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First Contact:

Peacetime Campaign Planning Versus the Realities of Combat,
the Need for an Operational Mechanism

by
Major Michael D. Heredia
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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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This monograph explores the issue of whether or not the United States Army should have an institutional mechanism to collect, interpret and apply the lessons of operational combat in order to correct the inevitable errors of peacetime planning and the lack of experience in waging war at the operational level. It begins by accepting von Moltke's observation that no plan survives first contact with the enemy and examines the implications of that statement for an Army that must prepare in peacetime for the complex task of waging war at the operational level. The paper first defines the operational level of war and then examines how operational doctrine and theory are effected by the harsh realities of combat. This is accomplished through the medium of a campaign analysis using the Soviet Operation Gallop of January 1943 as a vehicle. This campaign is one of the best examples of an operationally inexperienced army learning from (continued on reverse)			
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the lessons of combat and applying those lessons to future operations successfully. By conducting a campaign analysis of this operation, focusing on the after action reporting mechanism and the elements of operational design, the study assesses whether or not a mechanism for learning the lessons of operational combat existed then and what its utility might be for the US Army today.

After examining the Soviet and German mechanisms for exploiting the lessons of combat, the monograph concludes that the Soviet system was a superior learning tool and produced practical benefits for the Red Army. It then proceeds to assess the ability of the US Army to learn similarly from peacetime exercises and future combat and finds it lacking. In conclusion, the monograph offers a method to institutionalize an operational level lessons learning mechanism using the Center for Army Lessons Learned as the focal point.

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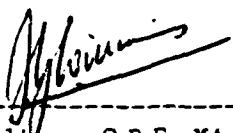
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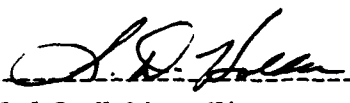
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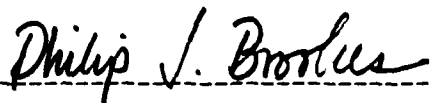
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Abstract

First Contact: Campaign Planning Versus the Realities of Combat, the Need for an Operational Mechanism by Major Michael D. Heredia, USA, 48 pages.

This monograph explores the issue of whether or not the United States Army should have an institutional mechanism to collect, interpret and apply the lessons of operational combat in order to correct the inevitable errors of peacetime planning and the lack of experience in waging war at the operational level. It begins by accepting von Moltke's observation that no plan survives first contact with the enemy and examines the implications of that statement for an Army that must prepare in peacetime for the complex task of waging war at the operational level.

The paper first defines the operational level of war and then examines how operational doctrine and theory are effected by the harsh realities of combat. This is accomplished through the medium of a campaign analysis using the Soviet Operation Gallop of January 1943 as a vehicle. This campaign is one of the best examples of an operationally inexperienced army learning from the lessons of combat and applying those lessons to future operations successfully. By conducting a campaign analysis of this operation, focusing on the after action reporting mechanisms and the elements of operational design, the study assesses whether or not a mechanism for learning the lessons of operational combat existed then and what its utility might be for the US Army today.

After examining the Soviet and German mechanisms for exploiting the lessons of combat, the monograph concludes that the Soviet system was a superior learning tool and produced practical benefits for the Red Army. It then proceeds to assess the ability of the US Army to learn similarly from peacetime exercises and future combat and finds it lacking. In conclusion, the monograph offers a method to institutionalize an operational level lessons learning mechanism using the Center for Army Lessons Learned as the focal point.

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CHALLENGE OF THE OPERATIONAL ART

The United States Army has reawakened to the significance of the operational art in the waging of war. Yet, the awareness of the importance of this level of war has not yet been meshed with a fully developed doctrine for its implementation by the operational commander. Despite the great strides that have been made, this problem is highlighted by the wide disparity in the structure of campaign plans prepared by various operational headquarters. Unfortunately, the final resolution of the debate will probably have to wait until the United States goes to war. The dilemma facing the operational planner now becomes how to go about correcting a flawed operational plan once the campaign has begun. The ability to make a "mid-course correction" becomes a critical consideration if one subscribes to von Moltke's observation that no plan survives first contact with the enemy and that errors in initial operational deployment are very nearly impossible to correct. The need for an established mechanism to study operational art methodically in peacetime and collect, interpret and apply the lessons of combat during wartime becomes essential to success in modern combat.

A Closer Look

Operational art is defined in FM 100-5 as
"... the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations."

Campaigns and major operations are therefore the means to link strategy with tactics to produce the desired end state through sequenced battlefield actions. It is the balancing of these means and ways to produce the

desired ends that constitutes the unquantifiable and artistic component of operational art.

Mastery of operational art is critical in modern warfare. The complexity, resources and sophistication of modern society virtually rule out war resolution via single, decisive battles; the result is usually protracted combat. Given this environment and the global responsibilities and myriad challenges to the US, our planners must make the most effective use of limited national means to achieve strategic ends.

The tremendous stakes of modern war, even at the low to mid intensity level, pose unique problems to US practitioners of operational art. We are struggling with developing a doctrine applicable across the spectrum of violence and of global utility. The dangers of conceptual and planning errors are magnified at this level. A basic planning error, which would be embarrassing or costly in peacetime, could prove to be a war loser during a conflict.

The theory of war and the planning that it supports in peacetime must be modified when the reality of actual armed conflict occurs. Despite the most careful preparation, plans always seem to prove less than adequate.

As Clausewitz reminds us:

*"War is the realm of chance. No other human activity gives it greater scope; no other has such incessant and varied dealings with this intruder. Chance makes everything more uncertain and interferes with the whole course of events."*²

Peacetime planning should provide a mechanism to deal with this phenomena, to assess the problem and to permit the deliberate modification of a plan during execution. However, a close reading of FM 100-5 does not reveal any

such concept. It is the purpose of this paper to identify what mechanisms the operational commander must establish in order to best exploit the experience of combat in the planning and conduct of a campaign.

METHODOLOGY

History offers numerous examples to study, but perhaps Operation Gallop, conducted by the Soviets as part of the Kharkov campaign of January-March 1943, is the best example of learning from operational experiences. By conducting a campaign analysis of this operation focusing on the after action reporting mechanisms and the elements of operational design, we can assess whether or not a mechanism for learning the lessons of operational combat truly existed in the campaign and decide on the utility of a similar system for the United States today.

THE CAMPAIGN

Strategic Context

Despite the fact that a truly global war was being waged by 1943, the situation on the Eastern Front remained curiously unaffected by events elsewhere. A glimpse at the major events of the period will highlight this phenomena.

In January 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill met at the Casablanca Conference to plot strategy for this new phase of the war. While they felt that no second front could be opened yet, they did agree upon the invasion of Sicily, a decision which would have far reaching consequences for the Germans in Russia following Operation Gallop.

In North Africa the Allied armies under the tactical command of British General Anderson were stalled in central Tunisia, unknowingly poised for

the American debacle of Kasserine Pass. In Burma, the British under Slim were just beginning their first limited offensive action against the Japanese. Concurrently, the war at sea against the U-boats was rising to a crescendo while the Combined Bomber Offensive against the heart of the Reich was getting underway.³

The great global struggle had amazingly little immediate impact on either the Eastern Front in general or Operation Gallop in particular. In this context, the war in the Soviet Union became almost exclusively a German-Russian war despite the significant Allied supply effort.

The war at this point had a decidedly different cast from the German perspective. (See map 1) Following the destruction of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad in December 1942, Hitler saw the fruits of his summer victories die. The loss of the Sixth Army alone did not defeat Germany, but a follow-up Soviet offensive against the disorganized southern wing of the German Eastern Front could tip the balance. The loss of over 20 good quality German divisions in the abortive Stalingrad operation severely limited options for Hitler's commanders at the front.

Field Marshal Manstein, commander of Army Group Don, felt that victory was no longer possible but that an acceptable stalemate might still be had. However, serious strategic errors, which presented the Soviets with a favorable operational situation and substantial numerical superiority, had to be dealt with first. These included Hitler's "no retreat" order, the tremendous over-extension of German forces, a broad discontinuous front with an open southern flank, weak Axis (Rumanian, Italian and Hungarian) armies with no appreciable operational reserves and vulnerable lines of

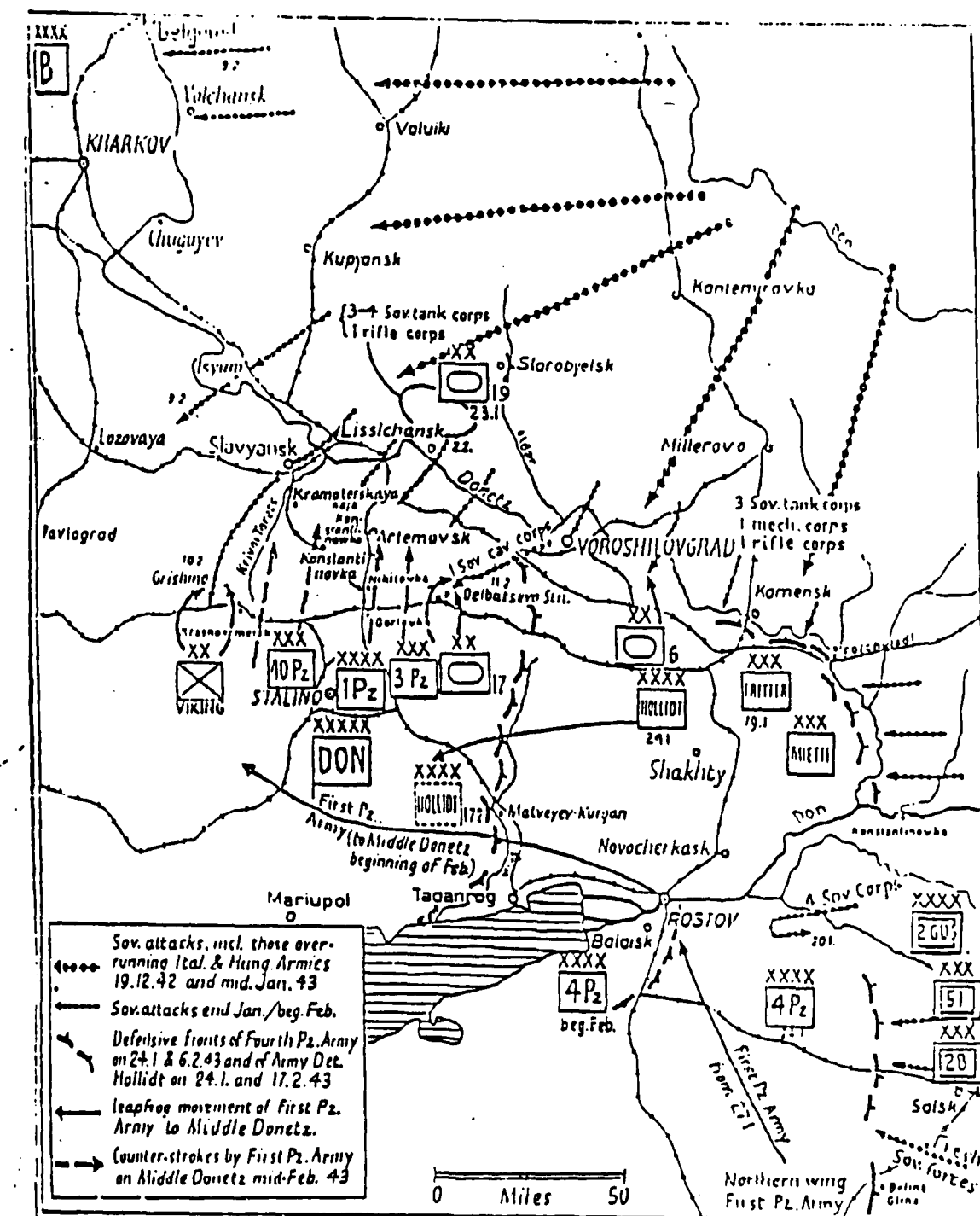
communication (especially around Rostov) within striking distance of enemy forces.⁴

Of course, from the Soviet perspective, things looked altogether different. The "Hitlerites" were on the ropes and reeling, 1943 was the time to go for the knockout. STAVKA's attitude was one of euphoria following the Stalingrad victory and they envisioned great things to come. The liberation of the Ukraine beckoned with the promise of destruction of 75 Axis divisions thrown into the bargain. German operational reserves had been nearly depleted by the Stalingrad fiasco and the average panzer division had been reduced to a battalion's worth of tanks. The immediate effect of the reduction of Stalingrad had also been to smash the Axis allied armies leaving huge gaps in already overstretched German lines. All things considered, the collapse of the Germans seemed to be in view if only the initiative could be retained and one final effort thrust home before the spring thaw brought movement to a halt for several weeks.

Operation Gallop was intended to provide this final impetus by liberating the Donbas region and driving the Germans across the Dnepr River. Meanwhile, supporting operations from Leningrad to the Caucasus would apply strategic pressure across the Eastern Front and prevent operational reserves from being formed to react in the Army Group Don sector.⁵

Operational Context (See map 2)

The German perspective on the Eastern Front depended on whether you were at Oberkommando des Wehrmacht (OKW) or Army Group Don headquarters. At OKW Hitler, who made all decisions, was still stunned by the magnitude



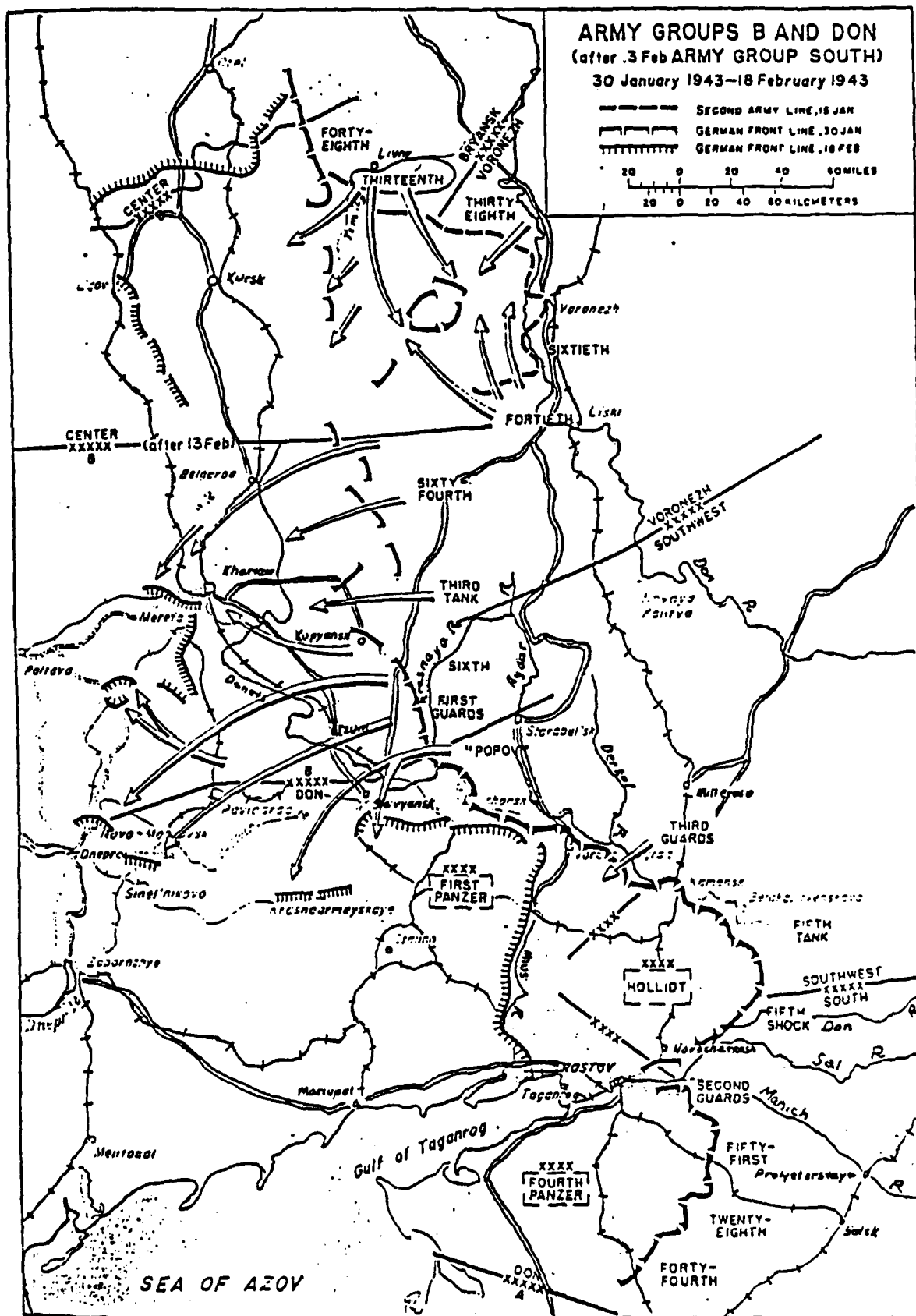
Map 2 Winter Campaign 1942-3: Don Army Group's battles to keep Communications Zone free

of the defeat at Stalingrad. Blaming the army for this catastrophic failure, he sought to reassert control by issuing the no withdrawal orders. Unlike the previous winter, where these orders had served useful purposes, they now served only to sacrifice operational mobility.⁶

At Army Group Don, Field Marshal Manstein held a much more flexible point of view. While he also saw a Soviet offensive as inevitable, his proposed solution for it was to exploit the advantages he possessed. Using his operational mobility and tactical skills, he proposed to conduct large scale withdrawals to let the Soviets overextend themselves and then to envelop and destroy those weakened forces. His essential problem was to convince the overly centralized command structure of OKW to yield to the realities of the battlefield and let the commander on the spot (Manstein) make the operational decisions.⁷

The Russian operational perspective (see map 3) did not suffer from the split personality problem of the Germans. It followed closely the preconceptions of the strategic viewpoint. The best way to exploit the collapse of the Axis allied armies and the current German disarray was an immediate offensive to envelop German forces to their operational depth and thereby precipitate their imminent collapse. This view of German weakness became so entrenched that it did not allow reality to interfere with it; a situation that was to have major ramifications for Operation Gallop.

Soviet planners envisioned striking without operational pause following Stalingrad in order to exploit the gaps in German lines and strike before operational reserves could be reconstituted.⁸ Given the tremendous Axis losses this seemed a reasonable risk.⁹



Opposing Forces and Plans

Manstein's Army Group (renamed Army Group South) consisted of 32 "divisions" of widely varying strength stretched over 470 miles of front.¹⁰ His seven panzer divisions averaged between 20 and 40 tanks per division.¹¹ The one significant material advantage possessed by the Germans lay in the 950 first line aircraft (53% of the total available on the Eastern Front) dedicated to Manstein's Army Group.¹²

As Manstein saw it, the Soviet course of action following the Stalingrad victory was obvious and required little imagination to predict. His solution to defeat the projected envelopment involved a three phased plan: (see map 3)

Phase 1- Protect rear of Army Group A while it disengaged from the Caucasus (specifically protect Rostov and lower Don crossings).

Phase 2- Protect LOCs of southern wing of his own forces.

Phase 3- Execute a counterstroke when the time was ripe.

To carry out this operation involved careful calculations of time and space. Due to a lack of operational reserves, he had to think far enough ahead to switch units from one threatened area to another. This required accepting great risk in the process, to buy time to defeat the enemy piecemeal. By his own estimate, an Army Group must be able to think four to eight weeks out to plan its campaign. If this were not difficult enough, he also had to convince Hitler to allow him the flexibility to draw the Soviets into overextending themselves by ceding terrain and then launch the counter-stroke. All this had to be pulled off in the face of Soviet superiority and timed to conclude precisely at the onset of the spring thaw so as to allow

the Germans six weeks to regroup during the seasonal period of immobility.¹³

Confronting Manstein was the Southwest Front consisting of some 37 divisions, 500 tanks and 274 aircraft commanded by GEN N.F. Vatutin. By Soviet reckoning this produced a correlation of forces (Soviet : German) roughly as follows:

Infantry 2:1

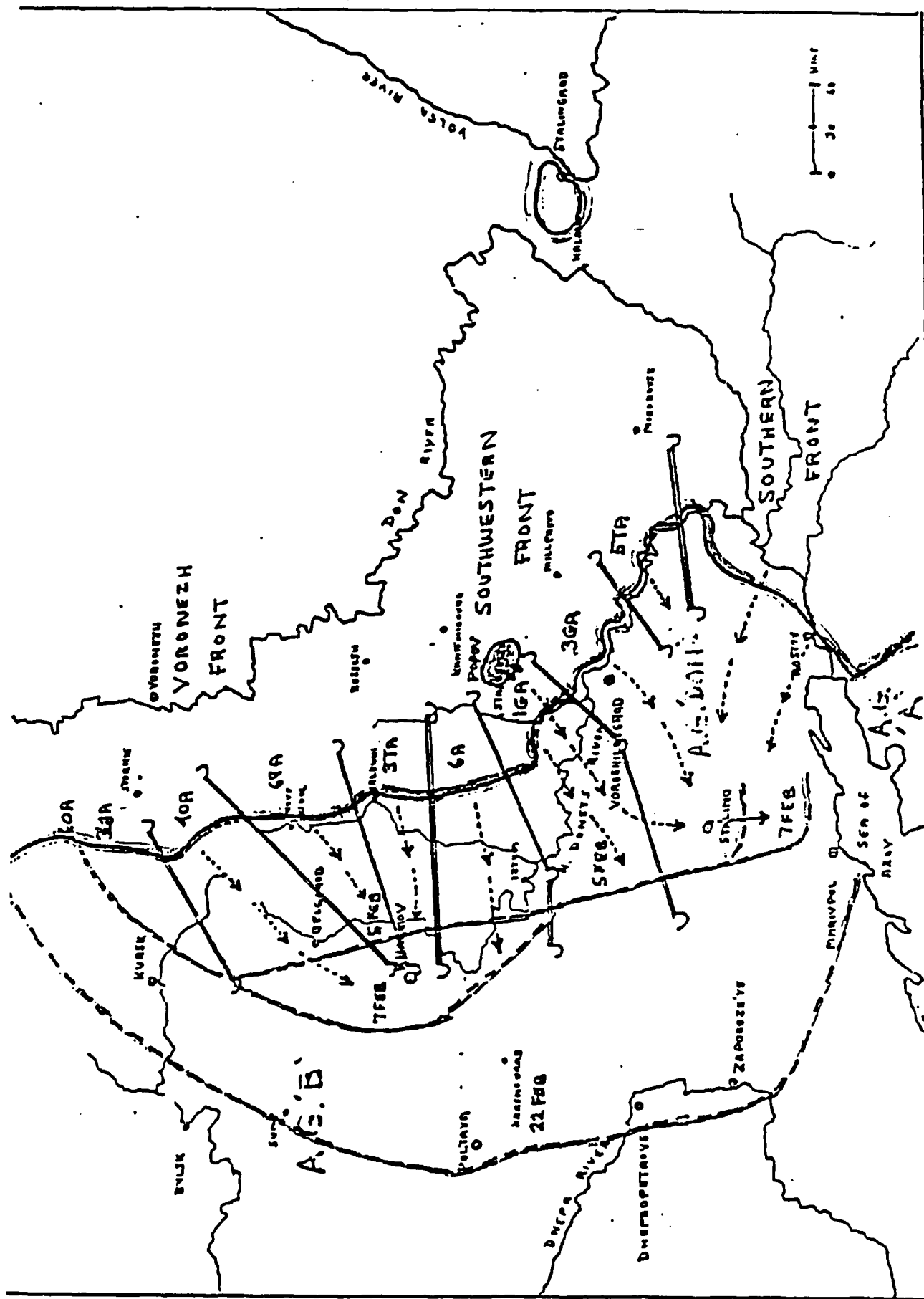
Armor 4:1 (This initial ratio quickly declined)

Aircraft 1:3.5¹⁴

The Soviet plan (see map 4) envisioned by General Vatutin was a two front operation (Voronezh and Southwestern) to penetrate Army Groups B and South and push to Dnepr crossings in the north and the Sea of Azov in the south. This would hopefully collapse the southern wing of the German front. It was a hasty plan conceived by Vatutin and approved by STAVKA in only 10 days (submitted 19 January, executed 29 January).¹⁵ Both fronts were to conduct this campaign following the Stalingrad operation without an operational pause. STAVKA felt the German situation warranted such risks and promised substantial gains.¹⁶

The Curtain Rises (see map 5)

The campaign can best be described by viewing it in five phases. These phases track the development of the offensive against the Germans and their immediate reaction. Next, they will highlight the blunting of the Soviet thrust and the preparations for the German counterstroke. Finally they will present the results as seen by each antagonist.



Map 4 Winter Offensive Plan: February 1943

On 29 January the Soviet main attack was delivered against Army Group South.¹⁷ The Southwestern Front under Vatutin was attacking to seize the Donbas and conduct deep outflanking moves against Army Group South with four armies (north to south: 6th; 1st GDS, 3d GDS, 5th Tank), one air army, mobile Group Popov (212 tanks), one mechanized and one cavalry corps as well as several independent tank brigades.¹⁸

Despite being deeply enmeshed in a desperate and brutal war, the Soviets were also involved in a period of operational experimentation with the command and control techniques and organizations of mobile forces used in exploitations. Learning from previous campaigns, they had decided to form Group Popov as a tool to be immediately committed to go deep and cut German escape routes from the Donbas.¹⁹

By 12 February, the Soviet offensive had forced back widely dispersed German units in the north and opened a gap from Kharkov to Slavyansk which Vatutin found irresistible. Grasping at this opportunity, Vatutin quickly committed the 6th Army toward the Dnepr crossings and subsequent envelopment of Army Group South.²⁰ By 16 February, a 100 mile gap had been torn open between Army Groups B and South with the Voronezh Front to the north heading toward Kharkov and the right flank of the Southwest Front steadily drawing away to the west and south following the thrustline of the 6th Army. This perceived success was to come back to haunt the Soviets as they had no reserves to fill the gap in the flank should the Germans prove unexpectedly aggressive.²¹

During the period 10-26 February, major German armor and motorized formations slowly began to concentrate across the path of the Southwest

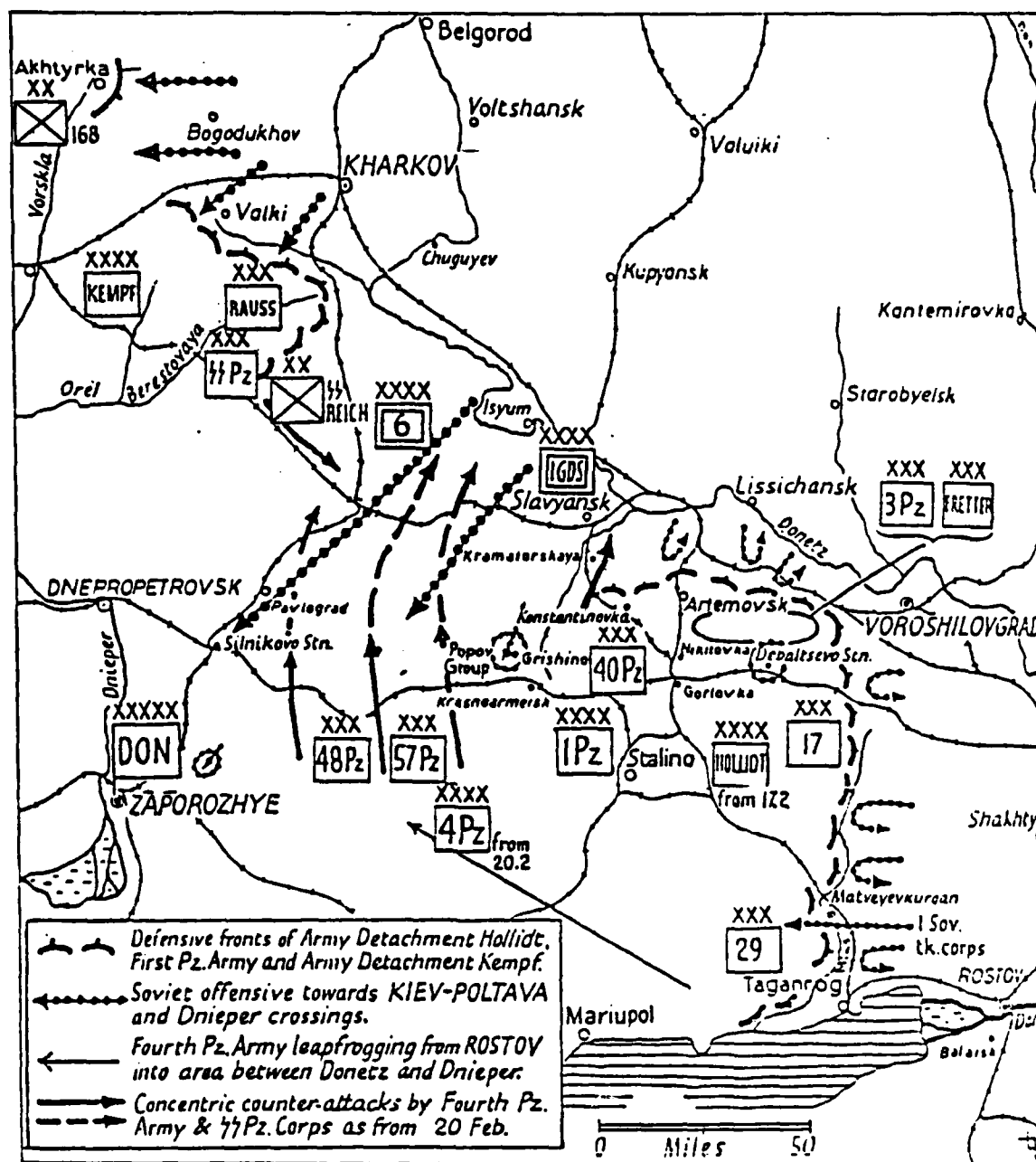
Front's right flank. Partisans and cavalry patrols reported the presence of these unexpected concentrations. In consonance with Front's belief that the Germans were broken, these reports were interpreted as locating rearguard positions intended to cover further withdrawal. Despite other reports by deep reconnaissance units of the scope of these concentrations, this assumption was never seriously questioned at higher headquarters.²²

Manstein's Counter-stroke, Phase I (See map 6)

By 20 February, Manstein was satisfied that the Soviets were over-extended and ready for the counter-stroke. His "armored shears" initiated their attack from the north and south to chop off the Soviet advance to the Dnepr crossings and restore the situation between the Dnepr and Donets, then deal with the Kharkov threat.²³ Critical to this operation was the use of the newly arrived SS Panzer Korps with three panzergrenadier divisions.²⁴

Despite initial optimism, Group Popov realized by 21 February that the Germans were not forming rearguards but were attacking in strength. The unexpected hammer blows of the SS Panzer Korps seriously hurt Popov and he quickly requested permission to withdraw some 20 miles to the north towards Krasnoarmeisk to avoid encirclement. Vatutin just as quickly refused as he believed the enemy was desperately trying to withdraw from the Donbas and ordered Popov and the Sixth Army to attack. STAVKA quickly backed this order and chided the Southern Front for not showing similar aggressive spirit.²⁵ (See map 7)

Socialist exhortations notwithstanding, the Sixth Army had ground to a halt for lack of fuel and combat power by 22 February. Group Popov barely



Map 7 Winter Campaign 1942-3: German Counterstroke, the battle between the Donets and Dniepr

avoided entrapment and was pushed back to the northwest while the Sixth Army struggled to extricate itself from impending encirclement. Rapidly, the supporting attacks from the Voronezh and Southern Fronts were halted and by 24 February the initiative was clearly lost across the front to the Germans.²⁶

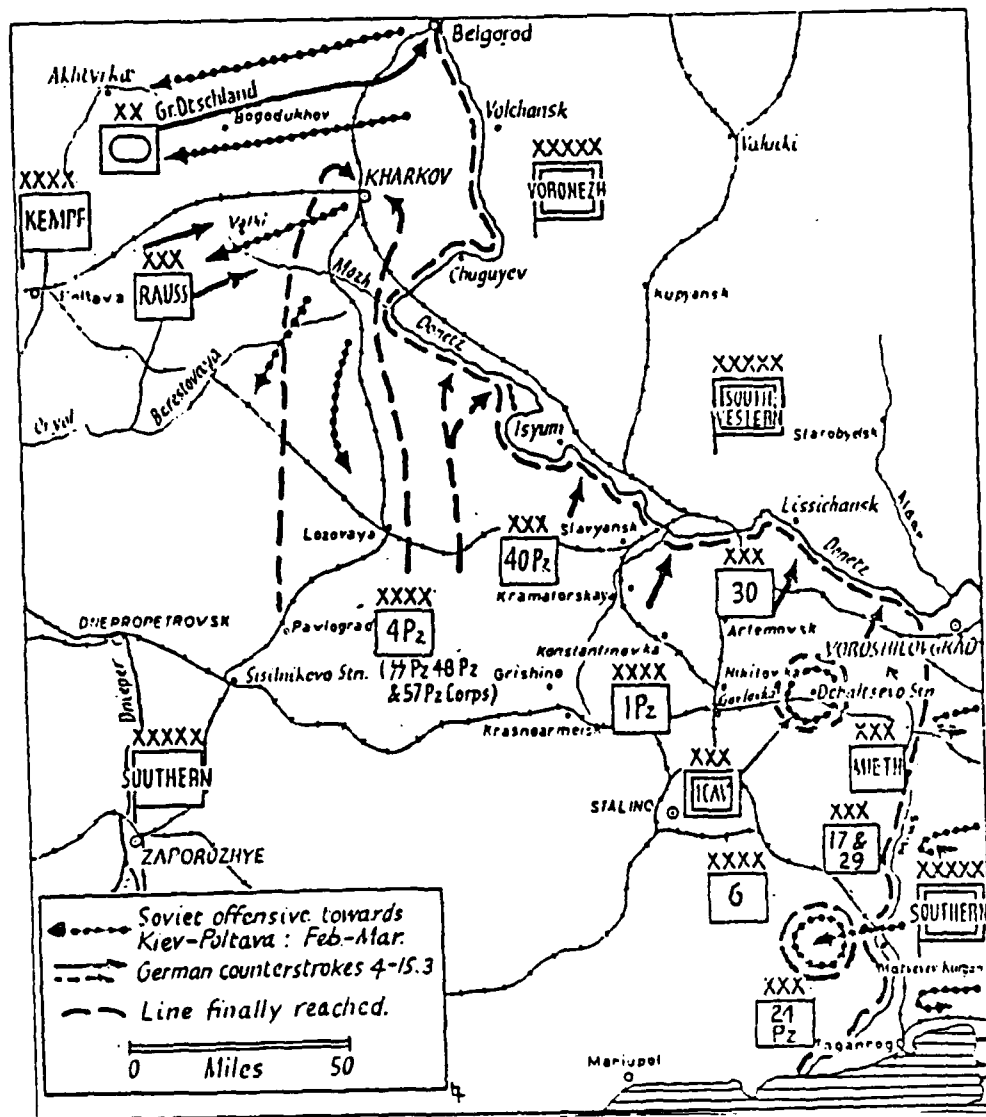
The Soviet Offensive Crumbles (See map 8)

Vatutin was forced to admit failure by 24 February and reported to STAVKA the true extent of the serious situation that had developed on his right flank. The operational fog which had clouded his judgement was finally dispersed by the three fresh divisions of the SS Panzer Korps equipped with some 400 tanks. The 25th found Vatutin with much of the Sixth Army encircled and Group Popov falling back with a handful of armor left. He was forced to order the right flank over to the defensive and request immediate reinforcements from STAVKA.²⁷

Still short of reserves, STAVKA directed that the Voronezh Front place the Third Tank Army under Vatutin's control to conduct a counterattack to relieve Sixth Army. As exhausted as the rest, the Third Tank Army counterattack only hastened its own destruction and encirclement.²⁸

Manstein's Counter Stroke, Phase II (See map 8)

Racing to beat the Soviets and the onset of the spring thaw, the Germans attacked north into the stalled Third Tank Army on 7 March. By the 10th, the SS Panzer Korps (one of the key operational reserves available to Manstein) entered the suburbs of Kharkov from the south and shortly thereafter resistance west of the Donets collapsed.



Map 8 Winter Campaign 1942-3: German Counterstroke, the Battle of Kharkov

By feverishly shifting forces from the Central Front in the Stalingrad area, the Soviets managed to stabilize the line on the Donets from Belgorod all the way to the Mius River, the same line held by the Germans in the winter of '41-'42.²⁹

The Dust Settles

As Manstein saw the situation, a decisive defeat of the southern group of German armies had only just been avoided. The possibilities for victory seemed distant with stalemate the most favorable outcome to be expected.³⁰ The Soviet view was a bit different. Operation Gollop had been a high risk venture from the start and had miscarried in terms of potential possibilities. It had, however, hurt the Germans seriously and had liberated much territory. The essential difference between the two viewpoints was that the Soviets felt they possessed the initiative. True, they had suffered an operational setback, but they were well prepared to learn from their errors and go forward again. In contrast, the Germans found themselves forced onto the defensive with fewer means at hand to fight with. This lack of material resources coupled with a less flexible and forward looking operational lessons mechanism began to force them into an ever-increasing downward spiral.

CAMPAIGN ANALYSIS

In order to draw lessons from this campaign two areas need to be examined. The first is to look at the two mechanisms established by the belligerents to exploit the lessons of combat: the German Army Training Branch and the Soviet 'War Experience Directive' to see how each was structured. The second will be to compare the effectiveness of the

respective commander's conduct of the campaign using the elements of operational design as expressed in FM 100-6, Large Unit Operations as an analytical framework.

German Army Training Board

The Germans organized their Army Training Branch prior to the Polish campaign of 1939 in recognition of the dilution of standards that the massive expansion of the Wehrmacht had engendered. The purpose of this organization was to permit the High Command to exercise influence upon the training of field troops, replacements and newly activated formations. Another goal was the speedy evaluation of the experience of combat and the transmission of the lessons to the field army, schools and reception centers. This would become increasingly important as the war and casualty lists lengthened.³¹

The methods of collecting combat experience for evaluation involved several techniques. Headquarters and units were ordered to report new enemy methods and means of combat as well as their own internal experiences. This data was fleshed out with the reports of Army Training Board officers who were sent to the front to study the area of operations, talk to key commanders and identify what from the mass of information received was of general applicability and what was only of incidental or local value.

After each campaign or major operation, selected headquarters and units were ordered to submit reports on either their specific experiences or on subjects of special interest to the board. Officers were regularly exchanged between the board and the field to insure experienced and current

judgements would be made on the value of these and other reports. Finally, the chiefs of arms and services at OberKommando des Heeres (OKH) were consulted for their opinion on observations affecting their area of expertise. The sum of all these deliberations was submitted to selected senior officers for review and to combine field experience with their seasoned judgement.³²

The Germans realized that the collection and analysis of all their combat experience had no value if it were not passed on to operational commanders and troops in the field. Toward this end, the Germans used several techniques. Frustrated by their inability to get a complete manual published quickly in wartime, they opted for short pamphlets and memos which contained a distillation of essential information of immediate value to the field.³³ To speed the dissemination of operational experience to senior commanders further, the Germans conducted a pre-command course for Corps Commanders and their Chiefs of Staff using the assets of the War Academy which had initially been closed at the start of the war. This was further exploited by conducting a short course at the Academy for general staff officers selected by their units and approved for the condensed wartime training course.³⁴

This system clearly built upon an established common military culture within the Wehrmacht that dated back even beyond the excellent pre-war Reichswehr. The long period of professional development and military excellence provided a firm foundation upon which details could be added. It was not intended to be a fresh inquiry into the nature of waging war at the operational level.

As thorough as this system appears, one gets the strong impression reading the post-war reports of debriefed German officers that it suffered from the stifling bureaucracy of the Nazi regime and a certain professional arrogance concerning German military prowess. Nevertheless, it did provide the Germans with valuable insights into the art of war.

Soviet War Experience Directive

The Red Army did not suffer from military complacency for long following the disastrous defeats of the summer of 1941. It was desperately trying to cope with the internal problems caused by the prewar purges of the officer corps and the resulting inexperience levels as well as the relentless blows of the invading Nazi armies.

The issue of Directive No. 1005216, 'Study and Application of War Experience' in November 1942 marked a critical point in the Soviet war effort. Realizing that their inability to deal with the massive invasion had nearly lost them the war at its outset, the Soviets were forced to return to the serious study of war in order to catch up with the Germans. As they explained it:

*"As is well known, the Great Patriotic war began in conditions unfavorable for the Soviet Union. A surprise blow of a multi-million man, fully mobilized, and well equipped German-Fascist army, which had almost two years of combat experience in military operations fell upon our nation. To a large degree this anticipated the unfortunate outcome of the initial period of war and several subsequent operations for the Soviet Army. The reasons for these misfortunes--is a theme of special discussion. Of major importance among them was the absence in our forces of combat practice."*¹⁰⁰⁵

The intent of the Soviet order was more wide ranging than the German program as it envisioned an ongoing study of war in the Marxist-Lenninist traditions of the earlier Soviet military theoreticians Marshal Mikhail

Tuchachevski and V.K. Triandafillov. Three purposes were to be served by the order:

1. Convey properly and in a useful form and timely manner, results of war experience to the troops
2. Generalize war experience (Front and Army level) and exchange such insights with neighboring elements
3. Critique operations so as to derive practical benefits from the effort³⁶

The order went on in exhaustive detail to spell out how the data was to be organized and collected. It directed that the most capable officer available to study and summarize the experience be appointed to the position under the direct supervision of the Chief of Staff and excused from any additional duties. Each Front and army would establish a priority list of operational and tactical problems to be studied in addition to any generic areas prescribed by higher headquarters. This was to be used as a sort of operational mission essential task list. Finally, field data would be submitted on a monthly report which summarized essential observations and which was supported with diagrams and tables, necessary figures and pertinent facts.³⁷

The Soviets envisioned using the data as a basis to adjust force structures and develop new operational and tactical combat techniques. These could then improve not only current organizations and combat methods, but avoid potential future shortcomings and errors by units not yet exposed to these conditions. The key point here is that while the order was intended to deal with immediate problems it was also designed to prevent

future difficulties through careful study of the lessons of war. It is interesting to note that the techniques developed during the 'Great Patriotic War' are still being used by the Soviets today in studying the experience of foreign armies in local wars and of the Soviets themselves in Afghanistan.³⁸

The Soviet collection plan had many similarities to the German one. They also used visits of selected officers to the front to collect unbiased impressions of the conditions and situations encountered. Conversations with key officers of engaged units and formations were used to gain additional perspectives on their written reports. An interesting additional method was the assignment of collection missions to liaison officers (LNOs) and selected general staff officers of certain units or sectors. Further, the chiefs of section of arms and services, training, intelligence and operational sections were all deliberately involved in the cooperative effort. All these efforts, combined with the careful selection of capable, articulate and objective officers for the position of Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff for War Experience led to a powerful analytical tool for the Red Army.³⁹

The published product generated by this centralized organization was similar in some respects to the German effort. It comprised papers and critiques of various operations and 'combat problems'. Additionally, exercises were produced for individual staff officers or entire staff groups to work on particular military problems. Finally, brief summaries with conclusions were prepared to provide an overview to senior officers.⁴⁰

All these efforts appear formidable, but they also suffered from certain bureaucratic problems. Communist ideology complicated the field processing of information by requiring that lessons be drawn only from successful operations. Unfortunately, the Red Army assumed its doctrine was scientifically correct until proven otherwise. Consequently, lessons could only be drawn from failures which were initially viewed as mistakes in the application of doctrine until conclusively shown to be otherwise. In short, there was a strong tendency toward a lack of pure objectivity in the assimilation of the experience gained.⁴¹

As we return our attention to the campaign itself, it is useful to reflect upon the effectiveness of these two systems. The German method provided topical assistance and immediate fixes to operational commanders in the field. It did little to help prepare the Germans for the problems of protracted operational war. Conversely, the Soviet system not only helped train an operationally uncertain army but it provided it with the means to project its needs, objectives and techniques into the future. By thus seizing the intellectual initiative, the Soviets could begin to out think as well as out mass their enemies.

Operational Analysis

The analysis of the campaign will use the elements of operational design as an analytical framework. These elements, expressed in greater detail in FM 100-6, Large Unit Operations, provide a convenient structure to use in examining the conduct of the campaign from the Soviet and German perspectives. The elements to be addressed are: sequencing operations;

balancing ways, means and ends; operational intelligence; operational maneuver and fires; sustainment and deception.

The first area of analysis is that of sequencing operations. FM 100-6 defines this as the visualization of the sequence of operations necessary to achieve the conditions of operational success.⁴² We have previously seen that both operational commanders had a clear view of what actions they needed to take to accomplish their goals. The Germans had a clearly stated, phased operation designed to protect friendly vulnerabilities while hastening the enemy's culminating point. Conversely, the Soviets had a logical concept to exploit the initiative by conducting an envelopment and destruction of the main grouping of enemy armies with a two Front offensive.

In this case, it seems reasonable to conclude that both commanders had a correct perception of the sequence of events needed to achieve success. Where they differed was in the accuracy of their appraisal of the ability of their troops to carry out the operations. The Germans were correct, the Soviets were not. Both operational commanders clearly visualized the desired ends they had to achieve. The crucial differences existed in the assessment of risk attendant to a course of action and the available means to carry it out. This leads directly to the next area of analysis, the balancing of ways, means and ends.

Balancing ways, means and ends proved to be an extraordinarily difficult task for Manstein. The Germans struggled with constant limitations on their operational mobility due to Hitler's no withdrawal policy and the heavy hand of the overcentralized OKW command structure.

These limited options for maneuver and combat. The limited resources at Manstein's disposal forced him constantly to balance the need to maneuver to avoid enemy strength against the requirement to fight in defense of certain key areas. His resolution of this classic dilemma clearly demonstrated the extent of his gifts as an operational commander forced to execute a strategy of exhaustion. This strategy put a premium on armored forces as the primary means of mobile combat power for the Germans. The shortage of these forces exacerbated the difficulties of achieving the desired course of action with the limited means. Finally, the Germans never achieved the proper linkage between strategic goals and operational capabilities necessary to prosecute the war. This insured an institutionalized conflict between operational commanders and Hitler as the strategic planner.

Nevertheless, the Germans managed to persevere in the struggle for several reasons. On one hand, they had a good tactical doctrine which gave them a potent mobile defense meshed with experienced leadership, tactical skill and trained staffs. This was reinforced with institutional experience at tactical and operational levels. Additionally, they had in Manstein a true genius in the operational art.

On the Soviet side of the ledger, there existed an excellent structural linkage between operational and strategic aims. The centralized system created by Stalin in the form of the STAVKA did not preclude the possibility of error. It did, however, go a long way toward tying operational planning to strategic goals in a more rational manner than the German system. The greatest problem confronting the Soviets was the lack

of operationally competent commanders and staffs. Because of a number of significant problems beyond just the issue of inexperience, the Soviets found themselves unable to assess the risks of the offensive accurately and objectively. They also suffered from such things as the long term cost of the blood purges of Stalin, the struggle to master new doctrine with inexperienced commanders, experimentation with command and control, logistic support and employment of massed, mobile forces.

The tremendous impact of operational intelligence is clearly demonstrated in this campaign. FM 100-6, Large Unit Operations, stresses that the operational commander must determine his line of operations far in advance of battle and must strive to see the battlefield through the eyes of the enemy commander if he is to defeat him.⁴³ This ability to project the flow of the battle in time and space is akin to what Clausewitz thought of as "coup d'oeil" and to today's predictive intelligence. The essential point is to be able to get into the mind of your opponent, understand the limits of his freedom of action and perceive how he and his subordinates will act in a given situation.

Manstein clearly had this ability in that he was able to determine his adversary's desired line of operations far enough in advance to take appropriate measures to counter it. Furthermore, he grasped the idiosyncrasies of the Soviet command structure and their leaders well enough to make predictions of their behavior in given situations and take the necessary risks to exploit them.

In contrast, we find the Soviet commanders, notably Vatutin but also the STAVKA, lacking in the essential quality of being able to see the

battlefield through the enemy's eyes. This inability clearly placed them at a disadvantage and catered to their desire to believe what they wished to see. The understandable Soviet urge to exploit the hard won successes of Stalingrad and the evident logic of launching Operation Gallop predisposed the operational and strategic commanders to interpret intelligence in the most favorable light. Despite accurate reports of German forces massing across the Soviet line of advance, preconceptions of German weakness won out over reality and the German counter-concentration was consistently written off as merely a rear guard effort.

Operational maneuver seeks to gain or retain positional advantage by moving forces from their base of operations by the most direct route to their point of concentration. Fires are considered operational when their application yields a decisive impact on the conduct of a campaign or major operation.⁴⁴ To apply fully these concepts, two other theoretical terms must be addressed: culminating points and centers of gravity. Culminating points are defined in FM 100-5, Operations, as:

"...a point where the strength of the attacker no longer significantly exceeds that of the defender, and beyond which continued offensive operations therefore risk over-extension, counterattack, and defeat."⁴⁵

The centers of gravity are defined as:

"...those sources of strength or balance. It is that characteristic, capability, or locality from which the force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight...the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends..."⁴⁶

From the earlier discussion of the campaign, it becomes clear that the Soviets failed to predict their offensive culminating point during the planning of the offensive and missed it again during the execution of Operation Gallop. In their zeal to exploit operational maneuver with Group Popov and the thrust of the Sixth Army they over-played their hand and clearly continued past the point where the fruits of their offensive could be retained by a coherent defense. Conversely, the Germans shrewdly calculated the time when the Soviets would not only be over-extended but unable to regain their balance and defend. By brilliant maneuvering and assumption of risk, Manstein exploited the Soviet error without committing a similar one himself.

Manstein identified the mobile forces of the Soviets (3d Guards Army and Group Popov primarily) as their center of gravity. By destroying these forces he robbed the Soviet offensive of its impetus and set it up for destruction thus demonstrating an understanding of the use of the center of gravity concept. The Soviets had a similar opportunity when their reconnaissance elements spotted the Germans concentrating astride the thrust line of the Sixth Army but they misread the situation until too late. In retrospect, the center of gravity for both sides was probably the armored operational reserves available. The Germans were able to generate these in time, the Soviets were not. The price of the Soviet failure to withhold or create operational reserves was to prove to be defeat at the hands of the more astute Germans.

There is not as clear cut an example of the use of operational fires in this campaign. The Soviet penchant for massive artillery fires to achieve

the preconditions for operational success can be observed, but the effects cannot truly be said to have had operational significance. However, an indirect case can be made for German use of airpower to achieve effects similar to those of operational fires. That case lies in the air superiority enjoyed by Manstein. With better than a 3:1 advantage in first line combat aircraft, he was free to maneuver and concentrate forces for his critical strokes without fear of enemy interdiction. This situation could be said to have had the same effect as the delivery of fires in that it achieved at least two of the cardinal missions of operational fires: facilitating maneuver to operational depths and isolating the battlefield.

The linkage between sustainment and operational combat power is clearly demonstrated in this campaign. The deliberate decision by STAVKA to strike without an operational pause to refit and resupply the forces was an error in the context of the campaign but was probably seen as an acceptable risk in the overall strategic picture. If their assessment of German intent, a withdrawal, had been accurate, the resultant pursuit could likely have been sustained. As it was, this initial error in operational intelligence reverberated throughout the campaign and proved again the indivisible linkage between operations and sustainment.

The other error made in Soviet planning was the decision to strike without adequate logistical bases for the forces committed. The offensive rapidly pushed out beyond supporting distances with Soviet LOCs extending 250-300 km at the same time German ones were contracting.⁴⁷ Although this was undoubtedly justified by the assumption of a German withdrawal, the

result was to accelerate the hemorrhage of combat power of already tired units.

The Soviets did not practice operational deception during this campaign in part due to the haste in which it was conceived and executed. They probably felt that the objectives and likely courses of action were too obvious to hide; a supposition that Manstein supports in his memoirs. Nevertheless, deception was practiced during this campaign, but it was a curious type in that it involved the active collusion of the deceived. Firmly believing that the Germans were reeling and concerned only with withdrawal, the Soviets staked all on a bold offensive. This was so strong a conviction, that they chose to disregard the German forces detected massing in front of Sixth Army until too late. Manstein exploited this by doing nothing to dissuade Vatutin until he was ready to launch his counterstroke into the overextended Soviet forces. Thus, the end result of an operational deception plan could be observed despite the fact that neither side apparently concocted a specific plan in advance.

Operational Conclusions

The German response to Operation Gallop is generally regarded to have been a brilliant example of operational art and is often cited as the last victory enjoyed by the Nazis. Manstein's execution generally followed his campaign plan despite the limitations of means and restrictions of Hitler. The operational vision he demonstrated proved commensurate with the capabilities of his forces and the desired end state.

On the other hand, the Soviet execution differed markedly from the plan. The initial errors in operational judgement and actual execution

largely precluded the possibility of complete success. The vision of General Vatutin proved too optimistic in its estimation of enemy weakness and resiliency as well as friendly capabilities and sustainability. It would be incorrect, however, to leave Operation Gallop with just the above post-mortem.

The true significance of this campaign for the Soviets lies less in what it accomplished on the battlefield than in what it offered for future operations. Operation Gallop marked a transitional period in operational development, a sort of end of the beginning in the growth of operational maturity for major commanders and staffs. The hasty planning and costly conduct served to highlight to the Soviets that they had not recognized the fine line between a calculated risk and a gamble.⁴²

The harsh realities of combat caused the Soviets to sit back and soberly reassess their actions. This was done in the methodical and "scientific" context of the combat experience order outlined earlier and the results were force structure and doctrinal changes for the future. The operational procedures and structures that were tested in '43 became the improved and eventually victorious performances of '44 and '45. The lasting significance, then, is that the Soviets learned from their failures and exploited that knowledge while the Germans proved unable to do the same.⁴³

THEORY VERSUS REALITY: THE OPERATIONAL MECHANISM

If the concept of an operational mechanism is to have current validity to US planners and commanders, then it must show promise for demonstrable improvement in the application of the operational art in any future conflict. One measure of the effectiveness of the concept would be to see

if the Soviet conduct of war improved in the eyes of the Germans. This pragmatic appreciation could be contrasted with the Soviet view of their own effectiveness to gain a more balanced evaluation. Finally, the conclusions of a third party would help add a non-partisan flavor to the overall judgement of the effectiveness of an operational mechanism.

The German view reflects a grudging acknowledgement of the gradually increasing competence of the Soviet army at the operational level. The collective opinion seems to bear out the proposition that some system existed to allow the Soviets to build on experience successfully. A few observations from some key German officers will serve to illustrate the point:

"The staff were quick to learn from their early defeats and soon became highly efficient." GEN von Kleist, Army Group Commander⁵⁰

"As the war went on, the Russians developed an increasingly high standard of leadership from top to bottom. One of their greatest assets was their officer's readiness to learn, and the way they studied their jobs." GEN Dittmar, leading German military commentator⁵¹

"...Stalin's realization that military professionalism, not political reliability... was vital was the key turning point in the recovery of the Red Army after 1941..." Field Marshal Manstein⁵²

"...Russian command and staff... were constantly learning and improving based on their own experience and use of the .. tactics and methods of the Germans...this is most clear at the highest levels...in such commanders as Zhukov, Koniev and Vatutin..." MG von Mellenthin, 48th Panzer Korps⁵³

Candid assessments by the Soviets of their performance in the "Great Patriotic War" are notoriously difficult to come by as most of their analytical works are still classified. To overcome this barrier, we must

look at the changes that were made to organizations, doctrine and methods following the campaign and draw our own conclusions.

The impact of Operation Gallop was felt strongly in the areas of force structure and doctrine. Beginning in January '43, new tank armies were created to deal with the problems of generating combat power. Additionally, the sustainment structures for tank and mechanized corps were enhanced along with improvements in the C² structure. These attempts to correct deficiencies in command and control proved only partially satisfactory in that the commitment of Group Popov pointed out new problems in timing and mutual support of forces of varying organic mobility.⁵⁴

The solutions which grew out of this experience in using mobile forces centered upon closer control of the forces under headquarters trained to employ them properly within supporting distances and with adequate supporting arms and services. A key aspect of this was the provision of not only more logistics but also more transport for the necessary but heretofore footmobile rifle forces.⁵⁵

Finally, the key operational lessons of timing and sustainment, especially the use of operational pauses, grew directly from the lessons of Operation Gallop and were ably demonstrated in the summer offensives of '43, notably in the repulse of Operation Citadel at Kursk.⁵⁶

These changes and more flowed from the costly lessons of Operation Gallop. The fact that the Soviets could study the lessons and make major changes in how they organized, equipped and fought their forces in such a short period points to the existence of a well designed operational

mechanism to exploit the lessons of combat. The increasingly effective employment of Soviet forces did not occur as a result of copying German methods alone. The application of their War Experience Order coupled with increasingly seasoned commanders and staffs demonstrated that the Soviets believed in the efficacy of their own methods and deliberately worked to improve their performance throughout the rest of the war.

Immediately following the war, US analysts looked at how the Red Army had approached the task of recovering from the terrible defeats of the early years and staging a victorious comeback. In their opinion, many of the reasons for the successes ultimately enjoyed were due to the Soviet use of history as a pragmatic aid for solving current problems. From the Marxist viewpoint, history represents a continuing and predetermined process, making its study useful. The continued influence of historical effort stems in part from the experience processing program of the Great Patriotic War, a lesson learning system that operated as a historical activity.⁵⁷ Their conclusions went on to observe that the historical division's functions:

"...transcended mere recording of events...its recommendations became the chief basis for changes of Red Army operational doctrine, TO&E, equipment and material specifications... continuous study and rapid application of combat lessons has been one of the greatest assets of the Red Army..." ⁵⁸

Both the Soviet and German experience demonstrates that the idea of a mechanism to collect and exploit the lessons of operational combat had practical value, especially for an army without a great deal of current experience in large scale warfare. Such a system does not exist in the US

Army today. There does not appear to be any single agency tasked with supervising such a collection and analysis effort as described above.

Several agencies within the US Army appear to have responsibility for parts of the mission, but none have the charter to pull it all together. The Branch schools key on technical and tactical proficiency and strive to produce leaders competent in current tactical doctrine. The focus is necessarily at the tactical level of war and can not provide the desired operational mechanism.

The Command and General Staff College bills itself as the senior tactical school of the Army. At this institution the emphasis is on mastering the tactical intricacies of AirLand Battle doctrine and gaining a general appreciation for the basics of the operational art and joint services war fighting methods. While it is true that CGSC does have proponency for writing the doctrine expressed in FM 100-5, Operations and FM 100-6, Large Unit Operations, it is not equipped to seek out lessons from the field nor require their submission for suitable analysis. Accordingly, the operational mechanism cannot fairly be said to exist at the Command and General Staff College.

The US Army War College (USAWC) focuses primarily on the linkages between national strategic and military policy. While this may well be considered the rightful sphere of operational art, the structure of the USAWC is not such that it can collect and interpret lessons from the field toward our desired ends. Its current focus seems to be more in the area of rethinking US joint doctrine than providing an analytical tool to probe the

nuances of the operational art as it is planned for and practiced by the US in peace and war.

Similarly, other agencies exist which perform some of the vital functions of an operational lesson learning mechanism. Some examples are the Center for Army Lessons Learned, the Army Training Board (ATB) and the Military History Institute. The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) comes the closest of these separate agencies to meeting the requirements of an operational mechanism. Its mission is to provide the Army with combat relevant lessons learned in the areas of doctrine, training, organization and material at all levels of war.⁵⁹ The other agencies have far more narrowly defined missions which range from the daily problems of training the force (ATB) to the Military History Institutes largely archival function.

A single entity does not exist within the Army today to perform the kinds of operational study, analysis and dissemination discussed earlier. Given that the efficacy of this operational study mechanism is supported by historical evidence and that the US Army lacks current experience in the operational art, this seems a major oversight.

CONCLUSIONS

The US Army should establish an organization that collects, analyzes and disseminates the experiences of itself and foreign armies in operational art in peace and war. This organization should have a broad charter which allows it to look into all aspects (current and historical) of the operational level of war including issues of jointness, coalition warfare, operations short of war, sustainment, force structure, procurement

and doctrine to cite a few key areas. It is not intended that a new bureaucracy be created by this concept; rather a refocusing of the efforts and assets of existing organizations is the goal.

Several steps should be taken to institutionalize the process:

1. Establish a system incorporating aspects of the German and Soviet schemes using existing assets and soldiers already in place in the field army. The system would place a selected officer in the operations sections of division and higher formation headquarters whose purpose would be to collect the experiences of his unit or formation for possible use as operational lessons in peace or war. The officer would be chosen for his professional competence, resourcefulness in research, objectivity and ability to synthesize clearly and concisely and to draw lessons of general applicability.

This requirement might be partially filled using the graduates of the Advanced Military Studies Program and the Army War College Operational Studies Fellows as an initial cadre of officers schooled in a common theoretical and doctrinal background. These officers are already assigned to the operations and intelligence sections of divisions and corps with some in echelons above corps as well. They share a solid theoretical grounding in operational art and are well versed in doctrinal matters. At division and corps levels this knowledge of operational art is not being fully employed by virtue of the missions normally assigned to these officers and formations. They are, however, ideally placed to serve the role of a collector and filter for lessons and ideas which have implications for operational planners. As the number of graduates expands

and increases in rank they will gradually reach positions at operational level commands which can more immediately exploit their knowledge. All this is not to imply that AMSP graduates are the only source of operational expertise. In fact, most of them are only academically trained in the area. However, the number of officers in the Army who have had the opportunity to study the subject in depth is limited and the use of these graduates is a low cost solution to the problem of manning the mechanism in the field. An alternative might be to use recently retired senior officers who have the necessary experience and are no longer subject to the pressures of active service.

2. Funnel the after action reports (AAR) generated from field and command post exercises as well as studies and research efforts from the army's schools, colleges and the Military History Institute to the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). CALL would have the mission of analyzing the data for tactical and operational impact and making recommendations to TRADOC (US Army Training and Doctrine Command) for changes in any of the areas cited above in the introductory paragraph to this section. CALL would continue to publish bulletins to keep the Army current on its findings and proposed solutions.

3. Elevate the concept of the AAR, perfected at the tactical level at the NTC, to the operational level. Require divisions, corps and major operational headquarters to submit in a timely manner (not later than 60 days after the event) an AAR which rigorously analyzes the successes and problems experienced by that unit. The submission of such reports would be mandatory and should be stressed by commanders as an integral part of the

training, not an add on requirement of higher headquarters. This recommendation merely requires the enforcement of existing regulations, such as AR 350-28 and the use of existing automated systems such as Army Lessons Learned Information System and the Joint Universal Lessons Learned System.

4. Capitalize on the renewed interest in history in the US Army by emphasizing the practical benefits of historical study to commanders. This interest could be stimulated among the officer corps by publishing in appropriate service journals, such as Military Review, questions involving operational art which require historical research to answer and challenging the readers to contribute their ideas for publication. Contemporary problems in moving large formations, or sustaining major forces in remote areas without existing support infrastructure are two areas that could benefit from historical research and which have immediate relevance to serving officers today. The follow up of good ideas thus generated could be assigned to the Center for Military History or the Combat Studies Institute for further analysis.

5. Develop operational planning parameters for all aspects of the operational art starting at the tactical level and continuing upward. These parameters would consist of historical and exercise/combat experience supported standards for movement planning, fire support requirements, relative combat power considerations and a host of other practical concerns which are today often merely guessed at. Commanders today know well how long it takes to move and fuel a battalion; the same cannot be said for a division or corps. Intelligently interpreted research can go a

long way toward providing operational commanders and planners with rational planning figures for the multitude of missions they must undertake. The Soviets do this kind of careful research and produce planning "norms", there is no reason why the US Army should deny itself similar benefits. Operational warfare cannot be waged based on "swags". These would constitute the unglamorous but necessary underpinnings of operational art.

The United States Army must translate its rediscovery of the operational art into a practical, war winning tool before hostilities commence again. One key to accomplishing this end is the establishment of a mechanism to allow the operational commander to plan with maximum effectiveness in peacetime and to rapidly correct the unavoidable errors of wartime inexperience. As Sun Tzu reminds us:

*"War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied."*²⁰

Endnotes

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3. R. Ernest and Trevor Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History from 3500 B.C. to the Present, 2d Revised Edition. (New York: 1986), pp. 1090-1092.
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5. LTC David M. Glantz, From the Don to the Dnepr: A Study of Soviet Offensive Operations, December 42-Aug 43. (SAMS Special Reprint, FT Leavenworth, KS: AY 87-88), pp. 102-103, 164.
6. Manstein, pp. 371-372.
7. Ibid.
8. Glantz, pp. 102-103.
9. Ibid., p. 164. Nazi losses included the German Sixth Army, two axis armies and the isolation in the Kuban bridgehead of the badly mauled German Second Army.
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11. Glantz, p. 109.
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14. Glantz, pp. 109, 114.
15. Ibid., p. 103.
16. Ibid., p. 107.
17. Ziemke, pp. 84-85.
18. Glantz, pp. 107-109.
19. Ibid., p. 112.
20. Ziemke, pp.87-89.

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23. Manstein, pp. 428-431.
24. Ibid., p. 404.
25. Glantz, pp. 139-142.
26. Ibid., pp. 148-150.
27. Ibid., pp. 150-156.
28. Ibid., p. 162.
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36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 3. The compilation of these types of statistics probably formed the baseline data for the future norms so beloved by Soviet planners.
38. Ibid., pp. introduction, 6.
39. Ibid., pp. 12-14.
40. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
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43. Ibid., pp. 3-8 to 3-9.
44. Ibid., pp. 3-12 to 3-13.
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47. Glantz, p. 166.
48. Ibid., p. 434.
49. Ibid., pp. 434-445.
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The following notes are acknowledgements for the maps used in the text.

Maps 1, 2, 7, and 8 are drawn from Lost Victories by FM von Manstein.

Maps 3 and 6 are taken from the US Army Historical Series, Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East by Earl F. Ziemke.

Maps 4 and 5 are courtesy of COL David M. Glantz, Soviet Army Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth and derive from personal research he has conducted in Soviet operations.

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