the west bank had been reached, for the enemy with his superior strength was pressing hard in pursuit from the north. The enemy had not crossed the river yet below Nikopol, but had a bridge constructed quickly at that city so that the river could be crossed, unhindered by us. In addition the Russians had managed to enlarge their original point of penetration westward, and to push forward with tanks via Apostolovo to Shirokoye and the Ingulez. There were hardly any German forces left in this area.

The German front line now extended along the Dnieper from Berislav to Firovka, roughly, turning west in a straight line beyond the Ingulez, where remnants gathered from all kinds of troops tried to provide a scanty security. In the industrial region around Krivoy Rog hard fighting against the Russian infantry and tanks had begun. The Russian tanks moved about in any kind of weather, whereas the German tanks with their considerably narrow caterpillar tracks could move with the greatest difficulty only in the soaked terrain.

Between the Dnieper and the Ingulez the enemy incessantly attacked the new German front, which was being formed, in a southern direction. The fighting surged to and fro. While the Dnieper front was still preparing for defense, the Russians, as usual, made an assault across the river in a westward direction. To the south of Firovka they crossed the river with weak forces, roughly in the second part of February, settling in the synclines and ravines of the river highlands. The German defense forces were spread in a thin line along the

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margin of these heights. There was not enough manpower to beat the Russians back across the river in a counterattack. Consequently, the enemy managed to draw strong forces across the river within a short time and to ascend the river highlands. The Germans were not equal to this steadily increasing pressure. The Russians were thus able to form isolated, deep bridgeheads, which soon united with the Russian divisions advancing from the north, so that the entire German defense line on the Dnieper broke down. The result was that the enemy had been successful due to his numerical superiority and his superior expedients in winning the battle on the Dnieper, which had lasted several weeks. The enormous river barrier was in his hands, but with great sacrifices, and the German Sixth Army was neither destroyed nor defeated. Giving way to the overwhelming pressure, but turning head again, and shaking off the enemy in counterattacks, the army slowly retreated toward the Ingulez and the lower course of the Bug. The continuous, fierce fighting and the trying winter weather had considerably affected, but by no means broken, the forces of their fighting power.

4. Remarks on the Russian winter offensive for the capture of the Dnieper.

The aim of the Russian offensive in February 1944 obviously was the encirclement and annihilation of the Sixth Army, which was in an unfavorable and exposed position. The point of attack and the direction of the thrust toward the Dnieper bend, southwest of Nikopol, had been rightly chosen, in full understanding of the situation. That this well-planned operation was not a complete success must be described to the fact that the thrust of the tank forces in conjunction with the infantry, from the north toward the river, was not swift enough, and that parts of this group turned west toward Apostolovo, which seemed

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quite unintelligible. This move was ineffective, but the forces were missing at the decisive point. This, however, gave the Germans time to build up a defense front - though weak - northwest of Nikopol, under whose protection the divisions fighting northeast of Nikopol and the garrisons of the bridgehead of Nikopol could fight their way through westward. Here the well-planned Russian offense failed, and what followed was the usual frontal wrestling. - Nor was the enemy, who attacked the two German army corps in the bridgehead able to bind these forces and obstruct their crossing. The consequence was that the garrison of the endangered bridgehead could retreat according to plan, and the parts of it could join the fighting on the west bank of the Dnieper, where reinforcements were urgently needed. It was said above that also the Russians had to struggle with the difficulties of terrain and weather. But in spite of this it has not been clarified why the Russian headquarters could not end this operation in a decisive and final way, and why they did not exploit this unique chance fully. It possibly resulted from the lack of training and cooperation of the middle and inferior commanders, who were frequently unable to remove frictions, which always arise, and to use and develop beginning successes. More will be said about this below.

Like in former offensives the Russian headquarters did not make use of the idea of surprise. The first attacks were never decisive, but were more or less confined to deep penetrations; which were gradually extended. However, the breakthrough of the tanks toward south was a surprise indeed, though it was not concentrated enough nor rapid enough to make German counter-measures ineffective.

But the assault and thrusts of the Russian tanks under cover of night

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and invisibility were skillfully carried through and most effective. Their objective was in most cases limited and directed against places occupied by German forces. These attacks were in most cases successful, and not only threw the supply lines into disorders, but also caused losses to the supply troops, thus creating an atmosphere of insecurity, which surpassed by far the local tactical success. Also here the Russians made use of the services of guides familiar with local and enemy conditions. There was no effective counter-measure possible on the German side, on account of the deficiency of men.

The Russian air force restricted its activity substantially to fighter escorting and the dropping of bombs on the bridges and places which were occupied by trains and columns. There were losses at the bridge points but no large material damages. The commander in chief of the Sixth Army was shot down with his plane by Russian fighters on the Dnieper.

The boldness and energy, with which the enemy moved his available units across the river, without any large apparatus or machinery is especially worth mentioning. It is an example of his aggressive and militant spirit. Also the achievements of the Russian tanks and infantry in this difficult winter warfare must be praised. It seemed that no road or weather was too bad for them. We made the same experiences as in the winter 1942-1943 that the Russians are not only extremely skilful in this winter warfare, but that the Russian commanders in chief preferably made use of the inclemencies of the winter for their operations, out of the experience that the special qualities and abilities of the Russian soldier come out best in winter.

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VI. Russian attack across the Bug in March 1944. (Sketch 6).

1. The German army retreats across the Bug under hard pressure exerted by the enemy.

After the defense on the Dnieper had broken down the German command no longer had any freedom of operation. The initiative was with the enemy alone, and the anxiety arose whether he would not destroy the Sixth Army between the two barriers of the Dnieper and Bug or at least beat and defeat in such a way that an orderly retreat would be out of the question. In this case only remainders would be able to escape across the Bug shelter. That the Russian commanders had this intention became clear from all their measures and especially from the sharp pursuit.

The numerous cases the Russians could break through the German defense lines, which were to protect and cover the retreat, thrusting forward with tank units into the German army on the march. In some cases German divisions were cut off for days from their main forces. But again and again they had managed to escape destruction and rejoined the German front. It is the merit of the German middle commanders that they mastered all difficulties. In uncertain and often desperate situations the German officers of all ranks maintained the courage and confidence of the troops and forced their way out of the pockets, with their last physical and moral reserves against all expectations in a hopeless situation. The air force was cooperating by supplying such cut-off parts with information and instructions, food and ammunition. The hardships the German soldiers had to put up with were extreme. Complete confidence in their commanders, loyalty and willingness to make sacrifices kept away discontent, anxiety and a slacking of discipline. They kept up the

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discipline and courage of the "Ostkämpfer" (fighters in the East) who feel equal even to an overwhelming superiority. As long as there were enough men, who would keep up this spirit, there was no danger that even severe setbacks would undermine the morale of the troops.

There were four bridges across the Bug:

a floating bridge at Nikolayev, a portable bridge near Trichaty. The defense of the Bug was practically unprepared. Hardly a spade had cut the ground for the construction of defense installations. The positions for the artillery had neither been examined nor surveyed, since the troops had been fighting for weeks. There was only one security division on the west bank of the Bug, half-way between Nikolayev and Vossnesenz. The bridge points were secured by units arranged or for this purpose, consisting of men on leave or separated from their units, or convalescents.

Even when the German troops fought on the Ingulenz the two cities of Nikolayev and Vossbesenz had, by supreme orders, been declared "fortified places" (Feste Plaetze), i.e. two unfortified cities on the east bank of the Bug, which had been neither prepared for defense nor stocked with supplies. Their defense would have required a number of divisions, which were no longer at the disposal of the army. There were not even enough forces for the defense of the Bug sector, and yet, according to orders, these two cities were to be defended to the last breath. The local commanders and the troops disapproved of this order, and after long and urgent request this red tape (am grünen Tisch) order was withdrawn. But meanwhile valuable time had been lost, and time mattered, for the Russians pressed forward mightily in order to be able to reach the river before the German columns.

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But the Germans were able, especially with the aid of the railroad, to take trains and depots across the river. In exemplary order the German divisions, protected by the bridgeheads, crossed the river at Nikolayev and Vosnesenz\*, moving in night and day marches toward their sectors, which they were to occupy and defend on the west bank of the Bug. Only strong rear guards remained in contact with the enemy, which were to delay the advance of the enemy and secure the defense preparations. Although strong Russian forces pushed early enough toward the bridgehead of Nikolayev - Trichaty, there was no danger from these quarters, since the Russians would hardly be able to cross the lower course of the Bug, which is best (1,500 meters) wide. Conditions, however, were different at Novo Odessa and Vosnesenz, two road junctions, which the enemy would have to use under any circumstances. The width of the river at both places was only several hundred meters, so that an attack at these points was promising of a success. In crossing the Don and the Dnieper the Russians had proved that they were capable of mastering wider river courses.

2. Russian thrust into the German retreat by crossing the Bug near Novo Odessa on 17 March 1944.

The width of the Bug below Vosnesenz is about (200 to 300 meters). The river valley is broad and flat, and swampy in parts. The ground on both sides is covered with fields, meadows, rows of bushes, and here and there with undergrowth. The heights lie near the banks, sloping rather steeply toward the flood plain. No forests obstruct the view on the heights, but numerous ravines and synclines offer approach possibilities to the river bank, which cannot be recognized by the enemy.

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\* Also spelled Voznesensk.



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Even when the two bridgeheads of Nikolayev and Vosnesenz beat off successfully fierce Russian attacks, enemy forces broke through the weakly covering parties of the German rear guards and reached the river. Attacks of German mobile troops on the east bank of the Bug were without success. The German combat divisions were not yet ready for defense at this juncture, for they were still on their way to their assigned sectors. Merely the security division, consisting of older men with different armament and little artillery and spread along a broad front in group formation, offered a certain security. The battalions were spread out immediately by the river, only keeping up patrol connection with each other. Their defense strength might be equal to enemy raids, but not more, i.e. attacks on a larger scale, due to their numerical inferiority and deficiency in heavy weapons.

The enemy, not satisfied with the advance toward the Bug, moved two battalions on to the west bank of the Bug by means of boats and pneumatic boats during the following night, where he met with but little resistance. The security troops immediately by the river were defeated, so that the enemy could advance for about (one kilometer); but he kept quiet during the following day. The Russian infantry had at once arranged itself and prepared for defense in the bush terrain. It held the bridgehead against a counterattack (24 hours later) of a group of the security division formed for this purpose. This assault did not lead to the desired result, which indicated that the enemy was stronger than had originally been expected. A carefully prepared counter-attack, supported by powerful artillery of a combat division, which had arrived meanwhile, was a failure, too; the enemy could not be thrown out of the bridgehead. The task forces, which had been reduced in numbers so greatly, were no

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longer able to carry out such a difficult attack. In the meantime the enemy had moved further forces across the river and had extended the bridgehead. The German command foresaw a long chain of battles, whose end could only be that the Russians, due to their superior strength would overwhelm the German troops. The counterattack of the German mountain division just mentioned was the beginning of a number of stiff defensive combats, during which the Russians tried to take possession of the heights west of the Bug. The fighting which now took place greatly resembled the events on the Mius. In incessant and repeated frontal attacks the enemy forces his way up to the river heights. Systematically and stubbornly the attacks were repeated on the same spot so as to break and exhaust the power of resistance of the Germans, and to force open a breach for penetration. The same Russian forces continued the fighting, replenished with new men that had been partly trained. As soon as the Russian infantry had taken possession of the river highlands, the laying of a bridge was started, for the Germans were no longer able to keep the river under effective fire. Thus the Russians, in several days' severe fighting, were able to make a deep breach into the German front on the bank of the Bug, before a serried front could be formed. Before the German defense line could gain some stability or strength, it had already been broken and shattered by Russian attacks. The scanty reserves were entirely insufficient and much too weak to turn the course of events decisively.

3. The Russians cross the Bug, but do not force a decision.

Meanwhile, the German bridgehead on the east bank, Nikolayev and Vosnesenz, had been evacuated according to plan and without any losses. All available forces were now concentrated on the point where the Russians had penetrated.

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But even this could only be "patch work". For the advance of the enemy across the Bug could only be delayed, but not stopped. In the winter battles on the Dnieper, Ingulez and Ingul the fighting power of the German divisions had been reduced in such a measure, that the defense of the Bug line was out of the question. Stronger reserves and fresh troops would have been a necessary prerequisite, but these, unfortunately, were no longer available. Consequently the German front withdrew from the Bug to the Dniester, turning head and fighting continuously. The Russian armies followed the retreating German Sixth Army with strong tank and motorized forces, after crossing the Bug in a broad front. The German commanders observed the developing situation with anxiety, for not only had the troops been reduced in numbers, but also the remainders were at the end of their strength. The incessant fighting during two months in the Russian winter had greatly taxed the strength of the troops. Continuous fighting and long, forced marches, mostly during the night, had made any kind of rest an impossibility. Any relaxation of soldiers and horses, as well as primitive tendance of the motorized vehicles was out of the question. The situation of the Eighth Army, adjoining on the north was even worse. Its front had been broken at many places, its remains had been fighting their way back westward, blizzards and frost, alternating with thaw, increased the hardness of the troops. Would these forces, which were by no means defeated, but completely exhausted, to be able to escape annihilation and reach the Dniester - still at a distance of (200 kilometers) - before the enemy, in orderly retreat and without disintegration, which would spell certain perdition?

There was no slacking of discipline, officers and men shared the dangers and hardships. It was not a question of one's own life or of the present regime, but of a soldier's hard duty. Everything that was dear to the soldier was at

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stake, home, fatherland and family. In the uneven fighting, in which the soldier more often than not entirely depended on his own initiative and decision, the old soldierly tradition of generations stood the test, which has nothing in common with militarism, and which is a credit to any army in any country, and which, for this reason, is cultivated everywhere. As much as the Russians can be proud of their victory, the fighters on the German side may be proud of their courage and self-sacrificing spirit, of which there is no song or report.

During their retreat toward the Dniester the German divisions, or remains of divisions, were often encircled or their front was broken by the enemy, but they were always able to shake off the grip of the persecutors and cross the Dniester in a heavy blizzard at the beginning of April. A new close and serried German front was formed there, which put a temporary relieve of the Russian advance. Since the newly created German Sixth Army had sustained the first Russian attack in November 1942, it had - during 16 months - again and again turned face in an operation field of a depth up to (1,300 kilometers). In most cases, or most of the time, the Sixth Army was pitied against six to eight Russian armies.

h. Remarks on Russian operation across the Bug.

After the Russian armies had penetrated into the German front on the Dnieper between Berislav and Krivoy Rog, they advanced with strong forces across the Ingulez and Ingul toward the Bug. The German Supreme Command had refused to regain freedom of action by withdrawing in time and at the necessary distance. The consequence was that the Sixth Army was forced to fight wherever the enemy wanted to, and that under the most unfavorable circumstances. The Russians did not give them any respite in the inclemencies of the winter and the difficult

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terrain, but forced them to fight again and again. Also the Russians had to overcome enormous difficulties; but their ruthless attacking power, which had to sustain setbacks often enough, invariably asserted itself and deserves recognition of the enemy. In spite of this the German Sixth Army withdrew in an orderly fashion across the Bug and into the bridgeheads of Nikolayev and Vosnesenz. But the Russians were able to attain one advantage; they reached the Bug with strong forces at a time when the German Sixth Army was not ready for defense yet. Thus it was natural for the Russians to force the crossing of the river at a point where the least resistance might be expected, without delay and without waiting for reinforcements from the rear; this happened at Novo Odessa. After the German rear guard support had been forced back and defeated on the east bank of the Bug, bridgeheads were at once thrust on to the west bank. Though these could only be weak in the beginning they could reconnoiter the terrain, as well as disturb the enemy in his defense preparations, with the result that the German troops did not get any rest.

This crossing of the first wave must be called a successful surprise. The Russian covering forces were thrown across the river without much fuss or waste of time, it was rather an improvised affair. Without the loud "stroke on the kettle drum" of the artillery the Russians crossed the river under cover of night, unnoticed and in secret. It is the same method which the Russians applied in all river crossings. The landing point was well chosen, since it offered sufficient cover for the infantry crossing the river. Smoke screening was resorted to only in a small measure, since there was no defender to be dazzled; perhaps they did not even wait for the arrival of such screening ammunition. The Russian engineers worked as well as ever before. Without any noise and swiftly they put their pneumatic boats and ferries on to the water,

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so that the surprise crossing proved a complete success.

The way in which the Russians defended their bridgeheads and how tenaciously they held them has been described above. Also here the Germans could not score a decisive success in their counter-blows, though it must not be forgotten that their fighting power was not too strong any longer. As always, so here the Russian infantry had dug themselves in quickly, which deprived the defenders of any objectives.

The support of the Russian bridgehead by artillery and heavy infantry guns from the east bank of the Bug was most effective and weakened German counter-thrusts. The Russian artillery entertained a massive barrage fire around their bridgeheads, also from batteries in the flanks, so that all the avenues of attack from the heights down into the river valley became a target area. For this reason counterattacks launched against the Russian bridgeheads were extremely difficult, for during the day they were bound to face the front of the enemy batteries and during the night they became ineffective, since close contact becomes soon impossible in the difficult terrain of the Russian flood plains.

On the Bug as little as in former crossings the defenders were able to keep the points where the enemy crossed the river as well as the enemy foothold under such continuous fire that the arrival of reinforcements and supplies could be prevented. Nothing could detain the Russians from crossing the river under cover of night, though the harassing fire must have been troublesome. A strong artillery with much ammunition is required for such purposes, which is usually not at the disposal of any defenders.

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The air force on both sides was of as little importance here as in previous river crossings. Russian air raids on German formations, emplacements and bridges were weak, incoherent, and therefore ineffective. The German air force, it is true, could attack Russian movements and assembling of men and material in the synelines and channels leading down to the river - which was a certain relief - but the movements at night could not be checked or affected vitally.

The question remains why the Russian command did not force the crossing at Novo Odessa at a time when considerable German forces were engaged in heavy fighting on the east bank of the Bug near Nikolayev and Vosensenz. They surely knew that the German Sixth Army was still on its retreat and had not yet established a firm stand on the west bank of the Bug and prepared for defense. If the Russians had contrived - which seemed quite likely - to cross the Bug on both sides of Odessa with sufficient forces and to thrust forward in the direction of Beresovka, in order to capture the only railroad line - simultaneously shifting rear forces toward the north and south -, the fate of the Sixth Army, which was on the point of crossing the river, would have been sealed in all likelihood. But instead the Russian attack across the Bug was lacking in concentrating, which enabled the defenders to rally their forces and divisions on the west bank, and to establish a close front, which was in a position to meet the enemy once more. The reasons for this slow, systematic, and almost dropping or drop-line crossing of the Russians near Novo Odessa can only be a matter of conjecture. There was certainly no lack in boats and ferries. But possibly the inadequate road net did not permit of a large-scale re-arrangement in their strategy, aiming with the formation of a decisive center of gravity in their attack center. This may also be an explanation of the slowness of

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the Russian command on other occasions, when they were unable to rout the enemy decisively who was fighting to gain time. Possibly also there were supply difficulties for the attackers and pursuers - which could not be redressed so soon - since the Germans had destroyed or damaged means of communication, such as roads, bridges, railroad lines, and signal communications. In this way the movements of the Russians toward the enemy as well as to the sides were greatly delayed, and big troop movements could only be effected with considerable loss of time. The more the motorization of modern combined arms units increased, the more important the large-scale destructions. Leaving raised the concept of the "burnt earth", which is of Russian origin, modern warfare will make increasing use of the means of combat of military destructions. Not only will the defender, on leaving his positions, or an area, attempt to delay the pursuit of the attacker by all means, but also the attacker will try to paralyze the nerve system, as it were, of the enemy by means of continuous and repeated destruction in the rear, as was illustrated by the Allies before and during their invasion of the Atlantic coast.

## VII. General Remarks and Information.

### 1. The Eastern "Space".

The wide expanse of the Russian land taken as a theater of war has its own peculiar laws, to which the fighting armies had to submit themselves if they wished to hold their own. Size, topography and climate confronted the German command and troops with tanks such as they had never before encountered in their campaign against the Allies. The question sometimes arose, whether the Russian forces could be detected at all in the wide space, when they had avoided a decision. The memory of Charles XII of Sweden and Napoleon was



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recalled, in disregard to their ignorance and disdain of his wide extent with the destruction of their armies. It was argued that in the age of the motor in the air and on land conditions had greatly changed in favor of the attacker. The armies were no longer lost in the terrain, but could cover long stretches of land. With the aid of the air force and the armored motor distances could be covered in a few hours, which would have taken days and weeks in former times. The modern means of signal communication made a close contact of each combined-arms unit with the central possible, so that a coordinated command seemed guaranteed. The individual troop units operating in isolation had been turned into one attacking machine, which ran smoothly and could be steered and controlled from the distant headquarters at will. Nor did the supply of the armies that numbered millions seem difficult. Railroads, motor transport columns and air transport units certainly were in a position to transport supplies in great quantities to feed the fighting power. These conjectures were correct as long as the German armies were advancing fast, and the initiative was on their side. But when in the hard winter of 1941/1942 the offensive was checked and the enemy had gained time to draw from the depth of the realm new divisions and forces, again and again, equip them with allied arms and materials, and pour them into the battles, the Germans were out in their calculation. The command of a space or area depends on the number of troops available and on their mobility. Whatever may have been the cause of whose fault it may have been, the fact remains that the German army - since the disaster of Stalingrad at the latest - no longer dominated the vast area encompassed by its front. Memories from World War I perhaps, and autodidactic conceit may have led to the clinging to linear defense in too broad of front sectors. In addition, there was the rigid, much too rigid, holding of strips and points in the terrain

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without sufficient manpower and material to resist the enemy's superiority effectively, such as it was still possible in the decisive battles of the First World War. The front that had to face the Russian masses had no fighting power. The German divisions which often only had the combat strength of one regiment or less fought in excessively taut lines, which rather resembled "cordon positions", whose utility and value had already been derided by Napoleon I. For this reason, anyone wishing to obtain a clear picture of the battles and fighting described above always has to bear in mind that it was the Russian armies, which due to their strength, had the command of the gigantic Eastern theater of war, but not the German divisions that were lacking in numbers and mobility. Moreover, nothing was done on the German side to counterbalance the inferiority, with all means available. This must be borne in mind in the study of the following pages. The numerical inferiority should have been balanced by improvided possibility of the German armies. But not even motorization or tanks were a compensation, not to mention the pace of the Russian production with which the German industry could not keep abreast. This may have been one of the reasons why the German command was not able to carry through any large-scale operations, but had to restrict itself to a rigid and unimaginative clinging to its positions, mockingly called "hall combat tactic" by the German soldiers in the East. An area where operations have to cease is no longer dominated. In its wide expanse powers of resistance are absorbed and exhausted. There is no offending the three factors of mass, time and space without punishment.

2. Fighting power and morale of the Red Army in 1913.

In 1912 the Red armies had been practically beaten in Russia, and annihilated for the major part. But the enemy had contrived to form new units in the

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interior and in the east of his country, equipped them with allied material and supplies, and send them to the front. The remnants of the defeated units that had been saved were used for the formation of new forces on the largest possible scale. The Russian command always made a point of saving in time a certain skeleton corps or nucleus of officers and specialists. As early as in the spring of 1942 the Russian divisions had shown a remarkable and aggressive power (attacks at Izyum and Kharkov). The attacks of the Russian army in the winter of 1942, near Stalingrad and on the Don, were no surprise, as to their momentum. The Russian government and its military leaders may take credit for having imbued their tree with a new fighting spirit and confidence of success, which was kept awake by all kinds of means and unparalleled energy. The splendid success and victory at Stalingrad over an opponent that had until then not been defeated, were a tremendous stimulus and restored the self-confidence of the Russians at home and on the front. The morale of the Russian soldiers was fed from different springs.

In the first place it was the Communist doctrine and outlook which filled the Russian officer and the Russian youth with the knowledge that they were ambassadors of a revolutionary mission, and which gave them courage to face death undaunted. The Russian soldiers knew what they were fighting for and why they were making such tremendous sacrifices. Apart from this the appeal to the Russian's love of fatherland and homeland was most successful. The Russians have always defended their native soil to their last breath, as has become manifest in their history in the course of many centuries. Even those who were indifferent toward Communism or who rejected it were filled with a "holy fire". Even the splendid history of the tsarist armies was recalled to the Red Army. This patriotism was nourished by the revival and influence of

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the orthodox church. Not only the Russian soldier animated and roused by his hatred of fascism, but also by the wrath of the Slav and Russian pious patriot against the western aggressor, who had desecrated the holy soil of Russia. Stalin's many appeals to the Russian people and army not only to defeat the invader, but also to annihilate him, so that no German soldier would leave the country, were in the first place appeals to the Russians' love of their country, and only secondarily or in the second place to their bolshevist outlook. In addition the hatred and fighting spirit of the Russian soldiers were whipped up by systematic propaganda and training, a means that has been applied in modern warfare everywhere, which has poisoned the minds of nations for generations. Tales of horror, leaving their deep marks, convinced the Russian soldier that not only certain death but unutterable atrocities and torture were awaiting him in German captivity. The only means to escape this fate was to fight to the last bullet and kill yourself with it. It was also announced that retaliatory measures would be taken against the dependents of these soldiers who would allow themselves to be taken prisoners.

It is understandable that the Russian units which for the major part were formed in the course of the war, and which were composed of numerous nations and tribes, could only be welded and kept together by the most vigorous measures and penal clauses. The fatalist tendency of the Russians and the disregard of their own lives and that of others were accentuated in the army where weakness and failure were not tolerated and where coercive measures and deterrents were ruthlessly enforced. The dulness so often observed with Russian prisoners, may, to a certain degree be traced back to this slavery of the mind. The fear of the government and its representatives seemed to have suppressed all other feelings. But this does not mean that the individual was not capable of heroic feats of his own accord.

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In this connection brief mention must be made of the institution and activity of the political commissars and politicians whose significance is generally known. The highest officer as well as the simple soldier were shadowed and controlled by the members of this organization. The best comrade or inferior could be a spy. An iron discipline, safeguarded by this system, in conjunction with the existing and nourished hatred made the troops a unique instrument, but also the individual a never-failing fighter, who was determined to risk everything. It would be a mistake to consider the Russian soldier merely as a particle of the great masses. He had been certainly accustomed, from his early youth, to think and work collectively and to submit himself to orders, an excellent training system for the handling and tending of the modern machine weapons and collective weapons. But there was ample occasion and scope for the individual soldier in the fighting to test his abilities and distinguish himself (although, on the other hand, the too rigid discipline did not seem to encourage initiative and independent action).

3. State of training and armament of the Russian attack units in 1943.

Most of the units which the Russians sent into action in 1943 were new or replenished formations, and bear characteristic features as such. The troop officers and lower ranks had been trained at schools and in short courses. Their tactical knowledge and skill was confined to the knowledge of the simplest things, presumably. The result was a certain clumsiness or slowness of the lower Russian commanders. The coordination and cooperation of the various arms, especially of the artillery and the infantry, seemed to be only moderate. This deficiency could be compensated by the employment of masses, disregarding casualties. But it was striking how, in the course of the struggles, the

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Russians were able to improve their tactics continuously by their own experience. The enemy is perhaps the best teacher, and a person will learn mostly from his own mistakes. Thus the Red Army willingly accepted the lesson it had learned on the battle fields. It can be said without exaggeration that the fighting value of the Russian units increased from month to month, accompanied by self-confidence.

But such a development is only possible with an army that need not trouble about its recruitment. There seemed to be an almost inexhaustible flow of fresh men from all parts of European and Asiatic Russia. Also the regained territories supplied new forces. In the course of but a few days men of all ages were enlisted in the units, sufficient manpower for the unparalleled mass attacks. The consequence was that the Germans saw themselves compelled to remove that part of the population which was eligible for military service from the grip of the Russians. In the same measure as the deficiency in arms and material made itself felt within the German army, the material conditions of the Russians improved. This was particularly noticeable in the number of Russian tanks and the strength of the artillery. When the Russians attacked with from 200 to 300 tanks, the German defenders deemed themselves fortunate when they could pit 30 to 40 tanks against this number. The marksmanship of the Russian artillery improved from day to day. By employing special artillery divisions (several artillery regiments under one commander) the Russians attained a superiority for which there was no match on the German side. In addition the Russians brought an assault artillery into the field in 1943, which had been modelled on the German pattern. They were superior, from the beginning, in their infantry guns, mortars, and rocket shells (Raketengeschoss?).

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Lack in ammunition, especially for tanks, anti-tank defense and gunners were the daily concern of the German command. In many cases mass attacks by the Russians could have been beaten off easily, if sufficient ammunition had been available for the artillery. The Russians did not seem to know any such deficiency. The employment of the Russian anti-tank defense brigades has already been discussed. These brigades were not, as on the German side, a conception of camouflage, but permanent formations composed of several anti-tank defense units, which gave the Russian anti-tank defense an unparalleled defensive strength.

The Russian command was not sparing anything in the distribution of decorations. The title of "guard division" was bestowed on specially tried divisions, which was a stimulus to the morale of the entire army.

This is not the place to speak of or describe the Russian armored formations and mechanized-motorized formations. All these new formations were a sign of large-scale planning and tenacity of purpose on the side of the Russian Supreme Command, and showed that the requirements of modern warfare in conjunction with the peculiarities of the Eastern theater of war had been clearly recognized. In the bracing war in the air all these new formations soon got rid of their initial ailments, so to speak, and were developing into units, which deserved all respect even of the enemy. Though it must be added that the German soldiers fighting in the East had given up early enough to be impressed by the enemy.

4. Russian tactics in river crossing.

Despite their numerical and material superiority the Russians did not

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succeed in gaining a decisive victory of the Sixth Army. That such a "victory of extermination" was their aim several times can be clearly seen for the disposition of the Russian operations in 1943. The Russian operations, inclusive of the stream crossings, were merely part of a strategy of attrition with the object of driving back the enemy, irrespective of heavy losses on the Russian side, and of forcing him to give up the terrain occupied by him. Start, as well as implementation of these river crossings were repeated almost monotonously, the same pattern seemed to prevail each time. This may perhaps be called characteristic. There were hardly any variations. This enabled the German command to foresee the presumable course and to take counter-measures within the framework of their own possibilities. If these were not a decisive success, it was due to orders from "above" or lack in forces, but not to missing foresight. It is possible that this stereotype procedure of a certain inelasticity of the Russian command, such as it can be ascertained in the history of the Russian army as a whole. Each nation cultivates procedures and methods in agreement with its own peculiarities and possibilities, which will bring out the best and most easily the assets and potential de guerre of its national character. The Russian army in the battles north of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea was probably correctly called "the Russian steam roller."

The element of surprise.

In German instruction emphasis is laid on the element of surprise as a prerequisite to success in big operations and small engagements. This applies especially to stream crossing where the defender must be struck unprepared and not be given time to take counter-measures. This moment of surprise did not seem to be a particular object of the Russian operations. Though their



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troop concentrations and all preparatory measures were carried through most skillfully and well camouflaged, they did not seem to draw the consequences, namely loss of time and make a deep thrust into the enemy area. Instead they gain a number of small bridgeheads and stop there for defense, instead of thrusting forth from these points - which are protected by covering troops - with fresh forces into the enemy territory, so that bridge construction and ferry traffic may be started early and undisturbed. In this way, however, they let the success of the first landing slip by, giving the enemy an opportunity to take counter-measures, which might have had unfavorable consequences, if the defenders had had enough reserves. But even so they were able to gather their scanty reserves and bring them into the field, so that fierce frontal struggles ensued, which often lasted for days.

The first phase of the Russian stream crossing was not so much of a massed and powerful grip, but rather a schematic infiltration. It seems surprising that the Red Army with its enormous aggressive power should resort to the means of infiltration. This method is not new; it was applied in the war of position during World War I, leading at that time to fierce fighting for each trench and every inch of ground. It belongs into the category of "strategy of attrition", which renounces quick and decisive results in favor of a slow attrition of the opponent. It can only be implemented if the attacker has time and can replace losses easily. But this kind of warfare seems to be congenial to the Russians. (viz. the partisan fighting).

Deception and feint attacks.

Both means of combat were amply and skillfully applied by the Russian command; their numerical superiority facilitated this greatly. But thanks

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to his air reconnaissance and radio intelligence the defender was always able to find out where a serious attack might be expected, and what was a diversion. The responsible commander must study the maps again and again, evaluate the aerial photos, and try to obtain a clear picture by personal knowledge and reconnaissance of the terrain. He must find out where attacks are possible and probable, nor must he be deceived by numerous and manifold reports and enemy feints. It occurred rarely that the German local command was compelled to correct its estimate of the situation, and if so only in the insignificant points. A rather close knowledge of the enemy and his habits was most helpful, but not always possible.

Fighting for the river heights.

During the fighting in the flood plains the attacker, with whom was the initiative, showed himself superior in every respect. The advantage of the "first move" cannot so easily be retrieved, even if in many cases the attacks were shattered by the resistance of the defender. It might, however, be assumed that the fighting for the river heights, which were in many cases (100 meters) above the water level of the river would have offered better chances to the defender. But this was erroneous. Though it must be admitted that the possession of commanding heights has its advantages, such as better possibilities of observation, freer terrain with increased effectiveness of arms, these favorable circumstances are undone by the peculiarities of the topographic forms along the Russian rivers. As mentioned above these river highlands are an undulating high surface with rather steep escarpment toward the flood plain. Small and larger basins and gorges or ravines are deeply entrenched in these heights (the gorges are called balkas) and give the enemy a good opportunity

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of approach. Nor can they effectively be blocked by obstacles or mine fields. The ascent of the heights can be powerfully supported by artillery fire, whereas the artillery and the heavy weapons of the defenders can keep the slopes under fire only with difficulties. Once the defender has lost the protective obstacle or the river course, the numerical superiority of the enemy becomes more and more efficacious. The Russians always took the necessary time for preparations, i.e. moving the attack troops into assembly areas, awaiting the arrival of the artillery and the heavy weapons, and the tanks, so as to ensure full success of the assault. Protected by heavy artillery fire the Russian infantry assaulted the highland emplacements frontally in light waves, whereas the center of gravity of the assault lay in the synclines and gorges. They used to repeat their old method of keeping the heights down by means of continuous firing, and seizing the highland positions by penetration of the valleys and subsequent envelopment. In many cases the Russian spearheads which thrust forth through the synclines were aided by tanks, which were closely linked-up with the infantry. The fighting for the highland margins and emplacements mostly took several days. Setbacks were borne with equanimity by the Russians, for ever fresh forces could be brought into the field. But the strenght of the defenders was bound to be exhausted gradually; there were not only considerable casualties, but also lack in ammunition, so that even objectives that were worth the fighting could not be fought for. The fighting was especially fierce where the synclines ended and passed over into the highlands. The security troops stationed there were naturally the aim of the enemy attacks and the superior Russian fire.

With the seizure of the dmominating highland margin the attacks not only held the important observation points but also the points which dominated their crossing and bridge points. In most cases they had also broken through the

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main field of combat of the defenders, who had no other choice left but to resume fighting from a second position. But this did not exist in most cases, or if so had not been sufficiently improved. Not only had the artillery to be withdrawn, but also to be completely regrouped. There was mostly sufficient time for these operations, for the attackers needed a certain time for the advancement of the artillery and new assault units, although it must be admitted that the Russian command sped up the continuation of the attacks without sparing their troops. On the whole it can be said that the seizure of the river heights was not especially difficult for the attackers.

Breakthrough after successful river crossing.

Soon after the capture of the river heights the Russians started on their attack, whose aim was the breakthrough. It was merely after the crossing of the Don at Serafimovitch in August 1942 that they stopped their attack to resume it three months later for the final breakthrough. But this pause resulted from the general strategic situation which preceded the encirclement of Stalingrad. This operation was not described above, since it is not immediately linked up with the crossing of the Don. The situation of the defenders in the second position has all drawbacks of improvisations. Fighting has to be resumed without any obstacles, in makeshift dugouts, almost in the open terrain. The fighting power is somewhat impaired, for the troops are by no means fresh. They have not been able to settle down in the new positions, nor have they become familiar with the new conditions, nor do reinforcements always mean additional strength. In the continuation of their attacks the Russians chose those points in the terrain, which promised the best effect of their weapons and the quickest breakthrough. In the open terrain the road net no longer plays such an important

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role, since roads are not essential for infantry and tank attacks. Commanding heights are mostly outflanked, and the attacks are launched along valley throughs, which lie in the direction of the attacks. If the tanks have been kept back until now, they can now appear in larger units in the open, undulating terrain, which is ideal for tank activity. With the aid of these tanks, assaulting in a narrow front, the Russian infantry attempts the breakthrough. It is certainly a thankless task for the tanks to serve as pace-makers for the infantry in its attack. Breakdown of many tanks is the natural consequence. But since the repair shops are near the front, the major part of the tanks that were put out of action can be used again after a few days. On the other hand, German tanks that have been put out of action **must** in most cases be considered as a total loss, since they can be towed only rarely. As the compressed air hammer will break the hardest wall after a certain time, so does the Russian attacks, repeated again and again on the same spot, wear out the defensive power of the defenders.

The Germans were in most cases able to cope with attacks of the Russian infantry, even in overwhelming numbers, but not so the troops of the German allies. A defender, however, can only withstand the massed tank attacks with the aid of an anti-tank defense and tanks on his own side. In this case the infantryman will also let the enemy tanks pass him (laesst sich ueberrollen?). The anti-tank units assigned to the divisions proved insufficient (per regiment one company, per division one battalion - in most cases only 1/3 or 1/2 of the actual strength). But besides the rigid and stationary anti-tank defense, the shock batteries and mobile anti-aircraft artillery proved to be excellent. Unfortunately they were too small in numbers and very poorly trained as to regards in cooperation with the infantry. Nothing will shake the fighting

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morale even of excellent troops more than to be helplessly exposed to enemy tank attacks. The close combat weapon of the "Panzerfaust" can never be a substitute for a long-range anti-tank weapon.

In this connection may be mentioned that special aircraft served as excellent anti-tank weapons in the open terrain of Southern Russia, for they often helped and relieved the infantry of the Germans by putting out of action many tanks from the air.

5. Why was a battle of encirclement not possible for the Russians in the period described?

The Russian anti-tank, motorized-mechanized, and cavallery corps pressed through the breaches in the German front - often several kilometers wide - made in the breakthrough. Were they to free the struggle from the rigid was of position or were they to bring perdition? It is known that the early German successes in the Russian campaign were chiefly based on strategic envelopment and encirclement of strong enemy units. Though such operations may seem easy, they are extremely difficult in practice. They not only require an unusual measure of daring with the upper command, but also initiative and ability with the middle and lower commands. The troops themselves must have a high degree of training and must be able to bear even longer crises with equanimity. In their operations of 1943 the Russian command attempted the encirclement and destruction of the enemy several times. But in none of the cases the operations were carried through to perfection, though neither possibilities nor means were missing. As mentioned above the Red Army had at that time not yet reached its high degree of skill and training. There seem to be three chief reasons why a "wedge and trap" (encirclement) battle could not be successfully fought to the

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end, though the German Sixth Army fought in very advanced echelon order (weit vorgestaffelt kaempfte) and though it was winged by the Sea of Azov and later by the Black Sea, which actually invited encirclement.

a. In most cases the Russian forces turned too early after the breakthrough toward the encirclement. The result was that they remained too close to the former field of combat and soon became engaged in local fighting. Their first object should have been to thrust deep into the enemy area in a straight line, so as to put out of action the enemy's road, railroad and signal communications and to capture the supply points and command posts. The German command would not have been able to offer any resistance worth mentioning to such a thrust. These tasks being fulfilled, the time had come for the Russians to fan out (eindrehen) against the rear of the enemy's front. In this operation the mistake had to be avoided that the envelopment and encirclement were implemented by means of thin investing lines. It is not quite clear even today why - in face of the unfortunate tactics of the Germans to cling stubbornly to the same positions and to renounce far-sighted operations - the Russians, though they contrived to encircle the enemy on several occasions, were not successful in fighting a battle of extermination.

b. A further reason for this failure poorly is the absence of Russian air supremacy, though only local and temporary, which alone makes such large-scale movements possible and is most helpful in surmounting all obstacles and difficulties that are bound to occur. This applies especially to the frictionless supply of large motorized units, by land or in the air. It must be borne in mind that in the period considered (fall 1942 to spring 1944) the Russians did not possess this air supremacy. They obtained it later, toward the end of

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the war, when the German air force was exhausted and has succumbed to the superior strength of the West.

c. Finally it must be mentioned that the German local command knew how to escape threatening or existing encirclement, often thanks to their own initiative. Skill of the commanders, self-sacrifice, courage and efficiency of officers and men in cooperation found ways and means of thwarting the fatal encirclement in all cases. In these fights for the rivers it became especially clear how disastrous the method of the Supreme Command was to give binding orders, far away from the theater of war, orders that were not adequate and often overtaxed the strength of the troops; whereas in situations, where quick decisions or far-sighted orders were necessary, no such orders could be obtained, at least in most cases. This awkward and centralistic system recalls the War Council of the Viennese Court of the 18th century, under whose clumsy and often stubborn lead the Austrian armies became more and more dependent of the enemy. A dilettante command believes to be able to disregard the principles of leadership of the German Army, acquired and tried out in many generations. From the dark background of the fatal course of the war, courage and achievements of the German soldiers stand out radiantly.

6. Supply of Russian operations.

If the Russian defeats in World War I could mainly be traced back to a badly functioning supply system - with the result that they have often been called bad organizers - they have shown themselves to be veritable masters of organization and improvisation in World War II. The same energy and fanatic will-power which characterized the Russian soldier, also inflamed the individuals and organizations that were in charge of the supply of the front troops. The



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supply system worked accurately, as far as could be determined from the enemy side, and often ruthless means were applied. The capacity of the Russian railroads was greater than that of the Central European ones, due to their wider gauge. Transport movements were not carried through from block to block (mit Blockabstand), as on the German side, but at sighting distance (mit Sichtabstand). Large operations of the Russians could invariably be recognized weeks before from the supply transports from the depots near the front. Apparently numerous transport units were available. These plied to and fro mostly under cover of night and invisible weather, but stopped during the day. Air reconnaissance during the night was, for this reason, especially important. Its information was always useful, and the evaluation important with regard to the situation on the enemy's side.

Destroyed railroads, roads, bridges and constructions were restored and rebuilt by the Russians within a short time. There was certainly no lack in workers. The local population was employed as auxiliaries in great numbers. This had been a custom in peace times, and quite agreed with their conception of the total war. Especially women and girls took part in railroad track and road construction, carrying ammunition and fuel over long distances. Since any fit person was assigned to some duty, the Russian command contrived to have the supply follow the advancing army across the wide river courses, in spite of the little developed railroad and road nets. It may also be true, but only in isolated cases, that Russian units could not exploit their successes, due to temporary supply difficulties. Suffice it to mention the importance of tactical destructions in this connection. In this view the few Russian supply lines and stream crossing points, the German employment of the air force was of special importance and also effect. The Russian supply might be disturbed by the small number of German air task forces, but not essentially hampered. As soon as

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the German front was withdrawn westward the Russians were able to resume their supply traffic across the Black Sea, which was a certain relief for the railroad and motorized column traffic.

Special mention must be made of the supply traffic in winter: Wheeled vehicles could only proceed on roads and tracks from which the snow had been removed. Consequently, the supply lines had to be continuously kept free from snow. Here again civilian workers in great numbers, especially women and girls, were employed for this important task, which was quickly and effectively mastered. The transportation of the supplies on the field of combat itself was only possible with tracked vehicles and innumerable horse-drawn sleds. In a similar way the Russians surmounted the transportation difficulties during the muddy periods in spring and fall, unless the thaw and the bottemless, drenched and soaked roads, and the flooded terrain paralysed military operations for several weeks. The supply on Russian soil is more vulnerable than on any other European theater of war. Destructions and air raids by the Germans were most troublesome to the Russians, and the blasting of railroads and highways was also as effective as the Russian partisans which temporarily also paralyzed German movements. Thus the course of military operations can be greatly influenced on Russian soil, if a superior air force succeeds in disturbing or stopping the arteries of modern fighting armies temporarily or even permanently.

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VIII. The offensive defense of river courses.

A belligerent power, deciding to wage a defensive war at several sectors of the front for a certain period of time, will choose a terrain for this purpose, where the enemy can employ his superior manpower and means only to a limited extent. Each natural obstacle such as impassable mountain ranges, swamps, extensive and dense forests, as well as broad river course will be included in his defense system to counter-balance, at least to a certain degree, his inferiority. Though modern warfare, thanks to the achievements of engineering, has found ways and means to overcome such obstacles more easily than formerly, their importance cannot be underestimated, neither by the attacker nor the by the defender. The experiences of two tremendous wars have taught us that the defense is by far the more difficult form of fighting and makes the most exacting demands on the troops. Dashing attacks can be made with soldiers trained in a hurry, as regards to the infantry. But in the defense the highest demands are made on all arms, and it would be a fatal paralogism to believe that units of inferior quality will suffice for the defense. Without thorough training the soldiers will never have the proper confidence in their achievements, and thus in their success. Any superior will make a special point of cultivating the right fighting spirit, initiative, and comradeship among his men. Constant and warm-hearted care for the men is the prerequisite for the morale and especially the team spirit. The knowledge and conviction to be fighting for justice and a "holy" and good cause are the ethical presupposition of any fighting.

A defending power which merely restricts itself to defense, without cultivating and keeping awake an "offensive" spirit, is weak from the beginning

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and must finally lose the game. The question in the defensive is not to maintain and hold the occupied positions, but to defeat the attackers, cause them heavy losses, and crush their aggressive strength. This is to be taken into account by the defensive, provided that or taken for granted that modern armies do not greatly differ in their armaments.

No comprehensive description can be given here of all the factors a defender has to consider to be able to carry out his tasks to satisfaction. But some individual experiences will be presented here of the 16 months of defensive war on the South Russian theater of war.

A preliminary condition for successful defense is the successful fighting in the air against an enemy, who is in most cases superior. Though it may not always be possible to gain absolute control of the air, the air space above the defender must not become a domaine over which the enemy has full sway. The air superiority of the Allies during their invasion of France had decided the result of battles and operations on the ground before they began. It is always desirable that the air forces which are assigned to the task, remain tactically under the command is responsible for the operations. A coordination, in spite of the best intentions of both parties, will always involve so many frictions, that such a settlement can only be considered as an emergency solution.

#### Strength of troops.

The strength of the defense troops must be in the right proportion to the area that is to be defended, the peculiarities of the terrain, and the duration of the struggle. Troops that are or have been seriously bled and

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are tired out, will from the beginning doubt the successful implementation of their tasks. The width of the front for a modern infantry division (full strength) on the defensive should not exceed (6 to 8 kilometers) generally. The artillery of a normal infantry division will not suffice in view of the many tasks assigned to it. For this reason a strong assignment of motorized artillery regiments from higher command posts is necessary. In addition, the assignment of engineers and construction troops is necessary, whose employment will be reserved to the army and corps commands. The same applies to the anti-tank defense, which is of great importance in the river defense.

The success of any defense depends on the numerical strength and quality of the reserves available. Without sufficient mobile reserves modern defense is impossible. Approximately 1/3 of the full strength per battalion and per regiment is to be determined and placed as reserve at concealed points in the terrain, for counterthrusts as well as for employment in setbacks and surprise penetrations of the enemy.

Apart from the reserve of the strength of an infantry regiment, the infantry division needs special mobile reserves in tanks, assault guns, rocket launchers (Raketengeschuetze), and engineers. The reserves of the higher command must be attack units with numerous tanks at their disposal. Their number and composition will vary according to the situation. When the launching of counterattacks is intended they are to be removed close to the front and in good time, and require a special fighter escort. Close cooperation and interlinking with the air force are a prerequisite for their successful employment. These reserves must have intensive training with a view to their threefold task: a) Counterattack to crush an enemy that has penetrated the

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chief field of combat and regaining of the river line, b) counterattack against enemy penetration, c) annihilation of enemy air landing troops in the rear area.

Development and organization of the terrain installations.

The principle is that every cut with a spade saves blood-shedding and is a contribution toward success. After reconnaissance of the terrain the construction and development of the defensive installations must be begun by strong construction troops. What is left unfinished cannot be completed in the course of the fighting. Concrete pillboxes (Schartenstaende?), bunkers and the like did not prove to be useful. They can be attacked and seized without difficulties, and are too big objectives for the artillery, the bombers, and the special guns for the fighting of bunkers. According to experience, fighting is best and most elastic for the infantryman from field positions (Feldstellungen), which are concealed and well camouflaged in the open terrain. Short trenches and well concealed firing positions with numerous alternate firing positions proved to be best for heavy weapons. Field fortifications, which can easily be recognized on the aerial reconnaissance picture, are rather useless since they can be quickly put out of action in case of an attack. But dummy installations can be most useful, if they are skillfully made.

For the reinforcement of the river obstacle persistent or continued wire entanglements and, after careful reconnaissance, mine fields can be laid. But the obstacles must not become a barrier which the defenders dare not cross.

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Anti-tank trenches of the length of kilometers proved to be useless. They could not stop the advance of the enemy at any point, and their advantage bore no proportion to the amount of work involved in their construction. The laying of mine fields is only to be recommended if the enemy does not know their position, or if they cannot easily be photographed (or surveyed or removed Aufnehmen?). The Russians became very skillful in removing and crossing such mine fields. The defense depends entirely on the good functioning of the communication network. Care must be taken for this reason that, even if several lines are cut, orders and reports can reach their destination. The development of the road and highway net is of the same importance, as it guarantees not only the functioning of the supplies, but also the quick movement of reserves, artillery and tanks, and offers sufficient cross connections.

Command posts should be constructed at points from which the best and quickest communication with and influence on the troops is possible; preferable near infantry and artillery observation posts. Modern warfare with its rapid succession of events requires the presence even of the higher commander in the field, so that he and his troops can see each other.

The fighting in Russia has shown that the installation of only one front emplacement is not sufficient. Support or rear positions to hold the reserves and as bases for large-scale counterattacks seem indispensable. Also the installation of switch positions to stop possible enemy penetrations from the side have proven most useful.

The Supreme German High Command had forbidden the construction of strategic rear positions for reasons that can be contested strategically, and psychologically. Ludendorff himself, in World War I, had such rear positions constructed

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in the course of progressive attack operations. The fighting in Russia has been a warning that any commander who neglects the timely construction of such rear positions, where security troops can be placed, becomes guilty of a grave mistake. With a view to air landing operations these rear positions are particularly important.

Conduct of battle of the various arms in the river defense.

It may be called a principle that has been corroborated again and again by experience, that a mere defense carried out by forces and weapons assigned for this purpose cannot prevent the enemy from crossing the river and penetrating the defensive position. Even if sufficient forces were available - which is never the case - for rigid or fixed defense, the superior enemy artillery and air forces would crush it, so that only those parts could fight effectively that had escaped the preparatory enemy fire. For this reason the defending party or side must never confine itself to mere defense. Admittedly, the fire which meets the enemy when he moves into position must be so strong that an infiltration and crossing of the river in the form of a coup de main will fail. But the defender can only hope to carry a defensive victory, if the defense is mobile and offensive to the highest possible degree. This principle applies to the individual arms as well as to their cooperation. The natural consequence is that the troops cannot be spared and that they cannot rest in their positions. It would indeed be the wrong care for the troops to encourage them in their desire to be comfortable and settle down somewhere.

The complaint about missing attack reserves runs like a red thread through the above descriptions. Where they were available and arrived in time they



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were able to influence the battle decisively in favor of the defenders. It is they especially, together with the position troops, that have to wage the defensive battle. This is true of the local reserves of the infantry regiments as well as of the indirect reserves of the higher command. In this case it is not enough for officers and men to have been trained in a war game or map maneuver, but they must have been assigned to a certain area and know how to locate their roads and paths as well as their assembly positions during the night. Like the fire brigade these reserves should be on the spot where they are needed, in the shortest time possible.

The backbone of the entire river defense is the artillery now as ever. Its fire must command the entire front sector without any gaps and must reach far into the enemy assembly area. In time of quietness it will fulfill its tasks with roving guns from positions that should be changed continuously. Firing positions from where the defensive fighting is to be implemented should be kept secret to the last moment. Batteries that have been determined (anschneiden) and recognized by the enemy will quickly be put out of action, and therefore great mobility and quick withdrawal to alternate positions are a prerequisite. The surveying of the artillery positions cannot be begun early enough. Maps and plans are to be prepared and kept in readiness for the front as well as for the rear positions. Advanced observers should be on the commanding heights with the possibility of a good view as well as with the foremost infantry immediately by the river. Only when the observation posts of all arms cooperate closely, commands and troops can benefit by their information in the shortest possible time. Without a well trained and very active observer unit neither a tactic nor a good functioning of the artillery is possible. Closest cooperation with the air reconnaissance and especially with the artillery observation

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planes (Artillerieflieger) is of the greatest importance.

In the same way the infantry has to be mobile and offensive in its defense. The enemy river bank should not be left to the enemy without any resistance. As far as possible bridgeheads and troops should be advanced to the enemy bank and held there as long as possible. The river course itself is by no means "no man's land", but the most essential part of the defense system. An active defender will fight for the command of the river with all possible means and greatest toughness. Well prepared surprise assaults of shock troops across the river keep the troops in good form and impress the enemy. Such assaults require special training. Pneumatic and assault boats must be assigned to them.

When also the infantry weapons have to command the full width of the river, the disposition of the infantry should not at all become rigid. Continuous changing confuses the enemy and will prevent him from obtaining clear data for his attack. Clumsiness and thoughtlessness as well as trustfulness should not be tolerated, least of all toward such remarkable opponents as the Russians. If these are allowed to prevail the success may become doubtful. The illumination of the river by night as well as the automatic and sighted (gezielt) fire release in invisible weather and artificial fog must be constantly safeguarded. The repulsing and fighting of enemy amphibian and underwater tanks has also to be taken into consideration. Mine obstacles along the bank and advanced anti-tank guns can provide a certain security. How far radar instruments can serve as protection against surprise assaults is not known (to the author?).

As soon as the enemy attack has been recognized the entire defense fire available is to be concentrated on the point of penetration. According to plan

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and automatically, the shock troops rush forth to defeat the enemy - who is landing - in their counterthrust, before he has been able to organize and rearrange for the fighting. If the enemy is defeated, the defense must be resumed at once, since, according to experience, the Russians repeat their attacks on the same point.

In all circumstances the river course must be defended and held with the utmost toughness and tenacity. Possession or loss of the river bank line has often decided the result of the entire battle. Tempting as the idea may be to let the enemy cross the river with isolated units, and then to attack and defeat these, warning must be given of such an operation. It is extremely difficult in practice to feel and determine the right moment for such a "retour offensiv", nor can it be foreseen whether the forces for such a counterthrust are available at the envisaged point. The first phase of the struggle is doubtless the fighting for the possession of the river bank line and for the control of the wet obstacle, the river course. If it is not possible to crush the enemy crossing by means of the defensive fire, the first covering and landing troops have to be repulsed in a counterattack and annihilated. The destruction of the stream crossing material is of special importance.

If the enemy does succeed in gaining one or several bridgeheads on the defenders' bank and to establish there for defense, automatic counterattacks have little prospect of success and may on no account be launched. Even the unkind pressure exerted by the superior command post must not induce the troop commander to proceed without the necessary care. The reserves are to be moved up in a hurry into assembly position for the assault, which is to be prepared most carefully. Only a well organized counterattack, supported by all arms,

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has any prospect of success. Essential in such a lunge is also the air force of the defenders, which, however, can improvise its attacks as little as the ground forces. It will be the task of an active and aggressive air force to attack the inevitable concentrations and approach marches on the enemy side, with special centers of gravity. To fight in small detachments here and there will only be a waste of ammunition and strength, and is to be avoided, for this reason, by all means. The objective of such counterthrusts must be the annihilation of the enemy on the near shore and the re-occupation of the river shore lines. In many cases the decision will be difficult for the responsible commander to give such an early counterattack for the reserves, since he must fear lest the enemy should begin a simultaneous operation at another point. However, it is only in rarest cases that the situation will become clear soon, unless fortune or luck plays unusually favorable information about the enemy's forces and intentions into a commander's hands. He will, always grope in the dark, to a certain extent, and must make his decisions according to a clear and rational examination of the circumstances, guided by his own conscience and genius. On the whole it can be said that hesitation and temporizing will not bring this clarity, but that they often cause a commander to lose the best opportunity, which can never be retrieved. There are, in the history of German warfare in the East, deplorable examples of such a paralyzing wait-and-see policy and of decisions which lagged far behind events. For this reason it is advisable to launch the counterattack as soon as possible, before the enemy forces that have crossed the river have become too strong. It is a commander's task to draw and have on hand new reserves from front sectors that have not been attacked, and these will replace the reserves which were sent into action first.

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Such a mobile and offensive conduct of battle cannot be improvised, nor can it be demanded of any troop. Officer and men have to have a thorough training, in which all practical experiences are evaluated, until they are quite familiar with this kind of warfare. Naturally an over-elaborate system of training has to be avoided. Busyness cannot be identified with productive work and progress. It is not the number of men that is essential but the fighting qualities of a unit as a whole and of the individual man. Experience has shown many times that rested troops in full combat strength failed in the defense, because they did not understand their task and because, due to their insufficient training, they did not feel equal to the Russian attackers. Such failures caused grave setbacks and crisis on the Eastern front. On the other hand, there were small, ridiculously small units - in many cases only remnants of their former units - that came to close quarters with the enemy, again and again, seizing him by the throat courageously and boldly. Their courage often turned the course of the battle at critical moments, and they carried the victory against an overwhelming superiority; deeds of valor that can be compared with the proudest feats in military history.

Napoleon's words: "Activité, activité, vitesse"! still apply to the defense, particularly the defense of river courses. Inferiority in numbers and means of combat can only be counter-balanced by activity, mobility and swiftmess. Anyone who conduct the defense merely as defense is heading for disaster. The fate of the French army, which relied on the defensive effect of its extensive fortification zones, and the struggle of the German army in the East, which had been deprived of its mobility and a great deal of its inherent initiative, will be a warning in any future war, in which the defense is going to play a role.

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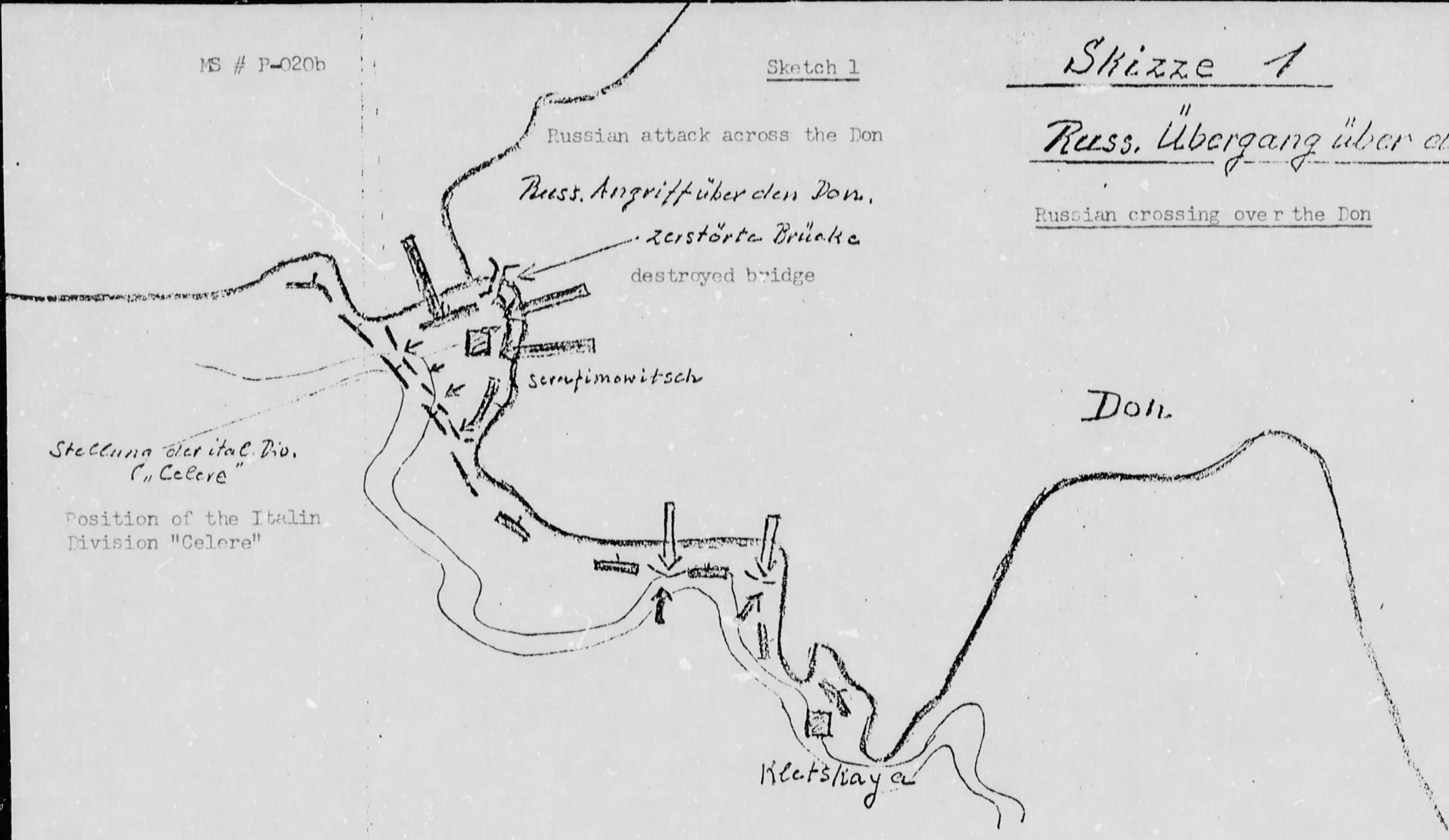
May the nations, which can and wish to defend their freedom with armed force, take care that their officers and men develop and retain the true military elan and spirit, which alone guarantee success and victory. Although the last two world wars were finally decided by the superior and overwhelming material of gigantic industrial powers, the decisive factor remains the individual fighting soldier who, knowing that he is fighting for a high ethical cause, takes this war potential into the battle field and wins the final victory.

(Signed): Karl Hollidt

Skizze 1

Russ. Übergang über den Don

Russian crossing over the Don



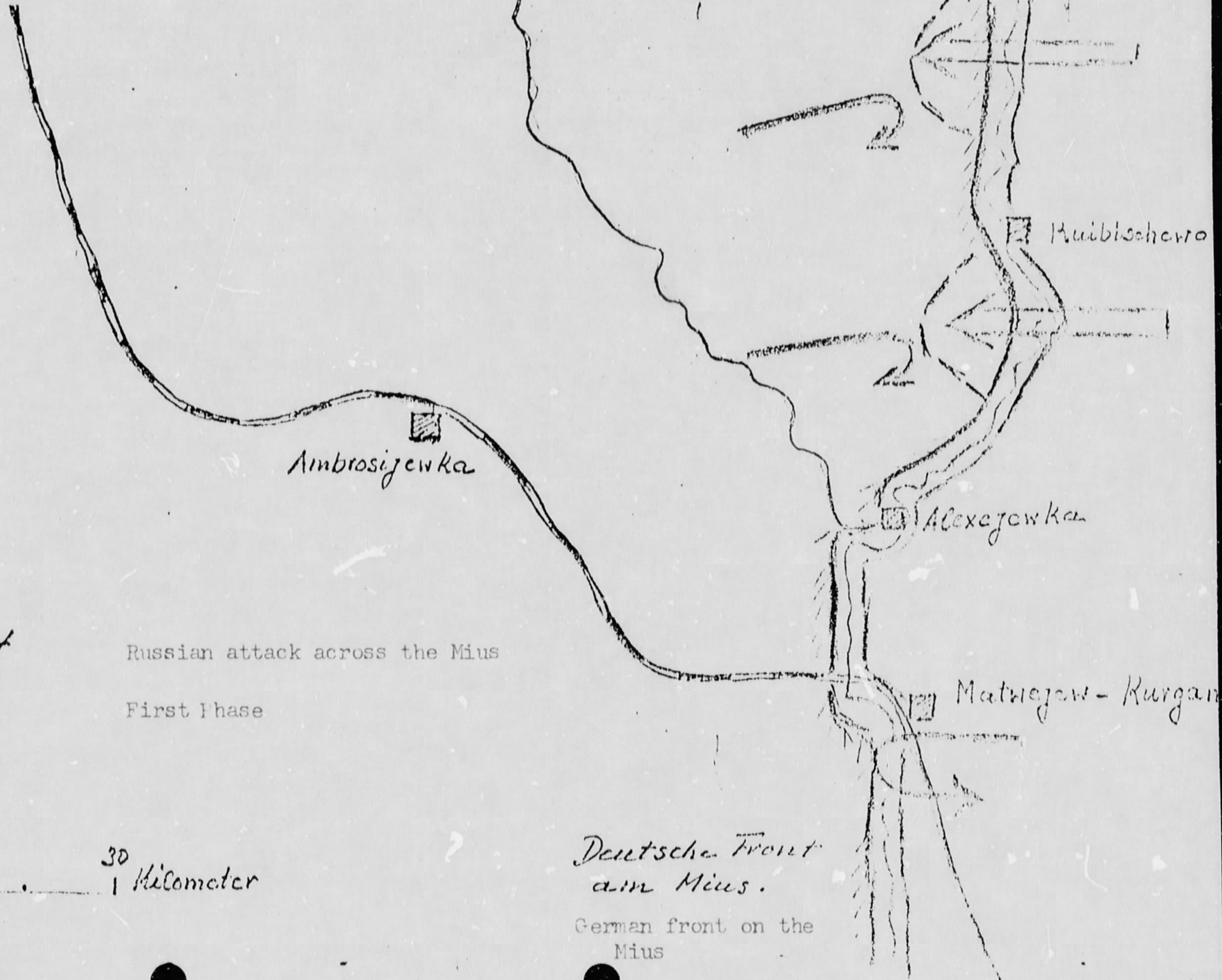
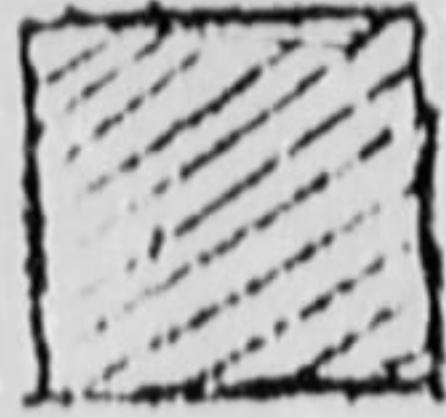
Stellung der ital. Div.  
"Celere"  
Position of the Italian  
Division "Celere"

Kletsliaya

0 5 10 15 20 Kilometer

Ungefährer Maßstab. Estimated scale

Stalino



Russischer Angriff  
über den Mius.  
1. Phase.

Russian attack across the Mius

First Phase

10 20 30  
| | |  
Kilometer

ungefährer Maßstab

Deutsche Front  
am Mius.

German front on the  
Mius

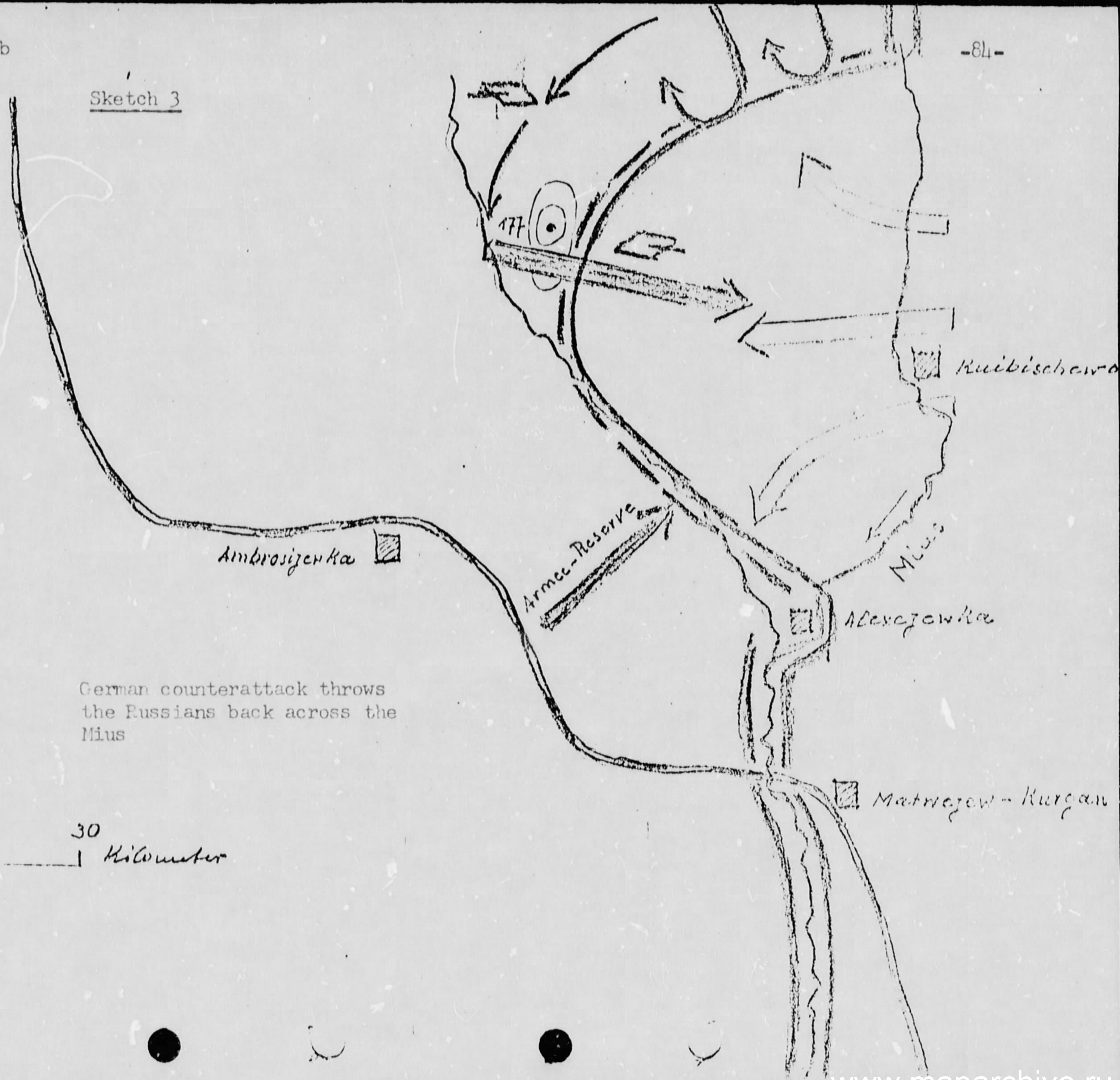


# Skizze 3

Sketch 3

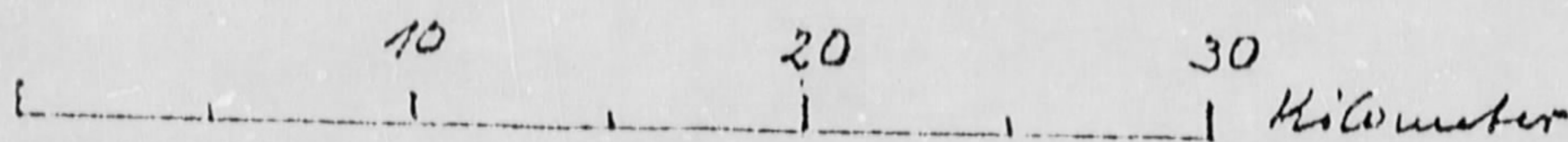


Stalino



Deutscher Gegenangriff  
wirft den Russen über  
den Mius zurück.

German counterattack throws  
the Russians back across the  
Mius

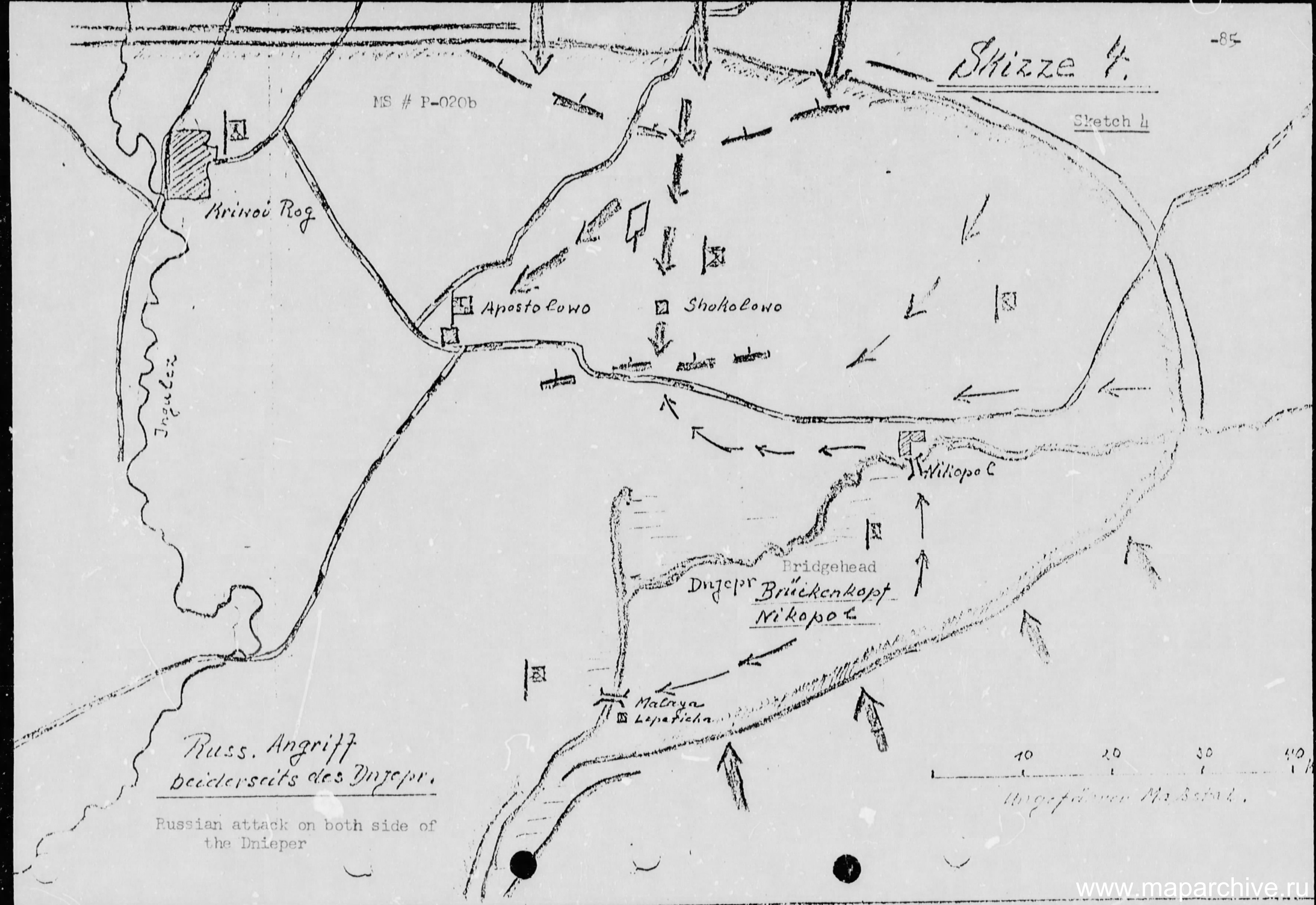


Ungefäherer Maßstab.

# Skizze 4.

Sketch 4

MS # P-020b



*Russ. Angriff  
beiderseits des Dnjepr.*

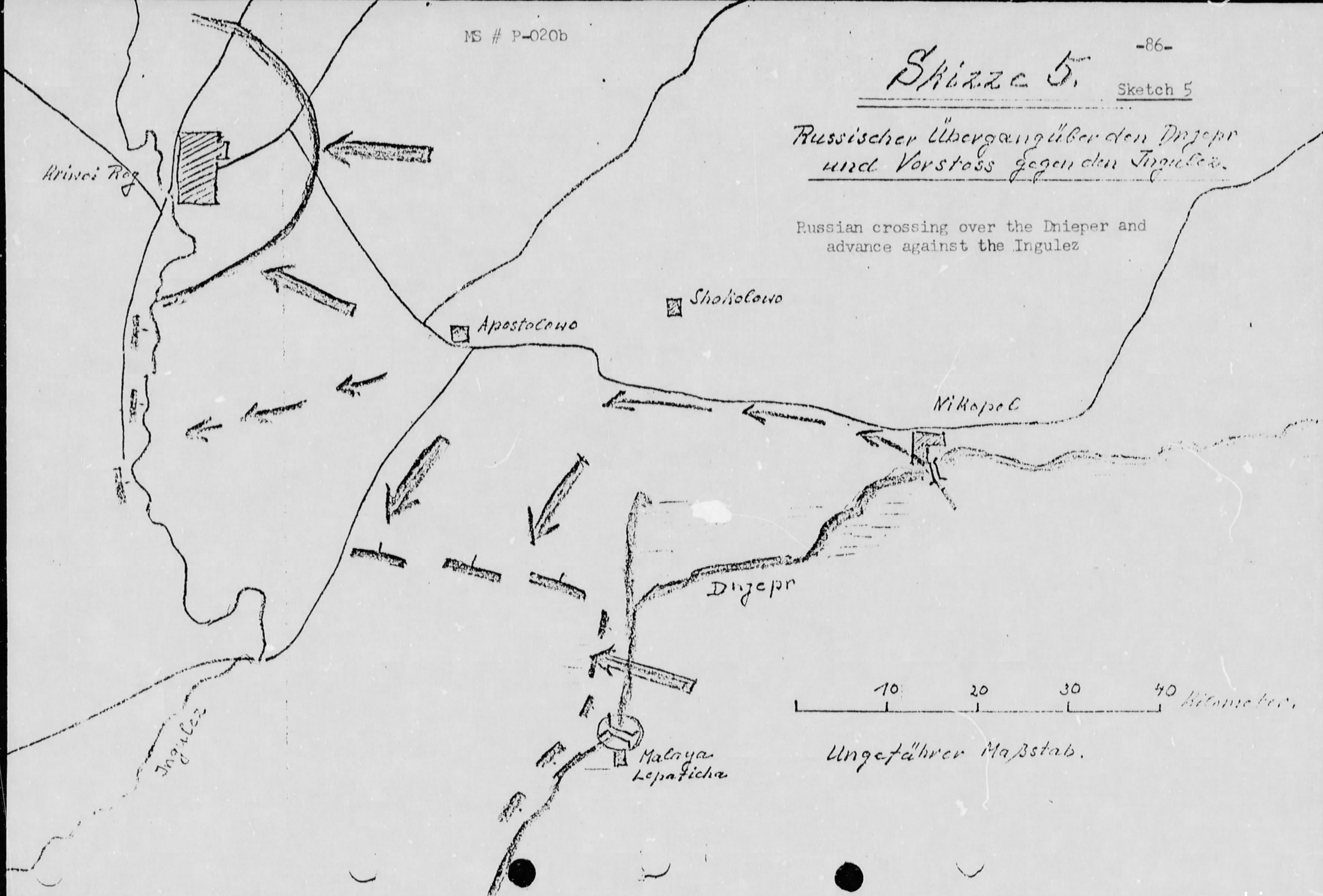
Russian attack on both side of  
the Dnieper

# Skizze 5.

Sketch 5

Russischer Übergang über den Dniepr und Vorstoss gegen den Ingulez.

Russian crossing over the Dnieper and advance against the Ingulez



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P - 020B

ENGINEER PROJECT - RIVER CROSSINGS BY THE RED ARMY IN WORLD WAR II

BY GENERAL OBERST KARL HOLLIDT.

[www.maparchive.ru](http://www.maparchive.ru)

02 OF 02

Russischer Übergang über den Bug.

Russian crossing over the Bug.

