

NO-A184 964

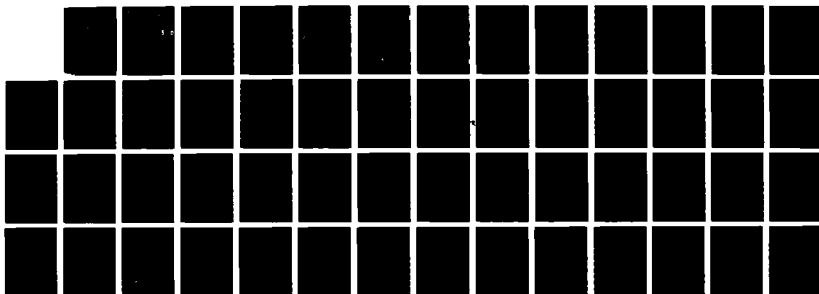
KURSK: A STUDY IN OPERATIONAL ART(U) ARMY COMMAND AND
GENERAL STAFF COLL FORT LEAVENWORTH KS SCHOOL OF
ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES K K PIERCE 20 MAY 87

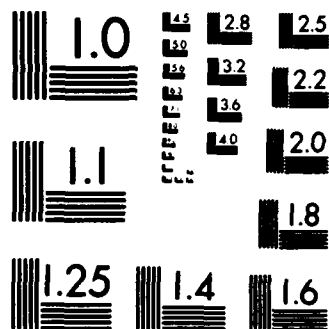
1/1

UNCLASSIFIED

F/G 15/6

NL





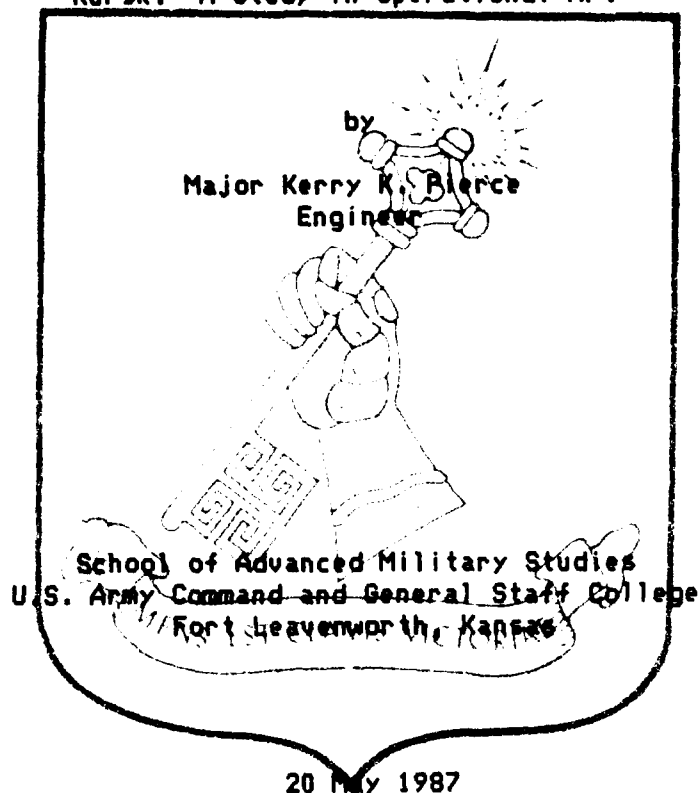
MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A

AD-A184 964

2

DTIC FILE COPY

Kursk: A Study in Operational Art



DTIC
ELECTE
OCT 14 1987
S D

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

87-3054

10 2 9

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No 0704-0188
Exp Date Jun 30, 1986

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS		
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY			3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited		
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE					
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION School of Advanced Military Studies, USAC&GSC		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) ATZL-SWV		7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900				7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)		9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)				10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
				PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) Kursk: A Study in Operational Art (U)					
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) MAJ Kerry K. Pierce, USA					
13a. TYPE OF REPORT Monograph		13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____		14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 87/5/20	
15. PAGE COUNT 47					
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION					
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)		
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP			
			Kursk operational art Eastern Front		
			LUCY Operation Kutuzov		
			Operation Citadel Operation Rumyantsev		
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)					
This monograph examines the practice of operational art from the perspective of the Kursk campaign of July-October, 1943. The study begins by presenting the German and Russian campaign plans as examples of two different methods of achieving a desired end state. Each plan's vision of the future was heavily influenced by the nature of the strategic situation and the personalities of the two principal artists: Adolph Hitler and Marshal Georgii Zhukov. These two leaders had vastly different understandings of strategic possibilities, time-space dimensions of the battle field, and the means required to achieve their desired end states. The success of Russia's campaign plan was directly related to his linkage of appropriate means and methods toward a desired end state, while Hitler's failure represented a failure to do likewise. The monograph also examines the several theoretical concepts of war. These include the relative strength of offense and defense, culminating points, the art of combinations, use of reserve, and the center of gravity.					
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT ☒ UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED ☐ SAME AS RPT. ☐ DTIC USERS			21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL MAJ Kerry K. Pierce			22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (913) 684-2138		22c. OFFICE SYMBOL ATZL-SWV

Item 19 (Continued)

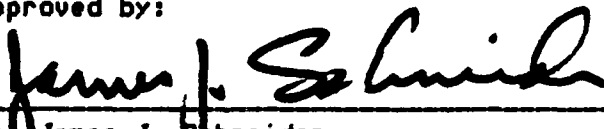
The Russian decision to defend first against an expected German offensive is an excellent example of the use of operational art. Acting on the information of the LUCY espionage network, Zhukov constructed his campaign around an unprecedented tactical defensive system in an effort to destroy the German armored formations as they attacked toward Kursk. He intended to initiate his counteroffensive at the point where the German panzer corps had been so attrited that they would not be able to prevent a Russian onslaught which would expel all German forces from the Donetz Basin. German operational flexibility, which had been the hallmark of their previous campaigns, was eliminated by Hitler's centrally devised and executed plan, reducing commanders such as Manstein and Model to mere tactical actors. In the end the Russian victory was a complete one: tactical, operational, and strategic. It also secured the strategic initiative for the remainder of the war.

School of Advanced Military Studies
Monograph Approval

Name of Student: Major Kerry K. Pierce

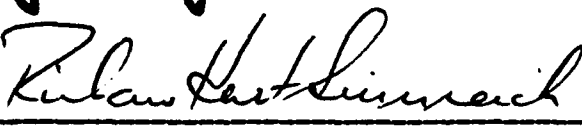
Title of Monograph: Kursk: A Study in Operational Art

Approved by:



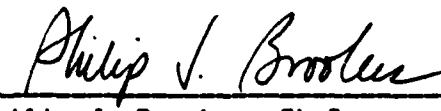
Mr. James J. Schneider

Monograph Director



Colonel Richard Hart Sinnreich, M.A.

Director, School of
Advanced Military Studies



Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D.

Director, Graduate Degree
Programs

Accepted this 3rd day of June 1987.

APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE:
DISTRIBUTION UNLIMITED.

ABSTRACT

KURSK: A STUDY IN OPERATIONAL ART. by MAJ Kerry K. Pierce, USA, 47 pages.

This monograph examines the practice of operational art from the perspective of the Kursk Campaign of July-October, 1943. The study begins by presenting the German and Russian campaign plans as examples of two different methods of achieving a desired end state. Each plan's vision of the future was heavily influenced by the nature of the strategic situation and the personalities of the two principal artists: Adolph Hitler and Marshal Georgii Zhukov. These two leaders had vastly different understandings of strategic possibilities, time-space dimensions of the battlefield, and the means required to achieve their desired end states. The success of Zhukov's campaign plan was directly related to his linkage of appropriate means and methods toward a desired end state, while Hitler's failure represented a failure to do likewise. The monograph also uses Kursk to examine several theoretical concepts of war. These include the relative strength of offense and defense, culminating points, the art of combinations, use of reserves, and the center of gravity.

The Russian decision to defend first against an expected German offensive is an excellent example of the use of operational art. Acting on the information of the LUCY espionage network, Zhukov constructed his campaign around an unprecedented tactical defensive system in an effort to destroy the German armored formations as they attacked toward Kursk. He intended to initiate his counteroffensive at the point where the German panzer corps had been so attrited that they would not be able to prevent a Russian onslaught which would expel all German forces from the Donetz Basin. German operational flexibility, which had been the hallmark of their previous campaigns, was eliminated by Hitler's centrally devised and executed plan, reducing commanders such as Manstein and Model to mere tactical actors. In the end the Russian victory was a complete one: tactical, operational and strategic. It also secured the strategic initiative for the remainder of the war.



Accession For	
NTIS CRA&I	☒
DTIC TAB	☐
Unannounced	☐
Justification	
By	
Distribution	
Availability Code	
Dist	Availability Code
A-1	

Table of Contents

	Page
Section I. Introduction	1
Section II. Strategic Situation	2
Section III. The Campaign Plans	8
Section IV. Preparation - The Means Available	13
Section V. The German Offensive	18
Section VI. The Flashing Sword of Vengeance	27
Section VII. Conclusions	32
Figures:	
1. Eastern Theater of War - March 1943	36
2. Army Group South situation - March 1943	37
3. Russian defenses at Kursk	38
4. German offensive plan (ZITADELLE)	39
5. Ninth Army's attack	40
6. Fourth Panzer Army's attack	41
7. Operation KUTUZOV	42
8. Operation RUMYANTSEV	43
Endnotes	44
Bibliography	46

'How many people do you think even know where Kursk is? It's a matter of profound indifference to the world whether we hold Kursk or not. I repeat my question: Why do we want to attack in the East at all this year?' Hitler's reply was: 'You're quite right. Whenever I think of this attack my stomach turns over.' 1

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of western accounts of the Second World War Kursk is synonymous with the war's largest tank battle. Far more than a single clash of armor, however, the Kursk campaign endured over a period of two months, involving over two million combatants, six thousand tanks, and five thousand tactical aircraft. When it had run its course the strategic scales were tipped irreversibly in favor of the Soviet Union. Never again would Germany marshal the necessary reserves to exercise the strategic initiative in the East. Just as important for the Red Army, blitzkrieg was defeated tactically for the first time on the fields of Kursk, thereby paving the way for Russia's first successful summer offensive. For these reasons it is Kursk not Stalingrad which holds the attention of Soviet historians as the decisive turning point in the Eastern Theater of War.

In the study of operational art, Kursk has much to offer in terms of both planning and execution. In the following narrative we will portray a clear dichotomy in the campaign plans of the two belligerents to the extent that tactical means and events were linked ultimately to a strategic end state. In the final analysis the campaign's outcome itself provides the definitive judgment on the effectiveness of each plan. We will also be

able to evaluate the two principal artists of the action from the perspective of planning and conduct of operations amid the fog and friction of war. Finally, Kursk provides an excellent laboratory in which to test several theoretical concepts of war including the relative strength of offense and defense, culminating points, the art of combinations, use of reserves, and the center of gravity.

SECTION II: STRATEGIC SITUATION

By late March 1943 the Eastern Theater of War had settled into relative inactivity. The spring thaw accompanied by oceans of mud certainly contributed to the respite, but so too did the exhausting events of the previous winter. The Red Army's winter offensive which sealed the fate of Paulus's 6th Army at Stalingrad achieved tremendous territorial gains, but ended disappointingly.

Still learning their operational craft, the Soviets had again overextended themselves logistically and fell prey to the operational agility of German armored formations. Failure in the end stemmed from overconfidence and an inability to match tactical resources to operational ends. The German counteroffensive of February not only inflicted heavy losses on Soviet tank units, but also succeeded in recapturing much of the lost territory, including the cities of Kharkov and Belgorod. It was evident that the German Army, and Manstein in particular, still occupied the operational high ground and could still inflict devastating destruction despite the Stalingrad setback.

The stabilized Eastern Front in March 1943 stretched from Leningrad in

the north to the Sea of Azov in the south, a distance of 2,000 miles. One of the most distinguishing features throughout its length was the massive Kursk salient thrusting some 140 miles into the German zone and extending north to south 170 miles. (see figure 1, page 36) Historically salients of this kind commanded a great deal of attention; Kursk would prove to be no exception. For the Germans it presented the opportunity to destroy overextended armored forces; on the other hand the Russians saw it as a possible launching point for a renewed offensive. The attraction was evident, but it would require outside events and situations to push the adversaries to actual operations there.

For many reasons 1943 loomed as a year of decision for Hitler and Germany. The expected loss of Tunisia would draw the campaign in North Africa to a disappointing close. At the same time, events in Russia were severely straining the Axis alliance. Heavy losses to Rumanian and Hungarian armies presented Hitler's allies with a strong argument to approach the Soviets for some way out of the carnage. Mussolini wanted his battered forces returned to Italy in response to threats closer to home.² OKW expected a new Allied offensive in the West, either in the Mediterranean (Greece or Italy) or perhaps a cross channel invasion. To make matters worse the Allied air campaign had reached a point where its impact on domestic life could no longer be ignored. Despite these ominous factors, Germany was still able to concentrate her military effort in the East. In fact, over 75 percent of all German forces - 161 Divisions - was stationed in Russia. There was still time, in Hitler's logic, to defeat the Russians before turning west to deal with the British and Americans. The question for consideration was how best to accomplish this end.

Because of the losses of the previous year, Germany found itself in the position of strategic defense. Within this context two options for offensive operations were available. In the words of Manstein one course of action was a preemptive attack, "on the forehand", aimed at disrupting Russian preparations for a summer offensive by destroying their operational reserves.³ This option would have to be carefully planned to take into account the reduced means available to the Wehrmacht. The alternative which Manstein preferred was to allow the Russians to launch first and strike them, "on the backhand", with concentrated mobile forces.⁴ Manstein had already demonstrated the effectiveness of this new kind of mobile reactive defense in the defeat of Soviet forces around Kharkov in February. German intelligence indicated that the Russians were indeed planning an offensive whose objective was the destruction of Army Group South. To be successful in the defensive option, however, Manstein required the freedom to give up ground while conducting a fluid mobile campaign fraught with some risk. Regardless of the choice, he felt that the desired end state would be operational and strategic stalemate, providing the basis for a negotiated end to the war in the East.

Just as he had in 1942, Hitler rejected even the notion of ceding territory already purchased with German blood. This, coupled with the hope that a military solution could be obtained in Russia, led to Hitler's choice of the operational offensive or forehand option. His reasoning certainly illustrated the blending of his perspective both as political leader and military commander in chief.

Field Marshal Keitel, Chief of Staff of OKW, perhaps best encapsulated the reasons for Operation ZITADELLE⁵, the reduction of the Kursk salient.

In response to Guderian's question as to why Hitler wanted to attack at all in 1943, he remarked, "We must attack for political reasons." ⁶ With the imposition of the 30 January austerity programs in Germany under the label of 'total mobilization', the home front was beginning to feel the bite of war for the first time. Hitler no doubt felt that the clock was running on the perishable commodity known as morale. It was certainly easier to demand sacrifice when the perception was one of victory rather than defeat. Even further, the image of the Wehrmacht had been dealt a serious blow at Stalingrad. An invincible military was essential not only for battlefield results, but to hold the wavering Axis together and to control conquered territories. The surest way to restore that prestige was a crushing military victory reminiscent of the glory days of blitzkrieg. Yet for all these rational reasons, Hitler also added a somewhat irrational infatuation with the economic significance of the Donetz Basin. Convinced that German occupation of this region severely hampered Russia's industrial production, he refused to consider any plan which would give back the area without a fight, even if some operational success could be achieved. In the final analysis, this intransigence which had hampered Manstein's previous winter campaign was to facilitate the causal chain of events leading to ZITADELLE.

The key concern, then, was where to attack. Kursk drew the attention of ⁷ OKH like a magnet. In addition to the opportunities afforded by a salient of this kind, intelligence presented an assessment of numerous enemy armored units which had been halted in their tracks by the spring thaw. These forces were vulnerable apparently to the kind of offensive envisioned by Hitler.

In March 1943 the German army was no longer the same army that conducted the campaigns of 1941 and 42. To be sure the 'total mobilization' effort did provide raw numbers almost equal to the peak German strength achieved earlier on the Eastern Front, but numbers alone were deceiving. Units were shells of their former selves; casualties had sapped not only strength but experience; but worst of all the armor situation was grave. In an effort to maintain the same number of panzer divisions, unit tank strength had been allowed to fall repeatedly. From the 1940 divisional strength of 350 tanks, the 1943 German panzer division contained only 27, with enough self propelled guns, or SPs, to field 80 total armored vehicles. In fact, by January, 1943 only 493 serviceable tanks were available on the entire Eastern Front.

The Wehrmacht could still rely on superior tactical combined arms organizations, more operational command and staff flexibility, and leaders of the caliber of Manstein. In the thinking of the Army Group South Commander, however, this calculus pointed toward mobile defense, not the massed offensive ordered by Hitler.

1943 also presented the Soviets with some difficult dilemmas and choices. The recently completed offensive, although initially successful, left many lingering doubts as to the operational skill of the Red Army. Yet, offensive opportunities certainly existed. Army Group South lay vulnerable for the next offensive round. If it could be cut off from Army Group Center and crushed against the Black Sea, its destruction would facilitate the strategic collapse of the entire German defense, opening a route all the way to Germany itself. (see figure 2, page 37) On the other hand, Stalin fully expected the Germans to open an offensive of their own.

After all, had they not done so in each preceeding summer? It was inherent in the spirit of the Wehrmacht, its doctrine, and its commander, Adolf Hitler.

The means available to STAVKA for the next campaign season left much to be desired. Yet to prove itself in the summer, the Red Army had shown some improvement in tactical capability, but still could not be reckoned as skillful as the German forces. Further, it had learned first hand the potential destructive capacity of a bruised but not beaten Wehrmacht, particularly under the agile direction of a Manstein. On the positive side could be counted an increasing tank production which would shortly reach one thousand per month and a flood of Lend Lease trucks which would eventually allow the Red Army to motorize most of its infantry units.

All these concerns no doubt influenced planners at STAVKA, but unlike the situation in the German strategic command, the Russians enjoyed a distinct advantage. By 1943 Stalin had developed such a degree of confidence in his Deputy Supreme Commander, Marshal Zhukov, that he was willing to lend a far greater scope of operational and strategic latitude than Hitler afforded to any of his subordinates. The hero of Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad, Zhukov commanded not only Stalin's respect but more importantly, his approval.

Following the setbacks around Kharkov in February, Stalin sent Zhukov to the Central Front to stabilize the situation and provide him with a detailed report of the area. Zhukov submitted a thoroughly reasoned and intelligence supported assessment in a memo dated 8 April. In it he accurately evaluated the weakened German situation which indicated that future offensives in the Lower Don, Volga and North Caucasus areas were

unlikely.

The bulk of German operational reserves, particularly panzer divisions, were concentrated near Kharkov, Orel, and Belgorod. This led Zhukov to conclude that the Germans would conduct an offensive in this area with the objective of reducing the Kursk salient and destroying the Central, Voronezh, and Southwestern Fronts. Zhukov ended his memo with a controversial yet perceptive recommendation.

I consider it unwise to launch a preventive attack in the next few days. It would be better if we first wore the enemy down with our defenses and destroyed his tanks, and only then, after having moved up fresh reserves, went over to a general offensive and finally destroyed his main force. 9

Although much of Zhukov's plan obviously relied on the information available from tactical intelligence and the marshal's own intuitive powers, history muddies the waters slightly as to the ultimate causal relationship in the Russian campaign plan. By this time in the war STAVKA had almost instantaneous access to the intentions of the German high command through an espionage network known as LUCY.¹⁰ Later in the preparations for Kursk we know the Russians had almost complete details of the attack plan, but at this early date it is not known how much LUCY had provided or the extent to which it influenced Zhukov's 8 April estimate.

SECTION III: THE CAMPAIGN PLANS

Zhukov was recalled to Moscow on the 11th of April to prepare a plan for

the upcoming operation. He completed it in a single night with the assistance of his Chief of Staff General Vasilevsky. Stalin's approval of their efforts on the 13th, however, did not end the debate as to the best course of action. This would continue among the senior ranks well into June, by which time the Soviets knew the full details of ZITADELLE.

Zhukov's plan envisioned the defense of the Kursk salient conducted by two fronts. (see figure 3, page 38) General Rokossovsky's Central Front in the northern sector and General Vatutin's Voronezh Front in the south were to prepare strong antitank defenses in great depth to erode the armored strength of the attacker. These were essentially infantry organizations with a single tank army each to act as mobile reserve. To the rear of these fronts Zhukov concentrated the strategic tank reserves of the Soviet Union under the banner of General Konev's Steppe Front. Although Steppe Front was earmarked for the counteroffensive phase, it would also be prepared to assist in the defense of Kursk and seal off any German penetrations. It is a further mark of Stalin's confidence in his Deputy Supreme Commander that he allowed the positioning of these critical assets away from Moscow.

Once the defensive phase had achieved sufficient attrition of German armor, a massive Soviet counteroffensive would commence. To the north Central Front in conjunction with Bryansk and Western Fronts would launch into the Orel pocket. South of the salient Voronezh, Southwestern and Steppe Fronts would attack into the Belgorod-Kharkov sector. The campaign was designed to achieve the elimination of all German troops east of the Dnieper River and establish the conditions for a general offensive all along the Eastern Front. Extensive use of partisans was planned in order to

gather intelligence and sabotage the buildup of German resources into Orel and Kharkov.

Zhukov himself went to the Central Front to coordinate the activities of the northern three fronts, while General Vasilevsky was sent to control the three fronts to the south. This practice of establishing a temporary group-of-fronts command known as a 'strategic direction' was used by the Soviets at both Moscow and Stalingrad and illustrated their desire for unified strategic control. As we shall see shortly the German plan suffered from a lack of such unity. Zhukov's location with Central Front indicated his belief that the main German effort would come from the north. In this he was mistaken. This one error in planning was to have far reaching impact on the Russian campaign, especially the synchronization of the counteroffensive phase.

Under the direction of General Zeitzler the essential elements for a German spring offensive were established by March and contained in Operations Order Number Five. Army Groups A and North were ordered to defend in sector while Army Groups South and Center were directed to form strong tank armies on either side of the Kursk salient. Further details were to follow. The planning efforts of OKH culminated in Hitler's Operations Order Number Six on 15 April. The aim of this Operation, code named ZITADELLE, was, "to encircle the enemy forces deployed in the Kursk area by one attacking army each from the areas of Belgorod and south of Orel, and annihilating them through a concentric attack....It must give us the initiative for spring and summer."

To implement ZITADELLE Colonel-General Model's Ninth Army of Army Group Center would attack towards Kursk from the north while General Hoth's

Fourth Panzer Army and General Kempf's Army Detachment would strike from the south. (see figure 4, page 39) It was to be blitzkrieg all over again with narrow concentrated penetrations followed by deep exploitation, encirclement, and annihilation.

The problems with ZITADELLE were numerous especially when contrasted with the scope of the Russian plan. Leaving aside the question of adequate means for the moment, Operations Order Six reads more like a tactical plan than a campaign. Very little freedom of action was given to the army commanders as to avenue of attack or scheme of maneuver. Hitler clearly stated that his object was the seizure of the initiative, but to what ends? The post-envelopment phase of the operation was vague at best, giving Manstein and Kluge very little guidance for their own planning. Beyond destruction of the Central and Voronezh Fronts, ZITADELLE merely held out the possibility of continuing with Operation PANTHER, an old plan for advancing into the rear of Southwestern Front, or perhaps a renewed thrust towards Moscow. Even if the envelopment were successful, however, OKH had allocated insufficient forces to make any follow-on phase plausible. The plan failed not only to link conceptually these separate tactical events into a coherent whole, but also to provide some reasonable evaluation of the suitability of the means available.

From the tactical perspective the planners assumed many of the same old stereotypes of the Russian soldier. Breakthrough would be easily obtained and the Russians would flee in disarray as always. At Kursk, however, the Germans would meet a far more competent and determined foe.

The success of ZITADELLE depended on surprise and speed of execution, but information from the LUCY network was even then making a shambles of

any form of deception effort. Further, the attack was envisioned for April but no assessment was made as to the impact of any delay. The most glaring omission of all, however, was the absence of a unified commander. The method of ZITADELLE was to be a coordinated attack by two army groups, yet no one other than Hitler himself was charged with overall command. This lack of unified operational focus was to create problems right from the beginning. Operational combinations, unlike those executed within the Russian structure, were to be conducted by the strategic commander in East Prussia, not on the battlefield.

At this point in the story it is worth contrasting the vision and anticipation of the battlefield by the two key operational commanders. Based on good intelligence, the operational picture painted by German troop dispositions, his knowledge of the opponent, and his own intuition, Zhukov correctly assessed not only the current situation but the future course of events as well. He proposed a concept of operations that remained essentially unchanged throughout the period of preparation that culminated in a finished campaign plan. At the same time he continued to adjust the details to account for his opponent's activities. His determination to pursue the chosen course of action despite the opposition of his own military structure illustrates an essential ingredient of the operational art. Against this stands Hitler who adopted a plan of action which lacked an appreciation of his own means and a realistic view of the battlefield. It was a plan which assumed an almost static environment and a passive adversary who would not alter the location of his mobile forces. As delays set in and the mounting strength of the Russian defenses became obvious to all, OKH even considered two alternate plans. Both envisioned a more

indirect attack into the salient and as such, offered better chances for success. Hitler, however, endorsed ZITADELLE. This kind of determination is not a virtue for the operational commander; it is obstinacy and often proves disastrous. In a sense Hitler believed that the opportunities of March, for which adequate means did not exist, would still be available when Germany could marshal the resources. The true operational artist does not think in such limited dimensions. Unfortunately for the Germans, this flawed beginning was the source of profound disjointedness and ultimate failure at Kursk.

IV: PREPARATION - THE MEANS AVAILABLE

The months that passed between the formulation of campaign plans and the actual battle were seen by both operational commanders as time spent to their own advantage. ZITADELLE required massive human and material support of which insufficient quantities were available in April. Zhukov also needed time to construct the kind of defenses which would bleed the Germans white.

Thanks to the efforts of Albert Speer, the German economy was still growing in 1943. In fact, production levels stood at 126 percent of the previous year's totals. Medium tank production, for example, was more than double that of 1942.¹² These figures certainly seemed to promise an ability not only to replace the losses of 1942, but also to increase the armor strength of the panzer divisions. Additionally, new weapons systems were just beginning to roll off the assembly lines in great quantities. In the end it was the lure of qualitative superiority which caused the successive

13

delays in D-Day. Hitler believed earnestly that the new Pzkw V (PANTHER), Pzkw VI (TIGER) and FERDINAND SP would tip the armor scales decisively in his favor, while new ground attack aircraft such as the Focke Wulf 190 A and Henschel 129 would dominate the skies.

OKH allocated 50 divisions to the Kursk offensive, of which 16 were armored. Accounting for one third of the entire German strength on the Eastern Front, this force included 900,000 soldiers, 2,700 tanks, 10,000 guns and some 2,000 aircraft. Units were filled to organizational requirements and extensively trained in such tasks as breaching Soviet minefields and fortifications. In the view of General von Mellenthin, "There had been sufficient time to make thorough preparation for the attack."¹⁴

From an operational perspective, Hitler's preparations for the battle of Kursk revealed several flaws. He had repeatedly demonstrated his brilliance as a strategic thinker beginning with the Polish campaign of 1939. The early victories of Germany can be attributed, in fact, to Hitler's strategic understanding of his adversaries rather than to any overwhelming ability of the Wehrmacht. Yet, in translating strategic guidance into an operational realm and conducting actual military campaigns, Hitler's abilities did him little good. He could not grasp the battlefield impact of delay and became fixed upon only one input to operational design. This was in the form of new technology. Almost all the delay between the original date for ZITADELLE and the eventual one can be attributed to tank production, mechanical problems with new models and delays in transportation to the front. To be sure many of these new systems were excellent, but as with any initial production line, numerous

flaws needed to be sorted out. Operational experts like Manstein recognized that the tradeoff between more TIGERS and more time for the defender to prepare did not justify waiting. It was all a matter of relative strength. In the end Manstein's view of the future battlefield, not Hitler's, was the more correct in terms of all the factors involved in operational art.

Finally, Hitler demonstrated no ability to adapt to changing operational realities. His method remained viscerally rooted in the belief in technology and the racial superiority of his SS units. To this point in the conflict the German method of warfare had been clearly superior at both the tactical and operational levels. Blitzkrieg was a proven winner. Yet, as with every age, adversaries tend to copy success or find ways of degrading it. The true operational genius continually evaluates events and analyzes his tools to see if they must be adapted. Manstein, perhaps more than anyone else, embodied this ability. He adapted to a mobile defense in the winter of 1942-43 to counter the Soviet offensive, proposed the innovative 'backhand option' for the 1943 campaign which most closely matched means with ends, and as we shall see adopted an innovative armor tactic in the Kursk offensive. Hitler did not possess the same vision or ability. The lesson in operational art is clear: the battlefield environment is extremely dynamic and the successful operational commander must continuously analyze his methods, means available, and ends, always striving for the most effective combinations.

As the Germans marshaled their armor, the Russians were feverishly preparing their defenses. All the while LUCY kept defining the specifics of the German plan and simplifying their task. During the time between April

and July Zhukov was able to construct a defense whose tactical depth was unprecedented. Within the Central and Voronezh Fronts the fortifications extended to a depth of 110 miles. If the Steppe Front and Don River to its rear were included, the Kursk salient was 180 miles deep consisting of 8 defensive belts. To establish this STAVKA had amassed 20 percent of its total manpower, 36 percent of its tanks and SPs, and 27 percent of its combat aircraft in an area which occupied only 13 percent of the total strategic front.¹⁵ When the Germans did attack they would be inferior to their opponents in every category of combat power.

From the perspective of the theoretical concept of 'center of gravity', the Russian defenses aimed directly at degrading the German's source of operational power. Zhukov's original choice of allowing the Germans to attack first was made with keen understanding of the power of German panzer formations. In previous encounters where German armor and Russian armor met head on, the advantage went to the Germans. With the intentions of ZITADELLE fully known to him, however, Zhukov was able to devise a campaign which would not only attack the German center of gravity directly, but also shield his own until he was ready to unleash it. In this context the Kursk fortifications can be seen as an example of the operational use of obstacles.

The Russians certainly used obstacles to enhance the effectiveness of their weapons, delay the advance of German units, and screen their own movements, all of which were tactical uses. Zhukov, however, also employed them in a fundamentally different fashion. Much of the planning for the defensive belts was done by Zhukov and Vasilevsky in a top-down approach. The idea was to use obstacles to restrict German operational combinations,

create operational maneuver opportunities for Russian tank reserves, and gain time which could be measured in days instead of hours. Even as early as the 8 April Memo, Zhukov articulated clearly the aim of destroying German armor while also protecting his own. Because the Germans chose to attack into the Kursk salient along avenues which were defended by the mass of Russian forces, they allowed their center of gravity to be attacked directly. The entire focus of the Russian efforts centered on the German armored formations, to the near total neglect of the infantry.

The heart of the Soviet defense, then, lay in its antitank positions and zones. These combined arms regions consisted of antitank guns, artillery, mortars, infantry, and mobile engineer obstacle detachments. Supported by thousands of miles of antitank ditches and trenches, and minefields which were six times the density of those which protected Moscow in 1941, the emphasis of the defense was on armor attrition. Units at all levels pursued an intensive training program which focused on immediate counterattacks and the best tactics to destroy armor.

All this activity was carried out under a veil of secrecy which the Germans could not penetrate. As the launch date approached, OKH had increasing evidence of the Soviet buildup, but the full extent of Zhukov's preparations remained hidden. There were no loyal partisans behind Russian lines to provide such vital information to the Germans. The presence of Steppe Front was a virtual unknown as evidenced by the operational sketches of Manstein in his book Lost Victories

SECTION V: THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE

From the strategic aspect Zitadelle was to be a veritable 'death ride' for virtually the whole of the operational reserve was to be flung into the supreme offensive. 17

The final date for D-Day, 5 July, was established at a surprise meeting of the principal commanders at Rastenburg, East Prussia on 1 July. Manstein had believed all along that excessive delay would favor the defender, but on this day only Colonel-General Model objected strenuously to the initiation order. The Ninth Army Commander had brought detailed aerial photography which revealed the extent of Russian defenses, but the Fuhrer would not be deterred. His vision of the end-state for the campaign had become totally detached from the reality of the relative means available and the nature of his opponent. Despite the difficulties ahead, Hitler maintained almost mystical faith in the ability of his panzer divisions, particularly the SS formations, to conduct the kind of swift and violent penetration which had been the norm on every other summer offensive.

On the following day STAVKA knew of the imminent attack thanks to LUCY. All forward units were alerted to expect the Germans to initiate their offensive sometime between 3 and 5 July.

The ZITADELLE plan envisioned a simultaneous attack by two titanic armored forces which would quickly pinch off the Kursk salient. Yet, on the eve of combat the conditions to achieve this coordinated effort had not been established. The German counteroffensive which ended in February stopped just short of an area of high ground on the southern part of the

salient. General Hoth, commander of the Fourth Panzer Army, had to secure this key terrain before D-Day in order to situate spotters for his artillery units. Consequently, he ordered an assault on the heights to begin on the afternoon of 4 July. Despite the warning given by STAVKA, the Russians defenders were surprised by Hoth's attack. By midnight the high ground was secured. There remained precious little time, however, to sort out the units, coordinate artillery action, and prepare for the main attack which was scheduled to begin in a few hours. Additionally, any hope of operational surprise was gone.

Why did the Germans not seize this objective weeks before July? This is certainly one of the many examples of the loose ends which tend to occur in the execution of such a detailed campaign plan in the absence of an overall operational commander. It was a theme which was to plague the German efforts throughout the days to follow.

Colonel-General Model's northern attack was planned to traverse the obvious Orel-Kursk avenue. (see figure 5, page 40) Of his four corps participating in the operation, the 47th Panzer Corps was designated as the main effort. Its mission was to penetrate the left flank of 13th Army and race for Kursk and the eventual link-up with Hoth's forces from the south. Supporting roles were assigned to 41st Panzer Corps, 46th Panzer Corps and 23rd Army Corps. The 41st would attack the main portion of 13th Army and block any Russian forces moving from the east. Likewise the 46th was to penetrate the right flank of 70th Army, swing west and block mobile tank reserves. The 23rd Army Corps was assigned the limited but crucial task of splitting the 13th and 48th Armies and securing Maloarkhangel'sk. This would effectively block the routes which Russian operational reserves would take

in trying to stop 47th Panzer Corps.

To oppose the Germans General Rokossovsky echeloned his forces in great depth along this avenue. 13th Army which was arrayed in two defensive belts would bear the brunt of the main effort while 2nd Tank Army was located to the rear in a reserve echelon. (see figure 3, page 38)

Known more as an expert in defensive tactics, Model organized his attack forces along traditional blitzkrieg lines. Infantry divisions would open up routes in the minefields and breach fortifications in order to allow panzers divisions to exploit in the enemy's rear. He allocated nine infantry divisions and one panzer division in the first day's attack.

Beginning at 0730 with a massive artillery preparation, the Ninth Army attack covered a frontage of 28 miles. Supported by FERDINANDS and TIGERS it managed to force a penetration of 5 miles by the end of the day. This was far short of expectations as only the 46th Panzer Corps achieved its first day's objectives. To make matters worse, even limited success came with a high price. Massive Russian air support, artillery, and deadly antitank fire took a heavy toll on German armor. Model lost over 100 tanks and SPs on July 5 alone.

On the 6th Model decided to commit two of his reserve Panzer Divisions in the 47th Corps sector in the hopes of advancing limited success into a general penetration. These units collided with a Russian counterattack ordered by Rokossovsky, disrupting the German plan for the remainder of the day.

By the end of 6 July two critical events were taking shape which would determine the outcome on the northern sector. First, 2nd Panzer Division had reached the high ground north of the village of Olkhovatka and was

halted by 2nd Tank Army with its tanks in hull-down positions. The ensuing battle for these decisive heights and Olkhovatka itself was to dominate the entire efforts of both sides. Secondly, it became obvious even at this early date that 23rd Corps could not capture Maloarkhangel'sk. Its divisions had exhausted themselves and were now ordered by Model to defend their current positions. This meant that Russian reserves were unhampered in their ability to move from east to west. Zhukov took full advantage of this freedom of movement and quickly transferred sufficient forces to the Olkhovatka battlefield.

The focus of Model's assaults from 7 July until the 10th was the twenty mile front between Ponyri and Teploye. By now he had committed five of his seven panzer divisions. Each time that a gap opened in the 13th and 70th Armies' defenses there was always a Russian counterattack to seal it off. Rokossovsky was skillfully moving his scarce operational reserves to this decisive point in the northern battle while Zhukov orchestrated the strategic reserves. By 9 July 41st Panzer Corps actually secured northern portions of Ponyri, but the urban fighting that ensued resembled the carnage of Stalingrad. Model had requested additional forces from Kluge and did receive the 10th Panzer Grenadier and 8th Panzer Divisions, both of which were committed to the ridgeline battle.

Massive Russian counterattacks on 10 July marked the end of Ninth Army's offensive and the beginning of a slow agonizing retrograde. Model's last offensive attempt occurred on the evening of 10 July when a two division attack failed. Rokossovsky now ordered a general attack by his entire Front to push Model's tired forces back to their start points. This was also the day when the Western and Bryansk Fronts were poised to initiate

their own offensive.

As the signs of a Russian offensive presented themselves, Kluge ordered Model to switch to the defensive. Model was forced to use his last remaining reserves to block Soviet penetrations, several of which were stopped by massed artillery fire alone.

In the southern sector Hoth and Kempf had several distinct advantages over Model. In the first place the Soviets were in some doubt as to the exact route of attack the Germans would take. There was the obvious route across the Psel River to Oboyan, or the route northeast to Korocha, or further south from Volchansk to Novy-Oskol. (see figure 3, page 38) Additionally, Manstein had two separate armies to commit, 4th Panzer and Army Detachment Kempf. All this tended to force Vatutin to disperse his mobile forces to cover all the options. He employed 6th Guards Army on the Oboyan approach and 7th Guards Army along the Korocha avenue. 1st Tank Army was placed behind 6th Guards to protect Oboyan which Vatutin believed would be the most probable direction of the German main effort. The 69th Army occupied a second echelon defensive position behind 7th Guards.

Manstein utilized his armor in a different fashion than Model and employed a novel tactic. Realizing that his force was infantry poor he opted to mass his armor in small wedge-like formations of great density. He hoped to achieve overwhelming superiority at the point of attack and quickly bull through the fortifications. Although losses were bound to be heavy, Manstein was persuaded that he would save armor in the long run.

For all Manstein's planning and innovation the southern attack almost met disaster before it even began. Acting on the LUCY information, the Soviet Air Force marshaled a massive preemptive air strike on the German

air fields around Kharkov. Such an attack would have crippled the Luftwaffe on the ground and thereby seriously degraded the air support so critical to the ground forces. Manstein's air was saved, however, by technology and the initiative of subordinates. The Germans had deployed an early generation radar known as Freya around their air fields and it provided early warning of the Russian air strike. Luftwaffe commanders quickly assembled fighter wings and rose to meet the Russian bombers. Thanks to Freya the Germans not only saved their own air force from destruction, but so depleted the Soviet air forces that the skies over the southern sector belonged to the Luftwaffe for the first few days.

By 0500 on the 5th of July Manstein's armored juggernaut struck the 6th Guard's Army and 7th Guard's Army. The main effort was made by the 48th Panzer Corps and 2nd SS Panzer Corps which would strike on parallel axes toward Kursk. Army Detachment Kempf consisting of two corps would provide flank security for Hoth's forces. (see figure 6, page 41) Coupled with overwhelming air superiority, this impressive armor attack achieved all objectives set for the first day's battle.

On the Russian side Vatutin quickly assessed the thrust toward Oboyan as the main objective and began to move his forces accordingly. He ordered 1st Tank Army to cover the city while other mobile forces concentrated for a counterattack. Even as early as the first day Stalin began to consider the transfer of operational reserves to Vatutin. As the extent of Manstein's offensive became clearer, the Soviet leader transferred first the 27th Army and then the 5th Guards Tank Army to the Voronezh Front. Steppe Front Commander Konev was furious at this piecemeal commitment of his command, but it was to prove decisive in the final analysis.

At this point in the action an intangible factor from the moral domain of battle began to influence events and cause more than a little uncertainty for the Soviets. Using his own initiative General Hoth deviated from the campaign plan. He knew from his reconnaissance information that the Soviet defenses were echeloned in strength on the route he was scheduled to take. Instead of doing the obvious, Hoth decided to deal with the Russian strategic reserves first before moving north to link up with Model's Ninth Army. The terrain to the rear of Voronezh Front dictated that any tank reserves moving from the east would have to transit the narrow gap at Prokhorovka. It was here that he elected to order SS Panzer Corps once the penetration of 6th Guards Army was achieved.

Over the next few days the situation in the southern sector was both fluid and uncertain for the Russians. By the evening of 7 July SS Panzer Corps captured the village of Tetervino, the last major town before Prokhorovka. At this point two key operational decisions were made, one by Vatutin and one by Hitler, which were to have lasting ramifications. As 4th Panzer Army moved to the northeast, a gap began to develop between it and Army Detachment Kempf. From the beginning General Kempf had experienced difficulty in penetrating the 7th Guards Army defenses. Into this gap, Vatutin now ordered 69th Army, his second operational reserve. This was to prove extremely important as it guaranteed that Kempf would be slowed even further. The second key decision was taken by Hitler on the 7th and 8th of July. In response to Model's urgent requests for more forces, Hitler decided to shift much of Manstein's air to the northern sector. Hoth's loss of air superiority occurred at the critical juncture of the southern battle. Unhampered by overwhelming German air power, the Soviet air force

appeared in greater strength which forced Hoth to slow his advance toward Prokhorovka. Given the eventual outcome, any delay would have been lethal to the German efforts.

This perhaps more than any other incident demonstrates the disadvantage of not having a unified operational commander. By the 7th of August it was obvious that Model would not achieve a quick penetration towards Kursk; his battle could only be one of attrition. On the other hand, Hoth had not only succeeded in penetrating the first defensive belt, but was also proceeding on a course of action which promised to gain a favorable early decision with Russian tank forces. Hitler remained rooted to the letter of the plan: a double envelopment. One could argue that a unified commander on the ground would have seen the opportunities in the south and decided to reinforce success rather than draw from it. Certainly the removal of Hoth's air cover was one of the key decisions in the southern battle.

By the morning of 9 July 48th Panzer Corps was halted 10 miles from Oboyan in front of the Pena river. It had succeeded in occupying the attention of 1st Tank Army and allowed SS Panzer Corps to push for Prokhorovka against ever increasing pressure. Stalin, however, was quick to subordinate 5th Guards Tank Army to Vatutin. Over the next three days this armored unit would move 250 miles from its assembly area to Prokhorovka.

The 10th of July was an anxious day for the Russians. By this time, however, Vatutin had accurately assessed Hoth's intentions and advised Stalin that the Germans were heading for Prokhorovka. He planned a desperate counterattack on all flanks of the penetration using 5th Guards Army and 5th Guards Tank Army.

SS Panzer Corps reached the Prokhorovka area on the evening of 11 July but by this time the Russians had been able to stabilize the situation. 5th Guards Army had moved into defensive positions earlier in the morning while two other armies were moved into the Kursk area to insure that no link-up would occur. 5th Guards Tank Army concentrated throughout the day between the Psel and Donetz Rivers. The only unknown was whether or not Kempf could arrive in time to participate in the next day's attack. Late in the evening Marshal Zhukov arrived at Voronezh front to assume overall command of the operation.

Hoth intended 12 July to be the day of decision. If Kempf's 3rd Panzer Corps could arrive on the Prokhorovka battlefield he would be strong enough to defeat the Soviet tank forces and still have time to swing north for Kursk. SS Panzer Corps attacked into the gap with approximately 600 tanks initiating the largest tank battle of the war. General Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army picked almost the same instant to enter the gap from the east with 850 tanks. In the melee that ensued large unit control broke down completely. The speed and weight of the Russian attack overwhelmed the Germans, getting at close range where the advantage of the TIGER tank was lost.

Although Kempf's 3rd Panzer Corps secured a surprise bridgehead over the North Donetz prior to dawn on the 12th, it was unable to reach the battlefield in time. By 2100 hours Rotmistrov ordered his forces back into defensive positions, leaving the battlefield to the Germans. Both sides suffered losses in the neighborhood of 300 tanks each, but the relative loss to Hoth was far greater. His SS Corps was exhausted and Rotmistrov still maintained a considerable tank force. 3rd Panzer Corps did join Hoth

on the next day, but any chance of quickly defeating the Russian operational reserves was gone.

On the 13th of July Hitler called a conference of his Army Group Commanders at East Rastenburg to announce the end of ZITADELLE. Three days earlier the Allies had launched an invasion of Sicily and indications were that the Italians had little stomach for resistance. The Fuhrer wanted to begin shifting forces, notably the SS Panzer Corps, to Italy. There were also early signs that the Soviets were beginning their own offensive. In fact, on the 12th Zhukov launched his Western and Bryansk Fronts into the Orel pocket. Manstein urged Hitler to allow him to continue with Hoth's attack in the south. The Army Group South commander was convinced that he was destroying vital Soviet operational reserves. As with his original assessment of Russian forces available, Manstein's intelligence was erroneous. Steppe Front still had three uncommitted armies.

On July 17 Hitler ordered the withdrawal of SS Panzer Corps in preparation for its dispatch to Italy. For all intents and purposes ZITADELLE was over. Hoth did continue his operations in the south and was not halted until the 23rd, but all territorial gains were quickly surrendered as the full extent of the Soviet counteroffensive became evident.

SECTION VI: THE FLASHING SWORD OF VENGEANCE

Zhukov had envisioned that the planning for his great counteroffensive would proceed concurrently with the defensive battle. He planned for a simultaneous attack in both the north and south, but in this he was

frustrated by the disjointed execution of ZITADELLE and his own error in identifying the German operational center of gravity. Hoth's stubborn efforts in the south totally occupied the Steppe Front and made it impossible for General Konev to plan and execute his role in the counteroffensive until the German threat was extinguished.

Code named Operation KUTUZOV, the northern offensive commenced on 12 July. It involved units from Western, Bryansk and Central Fronts and was designed to cut off the Orel salient and destroy the German Ninth Army and 2nd Panzer Army. In this entire area the Germans only had five reserve divisions. Aimed at achieving depth, Soviet forces were arranged in columns of two or three echelons and supported by mass artillery. (See figure 7, page 42)

Hitler placed the 2nd Panzer Army under Model's command on the 13th of July. Although the Russians were able to surprise the Germans in the Orel salient, Model's defensive expertise and the strong German fortifications which had been constructed over a period of two years prevented a complete breakthrough.

The Russians were also rediscovering the friction involved with employing massive formations. As the tempo of the fight increased they were not able to keep enough units engaged. The combination of poor weather, agile German withdrawals and traffic jams on their own side kept most of their troops from the battlefields. By the 18th of August the Germans had completed their withdrawal to the Hagen Line which extended across the neck of the Orel salient. This marked the end of the Soviet counteroffensive in the north. The two German armies were indeed bloodied, having lost the equivalent of 14 divisions, but Model had succeeded in

forming a viable defensive position and frustrating the grand aim of the KUTUZOV plan.

South of the Kursk salient Manstein was dealing with a different problem. On the 19th of July the Soviets achieved a bridgehead over the Mius River which, if expanded, could threaten the entire southern front. Hitler rejected any request to fall back to a shorter line along the Dnieper which would have freed up vital mobile reserves. Instead, Hitler allowed Manstein the use of SS Panzer Corps to eliminate the bridgehead. The Germans attacked on 30 July and were able to push the Soviets off the west bank, but the Panzer Corps was withdrawn as soon as the situation was stabilized. Hitler's obsession with the threat to Italy prevented him from seeing the operational and strategic danger on the Eastern Front. This error caused the continued operational misuse of SS Panzer Corps and kept it out of action during some of the most crucial fighting of Manstein's defense of the Kharkov area.

As noted earlier, General Hoth's attack was halted on the 23rd of July. The Soviets then began their buildup for the southern offensive known as Operation RUMYANTSEV. The plan called for considerable reorganization due to the intermingling of Voronezh and Steppe Fronts during the defensive phase. Voronezh Front was assigned the mission of punching a hole through the German defenses and exploiting to the southwest with two tank armies. They would outflank Kharkov from the northwest. Steppe Front was to take Belgorod and continue toward Kharkov from the south, thereby tying down Army Detachment Kempf and eventually completing the encirclement of Kharkov. (See figure 8, page 43)

The Soviets were indeed confident and their planning reflected it. They

enjoyed an advantage of almost four to one in every combat category. While General Hoth had only forty percent of the armor with which he began ZITADELLE, the Soviets had been able to double their 5 July tank strength through replacements. Yet serious deficiencies existed in the forces assigned to RUMYANTSEV. They were exhausted from weeks of difficult fighting and personnel losses had not been made up. The Germans, although battered, had quickly gone over to the defense and had formed a line of fortifications two belts deep.

The Russians attacked on 3 August with 5th and 6th Guards Armies. They achieved a deep penetration by noon and Vatutin committed his two tank armies. Steppe Front was somewhat slower, but by late afternoon it too had sent in its mobile corps to exploit a breach. By the 5th of August Belgorod fell. By 7 August the offensive had achieved over 60 miles, opening a gap of 35 miles between 4th Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf.

Manstein realized the threat to his entire Army Group and wanted to withdraw to the Dnieper River, but Hitler would hear none of it. He ordered Kharkov defended at all cost. 11th Army Corps, consisting of six infantry divisions, was ordered into the city. Manstein knew that if Vatutin and Konev could reach the Dnieper River they could cut off Kleist's Army Group A in Crimea and destroy 17th Army. Further, if Kharkov were encircled, which seemed likely, 11th Corps would also be lost.

At this point there were two parallel battles being waged, one around Kharkov and one between Manstein and his Fuhrer. Manstein continued to urge OKH to allow him to evacuate the Donetz Basin in order to shorten his front, or to provide him with additional forces. Hitler promised more

forces, but they never came. All the while Manstein conducted a desperate operation to save his 11th Corps and prevent the Soviets from reaching the Dnieper. For all practical purposes Manstein's only reserve was the 3rd Panzer Corps which had been employed to help eliminate the Mius bridgehead. The timely return of this critical unit prevented the link-up of Konev's and Vatutin's forces.

Although some stability was achieved around Kharkov, the second half of August saw the entire Eastern Front explode in a series of Russian offensives. It was Foch's 1918 offensive all over again as the Germans were paralyzed by successive crises across the front. Their freedom of action was destroyed and their reserves exhausted. Hitler was so preoccupied with the general situation that he could do little more than express his displeasure when Manstein evacuated Kharkov against orders on the 22nd. The German leader flew out to meet with Manstein at Vinnitsa, Ukraine on 27 August. He again promised more forces which would be transferred from Kluge, but renewed Russian attacks in Army Group Center's area the next day canceled the move. As late as 3 September with the entire Donetz Basin in the balance, Hitler still refused to allow retreat. Kluge and Manstein even attempted to persuade him that he could no longer act as both strategic and operational commander in the east. They advised him to appoint a commander in chief for the eastern theater and create a Great General Staff to coordinate all wartime activities. All their efforts were to no avail.

The allies invaded Italy on 3 September and Hitler finally agreed to a withdrawal behind the Dnieper River on the 15th. Any hope of a Great 'Eastern Wall' along this river, however, were dashed by numerous Russian

bridgeheads on a broad front in early October. The Germans had ignored the need to construct such a defensive line in the previous year and they now simply had too few mobile reserves to extinguish all the fires. The climax came on 6 November with the fall of Kiev. The great summer campaign of 1943 was over. During the month-long pause which followed, the Russians consolidated their gains and brought up bridging in preparation for a massive crossing of the Dnieper.

SECTION VII: CONCLUSIONS

At first glance the Kursk campaign did not appear to be as great a debacle for the Germans as Stalingrad. There was no army which was surrounded and eventually lost. Yet the reality was that Kursk had far reaching operational and strategic significance. From the strategic point of view the initiative had shifted permanently. The Soviet Union recovered much of its population base which had lived under German domination in 1942, and her industrial base was now beyond the range of Luftwaffe bombers. This meant that the weight of production would favor the Soviets more and more in the months ahead. For its part Germany could no longer replace the losses in personnel and equipment on the Eastern Front. With the allied landings in Italy Hitler would have to shuffle his dwindling resources between two fronts. Germany would not attempt another offensive in the east until the ill-advised operation to relieve Budapest in June, 1945.

Operationally and tactically the Red Army gained immense confidence as a result of its victory at Kursk. It had taken on the best that Germany had

to offer on ground of the Wehrmacht's choosing and decisively defeated the blitzkrieg style of war. It was as much a moral and spiritual victory as a material one.

What does Kursk have to tell the student of operational art about the relative strength of offense and defense? Zhukov made a deliberate choice to defend which begs the question as to why any commander who has superior resources would elect to do so. History indicates that he made a wise selection, but several of the factors involved in the Russian campaign plan were unique. Rarely does a commander have complete and accurate information of the intentions of his adversary. LUCY provided the Russians with unprecedented intelligence in this regards. Zhukov also realized that once he knew of the enemy plan he could take advantage of several theoretical advantages of the defender. These included knowledge of the terrain to be defended, the ability to reinforce the terrain with obstacles, and the ability to reduce friction by deploying the units before the battle. When we add his lack of total confidence in the Red Army's tactical and operational abilities, the decision to defend makes great sense.

All things being equal the defense is theoretically stronger than the offense according the Clausewitz. When the enemy enjoys certain advantages such as a better tactical system or more accomplished operational commanders, the defense takes on even greater appeal. Kursk certainly validated the strength of the defense, especially the aspect of the 'flashing sword of vengeance'. There can be no question that the impact of KUTUZOV and RUMYANTSEV was greater because of the attrition of German armor during the defensive phase. On the other hand the Germans, had they

adopted Manstein's 'backhand option', should have been able to cause the Russian offensive considerable difficulty. In their panzer corps they had the ideal operational tool to strike at Soviet attacking concentrations as they had done earlier in February.

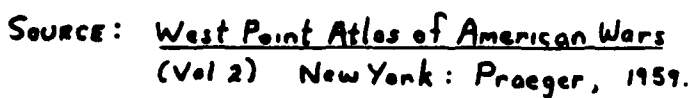
It would be easy to argue that the Germans had exceeded their offensive culmination point before ZITADELLE even began. The Russians had certainly amassed sufficient resources with which to initiate a threatening offensive by the summer, regardless of German activity. Although the Germans could have blunted such an operation, the growing material imbalance made future Russian offensives more likely with increasing chances for success. There simply were not enough German reserves on the entire Eastern Front to stop the kind of theater-wide attacks the Russians mounted in August of 1943. On the other hand the Soviets probably had not yet reached their defensive culmination point when they initiated their counteroffensive. The longer Manstein and Model were allowed to impale their armor on the Russian defenses the more advantages went to the defenders. Hitler would have called off the offensive in any case due to the Sicily invasion and his desire to siphon off forces for the west. All things considered Zhukov probably initiated Operation KUTUZOV at the right time with Operation RUMYANTSEV more dependent on the reorganization of his two defending fronts. Given his error in predicting the German's main effort and the resulting force allocations, it simply was not possible for Zhukov to synchronize both offensives.

In comparing the practice of operational art, Zhukov demonstrated a far greater grasp of the essentials than his counterpart, Adolf Hitler. In every aspect of operational planning and execution, ZITADELLE reflected

above all else, rigidity. It was rigid in its vision of the battlefield, the opponent, and the combinations of forces to be employed. The Germans paid dearly for this lack of flexibility in the form of wasted resources. Zhukov displayed far greater vision and flexibility in his creation of the Russian campaign. He took full advantage of the LUCY intelligence, but established a defensive combination which remained capable of dealing with unexpected enemy success, while at the same time allowing for a rapid transition to the offensive. He clearly understood the value of his own center of gravity, Steppe Front, and developed a defensive structure which not only protected it, but directly influenced the German operational center of gravity, the concentrated panzer corps.

If Hitler had paid attention to his stomach instead of his will, ZITADELLE might have been a defensive operation of the kind urged by Manstein. The final rigidity which contributed to the German downfall, however, may have been inherent in the very system of Nazism. Its self proclaimed superiority greatly inhibited the ability to conceive of anything less than aggressive offensive action. Religious-like fanaticism of this kind tends to purge any notion of a flexible approach to operational art and almost guarantees failure in the long run. The operational artist must remain free of absolute dogmatic principles, whether they be tactical or strategic, and utilize his skills within the confines of a battlefield dynamic which demands intellectual flexibility.

0 100 200 300 400 500 600
SCALE OF MILES



36

ARMY GROUP SOUTH SITUATION

(MARCH 1943)

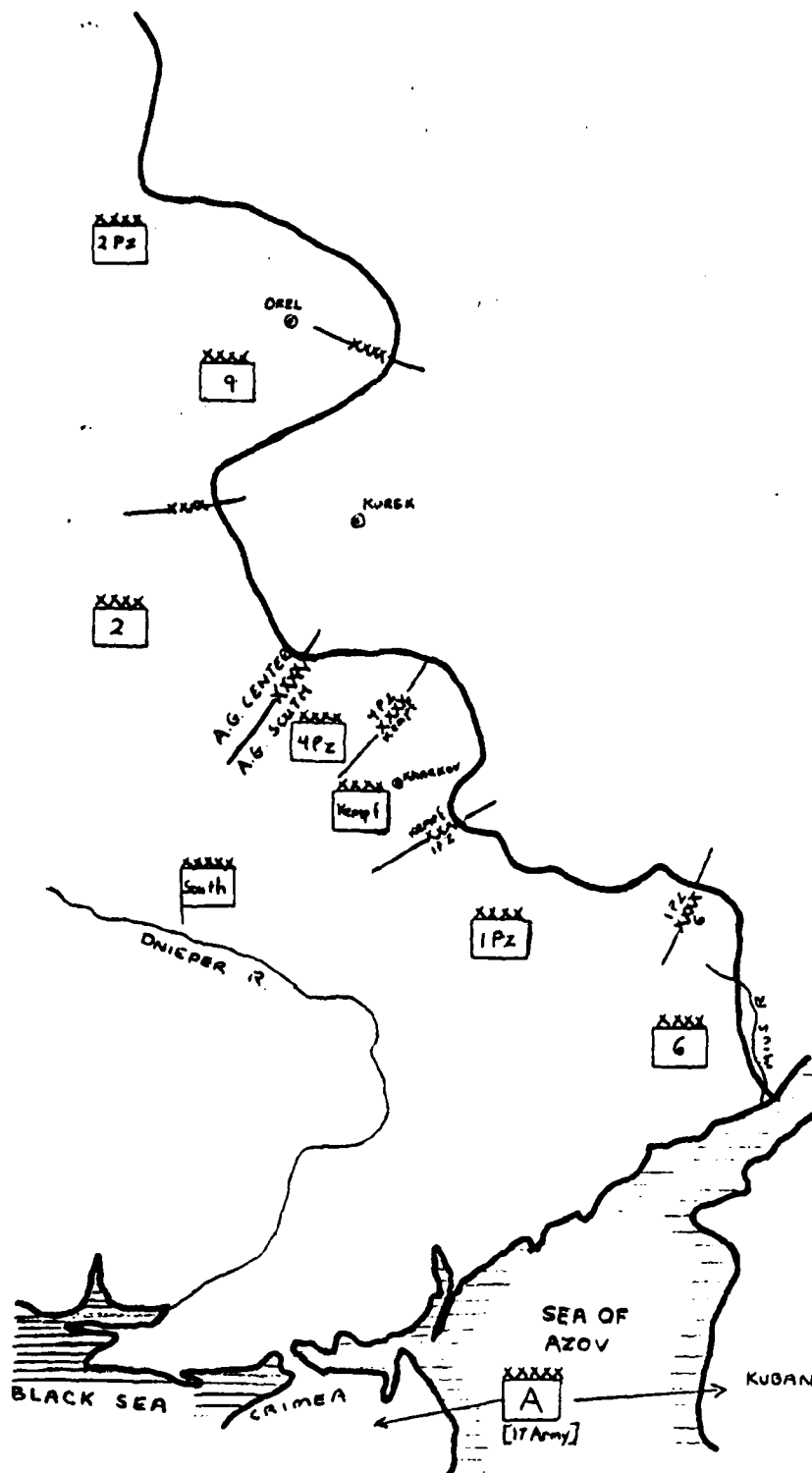
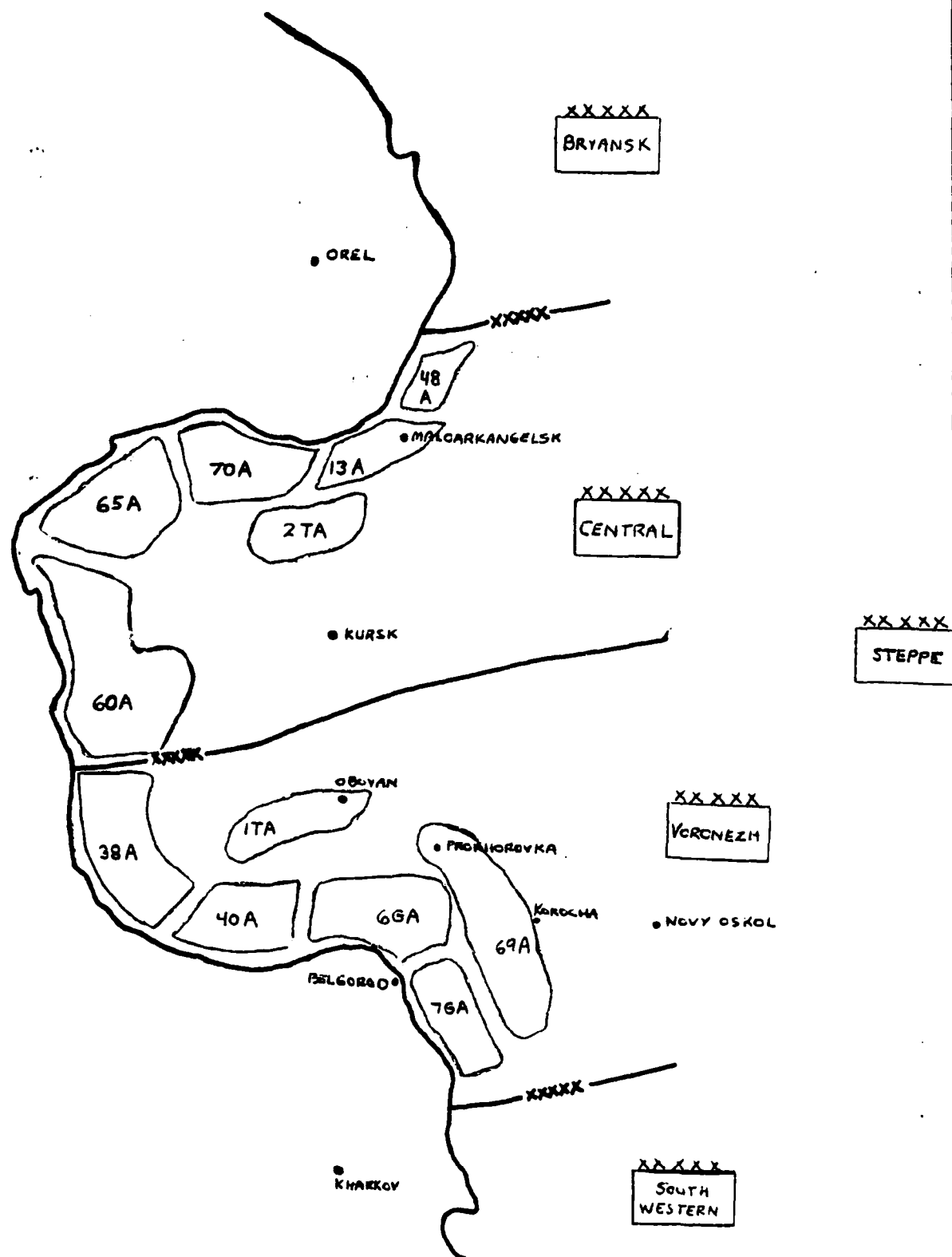


FIGURE 2



Legend: A - Army
TA - Tank Army

FIGURE 3

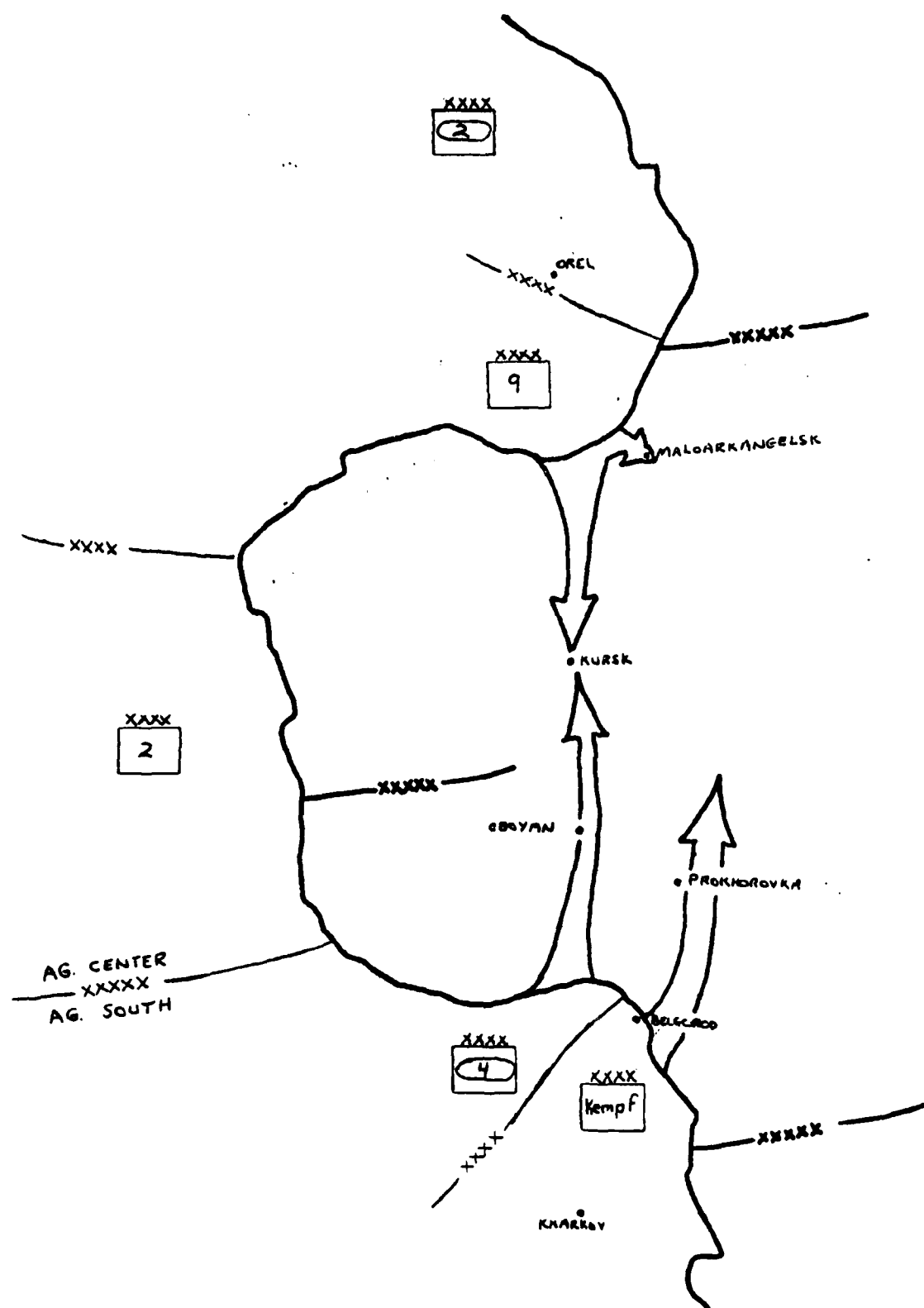


FIGURE 4

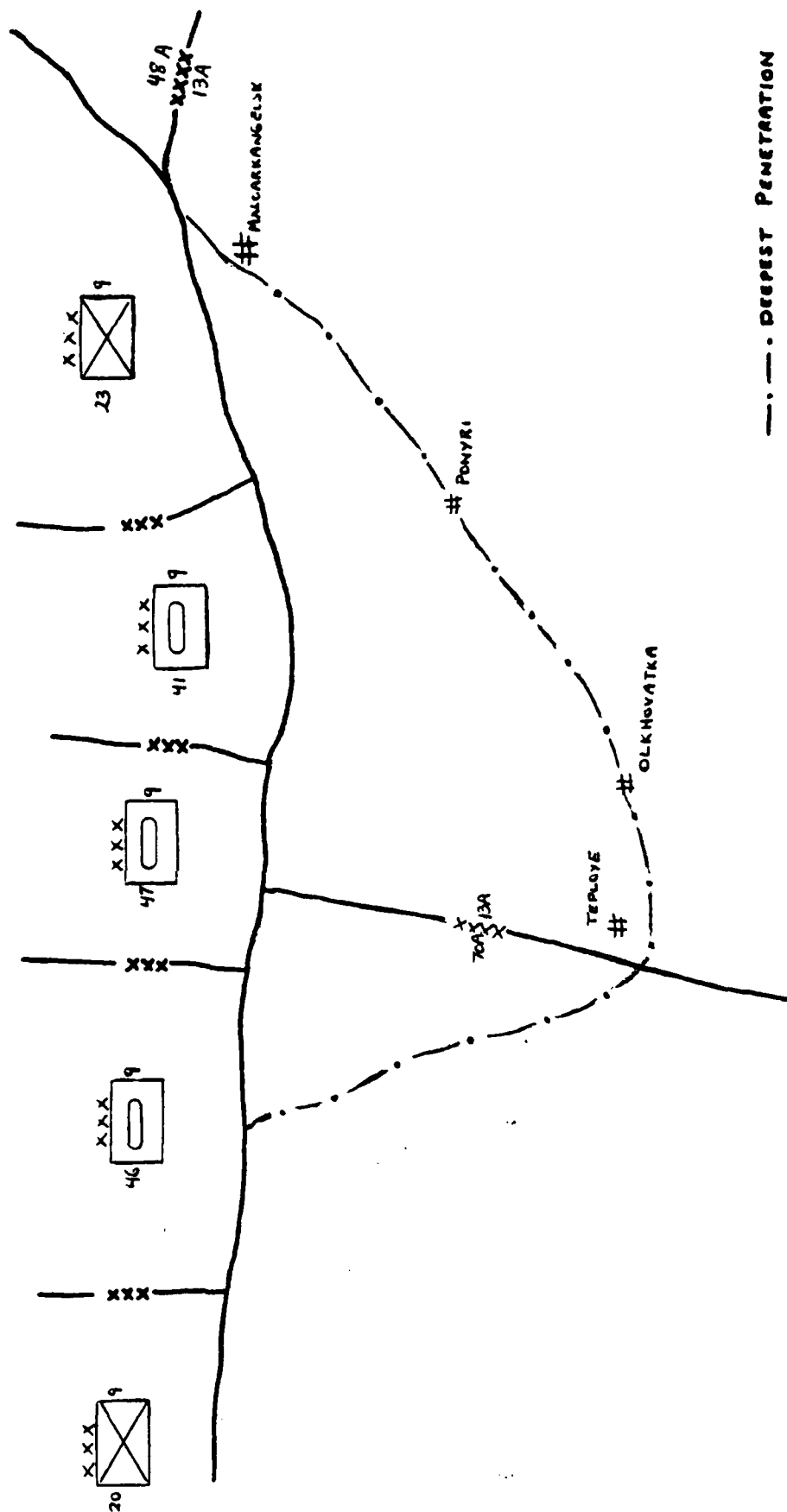


FIGURE 5

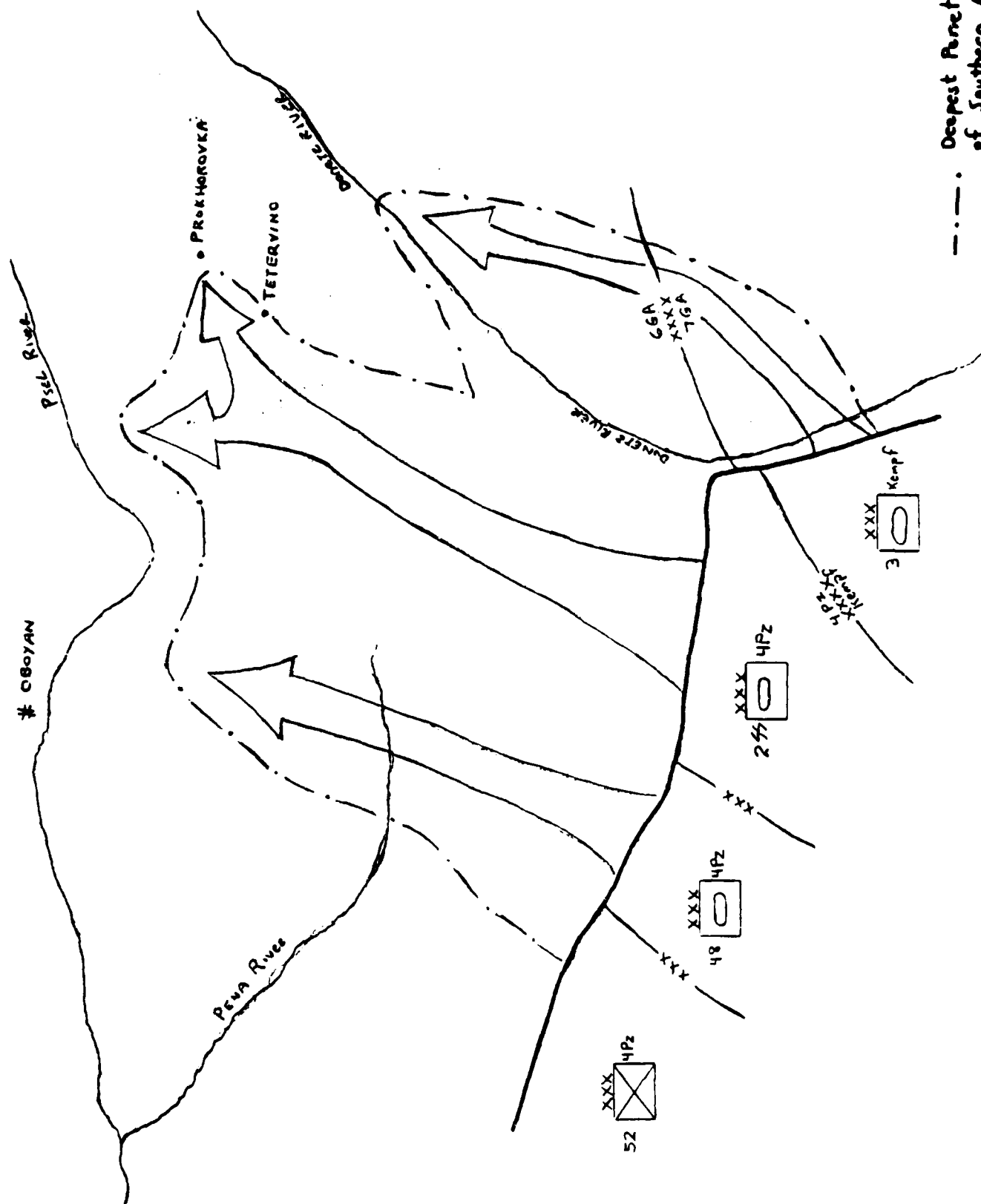


FIGURE 6

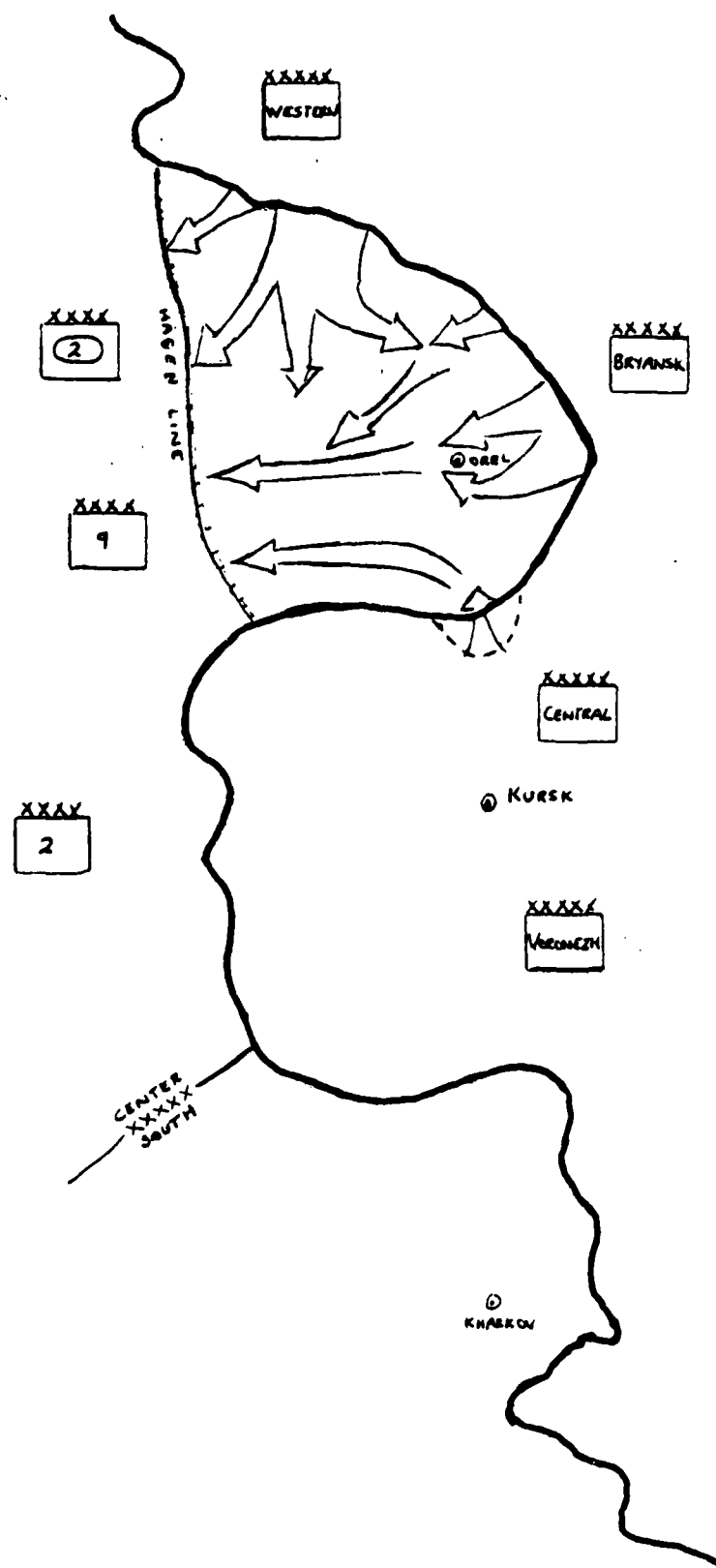


FIGURE 7

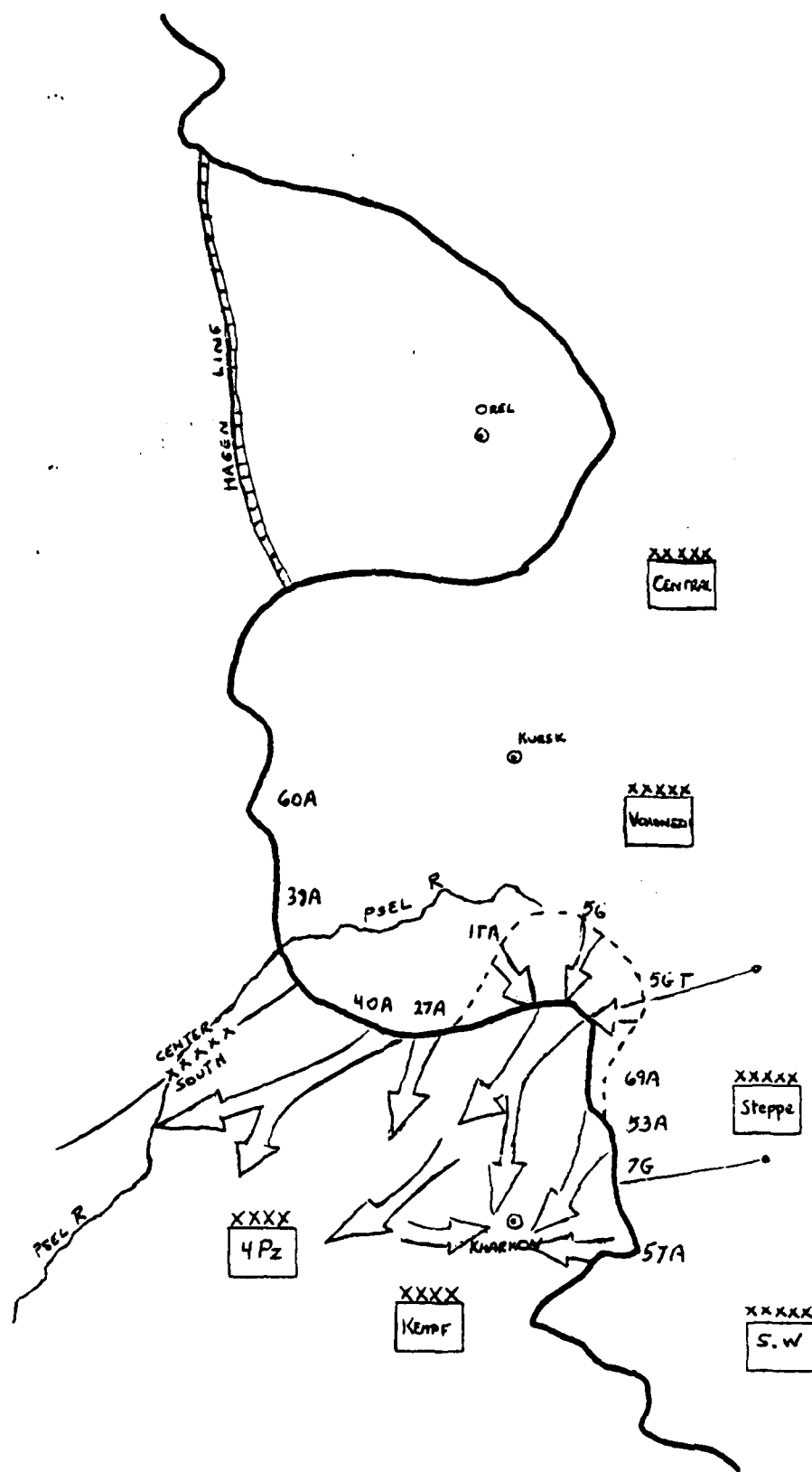


FIGURE 8

ENDNOTES

1 Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, (New York, 1952), p. 309.

2 O.K.W. or Oberkommando der Wehrmacht was the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces of Germany.

3 Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, (Navato, California, 1982 [original copyright 1958]), p. 446.

4 Ibid., p. 445.

5 Zitadelle in English is Citadel.

6 Guderain, op. cit., pp. 308,309.

7 O.K.H. or Oberkommando der Heeres was the Army High Command. Hitler had a long running dispute with OKH stemming from their objections to the Poland and France campaigns. Throughout the course of the war Hitler gradually transferred the responsibility for various theaters of war from OKH to OKW. He left only the Eastern Front under the direct control of OKH, but with himself as the commander of operations there. There was no supreme staff which could direct the overall war effort and provide input to the formation of Grand Strategy. It was inevitable that OKW and OKH should clash on their ideas of war priorities and the allocation of resources to the various theaters. It was an inefficient system, but it suited Hitler's temperament and his confidence in his own abilities as both strategic and operational commander, especially in the East.

8 Robert Icks, Famous Tank Battles, (Garden City, 1972), p. 162.

9 Georgi Zhukov, Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles, (New York, 1969 [original copyright 1965]), pp. 209,210.

10 Geoffrey Jukes, Kursk: The Clash of Armies, (New York, 1968), pp. 45-47.

11 Ibid., pp. 38,39.

12 Ibid., p. 41.

13 Pzkw or Panzerkampfwagen is German for tank.

14 F.W. von Mellenthin, Panzer Battles, (Norman, 1956), p. 219.

15 G. A. Koltunov, "Kursk: The Clash of Armour," History of the Second World War (1973), p. 1381.

16 Manstein, op. cit., p. 444.

17 Mellenthin, op. cit., p. 215.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Caidin, Martin. The Tigers Are Burning. New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1974.
- Carell, Paul. Scorched Earth, The Russian-German War 1943-44. New York: Ballantine Books, 1966.
- Chant, Christopher. Kursk. London: Almark Publishing, 1975.
- Clark, Alan. Barbarossa. New York: Quill, 1985.
- Erickson, John. The Road to Berlin. Boulder: Westview Press, 1983.
- Erickson, John. The Soviet High Command. London: MacMillan, 1962.
- Guderian, Heinz. Panzer Leader. New York: Dutton, 1952.
- Icks, R.J. Famous Tank Battles. Garden City: Doubleday, 1972.
- Jukes, Geoffrey. Kursk: The Clash of Armour. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.
- Manstein, Erich von. Lost Victories. Navato, California: Presidio Press, 1982.
- Markov, Walter, ed. Battles of World History. New York: Hippocrene Books Inc., 1979.
- Mellenthin, F.W. von. Panzer Battles. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956.
- Parotkin, Ivan, ed. The Battle of Kursk. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974.
- Salisbury, Harrison. The Unknown War. New York: Bantam Books, 1978.
- Solovyov, Boris. The Battle of Kursk. Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1973.
- Spielberger, Walter J. and Uwe Feist. Armor on the Eastern Front. Fallbrook, California: Aero Publishers Inc., 1968.
- Stokesbury, James L. A Short History of World War II. New York: William Morrow and Company Inc., 1980.
- Werth, Alexander. Russia At War. New York: Dutton, 1964.

Zhukov, Georgii K. The Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov. New York: Delacorte Press, 1971.

Zhukov, Georgii K. Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

Ziemke, Earl F. The Soviet Juggernaut. Alexandria, Va.: Time Life Books Inc., 1980.

Journals and Periodicals

Bolt, William J. and David Jablonsky. "Tactics and the Operational Level of War". Military Review. Vol. 67, No. 2, February, 1987.

Koltunov, G.A. "Kursk: The Clash of Armour". History of the Second World War. Marshall Cavendish USA Ltd., 1973.

Parrish, Michael. "The Battle of Kursk". Army Quarterly and Defense Journal. Vol. 99, No. 1, October, 1969.

Rokossovsky, K. "Kursk Battle, Part I". Soviet Military Review. Vol. 7, July, 1968.

Rokossovsky, K. "Kursk Battle, Part II". Soviet Military Review. Vol. 8, August, 1968.

Manuscripts

Crow, Charles C. "An Operational Analysis of Soviet Armored Formations in the Deliberate Battle of Kursk". Ft. Leavenworth: MMAS Thesis, 1985.

Glantz, David M. "Soviet Defensive Tactics at Kursk". Carlisle, Pa: Center for Land Warfare, U.S. Army War College, 1985.

Thach, Joseph Edward. "The Battle of Kursk: July 1943". Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Thesis, 1971.

END

11-87

DTIC